

**CLARENDON PRESS  
SERIES: BOOK 1 OF  
THE FAERY QUEENE**

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Clarendon Press Series: Book 1 of the Faery Queene by Edmund Spenser & G. W. Kitchin

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**EDMUND SPENSER & G. W. KITCHIN**

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BOOK I

OF

THE FAERY QUEENE

EDITED BY

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*Formerly Censor of Christ Church.*

SIXTH EDITION

Oxford

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE life of Edmund Spenser has few incidents and little certainty. He tells us he was born in London<sup>a</sup>, near the Tower, and was connected, though not closely, with the house whose name he bears<sup>b</sup>. But the date of his birth can only be inferred approximately from his matriculation at Cambridge, and his second courtship. He entered as a sizar at Pembroke Hall in 1569, when he was not likely to be under fifteen or over twenty years of age. His birth, then, will fall between 1549 and 1554. But he tells us (in his 60th Sonnet) that he was forty years old when his second courtship began. The date of that courtship lies between 1591 and 1593, so that he must have been born between 1551 and 1553. If then we take 1552 for the year of his birth, we shall not be far wrong.

We may conjecture from his writings, especially from his Letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, that, while at Cambridge, he studied Aristotle and Plato as well as the Greek and Latin poets. He became B.A. in 1573, M.A. in 1576. At the University he contracted a close friendship with Gabriel Harvey (the Hobbinol of his Shepheards Calender) the author of many ingenious poems. It was one of those college friendships the influence of which is felt through a man's whole life. For Harvey gave Spenser advice

<sup>a</sup> Prothalamium, ll. 128-131:

"To mery London, my most kyndly nourse,  
That to me gave this lifes first native source;  
Though from another place I take my name,  
A house of auncient fame."

<sup>b</sup> Colin Clouts come back again, ll. 538, 539:

"The honor of the noble familie  
Of which I meanest boast myself to be."

The Spensers of his day were wealthy landowners, not yet ennobled.

and encouragement as to his writings—save that he did not admire the Faery Queene; he induced him to retrace his steps from the north; he also helped him forwards by introducing him to the notice of Sir Philip Sidney, who, in his turn, obtained for him the goodwill and patronage of his uncle Lord Leicester.

It is thought that some disappointment, or disagreement with his college authorities, led Spenser to leave Cambridge soon after taking his M.A. degree; and he went into the north of England. The Shepheards Calender bears some few traces of northern dialect. Thence, by the advice of Harvey<sup>c</sup>, he came southwards again, and in the year 1578, or thereabout, settled in London. About the same time Harvey brought him and Sir Philip Sidney together. To Sidney he dedicated his first printed work, the Shepheards Calender, which was published in the year 1579. Next year, Arthur, Lord Grey de Wilton, took Spenser with him as his secretary to Ireland, in all probability through Lord Leicester's influence; for just before this time he had been staying at Penshurst, Lord Leicester's seat in Kent. On Lord Grey's recall, in 1582, Spenser returned with him to England. This brief period of active political life must have given Spenser much of that experience in Irish affairs which he afterwards embodied in his "View of the State of Ireland."

In 1586 his friends obtained for him from Queen Elizabeth a grant of a large estate, at Kilcolman, in the county Cork, part of the territories forfeited by the Earl of Desmond; and he appears to have gone at once to take possession of his new property.

The battle of Zutphen, in 1587, deprived him of his best friend, Sir Philip Sidney, whose untimely death he tenderly bewailed in an elegy entitled *Astrophel*.

And now Spenser seems to have passed a few years in literary

<sup>c</sup> In Eclogue vi. of the Shepheards Calender, Hobbinol (Harvey) prays Colin Clout (Spenser) to "forsake the soyle that thee doth so bewitch," and "to the dales resort." On this E. K. (Edward Kirke, the contemporary annotator of the Shepheards Calender) remarks, "This is no poetical fiction, but unfeignedly spoken of the poet selfe, who for speciall occasion of private affaires (*as I have been partly by himselfe informed*) and for his more preferment, remooved out of the north partes, [and] came into the south."

ease and employment at Kilcolman Castle. There, on the shore of a pleasant lake, with fine distant views of mountains all round, he busied himself in the composition of the first three Books of the Faery Queene. These he shewed in manuscript to Sir W. Raleigh (whose friendship he had gained during his first visit to Ireland). Sir Walter, while banished from court, seems to have spent some time at Kilcolman, and his visit forms one chief topic of the poem headed "Colin Clouts come home again." To Raleigh, whose opinion of the Faery Queene was most favourable, is addressed the explanatory letter prefixed to the work; and as soon as the three Books were ready for the printer, Spenser went over to England in Raleigh's company, induced partly by the wish to publish the book, and still more tempted by Sir Walter's promise to present him to "his Cynthia," Queen Elizabeth<sup>d</sup>. The Queen "unto his oaten pipe enclined her care, That she thenceforth therein gan take delight." She received the poet with high favour, and, soon after the publication of the first three Books of the Faery Queene in 1590, granted him a pension of fifty pounds a year, thus in fact making him her laureate.

He returned the same year to Ireland; and so much had his fame grown, that his bookseller eagerly gathered together a volume of his smaller poems, which came out in 1591. One of these pieces<sup>e</sup> may be briefly noticed here, as having given occasion to a groundless tale about Lord Burleigh's dislike to Spenser, and his endeavour to stop his pension. Spenser, who loved and admired Archbishop Grindal<sup>f</sup> (the good Algrind of the Shepheards Calender), must have disliked Burleigh, who treated the

<sup>d</sup> Colin Clout, ll. 184-196:

"The which to leave (sc. Kilcolman) thenceforth he counselled me,—  
And wend with him, his Cynthia to see,  
Whose grace was great, and bounty most rewardfull.  
So, what with hope of good and hate of ill,  
He mee persueded forth with him to fare.  
So to the sea we came."—

And so on, describing his voyage and reception at Court.

<sup>e</sup> Mother Hubberd's Tale, 898.

<sup>f</sup> Shepheards Calender, Ecl. vii. 213-230.