

Here bygyneth the Book of the Tales of Canterbury.



Geoffrey Chaucer

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 Zepirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
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.

When the sweet showers of April fall and shoot
Down through the drought of March to pierce the root,
Bathing every vein in liquid power
From which there springs the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus¹ with his sweet breath 5
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the *Ram*² has run,
And the small fowl are making melody 10
That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers³ long to seek the stranger strands⁴
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially from every shire's⁵ end 15
In England, down to Canterbury the wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.

¹ Zephyrus: the west wind.

² *Ram*: Aries, the Ram is a group of stars seen about March 21.

³ palmeres: pilgrims returned from the Holy Land. They carried palm branches as tokens of their pilgrimage.

⁴ stranger **strands**: foreign shores.

⁵ shire (shir) county

Prologue to *THE CANTERBURY TALES* written phonetically

Wann THAHT AP-reel with his SHOR-rah SOOT-ah
Thuh DRACHT of MAH(r)CH hahth peer-said to thuh ROOT-ah
Ahnd BAH-thed every vine in switch LIK-oor
Of which VAIR-tyoo EN-JENDERED is thuh FLOOR;
Wann ZEF-air-OOS ache with his SWAY-tah breth
IN-SPEER-id hahth in every HOHLT and heth
Thuh TEN-der-uh KROP-EZ, and thuh YOONG-ah SOO-nah
Hahth in thuh RAWM his HAHL-VEH KOORSee-ROOw-nah,
And SMAL-eh FOO-LEZ MAHKEN melo-DEE-ah
That SLAY-PEN ahll thuh night with open EE-ah
(So priketh hem NAH-toor in heer kor-AH-jez,
THAN lo(w)ngen folk to go-on ON PIL-griMAH-jez):
And PAHL-mairs for to SAY-ken STROWN-je STRON-DEZ,
To FEAR-nah HAHL-wez koowth in SOON-dry LON-dez;
And SPES-see-allee from every SHEER-ez end-ah
Of ENgel-ond to CAHN-tair-BURY thy WEN-dah,
Thuh hole-ee blisful MAH(r)-tear for to say-kah,
That hem hahth HOLE-PEN wann thaht thy wair SAY-kah

CH Like German doch

ch Like German ich

URL for a recitation of the Prologue in Middle English:

<http://www.librarius.com/cantlink/audios.htm>