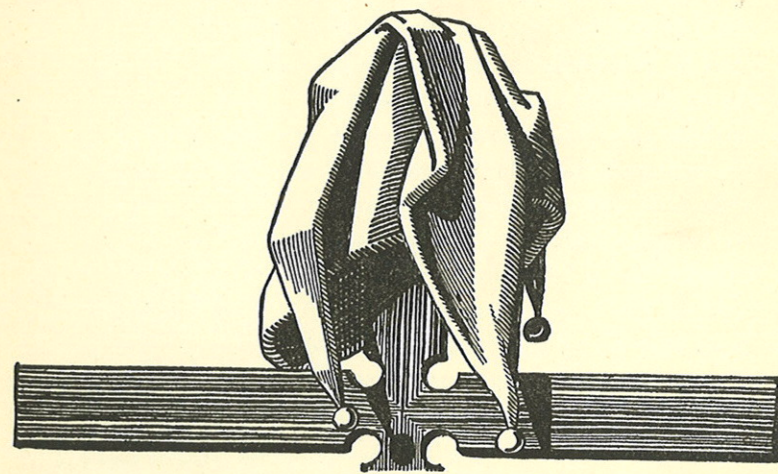


GEOFFREY CHAUCER
CANTERBURY
TALES

RENDERED INTO MODERN ENGLISH BY
J. U. NICOLSON. WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY ROCKWELL KENT AND AN INTRO-
DUCTION BY GORDON HALL GEROULD



De Luxe Edition
GARDEN CITY PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
Garden City New York

that it is as justifiable to render Chaucer into modern English as it is to translate Petronius from his cross-roads Latin. Indeed it may be that there are those who, having tasted here the diluted flavour of his wine, will be prompted to re-fill their glasses with the unadulterated vintage.

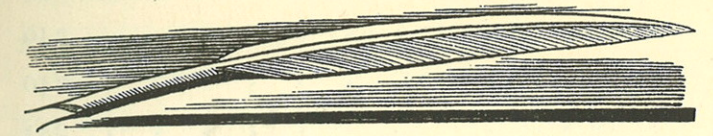
It is because I believe in the validity of the reason last adduced that I have permitted my version of the Tales to be put in print. I hope that I shall not be accused of seeking to better Chaucer, as others have (seemingly) sought to do. My unwavering desire has been to offer that which may prove provocative of further interest upon the part of the reader.

With this apology, I set forth a diluted drink. May it arouse an enduring thirst for the older and more potent liquor.

J. U. N.

Riverside, 1931

TABLE OF CONTENTS



GROUP A

THE PROLOGUE	1
THE KNIGHT'S TALE	27
THE MILLER'S PROLOGUE	86
THE MILLER'S TALE	88
THE REEVE'S PROLOGUE	107
THE REEVE'S TALE	109
THE COOK'S PROLOGUE	120
THE COOK'S TALE	121

GROUP B

INTRODUCTION TO THE LAWYER'S PROLOGUE	124
THE LAWYER'S PROLOGUE	127
THE LAWYER'S TALE	128
THE SAILOR'S PROLOGUE	158
THE SAILOR'S TALE	159
THE Prioress' PROLOGUE	171
THE Prioress' TALE	173
PROLOGUE TO SIR THOPAS	180
SIR THOPAS	181
PROLOGUE TO MELIBEUS	188
THE TALE OF MELIBEUS	189

THE MONK'S PROLOGUE	237
THE MONK'S TALE	240
LUCIFER	240
ADAM	240
SAMSON	241
HERCULES	243
NEBUCHADNEZZAR	244
BELSHAZZAR	245
ZENOBIA	247
PEDRO, KING OF SPAIN	251
PETER, KING OF CYPRUS	251
BARNABO OF LOMBARDY	252
UGOLINO, COUNT OF PISA	252
NERO	253
HOLOFERNES	256
ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES	257
ALEXANDER	258
JULIUS CAESAR	259
CROESUS	261
THE PROLOGUE TO THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE	263
THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE	265
THE EPILOGUE TO THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE .	281

GROUP C

THE PHYSICIAN'S TALE	283
THE WORDS OF THE HOST	291
THE PROLOGUE OF THE PARDONER'S TALE .	293
THE PARDONER'S TALE	297

GROUP D

THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE	311
THE WORDS BETWEEN THE SUMMONER AND THE FRIAR	333
THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE	334
THE FRIAR'S PROLOGUE	345
THE FRIAR'S TALE	346
THE SUMMONER'S PROLOGUE	356
THE SUMMONER'S TALE	357

GROUP E

THE CLERK'S PROLOGUE	374
THE CLERK'S TALE	375
THE MERCHANT'S PROLOGUE	410
THE MERCHANT'S TALE	411
THE EPILOGUE TO THE MERCHANT'S TALE .	441

GROUP F

THE SQUIRE'S PROLOGUE	443
THE SQUIRE'S TALE	443
THE WORDS OF THE FRANKLIN	461
THE FRANKLIN'S PROLOGUE	462
THE FRANKLIN'S TALE	463

GROUP G

THE SECOND NUN'S PROLOGUE	487
THE SECOND NUN'S TALE	491

THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S PROLOGUE . . . 504
THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE . . . 509

GROUP H

THE MANCIPL'S PROLOGUE . . . 530
THE MANCIPL'S TALE . . . 534

GROUP I

THE PARSON'S PROLOGUE . . . 541
THE PARSON'S TALE . . . 544

WHEREIN CHAUCER TAKES LEAVE OF HIS BOOK 622

CANTERBURY TALES

THE TALE OF THE WIFE OF BATH

NOW in the olden days of King Arthur,
Of whom the Britons speak with great
honour,

All this wide land was land of faëry.
The elf-queen, with her jolly company,
Danced oftentimes on many a green mead;
This was the old opinion, as I read.
I speak of many hundred years ago;
But now no man can see the elves, you know.
For now the so-great charity and prayers
Of limiters and other holy friars
That do infest each land and every stream
As thick as motes are in a bright sunbeam,
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchens, ladies' bowers,
Cities and towns and castles and high towers,
Manors and barns and stables, aye and dairies—
This causes it that there are now no fairies.
For where was wont to walk full many an elf,
Right there walks now the limiter himself
In noons and afternoons and in mornings,
Saying his matins and such holy things,
As he goes round his district in his gown.
Women may now go safely up and down,
In every copse or under every tree;
There is no other incubus than he,
And would do them nothing but dishonour.

And so befell it that this King Arthur
Had at his court a lusty bachelor
Who, on a day, came riding from river;³
And happened that, alone as she was born,
He saw a maiden walking through the corn,
From whom, in spite of all she did and said,
Straightway by force he took her maidenhead;

³ From river: that is, from hawking for waterfowl beside a stream or mere.





Should have a wife. For all the world's forlorn!
Religion, why it's gathered all the corn
Of treading, and we laymen are but shrimps!
From feeble trees there come but wretched imps.
That's why our heirs are all so very slender
And feeble that they may not well engender.
That's why our goodwives always will essay
Religious folk, for you may better pay
With Venus' payments than we others do;
God knows, in no light weight of coin pay you!
But be not wroth, my lord, because I play;
Full oft in jest have I heard truth, I say."

This worthy monk took all with sober sense,
And said: "I will do all my diligence,
So far as it accords with decency,
To tell to you a tale, or two, or three.
And if you care to hear, come hitherward,
And I'll repeat the life of Saint Edward;
Or rather, first some tragedies I'll tell,
Whereof I have a hundred in my cell.
Tragedy is to say a certain story
From ancient books which have preserved the glory
Of one that stood in great prosperity
And is now fallen out of high degree
In misery, where he ends wretchedly.
Such tales are versified most commonly
In six feet, which men call hexameter.
In prose are many written; some prefer
A quantitative metre, sundry wise.
Lo, this short prologue will enough suffice.
"Now hearken, if you'd like my speech to hear;
But first I do beseech, let it be clear
That I, in order, tell not all these things,
Be it of popes, of emperors, or kings,
Each in his place, as men in writings find,
But I put some before and some behind,
As they to memory may come by chance;
Hold me excused, pray, of my ignorance."

Explicit