Prologue to the Canterbury Tales

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| WHAN that Aprille with his shoures soote 1 |  |
| The droghte 2 of Marche hath perced to the roote, |  |
| And bathed every veyne in swich 3 licour, |  |
| Of which vertu engendred is the flour; |  |
| Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth | *5* |
| Inspired hath in every holt 4 and heeth |  |
| The tendre croppes, 5 and the yonge sonne |  |
| Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne, 6 |  |
| And smale fowles maken melodye, |  |
| That slepen al the night with open ye, | *10* |
| (So priketh hem nature in hir corages: 7 |  |
| Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages, |  |
| And palmers for to seken straunge strondes, 8 |  |
| To ferne halwes, 9 couthe 10 in sondry londes; |  |
| 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. 11 |  |
|   Bifel that, in that sesoun on a day, |  |
| In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay 12 | *20* |
| Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage |  |
| To Caunterbury with ful devout corage, |  |
| At night was come in-to that hostelrye |  |
| Wel 13 nyne and twenty in a compaignye, |  |
| Of sondry folk, by aventure 14 y-falle 15 | *25* |
| In felawshipe, and pilgrims were they alle, |  |
| That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde; |  |
| The chambres and the stables weren wyde, |  |
| And wel we weren esed atte beste. 16 |  |
| And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste, | *30* |
| So hadde I spoken with hem everichon, 17 |  |
| That I was of hir felawshipe anon, |  |
| And made forward 18 erly for to ryse, |  |
| To take our wey, ther as I yow devyse. 19 |  |
|   But natheles, 20 whyl I have tyme and space, | *35* |
| Er that I ferther in this tale pace, 21 |  |
| Me thinketh it acordaunt to resoun, |  |
| To telle yew al the condicioun 22 |  |
| Of ech of hem, so as it semed me, |  |
| And whiche 23 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 |  |
| To ryden out, he loved chivalrye, | *45* |
| Trouthe and honour, fredom 24 and curteisye. |  |
| Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre, 25 |  |
| And thereto 26 hadde he riden (no man ferre 27) |  |
| As wel in cristendom as hethenesse, |  |
| And evere honoured for his worthinesse. | *50* |
|   At Alisaundre he was, whan it was wonne; |  |
| Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne 28 |  |
| Aboven alle naciouns in Pruce. 29 |  |
| In Lettow 30 hadde he reysed 31 and in Ruce, 32 |  |
| No cristen man so ofte of his degree. | *55* |
| In Gernade 33 at the sege eek hadde he be |  |
| Of Algezir, and riden in Belmarye. 34 |  |
| At Lyeys 35 was he, and at Satalye, 36 |  |
| Whan they were wonne; and in the Grete See 37 |  |
| At many a noble aryve 38 hadde he be, | *60* |
| At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene, |  |
| And foughten for our feith at Tramissene 39 |  |
| In listes thryes, and ay slayn his foo. |  |
| This ilke 40 worthy knight hadde been also |  |
| Somtyme with the lord of Palatye, 41 | *65* |
| Ageyn another hethen in Turkye: |  |
| And everemore he hadde a sovereyn prys. 42 |  |
| And though that he were worthy, he was wys, |  |
| And of his port 43 as meek as is a mayde. |  |
| He nevere yet no vileinye 44 ne sayde | *70* |
| In al his lyf, un-to no maner wight. 45 |  |
| 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 46 he wered a gipoun 47 | *75* |
| Al bismotered 48 with his habergeoun. 49 |  |
| For he was late y-come from his viage, 50 |  |
| 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, 51 as they were leyd in presse. |  |
| Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse. |  |
| Of his stature he was of evene lengthe, 52 |  |
| And wonderly delivere, 53 and greet of strengthe. |  |
| And he hadde been somtyme in chivachye, 54 | *85* |
| In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Picardye, |  |
| And born him wel, as of so litel space, 55 |  |
| In hope to stonden in his lady 56 grace. |  |
| Embrouded was he, as it were a mede |  |
| Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and rede. | *90* |
| Singinge he was, or floytinge, 57 al the day; |  |
| He was as fresh as is the month of May. |  |
| Short was his goune, with sleves longe and wyde. |  |
| Wel coude he sitte on hors, and faire ryde. |  |
| He coude songes make and wel endyte, 58 | *95* |
| Iuste and eek daunce, and wel purtreye and wryte. |  |
| So hote he lovede, that by nightertale 59 |  |
| He sleep namore than doth a nightingale. |  |
| Curteys he was, lowly, and servisable, |  |
| And carf 60 biforn his fader at the table. | *100* |
| A YEMAN hadde he, 61 and servaunts namo 62 |  |
| At that tyme, for him liste 63 ryde so; |  |
| And he was clad in cote and hood of grene; |  |
| A sheef 64 of pecok arwes brighte and kene |  |
| Under his belt he bar ful thriftily, | *105* |
| (Wel coude he dresse his takel yemanly: |  |
| His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe), |  |
| And in his hand he bar a mighty bowe. |  |
| A not-heed 65 hadde he, with a broun visage. |  |
| Of wode-craft wel coude 66 he al the usage. | *110* |
| Upon his arm he bar a gay bracer, 67 |  |
| And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler, |  |
| And on that other syde a gay daggere, |  |
| Harneised 68 wel, and sharp as point of spere; |  |
| A Cristofre 69 on his brest of silver shene | *115* |
| An horn he bar, the bawdrik 70 was of grene; |  |
| A forster was he, soothly, as I gesse. |  |
|   Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE, |  |
| That of hir smyling was ful simple and coy; |  |
| Hir gretteste ooth was but by seynt Loy; 71 | *120* |
| And she was cleped 72 madame Eglentyne. |  |
| Ful wel she song the service divyne, |  |
| Entuned in hir nose ful semely; |  |
| And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly, 73 |  |
| After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe, 74 | *125* |
| For Frensh 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. 75 |  |
| Hir over lippe 76 wyped she so clene, |  |
| That in hir coppe was no ferthing 77 sene |  |
| Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte. | *135* |
| Ful semely after hir mete she raughte, 78 |  |
| And sikerly 79 she was of greet disport, 80 |  |
| And ful plesaunt, and amiable of port, |  |
| And peyned hir to countrefete chere 81 |  |
| Of court, and been estatlich 82 of manere, | *140* |
| And to ben holden digne 83 of reverence. |  |
| But, for to speken of hir conscience, 84 |  |
| 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. 85 |  |
| But sore weep she if oon of hem were deed, |  |
| Or if men smoot it with a yerde 86 smerte: |  |
| And al was conscience 87 and tendre herte. | *150* |
| Ful semely 88 hir wimpel 89 pinched 90 was; |  |
| Hir nose tretys; 91 hir eyen greye as glas; |  |
| Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to softe and reed; |  |
| But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed. |  |
| It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe; | *155* |
| For, hardily, 92 she was nat undergrowe. |  |
| Ful fetis 93 was hir cloke, as I was war. |  |
| Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar |  |
| A peire 94 of bedes, gauded 95 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.* 96 |  |
|   Another NONNE with hir hadde she, |  |
| That was hir chapeleyne, and PREESTES thre. |  |
|   A MONK ther was, a fair for the maistrye, 97 | *165* |
| An out-rydere, 98 that lovede venerye; 99 |  |
| A manly man, to been an abbot able. |  |
| Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable: |  |
| And, whan he rood, men mighte his brydel here |  |
| Ginglen in a whistling wynd as clere, | *170* |
| And eek as loude as dooth the chapel-belle, |  |
| Ther-as 100 this lord was keper of the celle. 101 |  |
| The reule of seint Maure or of seint Beneit, |  |
| By-cause that it was old and som-del streit, 102 |  |
| This ilke monk leet olde thinges pace, | *175* |
| And held after the newe world the space. |  |
| He yaf 103 nat of that text a pulled 104 hen, |  |
| That seith, that hunters been nat holy men; |  |
| Ne that a monk, whan he is cloisterlees 105 |  |
| 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, 106 |  |
| Upon a book in cloistre alwey to poure, | *185* |
| Or swinken 107 with his handes, and laboure, |  |
| As Austin bit? 108 How shal the world be served? |  |
| Lat Austin have his swink to him reserved. |  |
| Therfor he was a pricasour 109 aright; |  |
| Grehoundes he hadde, as swifte as fowel in flight; | *190* |
| Of priking 110 and of hunting for the hare |  |
| Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare. |  |
| I seigh 111 his sleves purfiled 112 at the hond |  |
| With grys, 113 and that the fyneste of a lond; |  |
| And, for to festne his hood under his chin, | *195* |
| He hadde of gold y-wroght 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; 114 | *200* |