

THE CLERK'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE.

"SIR Clerk of Oxenford," our Hoste said, "Ye ride as still and coy, as doth a maid That were new spoused, sitting at the board: This day I heard not of your tongue a word. I trow ye study about some sophime:*
*sophism But Solomon saith, every thing hath time. For Godde's sake, be of
better cheer, *livelier mien* It is no time for to study here. Tell
us some merry tale, by your fay;* *faith For what man that
is entered in a play, He needes must unto that play assent. But preache not,
as friars do in Lent, To make us for our olde sinnes weep, Nor that thy tale
make us not to sleep. Tell us some merry thing of adventures. Your terms,
your coloures, and your figures, Keep them in store, till so be ye indite High
style, as when that men to kinges write. Speake so plain at this time, I you
pray, That we may understande what ye say."

This worthy Clerk benignely answer'd; "Hoste," quoth he, "I am under your
yerd,* *rod <1> Ye have of us as now the governance, And
therefore would I do you obeisance, As far as reason asketh, hardily:*
*boldly, truly I will you tell a tale, which that I Learn'd at Padova of a worthy
clerk, As proved by his wordes and his werk. He is now dead, and nailed in
his chest, I pray to God to give his soul good rest. Francis Petrarc', the
laureate poet,<2> Highte* this clerk, whose rhetoric so sweet
*was called Illumin'd all Itale of poetry, As Linian <3> did of philosophy, Or
law, or other art particulere: But death, that will not suffer us dwell here
But as it were a twinkling of an eye, Them both hath slain, and alle we shall
die.

"But forth to tellen of this worthy man, That taughte me this tale, as I
began, I say that first he with high style inditeth (Ere he the body of his tale
writeth) A proem, in the which describeth he Piedmont, and of Saluces <4>
the country, And speaketh of the Pennine hilles high, That be the bounds of
all West Lombardy: And of Mount Vesulus in special, Where as the Po out of
a welle small Taketh his firste springing and his source, That eastward aye
increaseth in his course T'Emilia-ward, <5> to Ferraro, and Venice, The
which a long thing were to devise.* *narrate And truely, as to
my judgement, Me thinketh it a thing impertinent,*
*irrelevant Save that he would conveye his mattere: But this is the tale,

which that ye shall hear."