

CHAUCER FOR CHILDREN



A Golden Key
H. R. Haweis

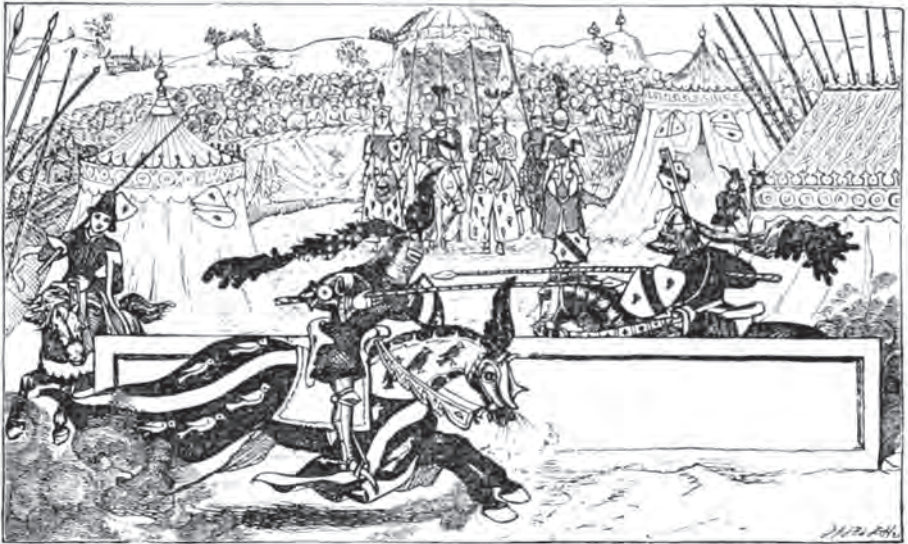


KNIGHT. SQUIRE. BOY. WIFE OF BATH. PRIORRESS. CHAUCER (A CLERK). FRIAR. MINE HOST.
MONK. SUMMONER. PARDONER. SECOND NUN. FRANKLIN.

CHAUCER FOR CHILDREN

A Golden Key

BY MRS. H. R. HAWEIS



'DOTH NOW YOUR DEVOIR, YONGE KNIGHTES PROUDO!'



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CHIEFLY FOR THE USE AND PLEASURE OF
MY LITTLE LIONEL,
FOR WHOM I FELT THE NEED OF SOME BOOK OF THE KIND,
I HAVE ARRANGED AND ILLUSTRATED THIS
CHAUCER STORY-BOOK

CONTENTS

FOREWORDS TO THE SECOND EDITION	I
FOREWORDS	III
CHAUCER THE TALE-TELLER	I
CANTERBURY TALES	
CHAUCER'S PILGRIMS	25
CHAUCER'S PROLOGUE	27
THE KNIGHT'S TALE	45
THE FRIAR'S TALE	75
THE CLERK'S TALE	85
THE FRANKLIN'S TALE	109
THE PARDONER'S TALE	120
MINOR POEMS	
COMPLAINT OF CHAUCER TO HIS PURSE	131
TWO RONDEAUX	132
VIRELAI	133
GOOD COUNSEL OF CHAUCER	136
NOTES ON THE PICTURES	139

FOREWORDS TO THE SECOND EDITION.

In revising *Chaucer for Children* for a New Edition, I have fully availed myself of the help and counsel of my numerous reviewers and correspondents, without weighting the book, which is really designed for children, with a number of new facts, and theories springing from the new facts, such as I have incorporated in my Book for older readers, *Chaucer for Schools*.

Curious discoveries are still being made, and will continue to be, thanks to the labours of men like Mr. F. J. Furnivall, and many other able and industrious scholars, encouraged by the steadily increasing public interest in Chaucer.

I must express my sincere thanks and gratification for the reception this book has met with from the press generally, and from many eminent critics in particular; and last, not least, from those to whom I devoted my pleasant toil, the children of England.

M. E. HAWEIS.

FOREWORDS.

To the Mother.

A CHAUCER for Children may seem to some an impossible story-book, but it is one which I have been encouraged to put together by noticing how quickly my own little boy learned and understood fragments of early English poetry. I believe that if they had the chance, many other children would do the same.

I think that much of the construction and pronunciation of old English which seems stiff and obscure to grown up people, appears easy to children, whose crude language is in many ways its counterpart.

The narrative in early English poetry is almost always very simply and clearly expressed, with the same kind of repetition of facts and names which, as every mother knows, is what children most require in story-telling. The emphasis¹ which the final E gives to many words is another thing which helps to impress the sentences on the memory, the sense being often shorter than the sound.

It seems but natural that every English child should know something of one who left so deep an impression on his age, and on the English tongue, that he has been called by Occleve "the finder of our fair language." For in his day there was actually no *national* language, no *national* literature, English consisting of so many dialects, each having its own literature intelligible to comparatively few; and the Court and educated classes still adhering greatly to Norman-French for both speaking and writing. Chaucer, who wrote for the people, chose the best form of English, which was that spoken at Court, at a time when English was regaining supremacy over French; and the form he adopted laid the foundation of our present National Tongue.

Chaucer is, moreover, a thoroughly religious poet, all his merriest stories having a fair moral; even those which are too coarse for modern taste are rather *naïve* than injurious; and his pages breathe a genuine faith in God, and a passionate sense of the beauty and harmony of the divine work. The selections I have made are some of the most beautiful portions of Chaucer's most beautiful tales.

i. I use the word 'emphasis' in the same sense as one might speak of a *crotchet* in music, to which you count two, being more emphatic than a *quaver*, to which you count one.

I believe that some knowledge of, or at least interest in, the domestic life and manners of the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries, would materially help young children in their reading of English history. The political life would often be interpreted by the domestic life, and much of that time which to a child's mind forms the *driest* portion of history, because so unknown, would then stand out as it really was, glorious and fascinating in its vigour and vivacity, its enthusiasm, and love of beauty and bravery. There is no clearer or safer exponent of the life of the 14th century, as far as he describes it, than Geoffrey Chaucer.

As to the difficulties of understanding Chaucer, they have been greatly overstated. An occasional reference to a glossary is all that is requisite; and, with a little attention to a very simple general rule, anybody with moderate intelligence and an ear for musical rhythm can enjoy the lines.

In the first place, it must be borne in mind that the *E* at the end of the old English words was usually a syllable, and must be sounded, as *Aprillē, swootē, &c.*

Note, then, that Chaucer is always *rhythmical*. Hardly ever is his rhythm a shade wrong, and therefore, roughly speaking, *if you pronounce the words so as to preserve the rhythm* all will be well. When the final *e* must be sounded in order to make the rhythm right, sound it, but where it is not needed leave it mute.¹

Thus:—in the opening lines—

when, showers, sweet	Whan that <i>April</i> <i>le</i> with his <i>schowr</i> es swoote
pierced, root	The drought of Marche hath per cèd to the roote
such, liquor	And bath ud eve ry veyne in swich licour
flower	Of whiche vertue engen drèd is the flour. (<i>Prologue.</i>)

You see that in those words which I have put in italics the final *E* must be sounded slightly, for the rhythm's sake.

small birds make	And <i>sma</i> <i>le fow</i> <i>les</i> ma ken me lodie
sleep, all	That sle pen al the night with o pen yhe. (<i>Prologue.</i>)

Again, to quote at random—

lark, messenger	The bu sy <i>lark</i> <i>e</i> mess ager of day,
saluteth, her, morning	Salu eth in hire song the <i>mor</i> <i>we</i> gray. (<i>Knight's Tale.</i>)
legs, lean	Ful <i>long</i> <i>e</i> wern his leg gus, and ful lene;
	Al like a staff ther was no calf y-sene. (<i>Prologue—'Reve.'</i>)

1. Those who wish to study systematically the grammar, and construction of the metre, I can only refer to the best authorities, Dr. R. Morris and Mr. Skeat, respectively. It would be superfluous to enter on these matters in the present volume.

or in Chaucer's exquisite greeting of the daisy—

alweys Knelyng | alwey | til it | unclo | sèd was
small, soft, sweet Upon | the *sma* | *le, sof* | *te, swo* | *te gras*. (*Legend of Good Wōmen*.)

How much of the beauty and natural swing of Chaucer's poetry is lost by translation into modern English, is but too clear when that beauty is once perceived; but I thought some modernization of the old lines would help the child to catch the sense of the original more readily: for my own rendering, I can only make the apology that when I commenced my work I did not know it would be impossible to procure suitable modernized versions by eminent poets. Finding that unattainable, I merely endeavoured to render the old version in modern English as closely as was compatible with sense, and the simplicity needful for a child's mind; and I do not in any degree pretend to have rendered it in poetry.

The beauty of such passages as the death of Arcite is too delicate and evanescent to bear rough handling. But I may here quote some of the lines as an example of the importance of the final *e* in emphasizing certain words with an almost solemn music.

speech, fail	And with that word his <i>spech</i> <i>e fail</i> <i>e gan</i> ; For fro his feete up to his brest was come
overtaken	The cold of deth that hadde him o ver nome;
now, arms	And yet moreo ver in his <i>ar</i> <i>mes</i> twoo
gone	The vi tal strength is lost, and al agoo.
without	Only the in tellect, withou ten more,
heart, sick	That dwel led in his <i>her</i> <i>te sik</i> and sore,
began to fail, felt death	Gan <i>fayl</i> <i>e</i> when the <i>her</i> <i>te felt</i> <i>e</i> deth. (<i>Knight's Tale</i> .)

There is hardly anything finer than Chaucer's version of the story of these passionate young men, up to the touching close of Arcite's accident and the beautiful patience of death. In life nothing would have reconciled the almost animal fury of the rivals, but at the last such a resignation comes to Arcite that he gives up Emelye to Palamon with a sublime effort of self-sacrifice. Throughout the whole of the Knight's Tale sounds as of rich organ music seem to peal from the page; throughout the Clerk's Tale one seems to hear strains of infinite sadness echoing the strange outrages imposed on patient Grizel. But without attention to the rhythm half the grace and music is lost, and therefore it is all-important that the child be properly taught to preserve it.

I have adhered generally to Morris's text (1866), being both good and popular,¹ only checking it by his Clarendon Press edition, and by Tyrwhitt, Skeat, Bell, &c., when I conceive force is gained, and I have added a running glossary of such words as are not immediately clear, on a level with the line, to disperse any lingering difficulty.

In the pictures I have been careful to preserve the right costumes, colours, and surroundings, for which I have resorted to the MSS. of the time, knowing that a child's mind, unaided by the eye, fails to realize half of what comes through the ear. Children may be encouraged to verify these costumes in the figures upon many tombs and stalls, &c., in old churches, and in old pictures.

In conclusion I must offer my sincere and hearty thanks to many friends for their advice, assistance, and encouragement during my work; amongst them, Mr. A. J. Ellis, Mr. F. J. Furnivall, and Mr. Calderon.

Whatever may be the shortcomings of the book, I cannot but hope that many little ones, while listening to Chaucer's Tales, will soon begin to be interested in the picturesque life of the middle ages, and may thus be led to study and appreciate 'The English Homer'² by the pages I have written for my own little boy.

ACCENT OF CHAUCER.

THE mother should read to the child a fragment of Chaucer with the correct pronunciation of his day, of which we give an example below, inadequate, of course, but sufficient for the present purpose. The whole subject is fully investigated in the three first parts of the treatise on 'Early English Pronunciation, with special reference to Shakespere and Chaucer,' by Alexander J. Ellis, F.R.S.

The *a* is, as in the above languages, pronounced as in *âne*, *appeler*, &c. *E* commonly, as in *écarté*, &c. The final *e* was probably indistinct, as in German now, *habe*, *werde*, &c.—not unlike the *a* in *China*: it was lost before a vowel. The final *e* is still sounded by the French in singing. In old French verse, one finds it as indispensable to the rhythm as in Chaucer,—and as graceful,—hence probably the modern retention of the letter as a syllable in vocal music.

1. "No better MS. of the 'Canterbury Tales' could be found than the Harleian MS. 7334, which is far more uniform and accurate than any other I have examined; it has therefore been selected, and faithfully adhered to throughout, as the text of the present edition. Many clerical errors and corrupt readings have been corrected by collating it, line for line, with the Lansdowne MS. 851, which, notwithstanding its provincial peculiarities, contains many excellent readings, some of which have been adopted in preference to the Harleian MS." (Preface to Morris's Revised Ed. 1866.) This method I have followed when I have ventured to change a word or sentence, in which case I have, I believe, invariably given my authority.

2. Roger Ascham.

Ou is sounded as the French *ou*.

I generally as on the Continent, *ee*: never as we sound it at present.

Ch as in Scotch and German.

I quote the opening lines of the Prologue as the nearest to hand.

Whan that Aprille with his showres swoote	Whan that Aprilla with his shōōrēs sohta
The drought of Marche hath perced to the roote,	The drōōkht of March hath pairsed to the rohta,
And bathud every veyne in swich licour,	And bahted ev'ry vīn in sweech licōōr,
Of which vertue engendred is the flour;	Of which vairtú enjendrèd is the flōōr;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breethe	Whan Zephirōōs aik with his swaita braitha
Enspirud hath in every holte and heethe	Enspeered hath in ev'ry holt and haitha
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne	The tendra croppes, and the yōōnga sōōnna
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours i-ronne,	Hath in the Ram his halfa cōōrs i-rōōnna,
And smale fowles maken melodie,	And smahla fōōles mahken melodee-a,
That slepen al the night with open yhe,	That slaipen al the nikht with ohpen ee-a,
So priketh hem nature in here corages—&c.	So pricketh hem nahtúr in heer coràhges, &c.

It will thus be seen that many of Chaucer's lines end with a *dissyllable*, instead of a single syllable. *Sote, rote, brethe, hethe*, &c. (having the final *e*), are words of two syllables; *corages* is a word of three, *àges* rhyming with *pilgrimages* in the next line. It will also be apparent that some lines are lengthened with a syllable too much for strict *metre*—a licence allowed by the best poets,—which, avoiding as it does any possible approach to a doggrel sound, has a lifting, billowy rhythm, and, in fact, takes the place of a 'turn' in music. A few instances will suffice:—

'And though that I no wepne have in this place.'

'Have here my troth, tomorwe I nyl not fayle,
Withouten wityng of eny other wight.'

'As any raven fether it schon for-blak.'

'A man mot ben a fool other yong or olde.'

I think that any one reading these lines twice over as I have roughly indicated, will find the accent one not difficult to practise; and the perfect rhythm and ring of

the lines facilitates matters, as the ear can frequently guide the pronunciation. The lines can scarcely be read too slowly or majestically.

I must not here be understood to imply that difficulties in reading and accentuating Chaucer are chimerical, but only that it is possible to understand and enjoy him without as much difficulty as is commonly supposed. In perusing the whole of Chaucer, there must needs be exceptional readings and accentuation, which in detail only a student of the subject would comprehend or care for.

The rough rule suggested in the preface is a good one, as far as the rhythm goes: as regards the sound, I have given a rough example.

I will quote a fragment again from the Prologue as a second instance:—

Ther was also a nonne, a prioresse,	Ther was ahlsoa a nööñ, a preeoressa,
That of hire smylyng was ful symple and coy;	That of her smeeling was fööl sim-pland cooy;
Hire gretteste ooth nas but by Seynte Loy;	Heer graitest ohth nas bööt bee Si-ent Looy,
And sche was cleped Madame Eglentyne.	And shay was cleppèd Màdam Eglanteena.
Ful wel sche sang the servise devyne,	Fööl well shay sang the <i>servicë divinä</i> ,
Entuned in hire nose ful semyly;	Entúned in heer nohsa fööl saimaly; And
And Frensch sche spak ful faire and fetysly,	French shai spahk fööl fēr and faitisly,
Aftur the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,	Ahfter the scohl of Strahtford ahtta Bow-a,
For Frensch of Parys was to hire unknowe.	For French of Pahrees was toh her öön-know-a.

Observe *simpland* for *simple and*: simple being pronounced like a word of one syllable. With the common English pronunciation the lines would not scan. 'Ver-nicle,' 'Christofre,' 'wimple,' 'chilindre,' 'companable,' &c., are further instances of this mute *e*, and may be read as French words.

CANTERBURY TALES.

CHAUCER'S PILGRIMS.

SOME OF Chaucer's best tales are not told by himself. They are put into the mouths of other people. In those days there were no newspapers—indeed there was not much news—so that when strangers who had little in common were thrown together, as they often were in inns, or in long journeys, they had few topics of conversation: and so they used to entertain each other by singing songs, or quite as often by telling their own adventures, or long stories such as Chaucer has written down and called the '*Canterbury Tales*.'

The reason he called them the 'Canterbury Tales' was because they were supposed to be told by a number of travellers who met at an inn, and went together on a pilgrimage to a saint's shrine at Canterbury.

But I shall now let Chaucer tell you about his interesting company in his own way.

He begins with a beautiful description of the spring—the time usually chosen for long journeys, or for any new undertaking, in those days.

When you go out into the gardens or the fields, and see the fresh green of the hedges and the white May blossoms and the blue sky, think of Chaucer and his Canterbury Pilgrims!

It happened that one day in the spring, as I was resting at the Tabard¹ Inn, in Southwark, ready to go on my devout pilgrimage to Canterbury, there arrived towards night at the inn a large company of all sorts of people—nine-and-twenty of them: they had met by chance, all being pilgrims to Canterbury.² The chambers and the stables were roomy, and so every one found a place. And shortly, after sunset, I had made friends with them all, and soon became one of their party. We all agreed to rise up early, to pursue our journey together.³

But still, while I have time and space, I think I had better tell you who these people were, their condition and rank, which was which, and what they looked like. I will begin, then, with...

1. A tabard was an outer coat without sleeves, worn by various classes, but best known as the coat worn over the armour (see p. 63) whereon there were signs and figures embroidered by which to recognize a man in war or tournament: for the face was hidden by the helmet, and it was easier to detect a pattern in bright colours than engraved in dark steel. So, of course, the pattern represented the arms used by him. And thus the tabard got to be called the *coat of arms*. Old families still possess what they call their coat of arms, representing the device chosen by their ancestors in the lists; but they do not wear it any more: it is only a copy of the pattern on paper. A *crest* was also fastened to the helmet for the same purpose of recognition, and there is usually a 'crest' still surmounting the modern 'coat of arms.' The inn where Chaucer slept was simply named after the popular garment. It, or at least a very ancient inn on its site, was recently standing, and known as the Talbot Inn, High Street, Borough: Talbot being an evident corruption of Tabard. We may notice here, that the Ploughman, described later on, wears a tabard, which may have been a kind of blouse or smock-frock, but was probably similar in form to the knight's tabard.

2. People were glad to travel in parties for purposes of safety, the roads were so bad and robbers so numerous.

3. Probably all or many occupied but one bedroom, and they became acquainted on retiring to rest, at the ordinary time—sunset.

The Knight.



there, valuable	A KNIGHT ther was and that a worthy man, That from the tyme that he ferst bigan	A knight there was, and that a worthy man, Who from the time in which he first began
ride	To ryden out, he lovede chyalrye,	To ride afield, loved well all chivalry,
frankness	Trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie.	Honour and frankness, truth and courtesy.
war	Ful worthi was he in his lordes werre,	Most worthy was he in his master's war,
further	And therto hadde he riden, noman ferre, As wel in Cristendom as in hethenesse, And evere honoured for his worthinesse.	And thereto had he ridden, none more far, As well in Christian as in heathen lands, And borne with honour many high com- mands.

He had been at Alexandria when it was won: in Prussia he had gained great honours, and in many other lands. He had been in fifteen mortal battles, and had fought in the lists for our faith three times, and always slain his foe. He had served in Turkey and in the Great Sea. And he was always very well paid too. Yet, though so great a soldier, he was wise in council; and in manner he was gentle as a woman. Never did he use bad words in all his life, to any class of men: in fact

He was a verry perfight, gentil knight.

He was a very perfect, noble knight.

As for his appearance, his horse was good, but not gay. He wore a gipon of fustian, all stained by his habergeon²; for he had only just arrived home from a long voyage.

1. The word Knight (knecht) really means *servant*. The ancient knights attended on the higher nobles and were their *servants*, fighting under them in battle. For as there was no regular army, when a war broke out everybody who could bear arms engaged himself to fight under some king or lord, anywhere, abroad or in England, and was paid for his services. That was how hundreds of nobly born men got their living—the only way they could get it. This is what the knight Arviragus does in the 'Franklin's Tale,' leaving his bride, to win honour (and money) by fighting wherever he could.

The *squire* waited on the knight much as the knight did on the earl—much in the position of an aide-de-camp of the present day. The *page* served earl, knights, ladies. But knight, squire, and page were all honourable titles, and borne by noblemen's sons. The page was often quite a boy, and when he grew older changed his duties for those of squire, till he was permitted to enter the knighthood. The present knight is described as being in a lord's service, and fighting under him 'in his war,' but he was a man held in the highest honour.

2. See p. 63 and Appendix, p. 139.