The Franklin’s Tale
Geoffrey Chaucer

Here follow the Words of the Franklin to the Squire, and the Words of the Host to the Franklin.

“In faith, Squire, you have conducted yourself well and nobly. I praise your wit highly,” said the Franklin, with such delicate understanding. In my judgment there is nobody in this company who shall be your peer in eloquence as long as you live. May God give you good fortune, and send you perseverance in virtue, for I have great delight in your speaking. I have a son, and by the Trinity I had rather he would be a man of such discretion as you, than have twenty pounds worth of land, even if it were put in my hand right now. 684

“Fie on possessions, unless a man is virtuous as well! I have scolded my son, and shall still scold him, because he will not wish to pursue virtue; but his habit is to play at dice and to spend and to lose all that he has. And he had rather talk with a page than converse with any noble person from whom he might properly learn nobility. 694

“A straw for your gentle manners!” said our Host. “What, Franklin, well you know, by God, that each of you must tell at least a tale or two, or break your word.” 698

“That I well know, sir,” said the Franklin. “I pray you not to hold me in scorn if I speak a word or two to this man. 701

“Tell your tale now, without more words.” 702

“Gladly, sir Host,” he said, “I will obey your will; now listen to what I say. I will not contradict you in any way as far, to the extent that my wits will suffice.

I pray to God that it may please yow; then I will know well that it is good enough.”

The Prologue of the Franklin’s Tale

“These old gentle Bretons in their time made lays about various adventures, rhymed in their early British tongue; which lays they sang to their instruments of music, or else read them, for their pleasure. And one of them I have in mind, which I will relate with good will as best I can. But, sirs, because I am an unlearned man, at my beginning I pray you to excuse me for my homely speech. In truth, I never learned rhetoric; anything I speak must be bare and plain. I never slept on the Mount of Parnassus, nor learned Marcus Tullius Cicero. I know no colors of speech, surely; only such colors as grow in the meadow, or else such as people dye or paint. Colors of rhetoric are too strange for me; my spirit has no feeling in such matters. But if you wish, you shall hear my tale.” 728

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1 Trinity. The divine trinity: the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit.
2 Twenty pounds worth of land. Land that would earn him twenty pounds in rent per year.
3 Without more words. I.e., words before the tale begins.
4 Bretons. Celtic peoples of Brittany, a region in northwest France, well-known for its transmission of Arthurian legends.
6 Mount of Parnassus. Home of the Muses, from whom poets gain the skill to carry out their poems.
7 Marcus Tullius Cicero. Most famous Roman orator (106-43 BC) whose Rhetoric is the central document for composition in the western world.
8 Colors of speech. Figurative language, such as simile, metaphor, and hyperbole.