

The Canterbury Tales and Other Poems



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THE CANTERBURY TALES

GENERAL PROLOGUE

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote, And bathed every veyne
in swich licour Of which vertu engendred is the flour; Whan Zephirus
eek with his sweete breeth Inspired hath in every holt and heeth The
tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne Hath in the Ram his half cours
yronne, And smale foweles maken melodye,¹⁰ That slepen al the nyght
with open ye (So priketh hem Nature in hir corages), Thanne longen folk
to goon on pilgrimages, And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes, To
ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes; And specially from every shires
ende Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende, The hooly blisful martir
for to seke, That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. Bifil that
in that seson on a day,²⁰ In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay Redy to
wenden on my pilgrymage To Caunterbury with ful devout corage, At
nyght was come into that hostelrye Wel nyne and twenty in a
compaignye Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle In felawshipe, and
pilgrimes were they alle, That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde. The
chambres and the stables weren wyde, And wel we weren esed atte
beste.³⁰ And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste, So hadde I spoken
with hem everichon That I was of hir felawshipe anon, And made
forward erly for to ryse, To take oure wey ther as I yow devyse. But
natheles, whil I have tyme and space, Er that I ferther in this tale
pace, Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun To telle yow al the
condicioun Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,⁴⁰ And whiche they weren,
and of what degree, And eek in what array that they were inne; And at a
knyght than wol I first bigynne. A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy
man, That fro the tyme that he first bigan To riden out, he loved
chivalrie, Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie. Ful worthy was he

in his lordes werre, And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre, As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,⁵⁰ And evere honoured for his worthynesse; At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne. Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne Aboven alle nacions in Pruce; In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce, No Cristen man so ofte of his degree. In Gernade at the seege 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 See⁶⁰ At many a noble armee hadde he be. At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene, And foughten for oure feith at Tramysse In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo. This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also Somtyme with the lord of Palatye Agayn another hethen in Turkye; And everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys. And though that he were worthy, he was wys, And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.⁷⁰ He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde In al his lyf unto no maner wight. He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght. But for to tellen yow of his array, His hors were goode, but he was nat gay. Of fustian he wered a gypon Al bismotered with his habergeon, For he was late ycome from his viage, And wente for to doon his pilgrymage. With hym ther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,

80 A lovyere and a lusty bachelor,
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 delyvere, and of greet strengthe. And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Pycardie, And born hym weel, as of so litel space, In hope to stonden in his lady grace. Embrouded was he, as it were a meede⁹⁰ Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede. Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al the day; He was as fressh as is the month of May. Short was his gowne, with sleeves longe and wyde. Wel

koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde. He koude songes make and wel endite, Juste and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write. So hoote he lovede that by nyghtertale He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale. Curteis he was, lowely, and servysable,¹⁰⁰ And carf biforn his fader at the table. A YEMAN hadde he and servantz namo At that tyme, for hym liste ride so, And he was clad in cote and hood of grene. A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene, Under his belt he bar ful thriftily (Wel koude he dresse his takel yemanly; His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe), And in his hand he baar a myghty bowe. A not heed hadde he, with a broun visage.¹¹⁰ Of wodecraft wel koude he al the usage. Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer, And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler, And on that oother syde a gay daggere Harneised wel and sharp as point of spere; A Cristopher on his brest of silver sheene. An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of grene; A forster was he, soothly, as I gesse. Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE, That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;¹²⁰ Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy; And she was cleped madame Eglentyne. Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne, Entuned in hir nose ful semely; And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly, After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe, For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe. At mete wel ytaught was she with alle; She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle, Ne wette hir fyngrs in hir sauce depe;¹³⁰ Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe That no drope ne fille upon hire brest. In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest. Hir overlippe wyped she so clene That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte. Ful semely after hir mete she raughte. And sikerly she was of greet desport, And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port, And peyned hire to countrefete cheere¹⁴⁰ Of court, and to been estatlich of manere, And to ben holden digne of reverence. But

for to speken of hire conscience, She was so charitable and so pitous She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde. Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde With rosted flessch, or milk and wastel-breed. But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed, Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;¹⁵⁰ And al was conscience and tendre herte. Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was, Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas, Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed. But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed; It was almoost a spanne brood, I trowe; For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe. Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war. Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,¹⁶⁰ And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene, On which ther was first write a crowned A, And after Amor vincit omnia. Another NONNE with hire hadde she, That was hir chapeleyne, and preestes thre. A MONK ther was, a fair for the maistrie, An outridere, that lovede venerie, A manly man, to been an abbot able. Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable, And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere¹⁷⁰ Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle Ther as this lord was kepere of the celle. The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit -- By cause that it was old and somdel streit This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace, And heeld after the newe world the space. He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen, That seith that hunters ben nat hooly men, Ne that a monk, whan he is recchelees,¹⁸⁰ Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees -- This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre. But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre; And I seyde his opinion was good. What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood, Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure, Or swynken with his handes, and laboure, As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served? Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved! Therefore

he was a prikasour aright:190 Grehoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flight; Of prikyng and of huntyng for the hare Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare. I seigh his sleeves purfiled at the hond With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond; And for to festne his hood under his chyn, He hadde of gold ywroght a ful curious pyn; A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was. His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas, And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt.200 He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt; His eyen stepe, and rollynge in his heed, That stemed as a forneys of a leed; His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat. Now certainly he was a fair prelaat; He was nat pale as a forpynd goost. A fat swan loved he best of any roost. His palfrey was as broun as is a berye. A FRERE ther was, a wantowne and a merye, A lymytour, a ful solempne man.210 In alle the ordres foure is noon that kan So muchel of daliaunce and fair langage. He hadde maad ful many a mariage Of yonge wommen at his owene cost. Unto his ordre he was a noble post. Ful wel biloved and famulier was he With frankeleyns over al in his contree, And eek with worthy wommen of the toun; For he hadde power of confessioun, As seyde hymself, moore than a curat,220 For of his ordre he was licenciat. Ful swetely herde he confessioun, And plesaunt was his absolucioun: He was an esy man to yeve penaunce, Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce. For unto a povre ordre for to yive Is signe that a man is wel yshryve; For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt, He wiste that a man was repentaunt; For many a man so hard is of his herte,230 He may nat wepe, althogh hym soore smerte. Therefore in stede of wepyng and preyeres Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres. His tyet was ay farsed ful of knyves

And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves.

And certainly he hadde a murye note: Wel koude he synge and pleyen

on a rote; Of yeddynges he baar outrely the pris. His nekke whit was as
the flour-de-lys; Therto he strong was as a champioun.²⁴⁰ He knew the
tavernes wel in every toun And everich hostiler and tappestere Bet than
a lazar or a beggestere, For unto swich a worthy man as he Acorded nat,
as by his facultee, To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce. It is nat
honest; it may nat avaunce, For to deelen with no swich poraille, But al
with riche and selleres of vitaille. And over al, ther as profit sholde
arise,²⁵⁰ Curteis he was and lowely of servyse; Ther nas no man nowher
so vertuous. He was the beste beggere in his hous; [And yaf a certeyn
ferme for the graunt; Noon of his bretheren cam ther in his haunt;] For
thogh a wydwe hadde noght a sho, So plesaunt was his "In
principio," Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente. His purchas was
wel better than his rente. And rage he koude, as it were right a whelp. In
love-dayes ther koude he muchel help, For ther he was nat lyk a
cloysterer²⁶⁰ With a thredbare cope, as is a povre scoler, But he was lyk
a maister or a pope. Of double worstede was his semycope, That rounded
as a belle out of the presse. Somwhat he lipped, for his wantownesse, To
make his Englissh sweete upon his tonge; And in his harpyng, whan that
he hadde songe, His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght As doon the
sterres in the frosty nyght. This worthy lymytour was cleped
Huberd.²⁷⁰ A MERCHANT was ther with a forked berd, In mottelee, and
hye on horse he sat; Upon his heed a Flaundryssh Bever hat, His bootes
clasped faire and fetisly. His resons he spak ful solempnely, Sownynge
alwey th' encrees of his wynnyng. He wolde the see were kept for any
thyng Bitwixe Middelburgh and Orewelle. Wel koude he in eschaunge
sheeldes selle. This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:²⁸⁰ Ther wiste no
wight that he was in dette, So estatly was he of his governaunce With his
bargaynes and with his chevysaunce. For sothe he was a worthy man

with alle, But, sooth to seyn, I noot how men hym calle. A CLERK ther was of Oxenford also, That unto logyk hadde longe ygo. As leene was his hors as is a rake, And he nas nat right fat, I undertake, But looked holwe, and therto sobrelly.²⁹⁰ Ful thredbare was his overeste courtepy, For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice, Ne was so worldly for to have office. For hym was levere have at his beddes heed Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed, Of Aristotle and his philosophie Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrie. But al be that he was a philosophre, Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre; But al that he myghte of his freendes hente,³⁰⁰ On bookes and on lernynge he it spente, And bisily gan for the soules preye Of hem that yaf hym wherwith to scoleye. Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede. Noght o word spak he moore than was neede, And that was seyde in forme and reverence, And short and quyke and ful of hy sentence; Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche, And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche. A SERGEANT OF THE LAWE, war and wys,³¹⁰ That often hadde been at the Parvys, Ther was also, fulliche of excellence. Discreet he was and of greet reverence -- He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise. Justice he was ful often in assise, By patente and by pleyn commissioun. 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 symple to hym in effect;³²⁰ His purchasyng myghte nat been infect. Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas, And yet he semed bisier than he was. In termes hadde he caas and doomes alle That from the tyme of kyng William were falle. Therto he koude endite and make a thyng, Ther koude no wight pynche at his writyng; And every statut koude he pleyn by rote. He rood but hoomly in a medlee cote, Girt with a ceint of silk, with barres smale;³³⁰ Of his array telle I no lenger tale. A

FRANKELEYN was in his compaignye. Whit was his berd as is the dayesye; Of his complexioun he was sangwyn. Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn; To lyven in delit was evere his wone, For he was Epicurus owene sone, That heeld opinioun that pleyn delit Was verray felicitee parfit. An housholdere, and that a greet, was he;340 Seint Julian he was in his contree. His breed, his ale, was always after oon; A bettre envyned man was nowher noon. Withoute bake mete was nevere his hous, Of fissh and flessch, and that so plentevous It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke; Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke, After the sondry sesons of the yeer, So chaunged he his mete and his soper. Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe,350 And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe. Wo was his cook but if his sauce were Poynaunt and sharp, and redy al his geere. His table dormant in his halle alway Stood redy covered al the longe day. At sessiouns ther was he lord and sire; Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire. An anlaas and a gipser al of silk Heeng at his girdel, whit as morne milk. A shirreve hadde he been, and a contour.360 Was nowher swich a worthy vavasour. AN HABERDASSHERE and a CARPENTER, A WEBBE, a DYERE, and a TAPYCER -- And they were clothed alle in o lyveree Of a solempne and a greet fraternitee. Ful fressh and newe hir geere apiked was; Hir knyves were chaped noght with bras But al with silver, wroght ful clene and weel, Hire girdles and hir pouches everydeel. Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys370 To sitten in a yeldehalle on a deys. Everich, for the wisdom that he kan, Was shaply for to been an alderman. For catel hadde they ynogh and rente, And eek hir wyves wolde it wel assente; And elles certeyn were they to blame. It is ful fair to been ycleped "madame," And goon to vigilies al bifore, And have a mantel roialliche ybore. A COOK they hadde with hem for the nones380 To

boille the chiknes with the marybones, And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale. Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale. He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye, Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye. But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me, That on his shyne a mormal hadde he. For blankmanger, that made he with the beste. A SHIPMAN was ther, wonynge fer by weste; For aught I woot, he was of Dertemouthe.³⁹⁰ He rood upon a rouncey, as he kouthe, In a gowne of faldyng to the knee. A daggere hangynge on a laas hadde he Aboute his nekke, under his arm adoun. The hote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun; And certainly he was a good felawe. Ful many a draughte of wyn had he ydrawe Fro Burdeux-ward, whil that the chapman sleep. Of nyce conscience took he no keep. If that he faught and hadde the hyer hond,⁴⁰⁰ By water he sente hem hoom to every lond. But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes, His stremes, and his daungers hym bisides, His herberwe, and his moone, his lodemenage, Ther nas noon swich from Hulle to Cartage. Hardy he was and wys to undertake; With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake. He knew alle the havenes, as they were, Fro Gootlond to the cape of Fynystere, And every cryke in Britaigne and in Spayne.⁴¹⁰ His barge ycleped was the Maudelayne. With us ther was a DOCTOUR OF PHISIK; In al this world ne was ther noon hym lik, To speke of phisik and of surgerye, For he was grounded in astronomye. He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel In houres by his magyk natureel. Wel koude he fortunen the ascendent Of his ymages for his pacient. He knew the cause of everich maladye,⁴²⁰ Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye, And where they engendred, and of what humour. He was a verray, parfit praktisour: The cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote, Anon he yaf the sike man his boote. Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries To sende hym drogges and his letuaries, For

ech of hem made oother for to wyne -- Hir frendshipe nas nat newe to bigynne. Wel knew he the olde Esculapius,⁴³⁰ And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus, Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen, Serapion, Razis, and Avycen, Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn, Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn. Of his diete mesurable was he, For it was of no superfluitee, But of greet norissyng and digestible. His studie was but litel on the Bible. In sangwyn and in pers he clad was al,⁴⁴⁰ Lyned with taffata and with sendal. And yet he was but esy of dispence; He kepte that he wan in pestilence. For gold in phisik is a cordial, Therefore he lovede gold in special. A good WIF was ther OF biside BATHE, But she was somdel deaf, and that was scathe. Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt. In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon⁴⁵⁰ That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon; And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she That she was out of alle charitee. Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground; I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound That on a Sunday weren upon hir heed. Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed, Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe. Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe. She was a worthy womman al hir lyve:⁴⁶⁰ Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve, Withouten oother compaignye in youthe -- But thereof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe. And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem; She hadde passed many a straunge strem; At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne, In Galice at Seint-Jame, and at Coloigne. She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye. Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye. Upon an amblere esily she sat,⁴⁷⁰ Ywympled wel, and on hir heed an hat As brood as is a bokeler or a targe; A foot-mantel aboute hir hipis large, And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe. In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe. Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce, For she

koude of that art the olde daunce. A good man was ther of
religioun, And was a povre PERSON OF A TOWN, But riche he was of
hooly thoght and werk.⁴⁸⁰ He was also a lerned man, a clerk, That
Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche; His parisshe devoutly wolde he
teche. Benygne he was, and wonder diligent, And in adversitee ful
patient, And swich he was ypreved ofte sithes. Ful looth were hym to
cursen for his tithes, But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute, Unto his
povre parisshe aboute Of his offryng and eek of his substaunce.⁴⁹⁰ He
koude in litel thyng have suffisaunce. Wyd was his parisshe, and houses
fer asonder, But he ne lefte nat, for reyn ne thonder, In siknesse nor in
meschief to visite The ferreste in his parisshe, mucche and lite, Upon his
feet, and in his hand a staf. 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 therto,⁵⁰⁰ That if
gold ruste, what shal iren do? For if a preest be foul, on whom we
truste, No wonder is a lewed man to ruste; And shame it is, if a preest
take keep, A shiten shepherde and a clene sheep. Wel oghte a preest
ensample for to yive, By his clenness, how that his sheep sholde
lyve. He sette nat his benefice to hyre And leet his sheep encombred in
the myre And ran to Londoun unto Seinte Poules⁵¹⁰ To seken hym a
chaunterie for soules, Or with a bretherhed to been withholde; But
dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde, So that the wolf ne made it nat
myscarie; He was a shepherde and noght a mercenarie. And though he
hooly were and vertuouus, He was to synful men nat despitous, Ne of his
speche daungerous ne digne, But in his techyng discreet and
benygne. To drawen folk to hevne by fairnesse,⁵²⁰ By good ensample,
this was his bisynesse. But it were any persone obstinat, What so he
were, of heigh or lough estat, Hym wolde he snybben sharply for the

nonys. A bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys. He waited after no pompe and reverence, Ne maked him a spiced conscience, But Cristes loore and his apostles twelve He taughte; but first he folwed it hymselfe. With hym ther was a PLOWMAN, was his brother,⁵³⁰ That hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother; A trewe swynkere and a good was he, Lyvyng in pees and parfit charitee. God loved he best with al his hoole herte At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte, And thanne his neighebor right as hymselfe. He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve, For Cristes sake, for every povre wight, Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght. His tithes payde he ful faire and wel,⁵⁴⁰ Bothe of his propre swynk and his catel. In a tabard he rood upon a mere. Ther was also a REVE, and a MILLERE, A SOMNOUR, and a PARDONER also, A MAUNCIPLE, and myself -- ther were namo. The MILLERE was a stout carl for the nones; Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones. That proved wel, for over al ther he cam, At wrastlyng he wolde have alwey the ram. He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre;⁵⁵⁰ Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre, Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed. His berd as any sowe or fox was reed, And therto brood, as though it were a spade. Upon the cop right of his nose he hade A werte, and theron stood a toft of herys, Reed as the brustles of a sowes erys; His nosethirles blake were and wyde. A swerd and a bokeler bar he by his syde. His mouth as greet was as a greet forneys.⁵⁶⁰ He was a janglere and a goliardeys, And that was moost of synne and harlotries. Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries; And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee. A whit cote and a blew hood wered he. A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne, And therwithal he broghte us out of towne. A gentil MAUNCIPLE was ther of a temple, Of which achatours myghte take exemple For to be wise in byyng of vitaille;⁵⁷⁰ For wheither that

he payde or took by taille, Algate he wayted so in his achaat That he was
ay biforn and in good staat. Now is nat that of God a ful fair grace That
swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace The wisdom of an heep of lerned
men? Of maistres hadde he mo than thries ten, That weren of lawe
expert and curious, Of which ther were a duszeyne in that hous Worthy
to been stywardes of rente and lond⁵⁸⁰ Of any lord that is in
Engelond, To make hym lyve by his propre good In honour dettelees
(but if he were wood), Or lyve as scarsly as hym list desire; And able for
to helpen al a shire In any caas that myghte falle or happe. And yet this
Manciple sette hir aller cappe. The REVE was a sclendre colerik man. His
berd was shave as ny as ever he kan; His heer was by his erys ful round
yshorn;⁵⁹⁰ His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn. Ful longe were his
legges and ful lene, Ylyk a staf; ther was no calf ysene. Wel koude he
kepe a gerner and a bynne; Ther was noon auditour koude on him
wynne. Wel wiste he by the droghte and by the reyn The yeldyng of his
seed and of his greyn. His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerye, His swyn,
his hors, his stoor, and his pultrye Was hoolly in this Reves
governynge,⁶⁰⁰ And by his covenant yaf the rekenynge, Syn that his
lord was twenty yeer of age. Ther koude no man bryng hym in
arrerage. Ther nas baillif, ne hierde, nor oother hyne, That he ne knew
his sleighte and his covyne; They were adrad of hym as of the deeth. His
wonyng was ful faire upon an heeth; With grene trees yshadwed was his
place. He koude bettre than his lord purchace. Ful riche he was astored
pryvely.⁶¹⁰ His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly, To yeve and lene hym
of his owene good, And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood. In youthe
he hadde lerned a good myster: He was a wel good wrighte, a
carpenter. This Reve sat upon a ful good stot That was al pomely grey
and highte Scot. A long surcote of pers upon he hade, And by his syde he

baar a rusty blade. Of Northfolk was this Reve of which I telle,⁶²⁰ Beside
a toun men clepen Baldeswelle. Tukked he was as is a frere aboute, And
evere he rood the hyndreste of oure route. A SOMONOUR was ther with
us in that place, That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face, For saucefleem
he was, with eyen narwe. As hoot he was and lecherous as a
sparwe, With scalled browes blake and piled berd. Of his visage children
were aferd. Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,⁶³⁰ Boras,
ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon, Ne oynement that wolde clense and
byte, That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white, Nor of the knobbes
sittyng on his chekes. Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes, And
for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood; Thanne wolde he speke and
crie as he were wood. And whan that he wel dronken hadde the
wyn, Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn. A fewe termes hadde
he, two or thre,⁶⁴⁰ That he had lerned out of som decree -- No wonder
is, he herde it al the day; And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay Kan
clepen "Watte" as wel as kan the pope. But whoso koude in oother thyng
hym grope, Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie; Ay "Questio quid
iuris" wolde he crie. He was a gentil harlot and a kynde; A bettre felawe
sholde men nocht fynde.

He wolde suffre for a quart of wyn⁶⁵⁰ A good felawe to have his
concubyn A twelf month, and excuse hym atte fulle; Ful prively a fynch
eek koude he pulle. And if he foond owher a good felawe, He wolde
techen him to have noon awe In swich caas of the ercedekenes curs, But
if a mannes soule were in his purs; For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed
be. "Purs is the ercedekenes helle," seyde he. But wel I woot he lyed
right in dede;⁶⁶⁰ Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede, For curs
wol slee right as assoillyng savith, And also war hym of a Significavit. In

daunger hadde he at his owene gise The yonge girles of the diocise, And
knew hir conseil, and was al hir reed. A gerland hadde he set upon his
heed, As greet as it were for an ale-stake. A bokeleer hadde he maad
hym of a cake. With hym ther rood a gentil PARDONER⁶⁷⁰ Of
Rouncivale, his freend and his compeer, That streight was comen fro the
court of Rome. Ful loude he soong "Com hider, love, to me!" This
Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun; Was nevere trompe of half so greet
a soun. This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex, But smothe it heeng
as dooth a strike of flex; By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde, And
therwith he his shuldres overspradde; But thynne it lay, by colpons oon
and oon.⁶⁸⁰ But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon, For it was trussed up
in his walet. Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet; Dischevelee, save
his cappe, he rood al bare. Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare. A
vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe. His walet, biforn hym in his
lappe, Bretful of pardoun comen from Rome al hoot. A voys he hadde as
smal as hath a goot. No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have;⁶⁹⁰ As
smothe it was as it were late shave. I trowe he were a geldyng or a
mare. But of his craft, fro Berwyk into Ware Ne was ther swich another
pardoner. For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer, Which that he seyde
was Oure Lady veyl; He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seyl That Seint
Peter hadde, whan that he wente Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hym
hente. He hadde a croys of latoun ful of stones,⁷⁰⁰ And in a glas he
hadde pigges bones. But with thise relikes, whan that he fond A povre
person dwellynge upon lond, Upon a day he gat hym moore
moneye Than that the person gat in monthes tweye; And thus, with
feyned flaterye and japes, He made the person and the peple his
apes. But trewely to tellen atte laste, He was in chirche a noble
ecclesiaste. Wel koude he rede a lessoun or a storie,⁷¹⁰ But alderbest he

song an offertorie; For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe, He
moste preche and wel affile his tonge To wynne silver, as he ful wel
koude; Therefore he song the murierly and loude. Now have I toold you
soothly, in a clause, Th' estaat, th' array, 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.⁷²⁰ But now is
tyme to yow for to telle How that we baren us that ilke nyght, Whan we
were in that hostelrie alyght; And after wol I telle of our viage And al the
remenaunt of oure pilgrimage. But first I pray yow, of youre
curteisye, That ye n' arette it nat my vileynye, Thogh that I pleyedly
speke in this mateere, To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere, Ne thogh I
speke hir wordes proprely.⁷³⁰ For this ye knowen al so wel as I: Whoso
shal telle a tale after a man, He moot reherce as ny as evere he
kan Everich a word, if it be in his charge, Al speke he never so rudeliche
and large, Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewely, Or feyne thyng, or
fynde wordes newe. He may nat spare, althogh he were his brother; He
moot as wel seye o word as another. Crist spak hymself ful brode in
hooly writ,⁷⁴⁰ And wel ye woot no vileynye is it. Eek Plato seith, whoso
kan hym rede, The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede. Also I prey yow
to foryeve it me, Al have I nat set folk in hir degree Heere in this tale, as
that they sholde stonde. My wit is short, ye may wel understonde. Greet
chiere made oure Hoost us everichon, And to the soper sette he us
anon. He served us with vitaille at the beste;⁷⁵⁰ Strong was the wyn, and
wel to drynke us leste. A semely man OURE HOOSTE was withalle For to
been a marchal in an halle. A large man he was with eyen stepe -- A
fairer burgeys was ther noon in Chepe -- Bould of his speche, and wys,
and wel ytaught, And of manhod hym lakkede right naught. Eek therto
he was right a myrie man; And after soper pleyen he bigan, And spak of

myrthe amonges othere thynges,760 Whan that we hadde maad oure rekenynges, And seyde thus: "Now, lordynges, trewely, Ye been to me right welcome, hertely; For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye, I saugh nat this yeer so myrie a compaignye Atones in this herberwe as is now. Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how. And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght, To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght. "Ye goon to Caunterbury -- God yow speede,770 The blisful martir quite yow youre meede! And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye, Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye; For trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon To ride by the weye doumb as a stoon; And therefore wol I maken yow disport, As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort. And if yow liketh alle by oon assent For to stonden at my juggement, And for to werken as I shal yow seye,780 Tomorwe, whan ye riden by the weye, Now, by my fader soule that is deed, But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow myn heed! Hoold up youre hondes, withouten moore speche." Oure conseil was nat longe for to seche. Us thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys, And graunted hym withouten moore avys, And bad him seye his voirdit as hym leste. "Lordynges," quod he, "now herkneth for the beste; But taak it nought, I prey yow, in desdeyn.790 This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyn, That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye, In this viage shal telle tales tweye To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so, And homward he shal tellen othere two, Of adventures that whilom han bifalle. And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle -- That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas Tales of best sentence and moost solaas -- Shal have a soper at oure aller cost800 Heere in this place, sittynge by this post, Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury. And for to make yow the moore mury, I wol myselven goodly with yow ryde, Right at myn owene cost, and be youre gyde; And whoso wole my juggement withseye Shal paye al that

we spenden by the weye. And if ye vouche sauf that it be so, Tel me anon, withouten wordes mo, And I wol erly shape me therfore."810 This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so, And that he wolde been oure governour, And of oure tales juge and reportour, And sette a soper at a certeyn pris, And we wol reuled been at his devys In heigh and lough; and thus by oon assent We been acorded to his juggement. And therupon the wyn was fet anon;820 We dronken, and to reste wente echon, Withouten any lenger tarynge. Amorwe, whan that day bigan to sprynge, Up roos oure Hoost, and was oure aller cok, And gadrede us togidre alle in a flok, And forth we riden a litel moore than paas Unto the Wateryng of Seint Thomas; And there oure Hoost bigan his hors areste And seyde, "Lordynges, herkneth, if yow leste. Ye woot youre foreward, and I it yow recorde.830 If even-song and morwe-song accorde, Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale. As evere mote I drynke wyn or ale, Whoso be rebel to my juggement Shal paye for al that by the wey is spent. Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynne; He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne. Sire Knyght," quod he, "my mayster and my lord, Now draweth cut, for that is myn accord. Cometh neer," quod he, "my lady Prioress.840 And ye, sire Clerk, lat be youre shamefastnesse, 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 Knyght, Of which ful blithe and glad was every wyght, And telle he moste his tale, as was resoun, By foreward and by composicioun, As ye han herd; what nedeth wordes mo?850 And whan this goode man saugh that it was so, As he that wys was and obedient To kepe his foreward by his free assent, He seyde, "Syn I shal bigynne the game, What, welcome be the

cut, a Goddes name! Now lat us ryde, and herkneth what I seye." And
with that word we ryden forth oure weye, And he bigan with right a
myrie cheere His tale anon, and seyde as ye may heere.

THE KNIGHT'S TALE

Whilom, as olde stories tellen us,

860 Ther was a duc that highte Theseus; Of Atthenes he was lord and
governour, And in his tyme swich a conquerour That gretter was ther
noon under the sonne. Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne; What
with his wysdom and his chivalrie, He conquered al the regne of
Femenye, That whilom was ycleped Scithia, And weddede the queene
Ypolita, And broghte hire hoom with hym in his contree⁸⁷⁰ With
muchel glorie and greet solempnytee, And eek hir yonge suster
Emelye. And thus with victorie and with melodye Lete I this noble duc to
Atthenes ryde, And al his hoost in armes hym bisyde. And certes, if it
nere to long to heere, I wolde have toold yow fully the manere How
wonnen was the regne of Femenye By Theseus and by his chivalrye; And
of the grete bataille for the nones⁸⁸⁰ Bitwixen Atthenes and
Amazones; And how asseged was Ypolita, The faire, hardy queene of
Scithia; And of the feste that was at hir weddyng, And of the tempest at
hir hoom-comyng; But al that thyng I moot as now forbere. I have, God
woot, a large feeld to ere, And wayke been the oxen in my plough. The
remenant of the tale is long ynough. I wol nat letten eek noon of this
route;⁸⁹⁰ Lat every felawe telle his tale aboute, And lat se now who shal
the soper wynne; And ther I lefte, I wol ayeyn bigynne. This duc, of
whom I make mencion, Whan he was come almoost unto the toun, In al
his wele and in his mooste pride, He was war, as he caste his eye
aside, Where that ther kneled in the heighe weye A compaignye of
ladyes, tweye and tweye, Ech after oother clad in clothes blake;⁹⁰⁰ But
swich a cry and swich a wo they make That in this world nys creature
lyvyng That herde swich another waymentyng; And of this cry they
nolde nevere stenten Til they the reynes of his brydel henten. "What

folk been ye, that at myn hom-comynge Perturben so my feste with
cryng?" Quod Theseus. "Have ye so greet envye Of myn honour, that
thus compleyne and crye? Or who hath yow mysboden or offended?
910 And telleth me if it may been amended, And why that ye been
clothed thus in blak." The eldeste lady of hem alle spak, Whan she hadde
swowned with a deedly cheere, That it was routhe for to seen and
heere; She seyde, "Lord, to whom Fortune hath yiven Victorie, and as a
conqueror to lyven, Nat greveth us youre glorie and youre honour, But
we biseken mercy and socour. Have mercy on oure wo and oure
distresse!920 Som drope of pitee, thurgh thy gentillesse, Upon us
wrecched wommen lat thou falle, For, certes, lord, ther is noon of us
alle That she ne hath been a duchesse or a queene. Now be we caytyves,
as it is wel seene, Thanked be Fortune and hire false wheel, That noon
estaat assureth to be weel. And certes, lord, to abyden youre
presence, Heere in this temple of the goddessse Clemence We han ben
waitynge al this fourtenyght.930 Now help us, lord, sith it is in thy
myght. "I, wrecche, which that wepe and wayle thus, Was whilom wyf to
kyng Cappaneus, That starf at Thebes -- cursed be that day! -- And alle
we that been in this array And maken al this lamentacioun, We losten
alle oure housbondes at that toun, Whil that the seege therabout
lay. And yet now the olde Creon -- weylaway! -- That lord is now of
Thebes the citee,940 Fulfild of ire and of iniquitee, He, for despit and for
his tirannye, To do the dede bodyes vileynye Of alle oure lordes whiche
that been yslawe, Hath alle the bodyes on an heep ydrawe, And wol nat
suffren hem, by noon assent, Neither to been yburyed nor ybrent, But
maketh houndes ete hem in despit." And with that word, withouten
moore respit, They fillen gruf and criden pitously,950 "Have on us
wrecched wommen som mercy, And lat oure sorwe synken in thyn

herte." This gentil duc doun from his courser sterte With herte pitous,
whan he herde hem speke. Hym thoughte that his herte wolde
breke, Whan he saugh hem so pitous and so maat, That whilom weren of
so greet estaat; And in his armes he hem alle up hente, And hem
conforteth in ful good entente, And swoor his ooth, as he was trewe
knyght,⁹⁶⁰ He wolde doon so ferforthly his myght Upon the tiraunt
Creon hem to wreke That al the peple of Grece sholde speke How Creon
was of Theseus yserved As he that hadde his deeth ful wel deserved. And
right anoon, withouten moore abood, His baner he desplayeth, and forth
rood To Thebes-ward, and al his hoost biside. No neer Atthenes wolde he
go ne ride, Ne take his ese fully half a day,⁹⁷⁰ But onward on his wey
that nyght he lay, And sente anon Ypolita the queene, And Emelye, hir
yonge suster sheene, Unto the toun of Atthenes to dwelle, And forth he
rit; ther is namoore to telle. The rede statue of Mars, with spere and
targe, So shyneth in his white baner large That alle the feeldes glyteren
up and doun; And by his baner born is his penoun Of gold ful riche, in
which ther was ybete

⁹⁸⁰ The Mynotaur, which that he wan in Crete.

Thus rit this duc, thus rit this conquerour, And in his hoost of chivalrie
the flour, Til that he cam to Thebes and alighte Faire in a feeld, ther as
he thoughte to fighte. But shortly for to speken of this thyng, With
Creon, which that was of Thebes kyng, He faught, and slough hym manly
as a knyght In pleyn bataille, and putte the folk to flyght; And by assaut
he wan the citee after,⁹⁹⁰ And rente adoun bothe wall and sparre and
rafter; And to the ladyes he restored agayn The bones of hir freendes
that were slayn, To doon obsequies, as was tho the gyse. But it were al to

longe for to devyse The grete clamour and the waymentynge That the
ladyes made at the brennyng Of the bodies, and the grete honour That
Theseus, the noble conquerour, Dooth to the ladyes, whan they from
hym wente;1000 But shortly for to telle is myn entente. Whan that this
worthy duc, this Theseus, Hath Creon slayn and wonne Thebes
thus, Stille in that feeld he took al nyght his reste, And dide with al the
contree as hym leste. To ransake in the taas of bodyes dede, Hem for to
strepe of harneys and of wede, The pilours diden bisynesse and
cure After the bataille and disconfiture. And so bifel that in the taas they
founde,1010 Thurgh-girt with many a grevous bloody wounde, Two yonge
knyghtes liggyng by and by, Bothe in oon armes, wrought ful richely, Of
whiche two Arcita highte that oon, And that oother knyght highte
Palamon. Nat fully quyke, ne fully dede they were, But by hir cote-
armures and by hir gere The heraudes knewe hem best in special As
they that weren of the blood roial Of Thebes, and of sustren two
yborn.1020 Out of the taas the pilours han hem torn, And han hem
caried softe unto the tente Of Theseus; and he ful soone hem sente To
Atthenes, to dwellen in prisoun Perpetuelly -- he nolde no
raunsoun. And whan this worthy duc hath thus ydon, He took his hoost,
and hoom he rit anon With laurer crowned as a conquerour; And ther he
lyveth in joye and in honour Terme of his lyf; what nedeth wordes mo?
1030 And in a tour, in angwissh and in wo, This Palamon and his felawe
Arcite For everemoore; ther may no gold hem quite. This passeth yeer
by yeer and day by day, Till it fil ones, in a morwe of May, That Emelye,
that fairer was to sene Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene, And
fressher than the May with floures newe -- For with the rose colour
stroof hire hewe, I noot which was the fyner of hem two --1040 Er it
were day, as was hir wone to do, She was arisen and al redy dight, For

May wole have no slogardie anyght. The sesoun priketh every gentil herte, And maketh it out of his slep to sterte, And seith "Arys, and do thyn observaunce." This maked Emelye have remembraunce To doon honour to May, and for to ryse. Yclothed was she fressh, for to devyse: Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse¹⁰⁵⁰ Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse. And in the gardyn, at the sonne upriste, She walketh up and doun, and as hire liste She gadereth floures, party white and rede, To make a subtil gerland for hire hede; And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong. The grete tour, that was so thikke and stroong, Which of the castel was the chief dongeoun (Ther as the knyghtes weren in prisoun Of which I tolde yow and tellen shal),¹⁰⁶⁰ Was evene joynant to the gardyn wal Ther as this Emelye hadde hir pleyynge. Bright was the sonne and cleer that morwenynge, And Palamoun, this woful prisoner, As was his wone, by leve of his gayler, Was risen and romed in a chambre an heigh, In which he al the noble citee seigh, And eek the gardyn, ful of braunches grene, Ther as this fresshe Emelye the shene Was in hire walk, and romed up and doun.¹⁰⁷⁰ This sorweful prisoner, this Palamoun, Goth in the chambre romynge to and fro And to hymself compleynynge of his wo. That he was born, ful ofte he seyde, "allas!" And so bifel, by aventure or cas, That thurgh a wyndow, thikke of many a barre Of iren greet and square as any sparre, He cast his eye upon Emelya, And therwithal he bleynte and cride, "A!" As though he stongen were unto the herte.¹⁰⁸⁰ And with that cry Arcite anon up sterte And seyde, "Cosyn myn, what eyleth thee, That art so pale and deedly on to see? Why cridestow? Who hath thee doon offence? For Goddes love, taak al in pacience Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be. Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee. Som wikke aspect or disposicioun Of Saturne, by som

constellacioun, Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn;1090 So stood the hevene whan that we were born. We moste endure it; this is the short and playn." This Palamon answerde and seyde agayn, "Cosyn, for sothe, of this opinioun Thow hast a veyn ymaginacioun. This prison caused me nat for to crye, But I was hurt right now thurghout myn ye Into myn herte, that wol my bane be. The fairnesse of that lady that I see Yond in the gardyn romen to and fro1100 Is cause of al my crying and my wo. I noot wher she be womman or goddesse, But Venus is it soothly, as I gesse." And therwithal on knees doun he fil, And seyde, "Venus, if it be thy wil Yow in this gardyn thus to transfigure Bifore me, sorweful, wrecched creature, Out of this prisoun help that we may scapen. And if so be my destynee be shapen By eterne word to dyen in prisoun,1110 Of oure lynage have som compassioun, That is so lowe ybrought by tyrannye." And with that word Arcite gan espie Wher as this lady romed to and fro, And with that sighte hir beautee hurte hym so, That, if that Palamon was wounded sore, Arcite is hurt as muche as he, or moore. And with a sigh he seyde pitously, "The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly Of hire that rometh in the yonder place;1120 And but I have hir mercy and hir grace, That I may seen hire atte leeste weye, I nam but deed; ther nis namoore to seye." This Palamon, whan he tho wordes herde, Dispitously he looked and answerde, "Wheither seistow this in earnest or in pley?" "Nay," quod Arcite, "in earnest, by my fey! God helpe me so, me list ful yvele pleye." This Palamon gan knytte his browes tweye. "It nere," quod he, "to thee no greet honour1130 For to be fals, ne for to be traitour To me, that am thy cosyn and thy brother Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother, That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne, Til that the death departe shal us tweyne, Neither of us in love to hyndre oother, Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve

brother, But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me In every cas, as I
shal forthren thee -- This was thyn ooth, and myn also, certeyn;1140 I
woot right wel, thou darst it nat withseyn. Thus artow of my conseil, out
of doute, And now thow woldest falsly been aboute To love my lady,
whom I love and serve, And evere shal til that myn herte sterve. Nay,
certes, false Arcite, thow shalt nat so. I loved hire first, and tolde thee
my wo As to my conseil and my brother sworn To forthre me, as I have
toold biforn. For which thou art ybounden as a knyght1150 To helpen
me, if it lay in thy myght, Or elles artow fals, I dar wel seyn." This Arcite
ful proudly spak ageyn: "Thow shalt," quod he, "be rather fals than
I; And thou art fals, I telle thee outrely, For paramour I loved hire first er
thow. What wiltow seyen? Thou woost nat yet now Wheither she be a
womman or goddess! Thyn is affecciou of hoolynesse, And myn is love
as to a creature;1160 For which I tolde thee myn aventure As to my
cosyn and my brother sworn. I pose that thow lovedest hire
biforn; Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe, That `who shal yeve a
lovere any lawe?' Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan, Than may be yeve to
any erthely man; And therefore positif lawe and swich decree Is broken al
day for love in ech degree. A man moot nedes love, maugree his
heed;1170 He may nat fleen it, thogh he sholde be deed, Al be she
mayde, or wydwe, or elles wyf. And eek it is nat likly al thy lyf To
stonden in hir grace; namoore shal I; For wel thou woost thyselven,
verrailly, That thou and I be dampned to prisoun Perpetuelly; us gayneth
no raunsoun. We stryve as dide the houndes for the boon; They foughte
al day, and yet hir part was noon. Ther cam a kyte, whil that they were
so wrothe,1180 And baar away the boon bitwixe hem bothe. And
therefore, at the kynges court, my brother, Ech man for hymself, ther is
noon oother. Love, if thee list, for I love and ay shal; And soothly, leeve