

Chaucer, 1390s

The following is the beginning of the general [Prologue](#) from [The Canterbury Tales](#) by [Geoffrey Chaucer](#). The text was written in a dialect associated with London and spellings associated with the then-emergent Chancery Standard.

Original in Middle English:

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 Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe 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.

Translation into Modern English: (by [Nevill Coghill](#))^[6]

When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
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* has run
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep away the night with open eye,
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then folk long to go on pilgrimages,
And palmeres long to seek the stranger strands
Of far off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially from every shires' end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
The holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick