

ENGLISH POETRY

1170-1892

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(1170-1892)

SELECTED BY

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PREFACE

The idea and plan of the present volume originated ten years ago when Professor Bronson, Professor Dodge, and I were engaged in giving an introductory course in English literature to a class of one hundred and forty freshmen and sophomores in Brown University. We found that we secured the best results by having the students read as widely as their time permitted and then discussing freely with them such points as seemed vital to the interest or the significance of the literature read. We proceeded on the theory that literary productions are vital, organic wholes, and that they must be treated as such to produce the effects intended by their authors. Special beauties of detail were noted and enjoyed, but were subordinated to the main meaning and beauty unless, indeed, as sometimes occurred, the significance of the piece we were reading lay in the beauty of its details, in the nature of its ornamentation, rather than in its meaning or form as a whole. Questions of structure and relation of parts were discussed, but with a view primarily to the main theme. Lectures on authors were given, but the greater part of each lecture was devoted to trying to show what the author meant by his work, what he wished to say, what was significant or interesting in his special way of saying it, and why it was or was not of permanent value. Dates and facts and groups of names were given and required to be learned, but not without an attempt to express their significance in such terms of human experience as had actuality for the students themselves.

That the interest and intelligent coöperation of every member of the class were gained by this method, I will not pretend; but I can testify that I have never seen better results from any class or a larger proportion of interested and intelligent listeners in any audience; and I have good reason to know that this method awakened a love of literature and the habit of reading in many members of the course. Experience with this class and with many classes before and since convinces me that we teachers are inclined to underestimate the capacity of pupils for grasping large ideas and their susceptibility to the beautiful thoughts and forms in which we ourselves have found delight.

For such work as was done in the course of which I speak, it is necessary to have a much larger range of reading matter than is usually given in any single volume of selections. We found no volume that met our needs, and were obliged to ask the class to purchase numerous cheap prints of single pieces. But the expense even of these amounted to more than we could reasonably impose upon the students. I then decided to collect into a single volume all the pieces of nondramatic poetry that any teacher would likely care to have at hand from which to make his own selections. The publishers readily agreed to aid me in bringing the price of the volume within the reach

of every student. Circumstances prevented me from beginning the book for several years, but five years ago I began it and have continued to work upon it whenever it was possible to find time and strength for it. Two years of illness sadly interrupted the work, which has, indeed, been much more difficult than I expected. It is now completed, and I hope it will be of service to teachers who believe, with me, that the love of reading and the habit of it are best awakened by treating pieces of literature as living, organic wholes and by subordinating all other considerations to this during the student's first introduction to the study of literature. It may also be useful to that large group of teachers who believe, as I do, that however small may be the number of poems that time permits one to read with his class, they should be chosen by the teacher himself with special reference to the taste and mental development of the pupils he actually has to deal with in each class.

In general the poems in this volume are given without introductory remarks or annotations. Such information can best be supplied by the teacher in the form and amount suggested by his knowledge of his pupils. In regard to most of the authors and poems presented, the most necessary information is to be found in any of the good elementary histories of English literature, and it is presumed that one of them will be used in connection with the course. In certain special cases I have supplied in the Introduction brief remarks intended to supplement the text-book.

Explanations of difficulties of thought or allusion I have avoided altogether. In such reading they are neither welcome nor helpful to a pupil until he feels the need of them, and then they can best be supplied by the teacher.

The earlier poems are provided with notes giving the meanings of unfamiliar words. It is believed that these notes and an ordinary dictionary will enable any student to read intelligently any of these poems. It will be observed that the modern equivalents of prepositions have not usually been given, and that rude English will often result from substituting the words in the notes for those in the text and making no further change. But it is only thus that the student can learn to receive the ancient thought in the ancient forms. Except in vocabulary Middle English is really not very difficult to any intelligent Englishman, and it is hoped that this book may help to remove the prevalent ignorance and fear of it. A little ingenuity and intelligent guessing at the identity of words disguised by their spelling will soon repay the student richly. Authors and poems which have hitherto been mere names to burden the student's memory may easily acquire meaning and interest by reading or even skimming these early poems.

Two principles have determined the choice of authors and poems: none has been omitted that seemed of real importance for the main features of the history of English literature; to these none has been added that had not a clear title to intrinsic beauty and value. It has of course been impossible to include all the poems of this character that exist in English literature, but it is hoped that no teacher will miss any old favorite whose place is not filled by a poem equally deserving of his favor.

Dramatic selections have been excluded because every play that deserves to be read should be read as a whole, and no single volume could contain all the good ones.

The selection from Ford's *The Lover's Melancholy* (p. 163) does not in reality violate this principle of exclusion, for the passage chosen is in no sense dramatic. It is a bit of pure narration, slightly helped in its movement by the interrupting questions, but not dependent upon them. It is highly characteristic of Ford, and under the circumstances there seemed no more impropriety in including it than in including a song from a play.

From some of the longer narrative and reflective poems only extracts are given. An effort has been made to choose extracts characteristic in themselves and, as far as possible, self-explanatory. Usually omissions are indicated by stars, but in a few instances these have been left out where the line numbering makes clear the nature and amount of the omission. Some teachers will be disappointed to find that the familiar *Knight's Tale* is not given among the selections from Chaucer. The authority of Milton, as well as its greater brevity, may be pleaded in justification for making the unfinished *Squire's Tale* the representative of the *Canterbury Tales*.

It is hoped that both teachers and students will approve the inclusion of specimens of the work of some of the living poets who belong to the age of Tennyson. Certainly George Meredith and Swinburne could not have been excluded without serious loss.

All chronological divisions of literature are in some respects unsatisfactory. The division made in this book of the Renaissance in England into the Beginning of the Renaissance, the Renaissance, and the End of the Renaissance is perhaps even more unsatisfactory than usual. The authors are arranged in the order of birth, but unfortunately they neglected to mature and to die at any standard uniform rate or to be equally quick and sensitive in responding to new ideas and new influences in poetical style. Thus it will be found that even before Wyatt and Surrey some writers showed traces, faint indeed but real, of the intellectual awakening that we call the Renaissance. And within the period itself it seems absurd — and from the point of view of style and ideas it is absurd — to find Giles Fletcher the Elder in the division called the Beginning of the Renaissance and William Warner in the Renaissance itself, as if the latter belonged to a more advanced stage of development than the former. Of course the explanation is that the work of Edmund Spenser is generally regarded as the first perfect flower of the epoch, and Fletcher, who happened to be born earlier, naturally finds place in the earlier period, though he outlived Spenser and shows in some of his work the fully developed qualities of the period of Spenser; while, on the other hand, Warner, though born later, seems to have been insensitive to the new ideas and the new style and belongs artistically to the previous generation of crude and antiquated workmanship.

In printing the texts the best accessible editions have been used and great pains have been exercised to avoid errors of every kind, but entire freedom from errors is too much to expect. I shall be grateful for any aid which will enable me to correct such as occur. The spelling of the earlier texts has been scrupulously reproduced with only such modifications as are accepted and used by good editors. In the single case of *The Ormulum* the ancient symbols for *th* and palatal *g* have been used. In it this procedure seemed necessary, as the main value of the work lies in the spelling. It would be inexcusable pedantry to preserve these old forms in other poems in such a book as this.

For aid in making the book I have to thank several friends. My cousin, Louise Manly, began making the selections with me and did a very large amount of work. These selections were revised by me and many were rejected for lack of space, while others were replaced by selections which seemed to me, for one reason or another, better suited to the purposes of the book; but my debt to her is very great, both because her selections were made with taste and judgment and because without her aid I should probably not yet have begun to carry out my plan. To Dr. Hardin Craig, Mr. A. E. Hill, and Miss Elizabeth Calhoun I am indebted for aid in verifying readings while the book was going through the press. To my sister, Annie Manly, I owe the greatest debt for aid in copying and for reading with me every revise of the proofs of the whole book.

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INTRODUCTION

THE POEMA MORALE (p. 1) is the first important English poem after the Norman Conquest. It consists of a large number (about 400 lines) of moral and religious precepts embodying the author's philosophy of life, and was evidently written for the purpose of inculcating right living in all who read or heard it. As the short specimen given here shows, the questions of life, present and future, are treated in a spirit of selfish prudence, and the sentiment most frequently and powerfully appealed to is that of self-preservation. The spirit of the author is a sincere but hard and narrow Christianity, untouched by the tenderness of personal affection for Jesus or of concern for one's friends and fellow-men notable in the best work of Richard Rolle, Thomas de Hales, or even the dull but lovable Orm. The author has, however, much skill in language and versification, and at times the vigor and vividness of his work is undeniable. The poem must have been very popular in its day, as all peoples in the early stages of development are fond of proverbial sayings and similar forms of practical wisdom. Several copies of it, made in various parts of England, have come down to us.

THE ORMULUM (p. 2) is interesting almost solely because the author was a theorist about English spelling. He devised a system of his own for representing the pronunciation as exactly as possible and carried it out with much skill and consistency throughout his long poem of 20,000 lines. As scholars are now greatly interested in learning how English was pronounced in early ages, Orm's work is of the very highest value. As literature, it hardly deserves consideration. It was not intended to be a poem in the modern sense. It was written in verse because verse then seemed the proper form for anything that aspired to be literature. The author merely wished to present to his countrymen an English version of the Gospels read in the services of the church throughout the year, accompanied by explanations which should make clear their whole meaning, figurative as well as literal. Unfortunately, either he was very dull himself or he suspected his audience of almost impenetrable dullness, for he is not content to say a thing once with absolute simplicity and clearness, but must say it over and over again, and, in his anxiety that there shall be no mistake as to what he is talking about, is not satisfied to use pronouns for referring to matters already mentioned, but at each recurrence of them repeats all that he has previously said about them. His poem seems not to have been altogether unprovoked, for it was written at the request of his brother Walter; but there is no evidence that it met with any appreciation, as the single copy that has been preserved seems to be that written by the author himself. In spite of his dullness, however, the gentleness and amiability of Orm and his real love of God and his fellow-men is manifest in all his work.

LAYAMON, the author of *The Brut* (p. 2), is a man of much greater ability. His work is a versified chronicle or history of Britain from the destruction of Troy to 689 A.D. It is based mainly upon a similar French poem, the *Roman de Brut* by Wace, but Layamon added much from oral traditions known to him, especially about King Arthur. The merits of the poem at its best are those of a lively and picturesque narrative, rapid, simple, and vigorous, with much of the spirit of the older English epic. The versification also, though not precisely that of the older epic, is thoroughly national.

To us of the present day the most interesting parts of Layamon are those which deal with the story of King Lear, the coming of Hengist and Horsa, and, above all, the wars and death of King Arthur. *The Brut* contains about 30,000 lines and exists in two versions, one of about 1200 A.D., from which our selection is taken, and another of fifty years later. a sort of modernization made necessary by the rapid change of the language in those days.

KING HORN (p. 4) is one of the earliest and best of the metrical romances, — a kind of literature which then filled the place now occupied by the novel. Ancient romances, like early novels, usually begin at the beginning. In our first selection, this part of his subject has been treated with artistic brevity by the author and made essential to the story itself. The second selection gives a part of the love story of the exiled Horn, whose royal descent is kept concealed, and the Princess. Another incident of the same story, slightly modified, is given in the ballad of *Hind Horn* (p. 77). The narrative is full of incident, is well constructed, thoroughly motivated, and told with rapidity and directness. The poem contains 1568 lines and, judging from the number of versions, was very popular.

THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE (p. 7) is a work of very different character from any of the preceding. It is poetry in the modern sense of the term and deserves a very high rank when tested by the best standards of modern taste. The strife between the Owl and the Nightingale is in itself such a theme as existed by the hundred in mediæval literature. Strifes and debates, indeed, formed a special literary type, found in every language cultivated in Western Europe. There were strifes between Summer and Winter, between Youth and Age, between Water and Wine; debates as to whether a soldier or a scholar is the better lover, as to whether women are an evil or a good, as to any subject having, or seeming to have, two sides. Only a few of them rise to any considerable dignity or beauty or force. One, *The Debate between the Body and the Soul*, is among the most powerful religious poems of that age and is almost as impressive to-day as when it was first written, though some of its themes have since been worn threadbare. What especially distinguishes *The Owl and the Nightingale* is the astonishing dramatic sympathy of the author. The grief and indignation of the Owl at the failure of the world to recognize the beauty of his song are set forth with the same imaginative simplicity and candor as is the Nightingale's confidence in her own superiority. Such sympathetic imaginative power, such psychological subtlety, and such humor as are shown in this poem, in Chaucer, and in Robert Henryson are rare even in these days when machine-made sympathy and subtlety have been put within the reach of the least endowed. The author's name is unknown; it has been supposed to be Nicholas de Guildford, because towards the end of the poem the birds agree to leave the decision of the strife between them to Master Nicholas of Guildford, who is described as very skillful in music. But obviously Master Nicholas is more probably not the author, but some friend of his. The poem contains 1794 lines.

CURSOR MUNDI (p. 9) is a versified account of biblical history from the Creation to the time of Solomon and from the birth of the Virgin Mary to her Assumption, ending with the Final Judgment. In subject-matter and in the organization of it, *Cursor Mundi* resembles the great dramatic cycles of the Middle Ages; so much so, indeed, that it has been supposed to be the source of some of these plays. The poem is very long, about 25,000 lines, and seems to have been very widely read. The specimen given here exhibits its merits fairly and may serve to show us one of the most agreeable forms in which our ancestors received their knowledge of Bible history. The story here related is, of course, not from any of the canonical books of the Bible, but from the apocryphal pseudo-gospel of Matthew.

THOMAS DE HALES (p. 10) was a Franciscan friar, known to us by an affectionate message to him in a letter from the famous Adam de Marisco. It is therefore probable that the date ascribed to his poem should have been about 1250. It is certain that he lived before the order of friars had been corrupted by the intrusion of designing and unscrupulous men, and while it still retained the purity and enthusiasm of its great founder. Thomas was a man of great learning, but the sweetness and passionate simplicity of this little poem are not unworthy of the fine spirit of St. Francis himself. The subject of the poem and the circumstances of its composition as given in the first stanza, it may be noted, indicate the nearness of the friars to the people, — that familiar and homely interest in all the affairs of old and young which gave them their tremendous opportunities for good and for evil in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In lines 67–68 Dr. Morris's text is followed. It would have been better to keep the reading of the manuscript:

Amadas and Dideyne (= Idoyne)
Tristram, Yseude and alle theo.

Amadas and Idoyne are almost as famous a pair of lovers as Tristram and Isoude.

The four little LYRICS (p. 12) brought together here are among the best of the multitudinous lyrics of the age. Many of them have been preserved for us in manuscripts, many others are alluded to or quoted in snatches by chroniclers or writers of narrative poems, and many many more must have perished entirely, either through loss of the manuscripts or because they were never written down. Enough remain to prove that the ancient fame of "Merrie England" for song was well deserved and to show that the poetical gifts of mediæval Englishmen are to be studied not in dull didactic poem or prosy rhymed chronicle, but in poems written in the spirit of free and joyous artistry. Better known than any of those given here is the charming *Cuckoo-song*, composed about 1250, of which the music as well as the words has come down to us. Of our selections the first and second are songs of springtime and love, and hardly require any comment, though it may be interesting to compare the second with the Earl of Surrey's treatment of the same theme on page 82. The fourth is an extract from a longer poem, but is a unit in itself and is one of the best lyrical expressions of a theme made famous to the Middle Ages by St. Bernard of Clairvaux and to all ages by François Villon (see Rossetti's translation of Villon's ballade, p. 532). Humorous songs are not rare in Middle English, but it is unusual to find one so thoroughly artistic in conception and execution as our third selection. The poem is uncommonly difficult, partly because of the language, but mainly because the speaker is dramatic and expects you to follow every shifting change of his thought, every fleeting suggestion that comes into his mind to explain the mysterious "man" in the moon. The three first stanzas are a sort of wondering soliloquy about the "man"; the fourth is a direct address; the fifth, an expression of disappointment that the "man" will not accept the author's friendly suggestion. In line 8 the hedge is said to be the only one who knows what clothes the man wears, either because the thorns have retained bits of his rags or because like Autolycus (see *Winter's Tale*, IV, iii, 5, 24) he is conceived as a "snapper-up of unconsidered trifles." Lines 13–14 are, of course, a suggestion as to the reason why the man has a bundle of thorns on his back. Lines 15–16, I take it, explain why he was out late: the man, says the author, felt, as dark came on, that he must cut another truss; without it to complete his pile, all that he had cut would practically count for nothing. The allusion in lines 23–24 is to the fact that it was the duty of the hayward to see that no one trespassed in any of the fields under his charge and to arrest every such offender or take of him a pledge for appearance at the manor court. The friendly proposition in stanza 4 is entirely in keeping with the

administration of justice in the Middle Ages, when a little judicious bribery of the officers of the law was recognized as a part of the regular course of business. No one who reads the poem often enough to surmount the initial difficulties of language can fail to recognize in it, not a mere happy accident of composition, but a bit of the work of a genuine artist in comedy floated down to us in the wreckage of time.

RICHARD ROLLE (p. 14) is one of the most interesting figures in English religious history. His mystical experiences of the love of God entitle him to a place beside St. Catharine of Sienna. As a poet, his technical skill is rather unusual for his time; but curiously enough none of his poetry, though he wrote much, rises to the heights of passionate beauty reached by the best of his Latin prose. His longest and best known poem is *The Pricke of Conscience* (9544 lines) dealing, in seven parts, with the wretchedness of human nature, the transitoriness of the world, the death of the body, purgatory, doomsday, the pains of hell, and the joys of heaven. Our selection is from the first part, and is a good specimen of his manner when untouched by strong emotion.

The author of *PEARL* (p. 15) and *SYR GAWAYN AND THE GRENE KNYGHT* (p. 18)—if they are really by the same author, as is usually supposed—was not merely a writer of great natural powers but a careful and conscious artist. It is supposed that *Gawayn* was written while the author was still occupied with worldly thoughts and interests and that *Pearl* and two (or three) other religious poems were composed after his conversion to a serious religious life, and this is doubtless true if the poems be all the work of one man. *Gawayn* belongs, of course, to the number of metrical romances dealing with the knights of the Round Table and their adventures, but in one important respect it is very different from most of them. They are as a rule the work of authors who had little qualification for their task beyond a certain ease in narration and versification and a retentive memory. The author of *Gawayn*, however, does not merely repeat a story which he has heard or read; he uses the materials of tradition as freely as Tennyson or Arnold or Swinburne or any other modern artist, and displays a power of construction, a skill in climax, a sense of pictorial effects, fairly comparable with theirs. All this can be seen in the brief episode here given, which we have chosen not because it is better than many others but because it is self-explanatory. The interest of the reader is maintained unflinchingly throughout the 2550 lines of the poem. *Pearl* (1212 lines), though entirely different in subject and tone and manner, is equally admirable. It seems to give the experience of a father who has lost a beloved little daughter, his "Pearl," and who, a few years later, falling asleep in his arbor, sees her in a vision, not as the helpless child he has lost, but as a radiant and beautiful young maiden, the Bride of the Lamb, and talks with her about the joys of her heavenly abode. Recently it has been argued with great learning and ingenuity that the poet is a cleric and can have had no child, and that he is merely a man who, being interested in the theological doctrine of grace, not works, as the basis of rewards in heaven, attempted to illustrate and enforce the doctrine by an imaginary case of a baptised child dying in infancy and receiving in heaven rewards equal to those given the greater saints. There can be no doubt that, whether cleric or not, the poet was deeply versed in theology and believed ardently in the doctrine of grace, but no sufficient reason has been adduced for refusing to recognize the genuine personal tone of the poet's grief and love. That the child was not his own is reasonably clear from his remark that she was nearer to him than aunt or niece (line 233), and from the absence of the terms father and daughter in their conversation. But many a man has loved with great devotion a child not his own; Mr. Swinburne's charming poems (see pp. 561 and 562, and the whole series entitled *A Dark Month*, written when the beloved child was away on a visit) may serve as a notable instance. That the bereaved heart of a lonely man here found consolation in the new and blessed doctrine of grace seems

more likely than that a mere theologian devised this most beautiful of poems as the framework for promulgating a favorite dogma.

GOWER (p. 22) and LANGLAND (p. 24) are so fully treated in the text-books that only a word on each need be added here. Gower is not a great poet, but through being contrasted with Chaucer he has had less than his due of recognition. Mr. Lowell, one of the most genial of critics, sought to enhance his praise of Chaucer by setting him off against a dark background and playfully celebrating his contemporary and friend Gower as dull with the dullness of super-man. But Chaucer needs no such setting; we now know his age to have been one of extraordinary mental activity and poetical production; and he shines with undiminished brightness above all its light. And Gower, though no artist and undeniably monotonous, is not altogether lacking in power of swift narrative and picturesque description, as the story of Medea and Eson clearly proves.

The poems which go under the name of Langland (p. 24) are the work of several distinct and very different men. One of these men wrote the Prologue and the first eight passus or cantos of the A-text (1800 lines) about 1362. The poem became very popular and was continued by another man who carried it on to about the middle of the twelfth passus and left it unfinished. A certain John But then finished it by a hasty and absurd account of the sudden death of the author. About 1377 another writer, almost equal to the first in picturesqueness of phrasing and vividness of detail, but woefully deficient in power of consecutive thought and constructive ability, revised the whole poem composed by the first two writers, neglecting the passus containing the death of the author. His method of revision was to leave practically unchanged what he found written but to make numerous insertions, expanding suggestions of the original, and numerous additions, developing themes untouched by the earlier writers. The work as he left it is called the B-text. Fifteen or twenty years later a man of greater learning than any of the others and of a more orderly and systematic habit of mind than the author of the B-text, but of much less poetic ability—a pedant, in fact—revised the B-text, rearranging, inserting, and adding. The poem as he left it is called the C-text. The moral earnestness, the satirical power, the picturesque phrasing, of the poem have long been recognized, but, until recently, when it was discovered that it was not all the work of one man, the poem was charged with vagueness, obscurity, formlessness. Now it appears that we ought to read and criticise the different parts separately; and if we do so, we find that the work of the first author (the first half of the A-text) is as clear as it is picturesque, that one need never be at a loss as to its meaning or the relation of its parts, and that its author was a man of remarkable constructive and organizing power. Confusion and uncertainty do not enter until his work has received the well-meant but inartistic insertions and additions of others. His work may be seen in the first and third selections. That of the writer of the B-text is seen at its very best, and free from its usual defects, in the second selection, which constitutes his first insertion in the poem as he found it.

HOCCLEVE (p. 47) and LYDGATE (p. 48) are of historical interest only. Each professed himself a follower and devoted pupil of Chaucer's, and there can be no doubt of their affection and admiration, but both singularly failed to reproduce any of his characteristic qualities. Neither seems to have understood his versification or to have had the ability to adapt it to the language of their time. Chaucer's verse, as everybody now knows, is as smooth and musical as the best verse of any age, if the final vowels which were pronounced in his speech are sounded in his verse. Hoccleve and Lydgate knew that final *e* was sometimes sounded, but in their own speech apparently sounded it much less often than Chaucer, and consequently, when they read his verse with their own pronunciation, it sounded to them as rough and uncertain as their own.

There must have been very great and sudden changes in the pronunciation of English during Chaucer's lifetime, especially in regard to sounding final *e*. He and Gower apparently spoke and wrote the more conservative speech of the upper classes. The younger generation, to which Hoccleve and Lydgate belonged, apparently spoke very differently. This may have been due to the sudden rise in social position of a vast multitude of people in consequence of the general political and social movements of the age. Such people would naturally try to acquire the pronunciation of the new class into which they had risen, but because of the multitude of them their own earlier habits of speech could not fail to exercise some influence upon standard English.

But it is clear also that neither Hoccleve nor Lydgate was possessed of much intellectual fineness or artistic sensibility. Neither of them understood the spirit and aims of Chaucer's work. To them and, sad to relate, to most men for a century to come Chaucer's merits were not those of a great artist, a true poet, but merely those of a voluminous writer of interesting stories and songs. Doubtless they enjoyed his work more than they did Gower's, but he and Gower seemed to them to belong essentially to the same class of writers. It is not strange, therefore, that Hawes and Skelton and other writers of the age of Henry VII and Henry VIII praised Chaucer and Gower and Lydgate in the same breath and with the same note of praise. The matter was all they could understand or appreciate; and Gower and Lydgate had as much material as Chaucer, if not more. In our own day the sudden addition to the reading public of a multitude of readers of uncultivated minds and undeveloped taste has resulted in a somewhat similar state of affairs. The success of a book — that is, of one of "the best sellers" — depends not upon its artistic qualities or its power and beauty of thought, but solely upon its presentation of the sort of material liked by the general public. Now, as in the fifteenth century, it is not even necessary that the material should be novel; the public swallows with avidity to-day absolutely the same story that it swallowed yesterday, provided the names of the hero and the heroine are changed. A century or two hence critics will find it as hard to account for the great vogue of some of our popular novels as we find it to account for the failure of the men of the fifteenth century to distinguish between Chaucer and Gower and Lydgate.

ROBERT HENRYSON, the Scot (p. 52), was also an imitator of Chaucer, and he was one of the few men of the time who at all understood him. Though much inferior to Chaucer in power, he has no little artistic skill, and in humor is a not unworthy follower of the great master. The charming ballad of *Robyn and Maunkyn* is perhaps his best known poem, but his beast fables seem more characteristic and better illustrative of his humor and psychological power. *The Mouse and the Paddock* belongs to that peculiar class of beast fables begun in English with Chaucer's *Nonne Prestes Tale* and continued in our own time with Kipling's *Jungle Books*.

THE NUTBROWNE MAIDE (p. 54) is curiously modern in every respect: in versification, in language, in tone, and in sentiment. One would like to know who was the author — to what class of society he belonged, of what education and experience of life he was, whether he ever wrote anything else. The existence of such isolated originality as is shown in this poem, in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, in *The Man in the Moon*, in some of the Early Tudor lyrics, and a few other ancient poems, makes one slow to believe that our remote ancestors were less capable of excellence in literature than we are, and confirms the view that the variation in the number of good writers in different periods is not due so much to differences in intellectual equipment as to variation in the interests that attract the attention of different periods.

WILLIAM DUNBAR, the Scot (p. 58), and STEPHEN HAWES, the Englishman (p. 59), belong also to the list of followers of Chaucer. They, like the rest of these imitators,

are insensible to those qualities of the master which make him significant not for the Middle Ages only but for all time. The literary forms and the style which attracted them and which they most frequently try to reproduce are those which Chaucer himself in the course of his marvelous artistic development outgrew and abandoned. They imitate *The Boke of the Duchesse*, *The Prologue to the Legende of Goode Women*, *The Parlement of Foules*, *The Hous of Fame*, and above all the *Roman de la Rose* or the translation of it. Allegory is the chosen form, abstractions are the favorite personages; the ancient conventional machinery of spring mornings and grassy arbors and dreams and troupes of men and fair ladies is used again and again, though all its parts have become loose and worn with use and age and creak audibly at every movement. To all this they add a pretentious diction that smells of schools and musty Latinity. The flowers that deck their fields are withered blossoms that they have picked up and painted and tied to the bare and lifeless stalks. Gaudy they are, but odorless, lifeless, and obviously painted.

DUNBAR's greatest poem is *The Golden Targe*, a long, tedious allegory setting forth the dangers of love and the efficacy of the golden shield of reason. Equally famous and less wearisome is *The Thrissill and the Rois*, a poem celebrating by means of the national flowers of Scotland and England the marriage of James IV of Scotland with Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry VII of England, — a marriage of so much significance later for England and the history of Great Britain. In his satires, such as *The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sinnis*, and in his shorter poems, such as his *Lament for the Makaris* (i.e. Poets), Dunbar is much more original and vigorous and less pedantic.

STEPHEN HAWES's most important poem is also an elaborate allegory. The full title of it is significant, *The Pastime of Pleasure; or the History of Graunde Amour and La Bell Pucell; conteining the knowledge of the seven Sciences and the course of mans life in this worlde*. All this is set forth in a series of incidents in which the hero Graunde Amour (Love of Knowledge) falls in love with and wins La Bell Pucell (the beautiful maiden, Knowledge). Our first extract gives a fair idea of the method and merits of the poem. After the marriage, Graunde Amour lives happily with his bride for many years; then, summoned by Old Age and Death, he dies and is buried, his epitaph being written by Remembrance. This epitaph is perhaps the most interesting passage of the poem to a modern reader.

That LYRICS (p. 63) were written in great numbers before the influence of Italy seriously affected English poetry in the sixteenth century is well known, but most historians of English literature entirely neglect these lyrics and speak as if England owed all her wealth of song in the age of Elizabeth to Italian influence. That there was much imitation of sonnet and madrigal and other Italian forms of lyric poetry is beyond question, but in many of the most charming of the lyrics of the latter part of the century one hears, I think, the same notes and discovers the same poetic method that had marked English lyrics at the beginning of the century and for ages before. Only a few specimens of these native wood-notes wild are given here, but they will serve to enforce what has just been said. One of them, it will be remarked, is curiously unlike the rest and curiously modern. In both tone and poetic method the love song:

Lully, lulley, lulley, lulley!
The fawcon hath born my make away! (p. 65)

smacks, not of the Middle Ages, but of that interesting nineteenth-century imitation of mediævalism associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Movement.

The BALLADS (p. 66) here given are specimens of a kind of literature which has attracted a great deal of attention and aroused a great deal of controversy in modern

times. Composed during the Middle Ages for the common people, they attracted scarcely any attention from cultivated readers and played little part in literature until the second half of the eighteenth century. Sir Philip Sidney knew and loved "the old song of Percy and Douglas," Shakespeare and some of the other dramatists quoted brief snatches of them in certain of their plays, and Addison devotes a critique in the *Spectator* to one of the best of them; but they had no general literary standing until some men of the eighteenth century, sick of the conventionalities and prettinesses of the poetry of their day, turned for relief to the rude vigor and simplicity of these old poems. The book most influential in this introduction of them to modern readers was Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, published in 1765.

But, although obscure until the time of the Romantic Movement, the ballads, as has been said, were composed centuries before that time. Even approximate dates of composition can be set for very few of them, for they were usually not written down but only preserved in memory and transmitted orally through the centuries, and consequently in most cases no certain conclusions as to their dates can be drawn from the forms of the language in which they are expressed. But we know that some of those that have come down to us belong to the fifteenth, the fourteenth, and even the thirteenth centuries. Perhaps the earliest of those printed here is *St. Stephen and Herod* (p. 79), one of the most remarkable for a vivid simplicity which no art could improve. This and *Sir Patrick Spens*, by some curious chance, have precisely the artistic qualities which we look for in the best modern verse; the excellences of some of the others, such as the *Battle of Otterburn* and *Captain Car*, though perhaps as great in their way, belong to an ideal of art entirely different from that of the modern individualistic, conscious artist.

Most of the lyrics of SIR THOMAS WYATT (p. 80) and the EARL OF SURREY (p. 82) were first printed in a little volume entitled *Songs and Sonnets, written by the Right Honourable Lord Henry Howard, late Earl of Surrey, and others*, but commonly known, from the publisher's name, as *Tottel's Miscellany*. The significance of this volume is duly emphasized in all histories of English literature.

GEORGE SANDYS (p. 157) is usually regarded as too unimportant to find a place in a brief history of English literature; but it has seemed worth while to give three brief specimens of his translations, because they show the falsity of the common opinion, shared by some of the best literary critics, that it is impossible to translate the poetry of the Old Testament into English verse and preserve the dignity and simplicity and force which are so finely preserved in the prose of the Authorized Version. The student may also be interested to notice that two of the verse-forms Sandys uses were afterwards made famous by Tennyson.

LADY WINCHILSEA (p. 213) finds a place here because of recent years the romantic qualities of her work, noted long ago by Wordsworth, have met with general recognition and have received special significance from their existence at a time when the Classical Movement seemed supreme.

WILLIAM HAMILTON OF BANGOR produced in his paraphrase of Hamlet's soliloquy (p. 260) what has been regarded as the very *reductio ad absurdum* of the "classical" method and style. Hamilton's own lack of ability is of course responsible for the absolute lifelessness of the lines, and bad writers will always write badly; but the tone, the manner of approaching the subject, the choice of imagery and of stylistic devices, are distinctly "classical." A comparison of the soliloquy with its original would be a good elementary exercise in defining the two contrasted ideals of literary art. It would also emphasize anew the great fact that in literature, as in life, the idea is little, while the emotions it awakens, the images it arouses, the associations that

accompany it, are everything; for Hamilton has used all the ideas of the great soliloquy and rejected all its means of effectiveness.

DAVID MALLET (p. 260) — his name was originally Malloch — lives in literary history by virtue of three rather curious circumstances: the title of one of his poems (*The Excursion*) had the honor of being used later by Wordsworth; the famous song, *Rule, Britannia!* (p. 258), was first sung in a musical comedy called *Alfred, a Masque*, composed by him and James Thomson; and he was the reputed author of *William and Margaret* (p. 260), the most important ballad in the history of the Romantic Movement. Fate favored him in Wordsworth's choice of a title for his poem. She favored him in the second instance by letting the poet James Thomson die before *Alfred* was printed and before any public claim had been made to the great song which all scholars now ascribe to Thomson. She favored him the third time by allowing him to retain for over one hundred and fifty years credit in literary circles for the authorship of *William and Margaret*, a poem which we now know to have been printed in slightly different form and sold about the streets of London while he was still a child. The importance of the ballad for the history of Romanticism lies partly in its real beauty, partly in the early date at which it attracted public attention and interest, and partly in the large amount of discussion to which it gave rise.

THOMAS WARTON (p. 283) owes his position in the history of English poetry not to the fact that he was poet laureate but to his having contributed, both by his own verse and by his *History of English Poetry*, to the triumph of Romanticism. His *History of English Poetry*, which is still a standard treatise, brought to the attention of the reading public the rich but forgotten fields of English poetry from the twelfth to the close of the sixteenth century, the influence of which became dominant in the Romantic revival. His best poetry also expresses two of the principal characteristics of Romanticism, — love of antiquity and love of nature. He is further notable as having helped to revive the sonnet as a form of English verse.

THOMAS CHATTERTON (p. 295) wrote under his own name some poems of great promise for a boy (he was only eighteen when he died), but his most important and interesting poems he pretended not to have written but to have discovered. Most of them, he said, were composed by a monk named Rowley in the second half of the fifteenth century, and had been found by himself among old papers in the church of St. Mary Redcliffe at Bristol. In the present state of knowledge of the English language it is easy for any scholar to see that these poems could not possibly have been written in the fifteenth century, and some persons suspected them when they were first produced; but to the majority even of the scholars of that day any imitation of old manuscripts, old writing, and old spelling was good evidence of age, and it seemed absolutely impossible that so young a boy — he was only twelve or thirteen when he began to produce these poems — could have composed the poems and fabricated the manuscripts. When the imposture was discovered the critics, making no allowance for its having been the work of a mere child, were filled with high moral indignation, and the poor boy was allowed to starve, until, being able to endure his neglect no longer, he took poison and died. It has been thought strange that the poems written in this "fake" old English are better than those in the English of his own day; but the explanation seems easy psychologically. The imagination of the boy was specially excited both by the idea of the imposture he was carrying on and by the odd forms of words which he used. He felt himself transported to the times and scenes he was trying to reproduce and wrote with the picturesqueness and vigor which belong to such excited states of mind. Professor Skeat, in his recent edition of Chatterton, has changed the old spelling of the poems to modern spelling, on the ground that the boy really thought in

eighteenth-century English and ought to be so represented. This sounds logical, but really is not. He may have thought thus, but we may be sure that he felt and imagined in these pseudo-archaic forms which made the antique world live again for him. Chatterton's method of old spelling is so simple also that it will give hardly any trouble. His first principle is to double letters as often as possible; his second is not to be too regular even in doing this; his third, to use any genuine old spellings that he happened to remember. No difficulty exists in *The Bristowe Tragedie*. *The Accounte of W. Canynges Feast* is harder. In line 1 *han sounde* is intended to mean *has sounded*. The meaning of line 2 is *a fair welcome does befit persons of dignity*, — *Bylecoyle* being a bad spelling of the name of one of the characters in the old Chaucerian translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. *Ealdermenne*, line 3, is of course *aldermen*; *cheorte*, line 4, really means *deariness* or *scarcity*, but Chatterton thought it could mean *delicious*; *swotelye*, line 6, means *sweetly* (= *sweet*) and *doe* is for *does*. *Syche coyne*, line 7, means *such food*. Professor Skeat thinks *coyne* means *daintily*, but Chatterton probably got the word from Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland*, where Spenser says, "by the woord of Coygnye is understood mans-meat," as opposed to horse-meat. *Coygnye* is also spelled *coy*n and *coyne*. In line 8 *dynne* is *noise*. In line 9 *Heie styлле* means *they* (the minstrels) *cease playing*. In line 11 *echone* is of course *every* (each one), and *deene* is *dine*. Line 12 means *if Rowley, Iscamm, or Tyb Gorges* (three of his friends) *be not seen*.

The MINOR SCOTTISH POETS represented in pages 304–309 are mainly interesting as a background to Burns. In methods and ideals he was not an isolated phenomenon; freedom and individuality had not perished entirely. In London literary circles and throughout Great Britain wherever people tried to write or to criticise as they thought all "up-to-date" people were writing and criticising, the prevailing fashion of "classicism" was omnipotent. But wherever people wrote for the pleasure of saying a thing as they wished to say it, life, with its old joys and hopes and sorrows and fears and desires, ran fresh and strong, as it always has run and always will.

PRAED (p. 428) and LOCKER-LAMPSON (p. 504) are the advance guard of a host of writers of *vers de société* of exquisite delicacy and refinement. The ideal of such verse is elegant and ingenious trifling with only occasional touches of more serious sentiment, — as a swallow circles bright and swift through the air, dips its wing for a moment in the water, and like a flash is off again in its careless flight. Some of the lighter verse of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries bears a close resemblance to the work of these later writers, but there is a difference in tone, in attitude, in personal concern with the sentiments expressed. Locker (or Locker-Lampson, to use the name he assumed upon his marriage to Miss Lampson) was far superior to Praed in tenderness, in reserve, in genuine poetic feeling, and in technique. His range of sentiments, of ideas, and of rhythms was greater; and he has had the greater influence upon later writers.

Fitzgerald's translation of THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM (p. 438) has long had a place in the hearts of lovers of high and serious poetry. Although a translation, it is in the truest sense an original poem and expresses as scarcely any other does the strange combination of doubt and defiance and sensuousness and religious yearning characteristic of much of the thought and feeling of the Victorian Age.

Bailey's FESTUS (p. 498) was one of the most successful poems of any age. Published in 1839, it passed through many editions in England, besides thirty in America. In addition to this popular success, it gained the extravagant praises of many critics and poets, even such men as Walter Savage Landor ranking it with the great poems of the world. But it is dead and will never be read again except as a literary curiosity. Three quotations from it still survive as the sum total of its claims upon the future. The poet and dramatist, Westland Marston, said, "I know no poem in any language

that can be compared with it in copiousness and variety of imagery." This is true; but the imagery of the poem is the result of intellectual ingenuity, not of poetic imagination, and the movement of it, both in general and in detail, is the movement of machinery, not of life.

COVENTRY PATMORE (p. 521) has been the subject of the most widely divergent judgments. One contemporary critic says, "It may be affirmed that no poet of the present age is more certain of immortality than he." Another regards him as possessor of no spark of the divine fire. The selections here presented seem to justify his claim to a unique and high position among the poets of his time, but his range was narrow—his vocal register had scarcely a tone that does not find utterance in these selections—and his voice obviously lacked resonance and power. Being incapable of self-criticism, he wrote much that is prosaic—some lines that even awaken inextinguishable laughter; but at its best his verse is simple, picturesque, passionate, of exquisite freshness and charm.

SIDNEY DOBELL (p. 523) is a notable example of the rather large class of poets in the nineteenth century who gave evidence of true and even great poetic ability, but who failed in unity, in consistency, in power of final and perfect utterance.

GEORGE MEREDITH (p. 537) is perhaps the most richly and variously endowed writer of the nineteenth century. He is best known as a novelist, but to many of his admirers he seems equally great as a poet. All of his work is notable for its combination of significance and beauty. In depth of insight, in subtle apprehension of life and the problems which it presents to try the hearts of intelligent men and women, even such great writers as Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot are hardly his equals; and his sensitiveness to the beauties of nature and of the soul of man has a wider range and a finer delicacy. The same qualities are manifest in much of his poetry. But the gods gave him also the fatal gift of excessive intellectual ingenuity and a delight in the exercise of it; while the sole gift they denied him was self-restraint. Like his own Bellerophon, he had the winged horse and the golden bridle, and he, too,

Could mount and sit
Flying, and up Olympus midway speed;

but instead of riding straight and hard for the summit he too often, in mere exuberance of power and of delight in his steed, executes difficult feats of horsemanship on the lower slopes of the mountain.

ROBERT BULWER LYTTON, "Owen Meredith" (p. 544), is notable only as an example of the worthlessness of contemporary popularity, however great, as a test of merit. No one can now read his verses without seeing clearly and at once that he had not a single quality of greatness. He had no power of thought, no sensitiveness to beauty, no real charm of manner. His success was a triumph of the commonplace and of cheap and tawdry sensationalism. That we are all now able to see this does not mean that we are wiser than the preceding generation or endowed with better taste, but only that this particular kind of commonplace and sensationalism does not appeal to us. Most of us are still equally ready to praise work different in badness, but just as bad.

SIR LEWIS MORRIS (p. 547) is not a great poet, but he occupies an honorable place among poets of the second rank. Though lacking in originality and strength he has sincerity and sensitiveness to beauty and truth; and often his verse has the simple, noble charm of genuine poetry.

JAMES THOMSON (p. 548) is one of the most curious and interesting figures of the Victorian period. No one has been more successful in catching the true poetic aspect of the pleasures of the lower middle classes of a great city. His "idyls of the London