THE PARSON'S TALE.

THE PROLOGUE.

By that the Manciple his tale had ended, The sunne from the south line was descended So lowe, that it was not to my sight Degrees nine-and-twenty as in height. Four of the clock it was then, as I guess, For eleven foot, a little more or less, My shadow was at thilke time, as there, Of such feet as my lengthe parted were In six feet equal of proportion. Therewith the moone's exaltation,* *rising *In meane* Libra, gan alway ascend, *in the middle of* As we were ent'ring at a thorpe's* end. *village's For which our Host, as he was wont to gie,* *govern As in this case, our jolly company, Said in this wise; "Lordings every one, Now lacketh us no more tales than one. Fulfill'd is my sentence and my decree; I trow that we have heard of each degree.* from each class or rank Almost fulfilled is mine ordinance; in the company I pray to God so give him right good chance That telleth us this tale lustily. Sir Priest," quoth he, "art thou a vicary?* *vicar Or art thou a Parson? say sooth by thy fay.* *faith Be what thou be, breake thou not our play; For every man, save thou, hath told his tale. Unbuckle, and shew us what is in thy mail.* *wallet For truely me thinketh by thy cheer Thou shouldest knit up well a great mattere. Tell us a fable anon, for cocke's bones."

This Parson him answered all at ones; "Thou gettest fable none y-told for me, For Paul, that writeth unto Timothy, Reproveth them that *weive soothfastness,* *forsake truth* And telle fables, and such wretchedness. Why should I sowe draff* out of my fist, *chaff, refuse When I may sowe wheat, if that me list? For which I say, if that you list to hear Morality and virtuous mattere, And then that ye will give me audience, I would full fain at Christe's reverence Do you pleasance lawful, as I can. But, truste well, I am a southern man, I cannot gest,* rom, ram, ruf, <1> by my letter; *relate stories And, God wot, rhyme hold I but little better. And therefore if you list, I will not glose,* *mince matters I will you tell a little tale in prose, To knit up all this feast, and make an end. And Jesus for his grace wit me send To shewe you the way, in this voyage, Of thilke perfect glorious pilgrimage, <2> That hight Jerusalem celestial. And if ye vouchesafe, anon I shall Begin upon my tale, for which I pray Tell your advice,* I can no better say. *opinion But natheless this