

The Canterbury Tales and Other Poems

By

Geoffrey Chaucer

Contents

PREFACE.....	6
LIFE OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER	10
THE CANTERBURY TALES.	30
THE PROLOGUE.....	30
Notes to the Prologue.....	44
THE KNIGHT'S TALE <1>	49
Notes to The Knight's Tale	84
THE MILLER'S TALE.....	92
THE PROLOGUE.....	92
THE TALE	94
Notes to the Miller's Tale	105
THE REEVE'S TALE.	109
THE PROLOGUE.....	109
THE TALE.<1>	112
Notes to the Reeve's Tale	119
THE COOK'S TALE	121
THE PROLOGUE.....	121
THE TALE	122
Notes to the Cook's Tale.....	124
THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE	125
THE PROLOGUE.....	125
Notes to the Prologue to The Man of Law's Tale	127
THE TALE. <1>	128
Notes to the Man of Law's Tale	150
THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE	152
THE PROLOGUE. <1>	152
Notes to the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale	166
THE TALE. <1>	169
Notes to the Wife of Bath's Tale	176
THE FRIAR'S TALE	178
THE PROLOGUE.<1>.....	178
Notes to the Prologue to the Friar's Tale.....	179
THE TALE	180
Notes to the Friar's Tale.....	186
THE SOMPNOUR'S TALE.....	188
THE PROLOGUE.....	188
THE TALE	189
Notes to the Sompnour's Tale	199
THE CLERK'S TALE.	202
THE PROLOGUE.....	202
Notes to the Prologue to the Clerk's Tale	204
THE TALE.<1>	205
Notes to the Clerk's	228
THE MERCHANT'S TALE	230
THE PROLOGUE.<1>.....	230
Notes to the Prologue to the Merchant's Tale	231
THE TALE.<1>	232

Notes to The Merchant's Tale.....	250
THE SQUIRE'S TALE	254
THE PROLOGUE.....	254
THE TALE.<1>	255
Notes to the Squire's Tale.....	266
THE FRANKLIN'S TALE	270
THE PROLOGUE. <1>.....	270
Notes to the Prologue to the Franklin's Tale	272
THE TALE	273
THE DOCTOR'S TALE	289
THE PROLOGUE. <1>.....	289
Notes to the Prologue to the Doctor's Tale	290
THE TALE	291
Notes to the Doctor's Tale	296
THE PARDONER'S TALE	297
THE PROLOGUE.....	297
Notes to the Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale	298
THE TALE <1>	299
Notes to the Pardoner's Tale	310
THE SHIPMAN'S TALE.<1>.....	313
THE PROLOGUE.....	313
Notes to the Prologue to the Shipman's Tale	314
THE TALE. <1>	315
Notes to the Shipman's Tale	322
THE PRIORESS'S TALE.....	323
THE PROLOGUE.....	323
Notes to the Prologue to the Prioress's Tale	324
THE TALE. <1>	325
Notes to the Prioress's Tale	330
CHAUCER'S TALE OF SIR THOPAS.....	332
THE PROLOGUE.<1>.....	332
Notes to the Prologue to Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas	333
THE TALE <1>	334
Notes to Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas	338
CHAUCER'S TALE OF MELIBOEUS.....	341
THE PROLOGUE.....	341
Notes to the Prologue to Chaucer's Tale of Meliboeus	342
THE TALE.<1>	343
Notes to Chaucer's Tale of Meliboeus.	356
THE MONK'S TALE.....	358
THE PROLOGUE.....	358
THE TALE. <1>	361
Notes to the Monk's Tale.....	376
THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE	380
THE PROLOGUE.....	380
THE TALE. <1>	382
Notes to the Nun's Priest's Tale.....	392
THE EPILOGUE <1>.....	397
Notes to the Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's Tale.....	398
THE SECOND NUN'S TALE <1>	399
Notes to the Nun's Priest's Tale.....	410

THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE. <1>	412
THE PROLOGUE.....	412
Notes to the Prologue to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale	415
THE TALE. <1>	416
Note to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale.....	428
THE MANCIPLE'S TALE	431
THE PROLOGUE.....	431
Notes to the Prologue to the Manciple's Tale	433
THE TALE. <1>	434
Notes to the Manciple's Tale	439
THE PARSON'S TALE.....	440
THE PROLOGUE.....	440
Notes to the Prologue to the Parson's Tale	442
THE TALE. <1>	443
Notes to the Parson's Tale	460
PRECES DE CHAUCERES* <1> *Prayer of Chaucer*	462
Notes to the Prayer of Chaucer	463
THE END OF THE CANTERBURY TALES	464
THE COURT OF LOVE.....	464
Notes to The Court of Love.....	487
THE CUCKOO AND THE NIGHTINGALE.	492
The Author to His Book.....	500
THE ASSEMBLY OF FOWLS	502
Notes to The Assembly of Fowls.....	518
THE FLOWER AND THE LEAF	524
Notes to the Flower and the Leaf	538
Notes to The House of Fame	562
TROIILUS AND CRESSIDA.....	570
THE FIRST BOOK.....	573
THE SECOND BOOK.....	580
THE THIRD BOOK	589
THE FOURTH BOOK.....	603
THE FIFTH BOOK.....	616
L'Envoy of Chaucer.....	627
Notes to Troilus and Cressida	628
CHAUCER'S DREAM.....	636
THE PROLOGUE TO THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN.....	648
Notes to The prologue to The Legend of Good Women.....	659
A BALLAD SENT TO KING RICHARD.	669
L'ENVOY OF CHAUCER TO BUKTON. <1>	670
Notes to L'Envoy of Chaucer to Bukton.	671
A BALLAD OF GENTLENESS.	672
Notes to A Ballad of Gentleness	673
THE COMPLAINT OF CHAUCER TO HIS PURSE.	674
GOOD COUNSEL OF CHAUCER. <1>	675
Notes to Good Counsel of Chaucer.....	676
PROVERBS OF CHAUCER. <1>	677
VIRELAY. <1>	678
Notes to Virelay	679
"SINCE I FROM LOVE." <1>	680
Notes to "Since I from Love"	681

CHAUCER'S WORDS TO HIS SCRIVENER.....	682
CHAUCER'S PROPHECY. <1>.....	683
Notes to Chaucer's Prophecy.....	684

PREFACE.

THE object of this volume is to place before the general reader our two early poetic masterpieces -- The Canterbury Tales and The Faerie Queen; to do so in a way that will render their "popular perusal" easy in a time of little leisure and unbounded temptations to intellectual languor; and, on the same conditions, to present a liberal and fairly representative selection from the less important and familiar poems of Chaucer and Spenser. There is, it may be said at the outset, peculiar advantage and propriety in placing the two poets side by side in the manner now attempted for the first time. Although two centuries divide them, yet Spenser is the direct and really the immediate successor to the poetical inheritance of Chaucer. Those two hundred years, eventful as they were, produced no poet at all worthy to take up the mantle that fell from Chaucer's shoulders; and Spenser does not need his affected archaisms, nor his frequent and reverent appeals to "Dan Geffrey," to vindicate for himself a place very close to his great predecessor in the literary history of England. If Chaucer is the "Well of English undefiled," Spenser is the broad and stately river that yet holds the tenure of its very life from the fountain far away in other and ruder scenes.

The Canterbury Tales, so far as they are in verse, have been printed without any abridgement or designed change in the sense. But the two Tales in prose -- Chaucer's Tale of Meliboeus, and the Parson's long Sermon on Penitence -- have been contracted, so as to exclude thirty pages of unattractive prose, and to admit the same amount of interesting and characteristic poetry. The gaps thus made in the prose Tales, however, are supplied by careful outlines of the omitted matter, so that the reader need be at no loss to comprehend the whole scope and sequence of the original. With The Faerie Queen a bolder course has been pursued. The great obstacle to the popularity of Spenser's splendid work has lain less in its language than in its length. If we add together the three great poems of antiquity -- the twenty-four books of the Iliad, the twenty-four books of the Odyssey, and the twelve books of the Aeneid -- we get at the dimensions of only one-half of The Faerie Queen. The six books, and the fragment of a seventh, which alone exist of the author's contemplated twelve, number about 35,000 verses; the sixty books of Homer and Virgil number no more than 37,000. The mere bulk of the poem, then, has opposed a formidable barrier to its popularity; to say nothing of the distracting effect produced by the numberless episodes, the tedious narrations, and the constant repetitions, which have largely swelled that bulk. In this volume the poem is compressed into two-thirds of its original space, through the expedient of

representing the less interesting and more mechanical passages by a condensed prose outline, in which it has been sought as far as possible to preserve the very words of the poet. While deprecating a too critical judgement on the bare and constrained precis standing in such trying juxtaposition, it is hoped that the labour bestowed in saving the reader the trouble of wading through much that is not essential for the enjoyment of Spencer's marvellous allegory, will not be unappreciated.

As regards the manner in which the text of the two great works, especially of *The Canterbury Tales*, is presented, the Editor is aware that some whose judgement is weighty will differ from him. This volume has been prepared "for popular perusal;" and its very *raison d'être* would have failed, if the ancient orthography had been retained. It has often been affirmed by editors of Chaucer in the old forms of the language, that a little trouble at first would render the antiquated spelling and obsolete inflections a continual source, not of difficulty, but of actual delight, for the reader coming to the study of Chaucer without any preliminary acquaintance with the English of his day -- or of his copyists' days. Despite this complacent assurance, the obvious fact is, that Chaucer in the old forms has not become popular, in the true sense of the word; he is not "understood of the vulgar." In this volume, therefore, the text of Chaucer has been presented in nineteenth-century garb. But there has been not the slightest attempt to "modernise" Chaucer, in the wider meaning of the phrase; to replace his words by words which he did not use; or, following the example of some operators, to translate him into English of the modern spirit as well as the modern forms. So far from that, in every case where the old spelling or form seemed essential to metre, to rhyme, or meaning, no change has been attempted. But, wherever its preservation was not essential, the spelling of the monkish transcribers -- for the most ardent purist must now despair of getting at the spelling of Chaucer himself -- has been discarded for that of the reader's own day. It is a poor compliment to the Father of English Poetry, to say that by such treatment the bouquet and individuality of his works must be lost. If his masterpiece is valuable for one thing more than any other, it is the vivid distinctness with which English men and women of the fourteenth century are there painted, for the study of all the centuries to follow. But we wantonly balk the artist's own purpose, and discredit his labour, when we keep before his picture the screen of dust and cobwebs which, for the English people in these days, the crude forms of the infant language have practically become. Shakespeare has not suffered by similar changes; Spencer has not suffered; it would be surprising if Chaucer should suffer, when the loss of popular comprehension and favour in his case are necessarily all the greater for his remoteness from our day. In a much smaller degree -- since previous labours in the same direction had left

far less to do -- the same work has been performed for the spelling of Spenser; and the whole endeavour in this department of the Editor's task has been, to present a text plain and easily intelligible to the modern reader, without any injustice to the old poet. It would be presumptuous to believe that in every case both ends have been achieved together; but the *laudatores temporis acti* - the students who may differ most from the plan pursued in this volume -- will best appreciate the difficulty of the enterprise, and most leniently regard any failure in the details of its accomplishment.

With all the works of Chaucer, outside *The Canterbury Tales*, it would have been absolutely impossible to deal within the scope of this volume. But nearly one hundred pages, have been devoted to his minor poems; and, by dint of careful selection and judicious abridgement -- a connecting outline of the story in all such cases being given -- the Editor ventures to hope that he has presented fair and acceptable specimens of Chaucer's workmanship in all styles. The preparation of this part of the volume has been a laborious task; no similar attempt on the same scale has been made; and, while here also the truth of the text in matters essential has been in nowise sacrificed to mere ease of perusal, the general reader will find opened up for him a new view of Chaucer and his works. Before a perusal of these hundred pages, will melt away for ever the lingering tradition or prejudice that Chaucer was only, or characteristically, a coarse buffoon, who pandered to a base and licentious appetite by painting and exaggerating the lowest vices of his time. In these selections -- made without a thought of taking only what is to the poet's credit from a wide range of poems in which hardly a word is to his discredit -- we behold Chaucer as he was; a courtier, a gallant, pure-hearted gentleman, a scholar, a philosopher, a poet of gay and vivid fancy, playing around themes of chivalric convention, of deep human interest, or broad-sighted satire. In *The Canterbury Tales*, we see, not Chaucer, but Chaucer's times and neighbours; the artist has lost himself in his work. To show him honestly and without disguise, as he lived his own life and sung his own songs at the brilliant Court of Edward III, is to do his memory a moral justice far more material than any wrong that can ever come out of spelling. As to the minor poems of Spenser, which follow *The Faerie Queen*, the choice has been governed by the desire to give at once the most interesting, and the most characteristic of the poet's several styles; and, save in the case of the *Sonnets*, the poems so selected are given entire. It is manifest that the endeavours to adapt this volume for popular use, have been already noticed, would imperfectly succeed without the aid of notes and glossary, to explain allusions that have become obsolete, or antiquated words which it was necessary to retain. An endeavour has been made to render each page self-explanatory, by placing on it all the glossarial and illustrative notes required for its elucidation, or -- to avoid repetitions that would have occupied space

-- the references to the spot where information may be found. The great advantage of such a plan to the reader, is the measure of its difficulty for the editor. It permits much more flexibility in the choice of glossarial explanations or equivalents; it saves the distracting and time-consuming reference to the end or the beginning of the book; but, at the same time, it largely enhances the liability to error. The Editor is conscious that in the 12,000 or 13,000 notes, as well as in the innumerable minute points of spelling, accentuation, and rhythm, he must now and again be found tripping; he can only ask any reader who may detect all that he could himself point out as being amiss, to set off against inevitable mistakes and misjudgements, the conscientious labour bestowed on the book, and the broad consideration of its fitness for the object contemplated.

From books the Editor has derived valuable help; as from Mr Cowden Clarke's revised modern text of *The Canterbury Tales*, published in Mr Nimmo's Library Edition of the English Poets; from Mr Wright's scholarly edition of the same work; from the indispensable Tyrwhitt; from Mr Bell's edition of Chaucer's Poem; from Professor Craik's "*Spenser and his Poetry*," published twenty-five years ago by Charles Knight; and from many others. In the abridgement of the *Faerie Queen*, the plan may at first sight seem to be modelled on the lines of Mr Craik's painstaking condensation; but the coincidences are either inevitable or involuntary. Many of the notes, especially of those explaining classical references and those attached to the minor poems of Chaucer, have been prepared specially for this edition. The Editor leaves his task with the hope that his attempt to remove artificial obstacles to the popularity of England's earliest poets, will not altogether miscarry.

D. LAING PURVES.