

1380

CANTERBURY TALES

THE SUMMONER'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 Summoner's Prologue Introduces the Summoner, a drunk who is incensed by the Friar's Tale about a Summoner.

THE SUMMONER'S PROLOGUE

High in his stirrups, then, the summoner stood;
 Against the friar his heart, as madman's would,
 Shook like very aspen leaf, for ire.
 "Masters," said he, "but one thing I desire;
 I beg of you that, of your courtesy,
 Since you have heard this treacherous friar lie,
 You suffer it that I my tale may tell!
 This friar he boasts he knows somewhat of Hell,
 And God He knows that it is little wonder;
 Friars and fiends are never far asunder.
 For, by gad, you have oftentimes heard tell
 How such a friar was snatched down into
 Hell In spirit, once, and by a vision blown;
 And as an angel led him up and down
 To show the pains and torments that there were,
 In all the place he saw no friar there.
 Of other folk he saw enough in woe;
 And to the angel then he questioned so:
 "'Now, sir,' said he, 'have friars such a grace
 That none of them shall come into this place?'
 "'Nay,' said the angel, 'millions here are thrown!'
 And unto Sathanas he led him down.
 "'And now has Sathanas,' said he, 'a tail
 Broader than of a galleon is the *sail*.
 Hold up thy tail, thou Sathanas!' said he,
 "'Show forth thine arse and let the friar see
 Where is the nest of friars in this place!'
 And ere one might go half a furlong's space,
 Just as the bees come swarming from a hive,
 Out of the Devil's arse-hole there did drive
 Full twenty thousand friars in a rout,
 And through all Hell they swarmed and ran about.
 And came again, as fast as they could run,
 And in his arse they crept back, every one.
 He clapped his tail to and then lay right still.
 This friar, when he'd looked at length his fill
 Upon the torments of that sorry place,
 His spirit God restored, of His high grace,
 Into his body, and he did awake;
 Nevertheless for terror did he quake
 So was the Devil's arse-hole in his mind,

Which is his future home, and like in kind.
God save all but this cursed friar here;
My prologue ends thus; to my tale give ear.

HERE ENDS

THE PROLOGUE OF THE SUMMONER'S TALE