

Exemplar Stories - The Canterbury Tales

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Translated into modern English by Neville Coghill. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951. (Late 14th Century) From The General Prologue

When in April the sweet showers fall
That pierce March's drought to the root and all
And bathed every vein in liquor that has power
To generate therein and sire the flower;
When Zephyr also has with his sweet breath,
Filled again, in every holt and heath,
The tender shoots and leaves, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the Ram has run,
And many little birds make melody
That sleep through all the night with open eye
(So Nature pricks them on to ramp and rage)
Then folk do long to go on pilgrimage,
And palmers to go seeking out strange strands,
To distant shrines well known in distant lands.
And specially from every shire's end
Of England they to Canterbury went,
The holy blessed martyr there to seek
Who helped them when they lay so ill and weak
It happened that, in that season, on a day
In Southwark, at the Tabard, as I lay
Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
To Canterbury, full devout at heart,
There came at nightfall to that hostelry
Some nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry persons who had chanced to fall
In fellowship, and pilgrims were they all
That toward Canterbury town would ride.
The rooms and stables spacious were and wide,
And well we there were eased, and of the best.
And briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
So had I spoken with them, every one,
That I was of their fellowship anon,
And made agreement that we'd early rise
To take the road, as I will to you apprise.
But none the less, whilst I have time and space,
Before yet further in this tale I pace,
It seems to me in accord with reason
To describe to you the state of every one

Of each of them, as it appeared to me,
And who they were, and what was their degree,
And even what clothes they were dressed in;
And with a knight thus will I first begin.