

1380

CANTERBURY TALES

THE MERCHANT'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 Merchant's Prologue - Introduces the Merchant, an unhappily married man of business.

THE MERCHANTS PROLOGUE

Of weeping and wailing, care and other sorrow
 I know enough, at eventide and morrow,"
 The merchant said, "and so do many more
 Of married folk, I think, who this deplore,
 For well I know that it is so with me.
 I have a wife, the worst one that can be;
 For though the foul Fiend to her wedded were,
 She'd overmatch him, this I dare to swear.
 How could I tell you anything special
 Of her great malice? She is shrew in all.
 There is a long and a large difference
 Between Griselda's good and great patience
 And my wife's more than common cruelty.
 Were I unbound, as may I prosperous be!
 I'd never another time fall in the snare.
 We wedded men in sorrow live, and care;
 Try it who will, and he shall truly find
 I tell the truth, by Saint Thomas of Ind,
 As for the greater part, I say not all.
 Nay, God forbid that it should so befall!
 "Ah, good sir host! I have been married, lad,
 These past two months, and no day more, by gad;
 And yet I think that he whose days alive
 Have been all wifeless, although men should rive
 Him to the heart, he could in no wise clear
 Tell you so much of sorrow as I here
 Could tell you of my spouse's cursedness."
 "Now," said our host, "merchant, so God you bless,
 Since you're so very learned in that art,
 Full heartily, I pray you, tell us part."
 "Gladly," said he, "but of my own fresh sore,
 For grief of heart I may not tell you more."

HERE ENDS THE MERCHANT'S PROLOGUE