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I OF THE FAERY QUEENE**

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

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Clarendon Press Series

*ENGLISH CLASSICS*

SPENSER

*KITCHIN*

Clarendon Press Series

SPENSER

BOOK I

OF

THE FAERY QUEENE

EDITED BY

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TENTH EDITION

 Oxford

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

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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 Hobbinal 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 source,  
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> Chlín Clouts come back again, ll. 538, 539:

"The honor of the noble familie  
Of which I meaneest 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 Shepherds Calender bears some few traces of northern dialect. Thence, by the advice of Harvey<sup>5</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 Shepherds 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>5</sup> In Eclogue vi. of the Shepherds Calender, Hobbinol (Harvey) prays Colin Clout (Spenser) to "forsake the soyle that thee doth so bewitch," and "to the daies resort." On this E. K. (Edward Klyke, the contemporary annotator of the Shepherds 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 Kilkolman 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 Kilkolman, 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 eare, 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. Kilkolman) 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 persuaded 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 Hubbard's Tale, 898.

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

Archbishop with no little severity; and on the other hand, Burleigh, Lord Leicester's rival at court, cannot have felt much goodwill towards one who was so closely attached to the party of his antagonist. Beyond this, there seems to be no ground for the tale.

Early in life Spenser had worshipped a fair Rosalind, whose faithless trifling with him, and eventual preference of a rival, are recorded in the *Shepheards Calender*. E. K.<sup>s</sup> tells us that "the name being well ordered will betray the *very name* of Spensers love," whence it has been conjectured that she was a Kentish lass of the name of *Rose Lynde*, the name of Lynde being found among the gentry of that county. But this may pass. She rejected him, and he remained some twelve or fourteen years without thoughts of marriage. But in the years 1592-3 (if Mr. Todd's reasonings are correct<sup>b</sup>) he fell in with an Elizabeth, (her surname is lost,) towards whom his heart turned; and after a courtship, set forth in his *Amoretti*, or Sonnets, he married her in 1594. The wedding took place on St. Barnabas' Day, as he tells us himself<sup>i</sup>, in the city of Cork, near which lies Kilcolman Castle. He was then forty-one or forty-two years of age<sup>k</sup>. His wife was of lowly origin—"she was certes but a countrey lasse" (*Faery Queene*, VI. x. 25), but beautiful—"So sweet, so lovely, and so mild as she" (*Epithal.* l. 169). Her eyes were "sapphires blue," her hair of "rippling gold." He likens her locks to the Queen's; but those were not golden, but red.

In 1596 Spenser was in England, superintending the second

<sup>s</sup> Edward Kirke was a friend of Spenser, and compiled a 'Gloss' on the *Shepheards Calender*.

<sup>b</sup> I must here record my great obligation to the careful *Life of Spenser* prefixed to Mr. Todd's edition of his works.

<sup>i</sup> *Epithalamium*, l. 265:

"This day the Sun is in his chiefest height,  
With Barnaby the bright."

<sup>k</sup> Sonnet lx.:

"So since the winged God his planet clear  
Began in me to move, one year is spent:  
The which doth longer unto me appear,  
Than all those *forty* which my life out-went."

edition of Books I-III of the *Faery Queene*, which came out in that year with Books IV-VI, then first given to the world. In 1597 he returned to Ireland, hoping for an honourable and quiet life at Kilcolman. But it was a vain hope. The Queen had already recommended him to the Irish Government as Sheriff of Cork<sup>1</sup>, when the Tyrone rebellion broke out in 1598, and he was obliged to flee in great haste to save his life. In the confusion and terror of flight one of his little ones by some strange oversight was left behind in the castle; and the rebels, following swiftly after, sacked and burnt the house. The child was never more heard of, and probably perished in the fire. Spenser reached England broken-hearted, and next January, some three months later, his body rested by Chaucer's side in the south transept of Westminster Abbey<sup>m</sup>.

So his life withered away; he died at the age of forty-five or forty-six. The limits of that life were almost those of the reign of the great Queen; it seemed to take its tone and character from it. Spenser's poems are full of allusions to the young life of England—to her outburst of national feeling, her devotion for the Queen, her resistance to Spain, her ocean adventures, her great men, her high artistic and intellectual culture, her romantic spirit, her championship of freedom abroad, and her reverence for law and authority at home. Spenser comes first in the series of great writers who are the glory of English literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Shakespeare appears soon after the publication of the *Faery Queene*; Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* is brought out in 1594; Bacon's *Essays* in 1597. The land is a-glow with every form of life: and Spenser connects the past with the future. Looking back to his master, Chaucer, he draws his own England with a romantic hand, the chivalrous and the imaginative qualities of his mind being

<sup>1</sup> See Todd's *Life*, ed. 1863, p. xlvii.

<sup>m</sup> In the copy of the ed. 1596 in the Bodleian Library there is preserved a tracing of the following note: "Qui obiit apud diversorium in platea Regia apud Westmonasterium juxta London, 16 die Janii. 1598 [1599] juxtaque Gefferium Chaucer in eadem ecclesia supradicta (Honoratissimi Comitis Essexiae impensis) sepelitur. Henry Capell, 1598 [1599]."