

# Chaucer at Woodstock

## Charles Kent

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## CHAUCER AT WOODSTOCK.

On the sultry noon of a summer,  
In a long, long vanished year,  
When the leaves were thick with verdure,  
And the skies were blue and clear,  
A great poet-soul lay basking  
In the sunny atmosphere.

Half reclined by garden-terrace—  
One plump hand on upbent knee,  
With gold links the other toying—  
Oh, a dreamful man looked he !  
In his deep brown eyes thought dancing  
To a merry minstrelsy.

Rich his vest of damson velvet,  
Velvet darkly damson-red—  
In a careless hood drawn upward  
Swathing half his hoary head—  
Down in glossy folds descending  
Round his languid limbs outspread.

From his crumpled cowl's sly covert,  
Mark how keen the glances thrown  
Over all that affluent flowering waste,  
Where calmly broods alone

This Father of our English verse.  
Here couched as on a throne.

Here, 'neath yon lordly fane where erst  
Our royal Edward made,  
In castled walls, his palace home,  
'Mid green embowering shade,  
Whence full many a leafy path reveals  
Its sylvan colonnade.

Hark! a fountain clear is sparkling  
Close behind yon privet wall ;  
You may see the shimmer of its spray,  
And hear its tinkling fall—  
Near the blue-green droop of the peacock's  
plumes—  
Thro' its shrilling trumpet-call.

Thickly round him bloom the roses,  
Roses red and roses white ;  
Palest roses with a tinge of pink  
Like a blonde's blush to the sight ;  
Yellow roses—damask roses  
Purpling in the golden light.

'Tis a nest of fragrant blossoms  
Where the greybeard poet dreams ;  
'Tis the very bank for basking  
Where the sunlight round him streams,  
While before him troop rare fancies  
Lit by visionary gleams.

Comes the Knight upon his war-horse,  
    In half-armour jingling by ;  
In his mail-stained fustian gipon,  
    His sheathed sword slung at his thigh ;  
His serene mouth dimpling sweetly  
    Under calm, sedatest eye.

Comes the Squire, a radiant stripling,  
    With an air of courtly grace,  
In his curling locks luxuriant,  
    With youth's down upon his face ;  
His green surcoat bloom-embroidered  
    Like some cowslip-sprinkled chase.

Comes the Monk on ambling palfrey  
    As a berry brown and sleek,  
His bald pate all glazed and glistening,  
    Flushed his health-anointed cheek ;  
You may hear the supple leather  
    Of his boot on stirrup creak !

Not like his with rich furs purfled  
    Are the Friar's loose-hanging sleeves--  
Filled with stores of homely baubles  
    Strown o'er every hearth he leaves :  
'Neath grey cowl his blithe eyes sparkle  
    Like the stars on frosty eves.

Loitering comes the stalwart Yeoman--  
    One of Lincoln's forest-band--  
Silver horn swung at his baldric,  
    Russet gauntlet on his hand ;

In his grasp a mighty yew-bow  
Whence he drives his levin-brand.

Slouching, next, the tawny Shipman  
Rears his rough but limber form ;  
Crisp as though with rime his ringlets,  
Large his generous heart and warm ;  
Thick his beard all blowzed and shaken  
By how many a briny storm !

Sauntering past the musing poet,  
Still they move that motley throng—  
Pilgrims from the Southwark Tabard  
Numbered in immortal song :  
Towards thy holy shrine, à Becket,  
Aye their shades shall glide along !

Here the Reeve, that man of choler,  
With the lean and spindling shanks ;  
His shrewd eye demanding payment,  
His sharp tongue ne'er craving thanks  
Here the burly, brawny Miller  
With his bold, salacious pranks—

Yonder Miller loud and brutal,  
Clothed in white with hood of blue ;  
On his nose a wart with bristles  
Like his hair of sanguine hue :  
Hear him blow his roaring bagpipes,  
And all chaos sounds anew

Next appears the comely Franklin,  
With his flowing milk-white beard,  
All his ruddy visage beaming  
With the smiles by churls revered,  
Meat and drink still ever snowing  
At his board where all are cheered.

In quaint hat broad as a buckler,  
On her sprightly cantering roan,  
With sweet trills of jocund laughter,  
Comes one seldom seen alone—  
'Tis the Wife of Bath, the Siren,  
With weird charms around her thrown.

Rough with whelks and knobs of scarlet,  
See the Sompnour's scalped face !  
Near the Pardoner's sallow features,  
Where good wine ne'er left a trace,  
Whence his hair, like yellow flax-lengths,  
Streams without one touch of grace.

Yet another, not left nameless  
'Mid that pilgrim throng, is seen ;  
'Tis the gentlest maiden-matron  
With the mild angelic mien ;  
'Tis the grey-eyed, rose-lipped Prioress,  
'Tis sweet Madame Eglantine !

These, among the soul-born shadows  
Trooping in the sultry air,  
 Crowd within the poet's vision,  
 All that summer-garden fair,

Fading out when at the brightest  
In the noontide's amber glare.

Silvery chimes the plashing fountain  
Sparkling thro' its verdant screen,  
Near the mound where still the peacock  
Trails his train of azure green,  
All the parterre's floral glories  
Vying with its varying sheen.

From his tranquil reverie starting,  
With a look of half-surprise,  
Now at bird with gorgeous plumage,  
Now at buds of dappled dyes,  
Downward turn the eltrich glances  
Of that bard's yet dreamful eyes.

He has plucked a tiny blossom  
From the moss-turf at his feet,  
'Tis a gold-cored star of silver  
On a thread-stalk green and sweet—  
Would you know the dainty floweret's name?  
'Tis the little Marguerite!

Poised the while in sunlit silence  
Filled with bloom-scents warm and faint,  
Lo! three butterflies on sportive wings,  
That gold and purple paint,  
Weave, in seeming, round the poet's cowl  
An aureole like a saint!