

# **SPENSER AND THE FAËRY QUEEN**

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Spenser and the Faëry Queen by Edmund Spenser & Mrs. C. M. Kirkland

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**EDMUND SPENSER & MRS. C. M. KIRKLAND**

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SPENSER

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BY MRS. C. M. KIRKLAND.



29  
NEW YORK AND LONDON:  
WILEY AND PUTNAM.

1847.

## P R E F A C E .

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It has become so much the practice to decry everything in the shape of "Selections," "Beauties," and "Extracts" from the standard authors, that it requires no small degree of courage to offer the public a work which shall come under either of the proscribed classes.

But, with all proper deference for the high authorities who condemn such superficial acquaintance with the best writers, we might yet ask whether something—provided it be good—be not better than nothing? Whether it be indeed wise to renounce all acquaintance with valuable works, because circumstances forbid our studying them thoroughly?

Those who speak with such lofty contempt of any but complete acquaintance with their favorites, are (or should be) persons of elegant acquirements, abundant leisure and ample libraries. There are many people in the world, both young and old, who possess none of these advantages; and we think such will not be wise to allow themselves to be persuaded by their more fortunate advisers, to accept of nothing less than the whole. Scarcely more foolish would be the hungry man who should be induced to refuse a lunch by his neighbor who had already had an excellent dinner.

Various inducements prompted the present attempt to render accessible to American readers a part of the works of a great poet, whose splendid reputation, refined elegance, and high moral tone, entitle him to be studied by all who would become acquainted with English literature. There was reason to believe that to many intelligent persons Spenser was entirely unknown, except by name; and that the antique spelling of the Faëry Queen had proved an insuperable bar to such as had been enterprising enough to attempt exploring its mazes. These reasons, together with a general desire to instil a genuine love for the best poetry, which should induce the young to store their fresh memories with it, as a resource against the tedium which may be the portion of advanced age or of declining health, suggested the idea of selections from the Faëry Queen.

These have been made with especial reference both to subject matter and to poetical merit. Much of the allegory is too subtle and obscure to be made intelligible to the general reader. Some branches of the subject, with the mode in which they are necessarily treated, are better suited to the times of Elizabeth than to our own day. A wide choice was still left, and I have endeavored to avail myself of the poet's abundance, as far as my own taste and the most careful examination enabled me to do so. The first Book, considered by all critics to be the cream of the work, is given nearly entire, and extracts from the others will follow if the present attempt should be successful.

The spelling has been modernized, wherever the rhythm or the rhyme was not materially injured by the change. Where this would have been the case, a few foot-notes have been added. No person who is sufficiently cultivated to

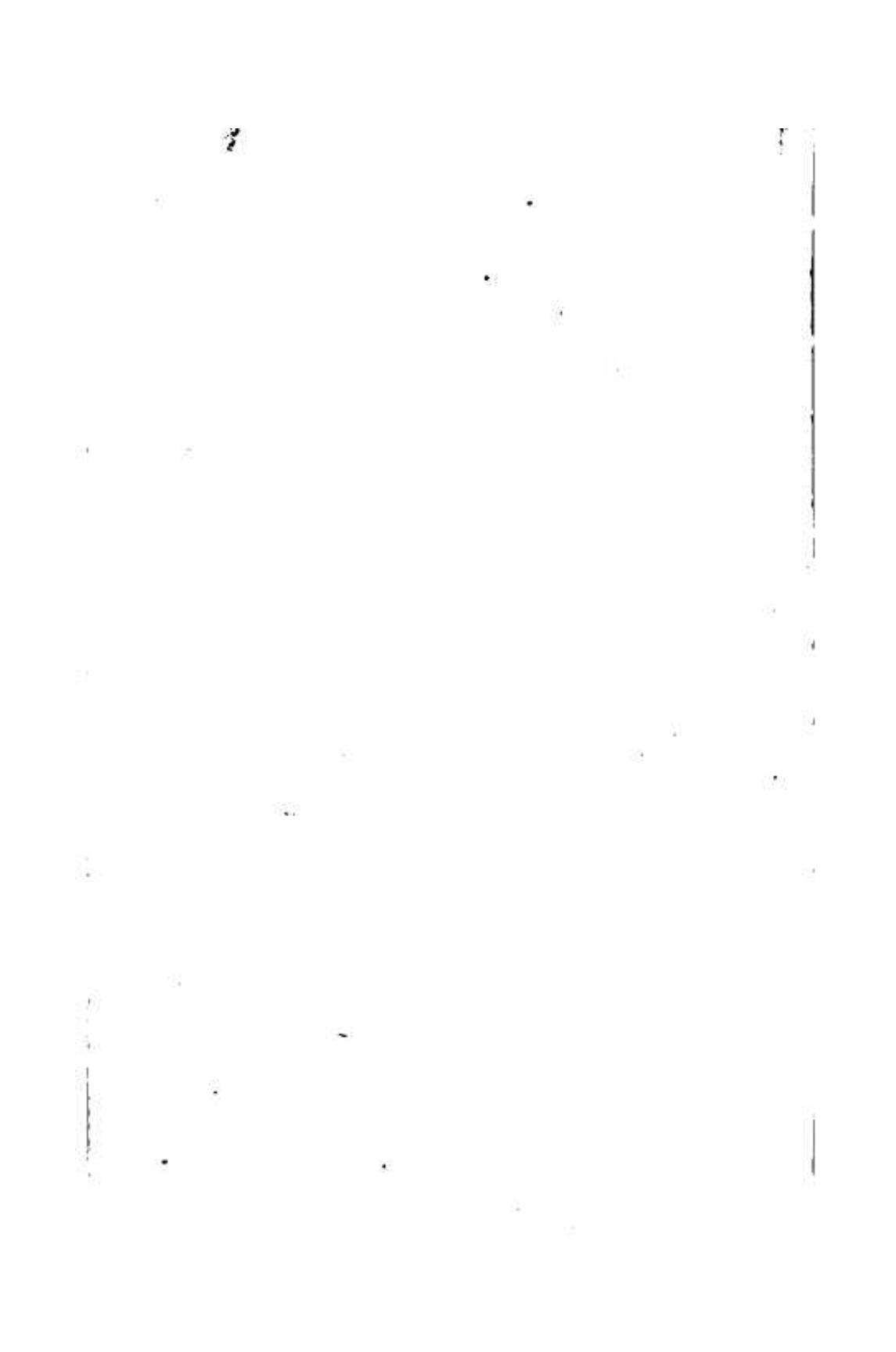
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relish the poem at all, will probably find any difficulty in this respect.

I am particularly concerned to have it understood that in venturing to offer a work of this kind, I am actuated solely by a desire to see Spenser more read in this country, and not by the most remote idea that I could improve upon what has been done. It would require a poet to do justice to Spenser's character—a poet as great as himself to do justice to his poetry. I have not even had access to the fountains of authority, but have been compelled to draw from second-hand sources; and I pretend to offer nothing more than a popular view of the life and character of the master of chivalric romance, with a taste—I hope an exciting one—of his delicious verse. If the result should be as I hope, a further attempt will be made to place a modernized Faery Queen within the reach of all. The American edition of the complete works of Spenser will still be essential to every American library of any pretension.

C. M. K.





## EDMUND SPENSER .

BORN ABOUT 1553—DIED, 1599.

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So few and so unsatisfactory are the materials which can be found for a Life of Spenser, that his admirers are obliged to content themselves with such knowledge of his character as may be gathered from his works, his choice of companions—or rather the characters of certain eminent persons who selected him as a companion—and the slight data that ingenious antiquaries have been able to make out from occasional mention of him by those among whom he lived. Men of inferior merit are often found to be solicitous as to their fame—to guard against being overlooked by their contemporaries—to provide for immortality. Shakspeare and Spenser, and men of their order—if such men there have been—in the unconsciousness which distinguishes and exalts them, forget their claims to the reverence of posterity; and while pouring out the riches which it is not possible for them to withhold, sink their own personality as a thing of no moment. They hope for fame indeed; nay, they expect it. The divine gifts which enable them to deserve it have a prophetic power, and assure them of the result. But it is for their works they covet fame, not for themselves. The children of their souls are far dearer to them than their own existence; and it is for their spiritual

offspring that they desire the loving appreciation of the ages to come. These are not the men who write memoirs of themselves. They might attempt such things ; but with the account of childhood and early youth—seasons upon which the man looks back with a fond feeling far removed from egotism—the record would cease. The commencement of conscious existence, while yet the new being is “trailing clouds of glory”—seeing a friend in every new face, a pleasure in every new object—has a purity and dignity in the mind’s retrospections. It seems worth remembering. But when ingenuous ardor has been chilled by uncongenial association ; when mortification and disappointment have left their mark in the heart’s most sensitive recesses ; when the treachery of friends, the cruel buffets of fortune, the crushing sense of irrevocable error and immedicable sorrow, have brought, by sad steps, the boy to manhood—the man to middle age ;—it is not for the poet, surely not for a poet of Spenser’s class, to expose the dread secret to the vulgar eye. All that he wills the world should know of him, is thrown spontaneously, or rather inevitably, into his works ; if he draws his own picture, it is because he cannot help it. He will not anxiously consult the mirror, throw in flattering touches, and give the performance a grand frame to fit it for the eye of posterity. Nor can such a man be expected to fill much space in contemporaneous records. Poets are men of retirement—men of few chosen friends, and those not of the Boswellian genus ; and it is because they are such, that they are able to leave those enduring works which lead posterity to search so eagerly for personal memorials of the authors.

Who were Spenser’s friends ? By what order of men was he sought ? The gallant, the gentle, the noble, the tender Sidney, —Astrophel, of whom it was said—

“ Ne spight it selfe, that all good things doth spill,  
Found aught in him that she could say was ill,”