THE MONK'STALE.

THE PROLOGUE

WHEN ended was my tale of Melibee, And of Prudence and her benignity, Our Hoste said, "As I am faithful man, And by the precious corpus Madrian, <1> I had lever* than a barrel of ale, *rather That goode lefe* my wife had heard this tale; *dear For she is no thing of such patience As was this Meliboeus' wife Prudence. By Godde's bones! when I beat my knaves She bringeth me the greate clubbed staves, And crieth, 'Slay the dogges every one, And break of them both back and ev'ry bone.' And if that any neighebour of mine Will not in church unto my wife incline, Or be so hardy to her to trespace,* *offend When she comes home she rampeth* in my face, *springs And crieth, 'False coward, wreak* thy wife *avenge By corpus Domini, I will have thy knife, And thou shalt have my distaff, and go spin.' From day till night right thus she will begin. 'Alas!' she saith, 'that ever I *destined To wed a milksop, or a coward ape, That was shape* will be overlad* with every wight! *imposed on Thou darest not stand by thy wife's right.'

"This is my life, *but if* that I will fight; *unless And out at door anon I must me dight,* *betake myself Or elles I am lost, but if that I Be, like a wilde lion, fool-hardy. I wot well she will do* me slay some *make Some neighebour and thenne *go my way;* day *take to flight* For I am perilous with knife in hand, Albeit that I dare not her withstand; For she is big in armes, by my faith! That shall he find, that her misdoth or saith. <2> But let us pass away from this mattere. My lord the Monk," quoth he, "be merry of cheer, For ye shall tell a tale truely. Lo, Rochester stands here faste by. Ride forth, mine owen lord, break not our game. But by my troth I cannot tell your name; Whether shall I call you my lord Dan John, Or Dan Thomas, or elles Dan Albon? Of what house be ye, by your father's kin? I vow to God, thou hast a full fair skin; It is a gentle pasture where thou go'st; Thou art not like a penant* or a ghost. *penitent Upon my faith thou art some officer, Some worthy sexton, or some cellarer. For by my father's soul, *as to my dome,* *in my judgement* Thou art a master when thou art at home; No poore cloisterer, nor no novice, But a governor, both wily and wise, And therewithal, of brawnes* and of bones, *sinews A right well-faring person for