

**THE SQUIERES TALE, WITH
LIFE, GRAMMAR, NOTES,
AND AN ETYMOLOGICAL
GLOSSARY**

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The squieres tale, with life, grammar, notes, and an etymological glossary by Geoffrey Chaucer

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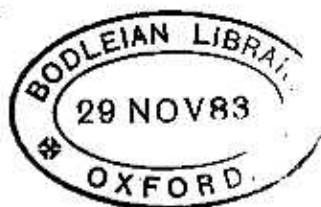


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Go, little booke,
And kisse the steps wheroux thou seest pace
Of Vergil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, Senece ;
And for there is so great diuersite
In English, and in writing of our tong,
So pray I to God, that none miswrite thee,
Ne thee mis-metre, for default of tong :
And redd wherso thou be or eles song,
That thou be understand, I God beseech.

CHAUCER, *Troilus and Criseide*, Bk. v., 1798-1800.



P R E F A C E.

THE study of Chaucer is now generally recognised as one of the best means of introduction to a knowledge of the English language and of English literature. In him there first appeared a standard English language, and his superiority over his predecessors is as much in the substance of his poetry as in his style. He is the father of all succeeding English poetry, the 'well of English undefiled,' the maker of an epoch and the founder of a poetical tradition continued and handed down to us by Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton.

The present volume contains the *Squieres Tale*, a fragment of rare poetical excellence, which serves as an excellent introduction to Chaucer's verse. It is the only one of the *Canterbury Tales* which borrows its subject from Eastern romance, and it is written throughout in an elevated strain of poetry which we know to have exercised a spell over the imagination of Milton. A Life of the poet has been given, as well as a brief account of Chaucer's grammar and versification. The notes deal with the difficulties which occur in the poem, and the Glossary has been constructed so as not merely to give the meanings and etymology of words, but to serve as an index to the line in which the word occurs. The basis of the present text is the Ellesmere MS. as printed in Mr Furnivall's Six-Text Edition for the Chaucer Society, with a few readings adopted from the other five MSS., and from the Harleian MS. as printed by Dr Morris in the Aldine edition of Chaucer's works. The orthography has been improved in some instances by collation with the other MSS. on the principle of making as few changes as possible, so that the present edition may be accepted as substantially a transcript of the Ellesmere MS., which is now generally accepted as the most satisfactory of the seven, and the spelling of which is upon a tolerably uniform system.

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THE LIFE OF CHAUCER

1. **His Time.**—CHAUCER'S LIFE AND WORKS belong to one of the greatest epochs of English History. The Elizabethan period, when England was strong both at home and abroad, and when the English drama was at its best; and the present Victorian period, when there exists everywhere unexampled activity both in literature and in science—are the only two epochs that can be compared with it. His life lay within the reigns of Edward III., Richard II., and one year of Henry IV. In the reign of Edward III. the nation—which consisted of two elements, the Norman and the Saxon—grew into one people; and the language, which had been gradually absorbing as much Norman-French as it could hold, became the ready and powerful instrument of a new literature. The year 1362 marks an important point in the history of the English Language. For in that year Edward III. passed an act of parliament authorising the use of English instead of French in courts of law, in schools, and in other public places. This is sufficient proof that the nation had become truly English. In 1380, the Bible was translated into English by Wicliffe; and this translation had a permanent effect on the character of English prose. Moreover, great events of all kinds were lifting men's minds, enlarging their ideas, and inspiring their souls: the battles of Crecy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) had been fought; the art of weaving cloth was introduced from Flanders; Windsor Castle was growing into the most splendid pile in the west of Europe; gunpowder had lately been invented; Londoners had seen two kings, the king of Scotland and the king of France, prisoners in their capital; and everywhere new powers and new ideas were stirring throughout the kingdom. And then the time was quite ready to welcome the 'ditties and songs glad,' with which Chaucer 'fulfilled the land over all'* even in the flower of his youth.

2. **His Birth and Parentage.**—GEOFFREY CHAUCER was born

* Everywhere.

in the year 1340 in London. And he lived most of his life in London. Spenser, Ben Jonson, Milton, and other later writers were also Londoners. But London in the fourteenth century was not the vast province covered with houses—filled with smoke and harassed by unceasing noise—that London now is. It was a clean, quiet, almost noiseless city, full of shady gardens, every house different in character from every other, permeated by green lanes, and the short streets divided and refreshed by green fields. The quiet meadows were within a few minutes' walk of the very heart of the city. There were no cabs or carriages, no part of the endless grind and roar that now fill the main arteries of London; but the slow leisurely rumble of a market-cart intensified the sweet silence. It was, indeed, as Mr Morris says:

London, small, and white, and clean;
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.

You could hear the songs of the birds clear and thrilling in the streets; and the citizens had the English love of the country so thoroughly in their blood, that, on the morning of the First of May, they rose at daybreak, with songs in their mouths and in their hearts, to do honour to the coming summer, gathered boughs of blossoming hawthorn, and with it decked the doorways of their houses—so that each street smelt from end to end of the May, and thick bushes of green and white met the eye on every side.

May, with all thy flouris and thy greene,
Welcome be thou, wel fairé freschē May!

The streets did not swarm with people dressed in black, or in dull and dead colours; but there were here and there groups of persons dressed in bright red or yellow or green or blue and white, and sometimes the one half of a man's coat was of a different colour from that of the other side.

His father was John Chaucer, citizen and vintner of London. His grandfather was Richard Chaucer, also a vintner; and the name of *Chaucere* is said to be on the roll of Battle Abbey. John Chaucer's house was in Thames Street, on a stream called Walbrook*—because it flowed past London Wall—which rose in Finsbury Moor, beyond the street still called Moorgate, and flowed into the Thames near what is now Cannon Street. The

* There is still a street of this name.

boy went to school in the neighbourhood; and no doubt he sometimes helped his father in the wine-cellar, and filled the pots of the citizens with their daily supply of draught-wine. But Chaucer's father had a connection with the court of Edward III. He attended that king when he went with his Queen Philippa on an expedition to Flanders and Cologne; and it is to this connection that Geoffrey owed his appointment as page in the household of Elizabeth, the wife of Prince Lionel, the third son of Edward III. He was then seventeen. Young men in the time of Chaucer went either to the university, or entered the service of some nobleman as page. There they learned courtesy of manners, riding, the use of arms, and all that related to the life of a soldier, a nobleman, and a man of public affairs. There is also a tradition that Chaucer was a member of both of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge; but this is doubtful. His position in the household of Prince Lionel threw him into the society of the most distinguished men and women of the time; his imagination would be fired by the splendour of the court festivities; he would meet on frank and cordial terms the great statesmen and warriors and writers of the age.

3. *His Official Life.*—In the year 1359, Chaucer—then a young man of nineteen—joined the army of Edward III., which invaded France in November of that year. In this campaign Chaucer was made prisoner; but he was released under the Peace of Brétigny in 1360, when the king paid for him a ransom of £16. In the year 1367, he was appointed one of the 'valets of the king's chamber,' and is mentioned in the patent or commission as 'dilectus valettus noster.' He received, by the same patent, a pension of twenty marks* for life. John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the fourth son of Edward, a man of exactly Chaucer's age, was his great friend and patron; and he remained true to Chaucer to the end of his days. When Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt, died at the age of twenty-nine, Chaucer wrote a beautiful poem in her honour—'The Deth of Blaunche the Duchesse.' Between the years 1370 and 1380, the poet was employed in seven diplomatic missions—some of them of great

* A mark is 13s. 4d. But there was little or no comparison between the buying power of money in Chaucer's time and now. A sheep sold for 8s. 6d.; a horse might be bought for 18s. 4d.; a chicken cost 2d.; and the price of a day's labour at the plough was 3d. Money must have gone, then, from ten to twenty times as far as it does now.