

THE  
POETICAL  
WORKS OF  
SPENSER.

*The Poetical Works of*  
**EDMUND SPENSER**

*Edited with Critical Notes*

By J. C. SMITH and  
E. DE SELINCOURT

*With an Introduction by*  
E. DE SELINCOURT  
*and a Glossary*



*London*  
**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS**  
*New York Toronto*

EDMUND SPENSER

Born: London, c. 1552

Died: Westminster, 16 January 1599

*This edition of Spenser's Poetical Works was first published in 1912, and reprinted in 1916, 1921, 1924, 1926, 1929, 1932, 1935, 1937, 1940, 1942, 1947, 1948, 1951, 1952, 1957, 1959, 1960, and 1961*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

O.S.A.

## PREFACE.

THE *Faerie Queene* is here reproduced from the text edited by Mr. J. C. Smith and published by the Clarendon Press in 1909 ; the text of Spenser's *Minor Poems*, save for the correction of a few errors, follows my edition of 1910. To the poems has been added the *Correspondence of Spenser and Harvey*, printed from the original editions of 1580. The Glossary has been compiled by Mr. H. Alexander.

I have prefixed to the volume a biographical and critical essay. My excuse is that of late years the poetry of Spenser has occupied far less attention than is warranted either by its own intrinsic beauty or by its importance as a vital influence upon the development of our literature. Since the publication in 1884 of Grosart's *Life of Spenser* little has been written in England either to advance our knowledge or to increase our appreciation of his life and work ; and I gladly recognize the debt owed by me, as by all students of Spenser, to the valuable researches of American scholars, in particular of Mr. R. A. Neil Dodge, Mr. E. A. Greenlaw, and Mr. P. Long. A full interpretation of his genius, worthy of its theme, is yet to be written.

I wish to record my thanks to Mr. J. C. Smith for reading the proofs of my essay, and to acknowledge my debt to my friend Miss Darbishire of Somerville College for many suggestions made in the course of its composition.

E DE SELINCOURT

GRASMERE,

Sept. 1912.

## INTRODUCTION.

OF Spenser's life something may be learned from official documents and from the writings of his contemporaries, but the most valuable information is to be found in his poetry. The art of an idealist is in a peculiar sense the expression of his mind and character, and of his relation with the world about him; and along with this intimate though often intangible autobiography Spenser has incidentally recorded some details capable of more definite interpretation. From a sonnet written in 1593, the year of his courtship, a year which, he tells us, seems longer

Than al those fourty that my life outwent,

we conjecture that he was born about 1552; from the *Prothalamion*, where he speaks of

mery London, my most kindly nurse,  
That to me gave this life's first native sourse;  
Though from another place I take my name,  
An house of auncient fame,

we learn that he was born in London, but that his parents were not Londoners. The 'house of auncient fame' with which he was connected was the Spencers of Althorpe, Northampton. Of three of the daughters of Sir John Spencer he hymns the praises in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*,<sup>1</sup> and to each of them he dedicated one of his minor poems, claiming a relationship with them that they seem gladly to have acknowledged.

His mother's name, he tells us, was Elizabeth; his father has been identified with one John Spenser, a gentleman by birth, and a member of the clan of Spencers whose home was in the Pendleton district of north-east Lancashire. But John Spenser had settled in London, and become a free journeyman of the Merchant Taylors Company, living in East Smithfield near the Tower. Here his three children, Edmund the poet, John, and Elizabeth were born. He was evidently in humble circumstances, for when his boys went, as 'pore schollers', to the newly-founded school of the Merchant Taylors, he received bounties for their maintenance from the Nowells,<sup>2</sup> a wealthy Lancashire family; and this generosity was repeated when they proceeded as sizars to Pembroke College, Cambridge. The poet was fortunate in his school. Mulcaster,

<sup>1</sup> ll. 536-71.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Grosart: *Life of Spenser*, p. 16, and *The Spending of the Money of Robert Nowell*.

its first head master, was a keen scholar with a generous conception of the aims of education. 'It is not a mind,' he wrote, 'not a body, that we have to educate, but a man; and we cannot divide him.' The conception derives from the enthusiastic culture of the Renaissance, and something both of the ideal and the practice of the perfect courtier, which Spenser was later to emulate and to portray, must have been instilled into him in early youth. Mulcaster grounded his pupils in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, he trained them daily in music both vocal and instrumental, and was a convinced advocate of the study of the mother tongue, and of the educational value of acting. He presented plays yearly before the court, in which his boys were the actors, and 'by that means taught them good behaviour and audacity'. It is highly probable that Spenser, as among Mulcaster's leading scholars, made his first appearance before the queen as an actor.

At school, too, Spenser acquired some knowledge of French, and made his first experiments as a poet. In 1569 appeared a small volume entitled *A Theatre, wherein be represented as wel the miseries and calamities that follow the voluptuous worldlings as also the greate joyes and pleasures which the faithfull do enjoy. An argument both profitable and delectable to all that sincerely love the Word of God. Devised by S. John vander Noodt*. It contained translations from Marot's version of one of the canzoni of Petrarch and from some sonnets by Du Bellay, which were afterwards included in Spenser's *Complaints* of 1591. A few of them were then rewritten, others left as they had stood in 1569, but all are clearly enough from Spenser's hand; and though the lines are often rough and boyish, they anticipate, however faintly, the liquid fluency of his later versification.

Of his years at Cambridge (1569-76) there is little detail to record. But though, as Dr. Johnson has remarked, 'a scholastic life is very uniform' and would put him 'little in the way of extraordinary casualties', its influence was none the less potent both upon his intellectual development and his subsequent career. During his residence the entry books of Pembroke College refer to him on several occasions as the recipient of allowances, 'aegrotanti', and it is possible that chronic ill-health tended to develop the dreamy and reflective side of his nature. But it does not seem to have affected the avidity of his reading, and it may well be that his bodily infirmities, like Herbert's, 'betrayed him to a lingering book,' and preserved him from the distractions of the world. He is among the most learned of our poets, and if some have been better scholars, none has been more widely read. Of his contemporaries, Ben Jonson, and perhaps Chapman, could rival his knowledge of the classics; but Ben Jonson, as Drummond informs us, 'did neither understand French nor Italiannes', and Spenser was widely conversant with both. His scholarship would be accounted superficial to-day. There are signs enough that, reading his authors for their spirit and matter, he inclined to disregard the

niceties of grammatical structure. Yet in his own time he was accounted a proficient Greek scholar;<sup>1</sup> and in Greek poetry, except the tragedians, so strangely neglected by the Elizabethans, he was well read. But he was attracted rather by the thought than by the art of Greece. He was an enthusiastic student of Plato and Aristotle. By the mystical element in Plato, more particularly as it is revealed in the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and parts of the *Republic*, he was profoundly influenced; and he knew both the originals and the chief Italian commentators upon them, Bembo, Ficino, and Bruno, who gave to Platonic teaching so wide a currency in his time. The poetry of Rome attracted him both by its wealth of material which he could shape to his own purpose, and by virtue of its style. It is significant too that while most Elizabethans turned chiefly to Ovid, Spenser was more vitally affected by the finer art of Virgil.<sup>2</sup>

At Cambridge Spenser formed a deep and lasting friendship with Gabriel Harvey, who was elected Fellow of Pembroke a year after the poet had come into residence, and was among the most notable figures at the University. Biographers of Spenser have wondered at this friendship between men who differed so widely in temperament and ideals, and have inclined to minimize it, or to attribute it to the modesty of the younger and the arrogance of the elder. It is, indeed, easy enough to represent Harvey as a pedantical scholar, vain of his own absurd achievements, an intellectual bully, so censorious that 'he could hardly find it in his heart to commend any man', quarrelsome, forcing his opinions upon men of finer genius than himself, unable to appreciate any art that did not conform to his own mechanical rules, and finally routed and held up to eternal scorn by the nimbler wit of Nashe. But this is mere caricature. Harvey was a scholar of eminence, deeply versed in all that was accounted learning in his day. His lectures on rhetoric drew crowded audiences, and enhanced a reputation that was already assured. His fame was not confined to his own University; Leicester and Sidney held him in high esteem and took a personal interest in his career. He was certainly unpopular. The son of a Suffolk rope-maker, he may well have been resented as an upstart by well-born colleagues who were intellectually his inferiors,<sup>3</sup> and his bearing towards them was not conciliatory. He was, moreover, a strong Puritan, and at Cambridge, the hot-bed of those ecclesiastical controversies which harassed the minds of Elizabeth and her advisers, the *odium theologicum* was peculiarly virulent; so that it is less to be wondered at that Harvey had many enemies than that Still and Preston, who favoured the more moderate party, were ranked among his friends. Harvey's literary theory and practice have

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bryskett, quoted *infra*, pp. xxv, xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Spenser's *Belesenheit*, von W. Reidner: Leipzig, 1908.

<sup>3</sup> Vide McKerrow (*Nashe*, v. 66 f.), who suggests this point, and has influenced my view of Harvey.

often been ridiculed. He followed Ascham in his contempt for 'the rude and beggarly habit of rhyming'; and at a time when contemporary poetry had not yet justified itself, made an attempt to impose classical prosody upon English verse. In this he tried to influence his younger friend, but without any success; for it was not till later, when Spenser came under the spell of Sidney, that he wavered, even momentarily, from following the true bent of his own genius. As to style, Harvey had the taste typical of the Renaissance scholar. Phrases like 'a rarenes of poetic invention', 'lively Hyperbolicall Amplifications', 'rare, quaint, and odde in every point, above the reache of a common schollers capacitie', to be met with in his criticism of Spenser's early and unpublished work, sufficiently indicate that side of Spenser which he was able to appreciate, and also that style which both in his prose and verse he himself attempted to achieve. Like many another minor poet, he thought too well of his own compositions, and the fact that they were written upon a scholastic theory tended only to harden his heart. Naturally, then, he was disappointed with the *Shepheardes Calender*, and tried to turn his friend from the composition of the *Faerie Queene*. The obtuseness of his judgement on the 'parcels' of Spenser's masterpiece which were submitted to his criticism is often quoted as his final condemnation. But we do not know what those parcels contained, or whether their contents were in a tentative or in their final form; and in any case this poem, with its interweaving of classic myth and barbaric English legend, and a diction that abounds in archaisms both genuine and spurious, was not inaptly described by an avowed Humanist in his famous phrase, 'Hobgoblin runne away with the garland from Apollo.' And this was his final protest. For when, some ten years later, the first three books were published, he made the *amende honorable* in a charming poem of welcome to the new venture. In his own day he was accused of vanity in publishing his correspondence with Spenser; yet it is vanity with a difference. Pride in his pupil is perhaps the most pardonable form of vanity in a scholar; and it should not be forgotten, that if these letters reveal an intimacy on which Harvey may well have congratulated himself, they reveal the fact, less pleasing to him, that the triumphs of the pupil had been won in defiance of the literary principles of the master.<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt that Harvey was both a loyal and a valued friend of Spenser's, that he took the keenest interest in his career, and introduced him to those who were best able to further it; and, if he gave him bad advice on literary matters, in all else he was a sound and judicious counsellor. Spenser at least recognized it. Years later he delighted to refer to Harvey as his 'entire friend', and there is no reason to believe that his opinion ever changed, or that his love was thrown away. This friend-

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting, too, that however wrong in principle, Harvey makes many sound and acute remarks on English quantity; and, in fact, practised the reformed versifying with more success than Spenser.



ship, so long and so loyally maintained with a man whose bitter tongue and cantankerous spirit had alienated many, and who certainly lacked that refinement of temper and sensibility which Spenser always prized, bears witness to his own sweetness of disposition and to the generous tolerance of his mind.

In 1576 Spenser obtained the degree of M.A. and left Cambridge for the society of his Lancashire kinsfolk. Whether this was his first visit to the North, or the renewal of an earlier acquaintance, it is not possible to determine. Some critics have thought that much of his boyhood was spent there, and have read as literal autobiography the account of Colin's youth in the *December Eclogue* of the *Shepheardes Calender*. But much of that poem is closely adapted from Clement Marot, and even if the rest recalls the actual pursuits of his own boyhood, there is no local colour which might not have been drawn from the country that lay at the gates of London. His familiarity with the dialect of the North, obvious in the *Shepheardes Calender* and not unmarked even in the *Faerie Queene*, could well be attributed in part to his residence there in 1576, in part to the influence of his parents and his schoolmaster, who must have retained, as Northerners do to-day, some traces of the pronunciation and vocabulary of their early home. Of his occupation at this time we only know that he fell in love with a lady whose identity he veils under the name of Rosalind in the *Shepheardes Calender*. Grosart has triumphantly identified her with one Rose Dinely, but the name, even if correct, is only a label. Other evidence suggests that she was a woman of good family and high spirits, who appreciated the wit and fancy of him whom she styled her 'Segnior Pegaso',<sup>1</sup> but preferred his rival for a husband. Others have questioned the sincerity of Spenser's love, and regarded his allusion to it as mere literary convention. The controversy on the emotional element in the love poetry of the Elizabethan age, conducted for the most part by critics who are not poets, is now become a trifle wearisome. It must readily be admitted on the one hand that much amorous verse was avowedly conventional and ideal, and that Spenser was quite poet enough to feign a passion, even if he never had one. On the other hand, it is obvious that love poetry only became a convention because it corresponded with a universal reality, that few men pass through early manhood without some experience of its depths and of its shallows, and that Spenser, like all poets and lovers of beauty, was by temperament peculiarly susceptible. It was his habit of mind so to rarefy and idealize his personal experience that it gained a permanent shrine in his thought and in his art, and the frame of poetic 'convention' encloses many of the pictures of his own life that are scattered about his verse. Human probability is all on the side of the sincerity of his attachment.

<sup>1</sup> *Familiar Letters, infra*, p. 625.

This love remained an integral part of his imaginative experience far on into his life, and Rosalind is alluded to with chivalrous devotion in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*.<sup>1</sup> Love is not the only emotion that gains an added beauty when it has become a memory. But whatever the depth of his feeling for Rosalind, and it would be surprising if it were not deep, it did not save him from the dangers and the delights of falling under other spells. The cautious Harvey had soon reason to warn him of the seductions of another 'Rosalindula', perhaps some lady of the court.

For Spenser did not remain long in Lancashire. Possibly in 1577, certainly in 1578, he was in London. Gabriel Harvey had not forgotten him, and had been the means of introducing him to Sidney and Leicester. It seems highly probable that Leicester employed him as a private messenger to friends at a distance, and that in this capacity he paid his first visit, in 1577, to Ireland, where Leicester's father-in-law, Sir Henry Sidney, was then Governor-General.<sup>2</sup> But the greater part of his time seems to have been divided between the houses of Sidney and Leicester at Penshurst and in London.

For one of Spenser's temper and convictions no other introduction could have been so happy. To Leicester he looked up as the recognized political leader of the Puritan faction, the powerful favourite of Elizabeth, who had not yet lost hope that a marriage with the Queen might set the seal upon his fortunes; to Sir Philip Sidney he was soon bound by a closer tie than that of patron and protégé. Though still a young man, Sidney was commonly regarded as the most brilliant figure at that brilliant court. His handsome bearing and his martial courage, his learning and accomplishments, his inflexible uprightness and gravity of demeanour had spread his reputation throughout Europe; and by his countrymen he was proudly recognized as the ideal courtier. Moreover, he was a serious politician. An earnest Protestant, he saw in Roman Catholicism the greatest danger to his country's liberty, and he was persistent in urging upon Elizabeth, against the inaction advocated by Burghley, a bold attack upon the power of Spain. Spenser accepted Sidney's political ideals without reserve, and time only strengthened their hold upon him. In other matters too his sympathy with Sidney was close. The Puritanism of both men was deeply tinged with Platonic mysticism; both set themselves to adapt to modern life the ideals of mediæval chivalry, and saw in the romance of bygone days a symbol not without inspiration for the battles they had themselves to fight. The soul that was stirred like a trumpet by the rude ballad of Chevy Chase, and later found both delight and intimate expression in *Arcadia*, had much akin with the poet of the *Faerie Queene*. In judgements upon art they were not entirely in accord. Sidney, as the less exuberant poetic genius, was more subservient to

<sup>1</sup> ll. 926-51

<sup>2</sup> Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, ed. J. C. Smith, p. x.

fashion and to precedent. Spenser's bolder linguistic experiments he 'dare not allow, since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sanazar in Italian, did affect it', and he led the scholars' movement to establish classical metres in English verse. His power to sway in this matter the sounder judgement of Spenser, where Harvey's fanaticism had failed, argues an agreement between them on things deeper than mere form. But the sonnets to Stella are evidence enough that Sidney's classical bias was not bigoted; and even when his interest in the new versifying was at its height he encouraged Spenser to the more ambitious undertaking of the *Faerie Queene*, approving a design which Harvey could only condemn. For on the vital issues of poetry they were at one. The view once put forward, that *The Defence of Poesy* is founded upon Spenser's lost pamphlet *The English Poete* rests indeed on no authority; but it is hardly fanciful to believe that the conception of art that finds so eloquent an exposition in Sidney's prose, was influenced by intercourse with Spenser at Penshurst, much as those rambles on the Quantock Hills in 1797 helped to form the mind which produced the *Biographia Literaria*.

How far this community of taste and interest developed towards a deep mutual friendship can never be determined. There is no evidence that their relationship became one of close personal intimacy. Sidney was a man of reserve not easily broken down; and Spenser, with the personal modesty that so often accompanies the confidence of genius, would naturally be conscious of their inequality in the eyes of the world. Moreover, the words in which, years later, Spenser dedicated *The Ruines of Time* to the Countess of Pembroke, claim no equal friendship with 'that most brave knight your noble brother deceased'; they speak rather of an 'entire love and humble affection, which taking roote began in his lifetime somewhat to bud forth and to shew themselves to him, as then in the weaknes of their first spring; And would in their riper strength spired forth fruit of more perfection'—of what might have been rather than of what was. But it is safe to speak of Spenser's deep love for Sidney. Love differs from friendship, in that it gives more and demands less. Yet assuredly those who speak of a close friendship are less astray than those who see in Spenser's attitude to Sidney merely the conventional worship of a popular hero and a private patron. It is an idle scholarship that belittles the emotions of a great artist into decorative fancy, and assumes that because art is conventional it is convention only. Spenser's love for Sidney was probably the deepest formative influence upon his life and character. Time did not efface it. That intensity of emotion common to all poets was combined in Spenser with the rarer quality of constancy, and the Sidney who had inspired his youth and given him a model for the brave courtier in *Mother Hubberds Tale*, lived on in his memory to vitalize some of his most beautiful conceptions in the *Faerie Queene*. Readers have been disappointed that in his elegy upon *Astrophel* Spenser

did not drop the pastoral cloak and speak in clearer accents. But this is to misunderstand both his mind and his art. There is nothing of the realist in Spenser's poetic constitution. His delicate reserve expresses his emotion far more in verbal cadence, in melody of phrasing, than by the logical values of words; and in the elaborate use of his characteristic effects of alliteration and repetition, he gives to the lay of *Astrophel* a lingering and tender pathos as potent and as moving as the direct expression of personal regard. And his use of the pastoral is not merely dictated by its association with elegy. That art form in which he first gave to the world his own idealized autobiography remained for him the metaphor by which to express his most intimate personal experience. The poet of the *Faerie Queene* was still 'Colin Clout' among his friends, and he who had been the 'Southern Shepherd's boy', and delighted to hint at their association in the subtle background of Kentish landscape, fitly lamented Sidney as *Astrophel*. Finally, when his own *Faerie land* becomes itself pastoral, and Colin Clout strays into it, we recognize in its hero, Sir Calidore, an ideal portrait of Sidney.

In 1579, when Spenser made his first bid for poetic fame, he dedicated his book to 'the president of noblesse and of chevalrie', Sir Philip Sidney.

The importance of the *Shepherd's Calender* was not underrated by Spenser and his friends. They realized its relations to the past of English poetry, and viewed it as the herald of a new movement likely to be condemned and misunderstood. It is edited by the mysterious E. K., with explanatory and apologetic notes, and prefaced with an elaborate letter addressed to Harvey, as the acknowledged representative of the litterati, asking for his protection for the work, discussing points that are likely to meet the criticism of the learned, and whetting curiosity by reference to other poems of the author's which only await a favourable public. E. K. has been denied a real existence, and regarded as a pleasant creation of Spenser's by whose mouth he could gracefully blow his own trumpet; but the majority of scholars have accepted the more natural view that the initials stand for Edward Kirke, Spenser's fellow student at Cambridge, and one of Harvey's enthusiastic disciples. But though Kirke was responsible for the Gloss, and sometimes unconsciously, sometimes of set purpose, fails to express his author's intention, it is clear enough that he can only have undertaken the task at Spenser's instigation, and that much that he wrote was inspired by a close intimacy with the poet's mind and thought.

Nor was the anxious care devoted to the publication of the *Shepherd's Calender* in any way misplaced. The poem is of deep interest, whether we regard it as veiled autobiography or as a work of art of historic interest and high intrinsic value. The spread of education, the influence of the learning and culture of the Renaissance, the habit of foreign travel, the awakening of a national consciousness, had all tended to create a public eagerly interested in literature, and especially in poetry. Many of the

leading nobles were already vying with one another as patrons of the arts; the new poet, who should prove worthy of the time and express its highest aspirations, was yet to seek. Spenser realized the situation and set himself to fulfil the demand. And he was able to fulfil it because, though he was himself steeped in all that was accounted learning by his contemporaries, he turned for his vital inspiration to that fountain of native poetry which they for the most part ignored.

His choice of form was happy; the pastoral eclogue was already popular, and its traditions in classical and Renaissance literature gave him a precedent for whatever allegorical use he chose to make of it. The shepherd's cloak was the acknowledged disguise of the lover, the poet, the courtier, the pastor of souls, the critic of contemporary life; the shepherd world gave him opportunities for description, often conventional enough, yet shot through with personal reminiscence and vivid local colour. In the lowliness of the vocation he could shroud his own glowing ambition, making the poem the repository of his personal emotions, his religious and political beliefs, his hopes and fears for art. Where his various predecessors had specialized in their pastorals Spenser was essentially eclectic and composite. The calendar used by shepherds to guide them in the management of their flocks, suggests to him the title of his poem, and an easily adaptable form in which different aspects of the same mind may find utterance. In the *dramatis personae* he can represent under a disguise, sometimes dark, sometimes transparent, himself and his friends. He is himself Colin Clout, Gabriel Harvey is Hobbinol, and Rosalind the object of his unhappy love. Under other names he alludes to other personalities, or gives expression to typical points of view.

E. K. has divided the Eclogues into Plaintive (1, 6, 11, 12), Recreative, 'such as al those be which containe matter of love, or commendation of special personages' (3, 4, 8), or Moral 'which for the most part be mixed with some Satyricall bitternesse' (2, 5, 7, 9, 10). No division can be entirely satisfactory; for what unity the work has is partly attained by the interweaving of its various motives. But if we except the *March* Eclogue, an attempt to naturalize in the English woods of early spring a Cupid who has strayed from a more congenial Sicilian background, the plaintive and recreative poems are chiefly devoted to presenting Colin Clout in his double character of lover and of poet. Love is the main theme of *January* and *December* alone. For mingling with the strain of melancholy which laments the cruelty of Rosalind rises the triumphant conviction that Colin is recognized by his brother shepherds as their chief singer, and identified by them with the great future of English verse. In *April* Hobbinol's reference to Colin's hopeless love is only the introduction to the recital of the lyric that he has written in praise of 'the fayre queene of shepherds all', a lyric of musical variety and beauty unmatched before in our poetry. In *August* the 'roundels fresh' of Perigot and Willie are 'yshend' by Cuddie, who recites 'a dooleful verse of Rosalind that Colin made'; and

the roughness of the conventional rustic singing match is of set purpose emphasized to contrast with the elaborate sestina of the accomplished artist. In *November* Colin himself rehearses a song which he made in imitation of Marot, 'farre surpassing his reach,' comments E. K., 'and in myn opinion all other Eclogues in this book.' It is, indeed, the most elaborate piece of melody that had yet rejoiced Elizabethan ears, and at that age can be surpassed only by the lyrical achievements of Spenser's own maturity.

In the first four moral eclogues, where Spenser expresses his outlook upon problems of wider import than his own love and poetic fame, Colin disappears from the *dramatis personae*, and the style becomes more homely, as though to suggest the rough sincerity of native satire. *February*, in its brilliantly told fable of the oak and the brier, contrasts the decrepitude of age with the arrogance of youth. But it has possibly a closer application; and it may well be that in the oak, once a goodly tree, but now decayed, he sees the true spirit of Christianity degenerated under the influence of Romish superstition, and in the haughty brier the irreverent and godless temper of the new clergy, whose irreligion offered so bold a contrast to the simple piety of pure Christian faith. But if this interpretation is forced, Spenser's purpose in *May*, *July*, and *September* is clear enough. His family was of the Reforming party, and the influences under which he had come at college drew his sympathies still more closely to the Puritan cause. Along with its leaders he viewed the temporizing policy of Elizabeth with anxiety, even with horror, and now in his desire

To teach the ruder shepherd how to feed his sheepe,  
And from the falsers fraud his folded flocke to keepe,

he was intensely in earnest. E. K., indeed, is often vague as to the exact meaning of these eclogues, at times even throws dust in the eyes of their readers. With a friend's prudence he does not wish the success of the volume to be jeopardized by incurring the bitterness of party controversy. He declines to recognize in Algrind, who is held up as the pattern of true religion and piety, a portrait of Grindal, the Puritan archbishop, then in disgrace for refusing to bow before Elizabeth's distrust of religious enthusiasm; and when Spenser contrasts the spiritual earnestness of the Puritan clergy with the orthodox but worldly members of the reformed Church, E. K. prefers to read the two types of pastor as the Protestant and the Catholic.

To the student of Spenser's art the most deeply interesting of the eclogues is *October*. It takes the form of a dialogue between two shepherds, Cuddie and Piers, Cuddie the perfect pattern of a poet, but dejected at the contempt into which poetry has fallen, and disappointed at the worldly fortune it has brought him, and Piers, enthusiastic both for art and for his friend's achievements in it. Whether the characters are meant to portray actual persons has been disputed; but it is clear enough that they prefigure two conflicting elements in the poet's own nature;

the practical—eager for fame, and inclined to value poetry at its market price, as a means to further his worldly ambitions—and the ideal, expressed in a passion for an art which, as he had learned from his master Plato, 'was a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to be gotten by labour and learning, but adorned with both; and poured into the witte by a certain *Ἐνθουσιασμός* and celestial inspiration.' Incidentally, too, the eclogue reviews the different themes of poetry, and suggests the development of Spenser's own genius, its response to the call of the heroic Muse, and its passage from the sphere of courtly panegyric to that lofty idealism in which the poet finds his truer home. It is the youthfully ardent expression of the conflict of mind, the questionings and the aspiration, which were to find fuller and freer utterance in the *Faerie Queene*.

But, as E. K. realizes, even more important than the contents of the *Shepheardes Calender* is the style in which it is composed, and the poet's attitude towards his predecessors. Spenser shows a full acquaintance with the pastorals of Greece, Italy, and France; but it is significant that though he imitates Bion and Virgil, even adapts and translates from Mantuan and Marot, he will acknowledge a debt to Chaucer alone. At a time when his contemporaries were running after foreign models, it is his ambition to be English. This reversion to Chaucer is the boldest sign of his independence. In weak imitation of Chaucer the poetry of the fifteenth century had wellnigh expired; and the reformers of versification, whilst they showed some knowledge and admiration of Chaucer, never dreamt that they could learn of him. At Cambridge, indeed, Chaucer was widely read, but Harvey, at least, would not have regarded him as a fit poetic model.<sup>1</sup> In the *June* eclogue Spenser represents Harvey as summoning Colin to the study of more stately masters; but the

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that Francis Beaumont, in a letter to Speght, published in Speght's edition of Chaucer (1593), writes: 'And here I cannot forget to remember unto you those auncient learned men of our time at Cambridge, whose diligence in reading of his (Chaucer's) works themselves and commending them to others of the younger sort, did first bring you and me in love with him: and one of them at that time was and now is (as you know) one of the rarest schollers in the world.' Speght was at Peterhouse, Cambridge, from 1566 to 1573, thus overlapping with Spenser four years. Did Spenser also come under the influence of this 'rare scholler'? Who was he? Miss Spurgeon, *Chaucer devant la critique* (1911), suggests that it might well be Whitgift, who was Fellow of Peterhouse, Master of Pembroke for three months in 1567, then Master of Trinity Hall, and Regius Professor of Divinity. He was Vice-Chancellor in 1579. Stowe, in dedicating to him his *Annals* (1600), speaks of his great affection towards studies in general and to antiquities in particular. Miss Spurgeon also quotes some manuscript notes, written in books in the possession of Harvey, in which he insists on Chaucer's learning, writing in one place, 'Other commend Chaucer and Lidgate for their witt, pleasant veine, varietie of poetical discourse, and all humanitie. I specially note their Astronomie, philosophie and other parts of profound or cunning art. Wherein few of their time were more exactly learned. It is not sufficient for poets to be superficial humanists: but they must be exquisite artists and curious universal scholars.' Spenser may thus have owed some of his knowledge of Chaucer to intercourse with Harvey, though his own poetic instinct would lead him to appreciate Chaucer on truer lines than Harvey.

modesty of Colin's reply barely conceals his deliberate conviction that his native poetry can gain little inspiration from the rhetoric of classical and Italian imitation.

Of Muses Hobbinol, I conne no skill,  
For they bene daughters of the hyghest Jove.  
I never lyst presume to Parnasse hyll,  
But pyping low in shade of lowly grove  
I play to plese myself, al be it ill.<sup>1</sup>

His master is Tityrus alone; and if only 'some little drops' from 'his learned hedde' may fall upon him, he need seek no foreign spring. 'That by Tityrus he meaneth Chaucer,' remarks E. K., 'hath been sufficiently said.' The account given by Colin of Chaucer's achievement is in part fanciful, adapted to the pastoral vein; and at first sight the relation of the *Shepheardes Calender* to Chaucer seems remote enough. But Chaucer did not appear to the Elizabethan in the light of modern scholarship. Several of the portraits in the *Canterbury Tales* were interpreted as the work of an earnest religious reformer, and the attribution to his authorship of the *Plowman's Tale*, with its allegory of the Pelican and the Gryphon, would lead Spenser to regard as Chaucerian a use of the beast fable very different from that suggested by the *Nonne Prestes Tale*. It is evident, moreover, from the traces in his *Hymnes to Love and Beauty*, already written, of Chaucer's *Compleynnte to Pity*, that he saw in Chaucer also the poet of unhappy love. But more than all was he drawn to him as the chief of those, who, in the words of Thynne's Preface, which Spenser must have read,<sup>2</sup> 'have right well employed themselves to the beautifying and bettering of the English tongue.' For this was his own ambition. In Chaucer he saw 'the well of English undefyled', in his contemporaries 'a gallimaufry and hodge podge of al other speeches'; and he set himself to form a poetic diction on the model of his great master, and so to recover a beauty which, as it seemed to him, his time had lost. The pastoral precedent for rustic speech allowed him to introduce dialect words which were commonly felt to be nearer to the purely native language than the vocabulary of the cultured, and with these he combined modern colloquialisms appealing to his ear by their native ring, and archaisms both genuine and spurious. It may fairly be urged against him that the result is itself a gallimaufry, though of a different kind from that which he attacked; it 'affects the ancients', and bears the same relation to the language of Chaucer that his conception of the 'goodly usage of those antique times' bears to their reality. But for all its remoteness in certain respects from the language of real life, suggestive of the ideality of the poetic mood, it is a genuine attempt at a diction not more elaborate, but

<sup>1</sup> *Shepheardes Calender* June, 65 f.

<sup>2</sup> William Thynne's Folio Chaucer was published in 1532, reprinted with additions in 1542 and 1550, and with large additions by Stowe in 1561. One of these editions must have been used by Spenser.



purser, simpler, more English than the literary language current in his day. Spenser was fully conscious that his work was tentative, and in the eclogues of satiric rather than purely poetic intention, he pressed his experiments to bolder lengths; but though in his later work he framed his style with a more careful art, he never departed from the principle which had inspired the diction of the *Shepheardes Calender*.

In metre the *Shepheardes Calender* is no less experimental. Spenser had no precedent in pastoral tradition for such metrical variety; in this he was inspired solely by his own eagerness to explore the native capabilities of the language. Here, too, though he owes something to his immediate predecessors both in England and France, he goes back for his models to an earlier age. He tries his hand at forms suggested by the ballad, at the irregular four-stressed lines, at the regular line of five feet, all traditional in English poetry, and again finds the fullest and most natural expression in the metre of Chaucer.<sup>1</sup> For the ballad metre, which he only employs where he is definitely aiming at a rough effect, he found that he had no taste; in the line of four beats, popular in the fifteenth century, he wrote with facility, giving it a variety unknown to earlier employers of it, and in particular, making delicate use of its opportunities for a triple rhythm. But he is not sure of its music, and it has been suggested that some of his metrical irregularities, where his line seems to hover between the irregular four-stressed line, and the line of five feet, but can in fact be read as neither, are due to his misreading, through the loss of the pronunciation of the unaccented *e*, of some of Chaucer's decasyllabics. This is likely enough, and is made more likely by his use of the measure in *February* and *May*, where in other respects his debt to Chaucer is obvious. But those who hold that the true rhythm of the Chaucerian decasyllabic was lost to him press their point too far. For with every allowance for change in pronunciation, much of Chaucer would retain its melody unspoiled.<sup>2</sup> This line had degenerated in the hands of feeble artists, and it had been somewhat stiffly reinstated by Surrey and Wyatt after a study of foreign models. Since their time Sackville had given some indication of its solemn dignity and strength, but it was left for Spenser to recapture the variety, the delicacy which it had lost.

In its exquisite and varied melody lies, doubtless, the greatest charm of the *Shepheardes Calender*, but it makes a further appeal to the lover

<sup>1</sup> That interlacing sequence of rhymes (a b a b b c b c) found in *April* and *November*, as well as in the Spenserian sonnet and the Spenserian stanza, is commonly ascribed to the influence of Marot. But it is found also in the *A B C*, and *Monkes Tale*, and other poems of Chaucer's.

<sup>2</sup> It would be difficult to convince me that Spenser's line '*And many minstrels miiken melody*' was not consciously or unconsciously reminiscent of Chaucer's '*And smale foules miiken melodie*', and if that is so Spenser could hardly have read it as '*And smalle fowls miiken melody*'. It should also be remembered that Spenser makes frequent use himself of plurals and possessives in *-es* to give his lines a lighter rhythm. His love of archaism was in part melodic.