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READINGS IN GOWER**

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SERIES IN

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READINGS IN GOWER

BY

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PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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READINGS IN GOWER.

BY MORTON W. EASTON,

PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

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THAT a new edition of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is sorely needed is well known to all students of the literature of the fourteenth century. But such a preliminary examination of some of the manuscripts as I have been able to make during the past summer, has convinced me that the work, if properly done, will require a number of years. It should not indeed be difficult to prepare a passably good edition in much less time; such an edition as should violate none of the canons of fourteenth century grammar, syntax and metrical usage, but, among the great variety of conflicting admissible readings, to select precisely that form of expression which is most in accordance with Gower's own taste, this is that which must probably render all progress very slow. In the meantime I have reason to believe that the selection of readings printed below will be welcome to many; while I cannot claim to have cleared up all the difficulties, yet, with this aid, I think that the printed texts will be rendered more intelligible, and many of the worst blemishes in grammar and in syntax removed. The complete revision of the whole, and even the thorough-going correction of the English can be attained only by the publication of a complete edition.

The readings given are all from the manuscripts in the British Museum. It may seem hardly worth while to have spent much time over these, as Pauli claims to have had them under his eye in the preparation of his edition, but every one who will take the pains to compare his text with only the asterisked lines in the following pages will soon see that "he

121

left much to be done." As is well known, there are many other manuscripts; nor have I as yet given to those in the Museum¹ as full an examination as they require.

I quote from the Museum catalogue its description of the manuscripts in question, adding only such details as concern the class of corrections selected for publication. The capital letters by which they are designated are my own.

A. "Harl. 3490. With various arms and other ornaments at the beginning of each book."

B. "Harl. 7184. The remains of a very fine copy of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, written on vellum and illuminated. The size, a large and magnificent folio. The first page a little defaced, the rest very clean. There are no paintings, except for the ornamenting of initial letters. It appears, however, to have been mutilated, at some period, for the sake even of these illuminations. Thus miserably mutilated, the MS. is still worthy of collation from its antiquity and from the care with which it was originally written. It is apparently of the fourteenth century."

C. "Harl. 3869. The volume is large and is written partly on vellum, partly on paper."

D. "Reg. 18 C. XXII."

E. "Eg. 1991. Vellum, fifteenth century. Written in double columns, with illuminated borders at the beginning of each book, and a single miniature. The miniature apparently the portrait of the author, repeated in Reg. 18 C. XXII."

F. "Additional, 12,043. On vellum, fifteenth century: folio."

G. "Additional, 22,139. Vellum, with coloured initials, very much mutilated. On a fragment of the first leaf, the date 1432 is written in a shield of arms; folio."

H. "Eg. 913. Portion of the first book, including the prologue. On paper; fifteenth century."

¹ Especially B.

Caxton's edition is referred to as *Cx.*, Pauli's as *P.*

A, D, G, E, H are dedicated to King Richard; *B, C* to King Henry. Caxton used a manuscript of the latter class, but it differed from such others as I have seen by including the lines addressed to Chaucer. (*P. III*, 374 page.) Pauli prints both dedications, and I judge from his remarks in the preface that he held substantially the same views as those expressed farther on with reference to the differences, although he certainly did not make full use even of the material at his hand. *F* lacks the distinctive passages at the beginning and end of the poem. Its first line is

"The strengthe of love to withstonde"

(*P. I*, 68-19), and it concludes with

"Mi love lust and lokes here"

(*P. III*, 356-7).

A closes with the line at the bottom of *P.* 377, but there is nothing to indicate that the scrivener had completed his copy; there is no formula of conclusion, no Latin verses. The deficiency is not, however, due to loss of folios, for the copy stops at or near the middle of the first column of the page.

B has lost many folios throughout the volume and a great part of Book VII with all of the eighth Book.

G has lost pieces of many folios at the beginning, nearly all of Book I, and all of Book II up to the thirteenth line of page 161 of Pauli's first volume.

H has lost part of Book I, and begins with the twenty-second line of page 97 of Pauli, although one torn folio before this preserves a few lines.

Pauli says that he made *B* the basis of his edition, and, considering how elastic the signification of the phrase is, I presume that he did so; at any rate, I judge that he referred oftener to *B* than to any other manuscript. One would naturally start with some degree of faith in the fidelity of his col-

lation, and, in consequence, I paid less attention to *B* than to *A* and *C*, having chosen these as representing the two versions.

A is a rather careless copy of some good original; many lines, scattered throughout the poem, were omitted by the copyist, and a great number of words written in a mutilated form, representing no possible various reading or peculiarity of pronunciation. One peculiarity of this text, as compared with *C*, is to write *-ing* in the present participle where *C* has *-end(e)*. It seems to me to have been written from dictation, something to be remembered if conjectural emendation becomes necessary. Many of the erroneous spellings imply a weakness in the utterance of the front palatals; *for* for *forth*, *seih* for *seith* and *saide*, *gol* for *gold*, etc. As I have implied, this seems to be due to the utterance, and may help to explain the endurance on the part of the speakers of the seemingly very harsh combination produced by the syncope of *-e* in the personal suffix *-eth* and leads to the wider inference that an inorganic *t* or *d* might much more easily make its appearance then than now. See remark on *simpleste* (I, 62-25).

I may be permitted to remark in passing that a systematic account of certain erroneous forms in these manuscripts would constitute one of the most valuable contributions to the history of English that could be made. Such constantly recurring forms as *astat* for *estat*, *wich* and *whas* for *which* and *was*, *dishese* for *disese*, *subiter* for *Jupiter*, etc., are very interesting, and quite as essential to the study of the history of the words in question as the normal forms. *Strenth* for *strength* seems to have assimilated its nasal to the front palatal. *World* and *word* interchange so frequently that an editor need not hesitate to conjecture one for other, if by so doing he can obtain a better reading; as to the former word, *wordl* is the manuscript orthography in a vast number of cases, seemingly not to be explained by the assumption of a mere error in transcription.

None of the manuscripts mentioned above show anything like a constant attention to metrical considerations, although there is much difference in respect to the care given to writing mute *-e*; but this may be due to a difference in pronunciation. In consequence, I have with greater confidence quoted many readings as presumably original, and not emendations of the copyist. *B* is specially apt to omit mute *-e*. Caxton's authority, if fairly followed by the printer, must have been especially deficient in its metre.

So far, however, as concerns mute *-e*, I am convinced that in the first place it is not an element to conjure with, and secondly that every word must stand on its own basis. The care given to writing the mute *-e* in the preterite *sende* is very noteworthy. And of this and other matters I may say here that I think that the study of the language of Gower should be carried on, so far as may be, without reference to the rules laid down from the study of Chaucer; the possibility of a difference in dialect, though unsuspected, must always be borne in mind.

An important question, especially with reference to a new edition, is, were there several recensions of the poem? Is the version dedicated to King Henry to be followed throughout, as representing the last word of the poet, or are we at liberty to select a reading from any manuscript of any class?

The readings quoted in the following pages have been selected on the latter principle, although I do not consider that the manuscripts in the British Museum justify me in coming to any final conclusion. As has been seen, only two among these certainly represent the Lancaster version. And yet, any one who attentively compares the readings given in detail, and above all those marked with a double asterisk, must, I think, feel that this evidence so far as it goes, leads to something like the following inference:

The changes made desirable — and fully justified — by the events of the closing years of the century, affect simply