

## THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE.

### THE PROLOGUE.

Our Hoste saw well that the brighte sun Th' arc of his artificial day had run  
The fourthe part, and half an houre more; And, though he were not deep  
expert in lore, He wist it was the eight-and-twenty day Of April, that is  
messenger to May; And saw well that the shadow of every tree Was in its  
length of the same quantity That was the body erect that caused it; And  
therefore by the shadow he took his wit\*, \*knowledge That  
Phoebus, which that shone so clear and bright, Degrees was five-and-forty  
clomb on height; And for that day, as in that latitude, It was ten of the clock,  
he gan conclude; And suddenly he plight\* his horse about.

\*pulled <1>

"Lordings," quoth he, "I warn you all this rout\*, \*companyThe  
fourthe partie of this day is gone. Now for the love of God and of Saint John  
Lose no time, as farforth as ye may. Lordings, the time wasteth night and  
day, And steals from us, what privily sleeping, And what through negligence  
in our waking, As doth the stream, that turneth never again, Descending  
from the mountain to the plain. Well might Senec, and many a philosopher,  
Bewaile time more than gold in coffer. For loss of chattels may recover'd be,  
But loss of time shendeth\* us, quoth he. \*destroys

It will not come again, withoute dread,\* No more than will Malkin's  
maidenhead,<2> When she hath lost it in her wantonness. Let us not  
moulde thus in idleness. "Sir Man of Law," quoth he, "so have ye bliss, Tell  
us a tale anon, as forword\* is. \*the bargain Ye be submitted  
through your free assent To stand in this case at my judgement. Acquit you  
now, and \*holdeyour behest\*; \*keep your promise\* Then have ye  
done your devoir\* at the least." \*duty "Hoste," quoth he, "de  
par dieux jeo asente; <3> To breake forword is not mine intent. Behest is  
debt, and I would hold it fain, All my behest; I can no better sayn. For such  
law as a man gives another wight, He should himselfe usen it by right. Thus  
will our text: but natheless certain I can right now no thrifty\* tale sayn,  
\*worthy But Chaucer (though he \*can but lewedly\* \*knows but  
imperfectly\* On metres and on rhyming craftily) Hath said them, in such  
English as he can, Of olde time, as knoweth many a man. And if he have not  
said them, leve\* brother, \*dear In one book, he hath said