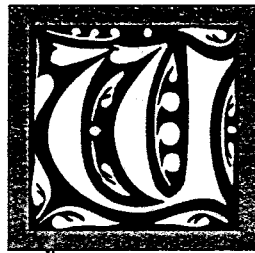


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FROM THE CANTERBURY TALES

An Introduction to  
**The Canterbury Pilgrims**



hen April rain  
bathes the earth  
and makes grass

and flowers grow, and when  
the west wind gently stirs the  
leaves, the little birds begin to  
make us merry with their  
songs. This is the time of year  
when people long to be out-  
doors! And in England it's the  
time when people journey to  
Canterbury to visit the shrine  
of Saint Thomas à Becket.  
He's the one we prayed to  
when we were sick, so it seems  
only right to give thanks to  
him now.

It was a spring day  
when I left London to make  
my pilgrimage to Canterbury.

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Just south of the river Thames, I stopped for the night at a place called the Tabard Inn. What a cheerful place! There I met twenty-nine other pilgrims, all headed for Canterbury, too. We decided it would be a good idea to travel together.

Altogether, the pilgrims represented almost every kind of person you can find in England. To begin with we were honored to have a member of the nobility with us, a **KNIGHT** who was valiant and courteous, along with his young son—a **SQUIRE**—and a **YEOMAN** who was the knight's servant. This merry fellow was dressed all in green and carried a sheaf of arrows with peacock feathers on them.

In our group, there were several members of the clergy, too. For instance, there were two nuns, one of whom was a **PRIORESS**; a **PRIEST** who rode along with them; and a **MONK** and a **FRIAR** (neither one of whom stayed inside much to pray, but instead were always singing and drinking and looking for good company).

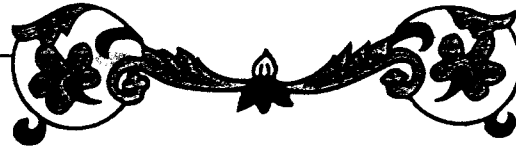
Then there were two pilgrims whose work was connected with the

church, though you'd hardly believe it by looking at them. One was a **SUMMONER**. He had a horrible, fiery-red face that frightened little children. His job was to summon people to court, but when he wasn't doing that he was usually drinking



in a tavern. Then there was a **PAR-DONER**. He carried a case full of pardons he said he'd gotten from the pope, and some worthless tidbits he said had belonged to saints. He'd sell these things to simple people for high prices.

A number of rich and distinguished men were in our group, too. There were a **MERCHANT**, a **PHYSICIAN**, and a **LAWYER**, along with a **FRANKLIN**, a well-to-do landowner. The Franklin had



represented his county in Parliament and had also served as a Justice of the Peace.

With us also was a SAILOR who said he had made many people walk the plank. And there was a WIFE from the city of Bath. She had a bold, red face and wore scarlet stockings, a broad hat, and several kerchiefs wound around her head. There were also a REEVE, a MILLER, and a MANCIPLE. The Manciple made a living buying food and drink and then selling them at a tidy profit to a group of lawyers. The Reeve, a thin and sour man, took care of an estate belonging to a rich lord. He did a good job as a caretaker, but of course he, too, made a handsome sum of money in the process.

Now, our HOST was the owner of the Tabard Inn. His name was Harry Bailey, and he was a large, handsome, friendly, and talkative man. He gathered us all together and said, "You're the merriest band of pilgrims that's come by here all year! I know you'll be talking and telling jokes all the way to Canterbury. I have a suggestion for getting yourselves organized. Why don't

each of you tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two stories on the way back? I'll go along with you as a guide and also as manager of the storytelling. When we get back here, we'll vote on who has told the best tale, and the rest of you will treat that person to a fine supper! What do you say to that?"

We all agreed that our host's idea was a fine one. Of course, he stood to make a profit from serving a big supper like that, but that didn't bother us, for he was a good-hearted person and offered fine food. And so, after confirming our agreement, we all went to bed and started off together for Canterbury the next morning. ♦