

1380

CANTERBURY TALES

SIR THOPAS

Geoffrey Chaucer

Chaucer, Geoffrey (1343-1400) - English poet, known as the most important writer of Middle English. His *Canterbury Tales* (~1380) are told by traveling pilgrims who meet at a tavern and have a storytelling contest to pass the time. Each tale is preceded by an introductory prologue. *Sir Thopas* - Sir Thopas is a Flanders Knight searching for love with an elf-queen. This is a dreary tale told by Chaucer who is interrupted and then goes on to tell the *Tale of Melibeus*.

SIR THOPAS

The First Fit

Listen, lords, with good intent,
I truly will a tale present
Of mirth and of solace;
All of a knight was fair and gent
In battle and in tournament.
His name was Sir Thopas.

Born he was in a far country,
In Flanders, all beyond the sea,
And Poperinghe the place;
His father was a man full free,
And lord he was of that countree,
As chanced to be God's grace.

Sir Thopas was a doughty swain,
White was his brow as paindemaine,
His lips red as a rose;

His cheeks were like poppies in grain,
And I tell you, and will maintain,
He had a comely nose.

His hair and beard were like saffron
And to his girdle reached adown,
His shoes were of cordwain;
From Bruges were come his long hose brown,
His rich robe was of ciclatoun-
And cost full many a jane.

Well could he hunt the dim wild deer
And ride a-hawking by river,
With grey goshawk on hand;
Therewith he was a good archer,
At wrestling was there none his peer
Where any ram did stand.

Full many a maiden, bright in bower,
Did long for him for paramour
When they were best asleep;
But chaste he was, no lecher sure,

And sweet as is the bramble-flower
That bears a rich red hepe.

And so befell, upon a day,
In truth, as I can tell or may,
Sir Thopas out would ride;
He mounted on his stallion grey,
And held in hand a lance, I say,
With longsword by his side.

He spurred throughout a fair forest
Wherein was many a dim wild beast,
Aye, both the buck and hare;
And as he spurred on, north and east,
I tell you now he had, in breast,
A melancholy care.

There herbs were springing, great and small,
The licorice blue and white setwall,
And many a gillyflower,

And nutmeg for to put in ale,
All whether it be fresh or stale,
Or lay in chest in bower.

The birds they sang, upon that day,
The sparrow-hawk and popinjay,
Till it was joy to hear;
The missel thrush he made his lay,
The tender stockdove on the spray,
She sang full loud and clear.

Sir Thopas fell to love-longing
All when he heard the throstle sing,
And spurred as madman would:
His stallion fair, for this spurring,
Did sweat till men his coat might wring,
His two flanks were all blood.

Sir Thopas grown so weary was
With spurring on the yielding grass,
So fierce had been his speed,
That down he laid him in that place

To give the stallion some solace
And let him find his feed.

“O holy Mary, ben’cite!
What ails my heart that love in me
Should bind me now so sore?
For dreamed I all last night, pardie,
An elf-queen shall my darling be,
And sleep beneath my gore.

“An elf-queen will I love, ywis,
For in this world no woman is
Worthy to be my make
In town;
All other women I forsake,
And to an elf-queen I’ll betake
Myself, by dale and down!”

Into his saddle he climbed anon
And spurred then over stile and stone.
An elf-queen for to see,
Till he so far had ridden on

He found a secret place and won
The land of Faery
So wild;
For in that country was there none
That unto him dared come, not one,
Not either wife or child.

Until there came a great giant,
Whose name it was Sir Oliphant,
A dangerous man indeed;
He said: "O Childe, by Termagant,
Save thou dost spur from out my haunt,
Anon I'll slay thy steed
With mace.
For here the queen of Faery,
With harp and pipe and harmony,
Is dwelling in this place."

The Childe said: "As I hope to thrive,
We'll fight the morn, as I'm alive,
When I have my armour;
For well I hope, and par ma fay,

That thou shalt by this lance well pay,
And suffer strokes full sore;
Thy maw
Shall I pierce through, and if I may,
Ere it be fully prime of day,
Thou'lt die of wounds most raw."

Sir Thopas drew aback full fast;
This giant at him stones did cast
Out of a fell staff-sling;
But soon escaped was Childe Thopas,
And all it was by God's own grace,
And by his brave bearing.

And listen yet, lords, to my tale,
Merrier than the nightingale,
Whispered to all and some,
How Sir Thopas, with pride grown pale,
Hard spurring over hill and dale,
Came back to his own home.

His merry men commanded he
To make for him both game and glee,
For needs now must he fight
With a great giant of heads three,
For love in the society
Of one who shone full bright.

“Do come,” he said, “my minstrels all,
And jesters, tell me tales in hall
Anon in mine arming;
Of old romances right royal,
Of pope and king and cardinal,
And e’en of love-liking.”

They brought him, first, the sweet, sweet wine,
And mead within a maselyn,
And royal spicery
Of gingerbread that was full fine,
Cumin and licorice, I opine,
And sugar so dainty.

He drew on, next his white skin clear,
Of finest linen, clean and sheer,
His breeches and a shirt;
And next the shirt a stuffed acton,
And over that a habergeon
'Gainst piercing of his heart.

And over that a fine hauberk
That was wrought all of Jewish work
And reinforced with plate;
And over that his coat-of-arms,
As white as lily-flower that charms,
Wherein he will debate.

His shield was all of gold so red,
And thereon was a wild boar's head
A carbuncle beside;
And now he swore, by ale and bread,
That soon "this giant shall be dead,
Betide what may betide!"

His jambeaux were of cuir-bouilli,
His sword sheath was of ivory,
His helm of latten bright,
His saddle was of rewel bone,
And as the sun his bridle shone,
Or as the full moonlight.

His spear was of fine cypress wood,
That boded war, not brotherhood,
The head full sharply ground;
His steed was all a dapple grey
Whose gait was ambling, on the way,
Full easily and round
In land.
Behold, my lords, here is a fit!
If you'll have any more of it,
You have but to command.

The Second Fit

Now hold your peace, par charitee,
Both knight and lady fair and free,
And hearken to my spell;
Of battle and of chivalry
And all of ladies' love-drury
Anon I will you tell.

Romances men recount of price,
Of King Horn and of Hypotis,
Of Bevis and Sir Guy,
Of Sir Libeaux and Plain-d' Amour;
But Sir Thopas is flower sure
Of regal chivalry.

His good horse all he then bestrode,
And forth upon his way he rode
Like spark out of a brand;
Upon his crest he bore a tower
Wherein was thrust a lily-flower;
God grant he may withstand!

He was a knight adventurous,
Wherefore he'd sleep within no house,
But lay down in his hood;
His pillow was his helmet bright,
And by him browsed his steed all night
On forage fine and good.

Himself drank water of the well,
As did the knight Sir Percival,
So worthy in his weeds,
Till on a day...

**HERE THE HOST HALTED CHAUCER IN HIS
TALE OF THOPAS**

THE END