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| Prologue: Middle English | High Modern English (still poetic) |
| Whan that aprill with his shoures soote The droghte of march hath perced to the roote, And bathed every veyne in swich licour Of which vertu engendred is the flour; Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth Inspired hath in every holt and heeth Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne, And smale foweles maken melodye, That slepen al the nyght with open ye (so priketh hem nature in hir corages); Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages, And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes, To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes; And specially from every shires ende Of engelond to caunterbury they wende, The hooly blisful martir for to seke, That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. | When April with his showers sweet with fruitThe drought of March has pierced unto the rootAnd bathed each vein with liquor that has powerTo generate therein and sire the flower;When Zephyr also has, with his sweet breath,Quickened again, in every holt and heath,The tender shoots and buds, and the young sunInto the Ram one half his course has run,And many little birds make melodyThat sleep through all the night with open eye(So Nature pricks them on to ramp and rage)-Then do folk long to go on pilgrimage,And palmers to go seeking out strange strands,To distant shrines well known in sundry lands.And specially from every shire's endOf England they to Canterbury wend,The holy blessed martyr there to seekWho helped them when they lay so ill and weal |
|  | Different Modern Version |
| Whan that aprill with his shoures soote The droghte of march hath perced to the roote, And bathed every veyne in swich licour Of which vertu engendred is the flour; Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth Inspired hath in every holt and heeth Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne, And smale foweles maken melodye, That slepen al the nyght with open ye (so priketh hem nature in hir corages); Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages, And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes, To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes; And specially from every shires ende Of engelond to caunterbury they wende, The hooly blisful martir for to seke, That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. | When April with its showers sweet and blessedThe drought of March has thoroughly redressed,And bathed each plant in its reviving powerBy virtue of which blooms the springtime flower;And gentle winds blow sweetly from the west,Life breathing into tender leaves caressedIn field and forests, and a youthful sunIn Aries only half its course has run,And birds begin to chirp a cheerful song,Those that with open eyes sleep all night long(Inspired by Nature with an instinct strong),Then folks to pilgrimages turn their faces,The more adventuresome to foreign places,To very distant shrines of great renown;But mostly common folk from every townIn England, off to Canterbury wind,That they the holy martyr there might find,Who had in their extremity been kind. |
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