

Here begins the Book of the Tales of Canterbury

When that April with his showers sweet  
The drought of March has pierced to the root  
And bathed each vein with liquor of such has power  
To bring about the birth to the flower; [here in the South we say  
"the sap's rising" when the trees are beginning to bud in the  
spring—that's what's happening here]  
When Zephyr [the warm west wind], with his sweet breath,  
Exhales an air in every grove and heath  
Upon tender shoots [you know how "tender" young plants are—  
the warm wind is a good thing!], and the young sun  
His half-course in the sign of the Ram [Aries, the first sign of  
the zodiac—the pilgrimage began on April 11, 1387] has run,  
And the small birds are making melody  
That sleep away the night with open eye  
So nature pricks them and their heart engages [the birds are  
hardly sleeping at night because of the wonderful weather]  
Then people long to go on pilgrimages [just like these people,  
we can't wait to get outside when springtime comes]  
And palmers [pilgrims who wore two crossed palm leaves to  
show they had visited the Holy Land] long to seek the  
stranger lands  
Of far-off saints, blessed in various lands,  
And specially, from every shire's [county's] end  
In England, down to Canterbury they went  
To seek the holy blissful martyr [St. Thomas Becket, the

Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered in 1170], quick  
To give his help to them when they are sick. [the pilgrims  
prayed for Becket's aid when they were sick]

**Now, we can get into the story as Chaucer Pilgrim explains  
how all the characters met and begins to introduce the  
pilgrims one-by-one.**

It happened in that season [springtime] that one day  
In Southwark, a suburb of London, at the Tabard [the Tabard  
Inn was one of Geoffrey Chaucer's favorite places to stay in  
London], as I lay  
Ready to go on pilgrimage and start  
For Canterbury, most sincere at heart.  
That night there came into that inn  
Some nine and twenty [29] in a company  
Of sundry folk [different types of people] happening then to fall  
In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all  
That towards Canterbury meant to ride. [The 29 pilgrims were  
also on their way to Canterbury]  
The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;  
They made us comfortable, all was of the best.  
And shortly; when the sun had gone to rest,  
By speaking to them all upon the trip  
I soon was one of them in fellowship  
And promised to rise early and take the way

To Canterbury, as you heard me say. [Chaucer Pilgrim is going to join the other travelers and ride to Canterbury with them]

But, nonetheless, while I have time and space,  
Before my story takes a further pace,  
It seems a reasonable thing to say  
What their condition was, the full array  
Of each of them, as it appeared to me  
According to profession and social standing,  
And what apparel they were riding in; [Chaucer Pilgrim says that while he had a little time, he had better tell us about the 29 others by describing their social standing, profession, and the clothes they were wearing]  
And at a Knight I therefore will begin. [He will begin with the knight because he has the highest social standing of anyone going]