

P O E M S

BY

*LAURENCE . MINOT.*

# POEMS

ON

INTERESTING EVENTS

IN THE REIGN OF

*KING EDWARD III.*

WRITTEN,

IN THE YEAR MCCCLII.

BY

*LAURENCE MINOT.*

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WITH

A PREFACE, DISSERTATIONS, NOTES,

AND

A GLOSSARY.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE neglect which writers of genius are occasionally condemned to experience, as well from their contemporaries as from posterity, was never exemplified, perhaps, in a more eminent degree than by the poet whose works are now offered to the public. His very name appears totally unknown to Leland, Bale, Pitts, and Tanner: it is mentioned, in short, by no one writer, till late in the present century, nor is found to occur in any catalogue: while the silence of the public records would induce us to believe that the great monarch whom he has so eloquently and earnestly panegyrised was either igno-

rant of his existence or insensible of his merit\*.

That these equally elegant and spirited compositions were at length retrieved from the obscurity in which they had been for ages interred was owing to a whimsical circumstance, which it may not be impertinent to relate. The compiler of the Cotton catalogue (printed at Oxford in 1696), or some person whom he employed, had contented himself with describing the inestimable volume (GALBA E. IX.) which contains some of the most precious relics of ancient English poetry in these words: "CHAUCER. *Exemplar emendate scriptum.*" The manuscript,

\* Of this monarch, who gave to Chaucer an office in the customs, upon condition that he wrote his accounts with his own hand, it has already been observed, that, "though adorned with many royal and heroic virtues," he "had not the gift of discerning and patronizing a great poet." Tyrwhitts Chaucer, Appendix to the preface, p. xxviii.

it must be confessed, is very *fairly*, and also pretty *correctly* written, (if either be the meaning of *emenaate*,) but owes not the smallest obligation to the great poet whose genuine works might, naturally enough, have been expected to occupy the whole. The indolence of our catalogue-maker being equal to his ignorance, readily converted the name of RICHARD CHAWFER, scrawled, perhaps by some former proprietor of the volume, on a spare leaf, into that of GEOFFREY CHAUCER, the supposed author of its contents. To this fortunate blunder, however, (if a blunder there was to be,) we are indebted for our acquaintance with the name and writings of LAURENCE MINOT, whom one of a different nature might have consigned to perpetual oblivion. The late ingenious and industrious mister Tyrwhitt, in preparing materials for his admirable edition of *The Canterbury tales*, consulted the manuscript for the purpose of

collating an *accurate* copy of his favourite author. His disappointment, which may be easily imagined, would be very speedily converted into the most agreeable surprise, on finding himself thus unexpectedly introduced to the acquaintance of a new poet, anterior, perhaps, to that favourite in point of time, and certainly not his inferior with respect to language. In consequence of this happy discovery, the name of LAURENCE MINOT (which he himself has luckily taken care to preserve) was first ushered into the modern world by a note to the learned "Essay on the language and versification of Chaucer."

A copy of these poems having been communicated to mister Warton of Oxford, some extracts from them appeared, with sufficient awkwardness indeed, in the third volume of *The history of English poetry*, published in 1781. Those extracts, however, are

by no means undistinguished by the general inaccuracy which pervades that interesting and important work. Its author, confident in great and splendid abilities, would seem to have disdained the too fervile task of cultivating the acquaintance of ancient dialect or phraseology, and to have contented himself with publishing, and occasionally attempting to explain, what, it must be evident, he did not himself understand. That an English writer of the first eminence should never have heard of the name of BALIOL must excite surprise: and yet this appears to have been the case of our poetical historian, who, in his, certainly bold, but not less erroneous, attempts to elucidate one of the following poems, makes "Edward THE BALIOLFE" to mean "Edward THE WARLIKE," that is, "Edward THE THIRD," who "is introduced," he says, "by Minot, as resisting the Scottish invasion in 1347 [1346] at Nevil's cross near

Durham:”\* though every child might be expected to know that this monarch was, upon that occasion, at the siege of Calais; and, in fact, he is, in the very poem alluded to, expressly stated to be “out of the londe.” With respect to the age of the manuscript, which the same gentleman attributes to the reign of Henry VI. he was probably misled by the person who transmitted the poems, as it may very fairly be referred to that of Richard II. though some pieces, it is true, are inserted by a later hand, and of a more modern date.

\* *The* is well known to be the northern corruption of *de*: hence *the* Bruce, *the* Baliol, of the Scottish poets. See Barbour's *Life of Bruce*, passim. Thus, also, *Philippe de Valois* is here called “*Philip the Valas*.” The name of *Baliol* was frequently written *Bailolf* or *Bailliof* in the age of our poet. In Morceses *Nomina nobilium equitumque sub E. I.* 1749, we find “*sir Thomas de Bailolf;*” and in a list of Durham knights, in the time of Henry III. preserved in an ancient MS. in the auditors-office, Durham, (called *The Boldon-buoks*, from its containing a copy of that record,) “*sir John de Bailliof, sir Hugh de Bailliof, sir Eustace de Baillof.*” Blind Harry, the Scottish Homer, calls John *de Baliol*, “*Jhon the Balzoune.*”



That these poems were written, or at least completed, in the beginning of the year 1352 (according to the present file), is not a mere circumstance of probability, but may be clearly demonstrated by internal evidence and matter of fact. The latest event they commemorate is the capture of Guifnes-castle, which happened, according to Avesbury, on saint Vincents day, the 22d of January, 1351-2; and it is manifest that the concluding poem, of which that capture is the subject, was written in "winter", (February, most likely,) while the fact was recent, and the captors were in possession of the place, which, we learn from Stow, they did not long occupy \*. The fact, indeed, might have been

\* Stows account, whencesoever he had it, is not every where very clear. If Avesbury be right, and the ambassadors from the earl of Guifnes did not arrive in London before the day of St. Maurice the abbot, which is the 15th of January, John de Doncaster must have kept possession till the following year (1352-3); which is highly improbable.

inferred from other circumstances: that the duke of Lancaster, who is familiarly mentioned by that title, was only so created the 6th of March 1350-1; and that some great events quickly succeeded the year 1352, which, as our author has not celebrated nor alluded to them, it may be presumed he did not live to witness. Minot, of course, is to be regarded as a poet anterior not only to Chaucer, who, in 1352, was but 24 years of age, and had not, so far as we know, given any proofs of a poetical imagination, but also to Gower, who, though he survived that writer, was probably his senior by some years. He cannot, at the same time, be considered as the first of English poets, since, not to mention the hermit of Hampole, the prolixity of whose compositions is compensated more by their piety than by their spirit, he is clearly posterior to Robert Mannyng (or of Brunne); whose namesake of Glouces-

ter is, in fact, the Ennius of this numerous family.\*

It seems pretty clear, from our authors dialect and orthography, that he was a native of one of the northern counties, in some monastery whereof the manuscript which contains his poems, along with many others in the same dialect, is conjectured to have been written; and to which, at the same time, it is not improbable that he himself should have belonged. Chance, however, may one day bring us somewhat better acquainted with his history.

\* How long Mannyng was employed upon his translation of *Langetoft* does not appear; but that he had not finished it in 1337 is clear from a passage in p. 243 of the printed copy: and, indeed, he, elsewhere, expressly tells us,

“Idus that is of May left i to write this ryme,  
B letter & Friday bi ix. that zere zede prime.”

(p. 341.)

The dominical letter, as Hearne observes, should be D: so that the poet finished his work, upon which he had probably been engaged for some years, on Friday the 15th of May, 1339.

The creative imagination and poetical fancy which distinguish Chaucer, who, considering the general barbarism of his age and country, may be regarded as a prodigy, admit, it must be acknowledged, of no competition; yet, if the truth may be uttered without offence to the established reputation of that preeminent genius, one may venture to assert that, in point of ease, harmony, and variety of versification, as well as general perspicuity of style, Laurence Minot is, perhaps, equal, if not superior, to any English poet before the sixteenth, or even, with very few exceptions, before the seventeenth, century. There are, in fact, but two other poets who are any way remarkable for a particular facility of rimeing and happy choice of words: Robert of Brunne, already mentioned, who wrote before 1340, and Thomas Tusser, who wrote about 1560.

As to what concerns the present publication, it may be sufficient to say, that the poems are printed, with scrupulous fidelity, from the only manuscript copy of them known to exist, of which even the evident corruptions, though unnoticed in the text or margin, are not corrected without being elsewhere pointed out to the reader, in order that he may decide for himself upon the necessity or propriety of the correction. All abbreviations, indeed, have been entirely discarded; as hath likewise the character *y*; the improper representative, though peculiar, perhaps, at that period, to the northern scribes, of the Saxon *þ*. The letter *z*, however, is retained; a retention which can require no apology, after the respectable examples of a Ruddiman and a Percy; notwithstanding they may have been ranked, among "ignorant editors," for the preservation of "this stupid

blunder.\* Its power, at the same time; is, in these poems, everywhere that of the modern *y* consonant; though, on many occasions, it is the substitute of *g*/*h*.

It may be requisite to apprise the reader, that our author, like Chaucer, and, perhaps, other poets of the same age, makes occasional use of the *e* feminine, which renders it necessary, in pronunciation, to divide, in some cases, what, in others, is a single syllable: a liberty upon which the metre and harmony of his lines will now and then be found essentially to depend. Thus, for instance, in page 1, line 8, the word “dedes” is to be pronounced, as a disyllable, “dedés”; though, in the very next line but one, it is equally requisite to be pronounced as a monosyllable.

\* See *Ancient Scottish poems*, 1786, p. 520. The asser-  
tion made in the same page, that the letter *z*, “in the old  
editions,” is “carefully distinguished from the” *y* conso-  
nant, in the manner there described, seems to be hazarded  
without the slightest authority or foundation.

In the same predicament are "Scottés" (p. 3. l. 5.) and "Scottes" (p. 4. l. 4.) and "bowés" (p. 20. l. 10.) and "bowes" (p. 23. l. 4.) The use of the acute accent, which has been introduced in a few instances of proper names, may, perhaps, be thought no less proper in the case spoken of; but, beside that there is only a single manuscript, the writer of which, not having received the terrible injunction layed upon *Adam scrivinere*\*, was possibly unaware of the poets intention, one must not forget the sentiment of a most ingenious and accurate person upon this subject: that "a reader, who cannot perform such operations for himself, had better not trouble his head about the verification of 'an ancient author'."\* It may, therefor, be deemed sufficient to add, in the words of the same excellent critic, that "the true & feminine is

\* See Urrys *Chaucer*, p. 626.

† *Canterbury tales*, iv. 95.