

Geoffrey Chaucer, d. 1400: Canterbury Tales: Prologue

Excerpt from: *Canterbury Tales: A Knight's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer

Old English

The Knight's Portrait

43: A knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,
44: That fro the tyme that he first bigan
45: To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
46: Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
47: Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
48: And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,
49: As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,
50: And evere honoured for his worthynesse.
51: At alisaundre he was whan it was wonne.
52: Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne
53: Aboven alle nacions in pruce;
54: In lettow hadde he reysed and in ruce,
55: No cristen man so ofte of his degree.
56: In gernade at the seege eek hadde he be
57: Of algezir, and riden in belmarie.
58: At lyeys was he and at satalye,
59: Whan they were wonne; and in the grete see
60: At many a noble armee hadde he be.
61: At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,
62: And foughten foroure feith at tramysse.
63: In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foe.
64: This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also
65: Somtyme with the lord of palatye
66: Agayn another hethen in turkye.
67: And everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys;
68: And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
69: And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
70: He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde
71: In al his lyf unto no maner wight.
72: He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght.
73: But, for to tellen yow of his array,
74: His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.
75: Of fustian he wored a gypon
76: Al bismotered with his habergeon,
77: For he was late ycome from his viage,
78: And wente for to doon his pilgrymage.

Modern Equivalent

THE KNIGHT

A knight there was, and he a worthy man,
Who, from the moment that he first began
To ride about the world, loved chivalry,
Truth, honour, freedom and all courtesy.
Full worthy was he in his liege-lord's war,
And therein had he ridden (none more far)
As well in Christendom as heathenesse,
And honoured everywhere for worthiness.
At Alexandria, he, when it was won;
Full oft the table's roster he'd begun
Above all nations' knights in Prussia.
In Latvia raided he, and Russia,
No christened man so oft of his degree.
In far Granada at the siege was he
Of Algeciras, and in Belmarie.
At Ayas was he and at Satalye
When they were won; and on the Middle Sea
At many a noble meeting chanced to be.
Of mortal battles he had fought fifteen,
And he'd fought for our faith at Tramisene
Three times in lists, and each time slain his foe.
This self-same worthy knight had been also
At one time with the lord of Palatye
Against another heathen in Turkey:
And always won he sovereign fame for prize.
Though so illustrious, he was very wise
And bore himself as meekly as a maid.
He never yet had any vileness said,
In all his life, to whatsoever wight.
He was a truly perfect, gentle knight.
But now, to tell you all of his array,
His steeds were good, but yet he was not gay.
Of simple fustian wore he a jupon
Sadly discoloured by his habergeon;
For he had lately come from his voyage
And now was going on this pilgrimage.