

**SECOND MIDDLE ENGLISH
PRIMER; EXTRACTS
FROM CHAUCER, WITH
GRAMMAR AND GLOSSARY**

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Second Middle English primer; extracts from Chaucer, with grammar and glossary by Henry Sweet

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HENRY SWEET

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Clarendon Press Series

SECOND MIDDLE ENGLISH PRIMER

SWEET

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SECOND
MIDDLE ENGLISH PRIMER

EXTRACTS FROM CHAUCER

WITH GRAMMAR AND GLOSSARY

BY

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

SECOND EDITION, REVISED

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OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
1905

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 (*Transs. 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



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.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
GRAMMAR	1
KEY TO PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION	25
TEXTS:—	
I. Complaint to Pity	26
II. The Former Age	36
III. Adam Scrivener	38
IV. Truth	39
V. The Hunt	46
VI. Parliament of Birds	45
VII. Prologue to the Canterbury Tales	71
VIII. Pardoner's Tale	98
GLOSSARY	106

SECOND MIDDLE ENGLISH PRIMER.



GRAMMAR.

CHAUCER was a native of London, and his dialect is the London dialect of the second half of the fourteenth century, which was mainly Midland, mixed, however, with some Kentish and South-Western elements. In its grammatical forms Chaucer's English is closely allied to that of the *Ormulum*. In its spelling it shows the same French influence as the *Ancren Riwe*, only stronger. The two main changes that took place in the language itself during the fourteenth century were (1) the further loss of grammatical forms, and (2) the wholesale introduction of French words.

SPELLING.

The chief innovations in spelling that took place in the course of the fourteenth century (some of which began earlier in some parts of the country) were the following. The sound of (uu) was represented by the French *ou*, *u* keeping its older value of French *u*, long and short, as also that of short (u) in many cases. But as in writing *u* was liable to be confused with some other letters, especially *n* and *m*, the sound of (u) was, according to French usage, expressed by *o* in such words as *some* 'son,' *somer*, *world*, *cors* - *curs* 'curse,' &c. As *i* was an ambiguous letter, *y*—again after French usage—was substituted for it, especially when in juxtaposition with *u*, *n*, *m*, as in *wyues* = *wyves*, *fyne* 'fine,' and generally at the beginning and end of words. Initial *u* was often written *v*, as in *vnder*, and initial *i* was