

1380

CANTERBURY TALES

THE COOK'S PROLOGUE

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. The Cook's Prologue- Introduces the cook, Roger, who was hired by the workmen to serve them during their journey.

THE COOK'S PROLOGUE

The cook from London, while the reeve yet spoke,
 Patted his back with pleasure at the joke.
 "Ha, ha!" laughed he, "by Christ's great suffering,
 This miller had a mighty sharp ending
 Upon his argument of harbourage!
 For well says Solomon, in his language,
 'Bring thou not every man into thine house;'
 For harbouring by night is dangerous.
 Well ought a man to know the man that he
 Has brought into his own security.
 I pray God give me sorrow and much care
 If ever, since I have been Hodge of Ware,
 Heard I of miller better brought to mark.
 A wicked jest was played him in the dark.
 But God forbid that we should leave off here;
 And therefore, if you'll lend me now an ear,
 From what I know, who am but a poor man,
 I will relate, as well as ever I can,
 A little trick was played in our city."
 Our host replied: "I grant it readily.
 Now tell on, Roger; see that it be good;
 For many a pasty have you robbed of blood,
 And many a Jack of Dover have you sold
 That has been heated twice and twice grown cold.
 From many a pilgrim have you had Christ's curse,
 For of your parsley they yet fare the worse,
 Which they have eaten with your stubble goose;
 For in your shop full many a fly is loose.
 Now tell on, gentle Roger, by your name.
 But yet, I pray, don't mind if I make game,
 A man may tell the truth when it's in play."
 "You say the truth," quoth Roger, "by my fay!
 But 'true jest, bad jest' as the Fleming saith.
 And therefore, Harry Bailey, on your faith,
 Be you not angry ere we finish here,
 If my tale should concern an inn-keeper.
 Nevertheless, I'll tell not that one yet,
 But ere we part your jokes will I upset."
 And thereon did he laugh, in great good cheer,
 And told his tale, as you shall straightway hear.

THUS ENDS THE PROLOGUE OF THE COOK'S TALE