

**CLARENDON PRESS SERIES;  
SECOND MIDDLE ENGLISH  
PRIMER: EXTRACTS FROM  
CHAUCER, WITH GRAMMAR AND  
GLOSSARY**

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**HENRY SWEET**

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*WITH GRAMMAR AND GLOSSARY*

BY

HENRY SWEET, M.A., PH.D., LL.D.

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## PREFACE



THE present work is intended as a continuation of my *First Middle English Primer*; it will, I hope, be welcome, not only to those who have already worked with the earlier book, but also to the more numerous class of students who simply wish to acquire the power of reading Chaucer at sight in such a way as to do full justice to the metre, and at the same time to restore, as far as possible, the genuine Middle English pronunciation.

My grammar is based mainly on Ten Brink's *Chaucers Sprache und Verskunst*, although, as will be seen, I differ from him on many questions of pronunciation. As regards *vertu, vertew, &c.*, I have adopted Henry Nicol's view (*Trans. Phil. Soc.* 1877-9, vi), which Ten Brink seems to have overlooked. In the treatment of the French elements and the versification I have followed him more closely, as also in the inflections.

The phonetic transcriptions added to the *Complaint to Pity* and the *Prologue* may seem too minute and conjectural. But in studying a dead language we must adopt some definite pronunciation, and it is surely better that the beginner should have the benefit of the knowledge and experience of others—however imperfect the results may be—than that he should be left to flounder about by himself. Those who find a

difficulty in realising a phonetic notation would do well to work through a few pages of my [*Primer of Spoken English*].

To avoid clashing with the volumes of Chaucer extracts already published by the Clarendon Press, I have followed the advice of that old Chaucer hand, Dr. Furnivall, and made my selections mainly from the minor poems, adding, however, the greater part of the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, together with an abridgment of the Pardoner's Tale, so as to complete the view of the development of Chaucer's genius in its chief aspects.

The text of the last two pieces is based on the Ellesmere MS., which certainly comes nearer to Chaucer's own language than the Harleian; that of the others on the one-text editions of the Chaucer Society. I have made as little alteration as possible in the MSS. texts, although metrical considerations made an exact reproduction of any one MS. impossible, and I have not hesitated to remove distinctly un-Chaucerian spellings wherever they seemed likely to confuse the beginner. I have not attempted to forestall the inevitable German who, it is to be hoped, will some day give us a critical edition of Chaucer, but have contented myself with attempting to construct a readable, metrical text. Whenever I introduce a conjectural reading, which I have frequently had to do in the Minor poems, I give the MS. reading at the foot of the page. I need scarcely say I have utilised Ten Brink's critical editions of the Complaint to Pity and the Prologue.

RHICONICH,

23 Aug. 1886.

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

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IN this new edition I have been able to utilize Professor Skeat's *Minor Poems of Chaucer*, and consequently am now able to present a much more satisfactory text of those minor poems included in my selection. If, as one might almost infer from Professor Skeat's preface, it was my remark about 'the inevitable German' which induced him to undertake this most welcome piece of work, I can only say that my little book ought to feel itself very much flattered. On the other hand I have the pain of knowing that my playful epithet has given offence in some German quarters; although the majority of German scholars have taken it as it was meant—as a direct compliment to German energy, and an indirect reproach to my own countrymen.

I am glad to see that my phonetic treatment of Chaucer's language has also had a stimulating effect on Professor Skeat, the result of which is his lately published school edition of the *Prologue*, which may be cordially recommended to those who are unable to take phonetics except homœopathically.

In the present edition I have cut out most of the MS. readings, as I consider such details superfluous in a book of this character. I have, of course, carefully revised the phonetic notation. I have not added any notes, for which I must refer the reader to the editions of Professor Skeat.

HENRY SWEET.

REIGATE,  
28. Nov. 1891.