

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13589-4 - The Cambridge Book of Lesser Poets

J. C. Squire

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Compiled by
J. C. SQUIRE



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AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
MCMXXVII

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by
Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521135894

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First published 1927
This digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-13589-4 paperback

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

IN an age of many anthologies a new one should be justified. Why should this one exist?

It is meant to be a supplement to those collections, amongst which *The Oxford Book of English Verse* and *The Golden Treasury* are conspicuous, which cover the whole range of English Verse. In an imperfect world we can scarcely expect anything better, along its lines and covering its period, than Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's book. I at least am almost prepared to defend its defects, for I know what it was to me. I was sixteen and a half when it appeared. I had the first edition within a week or two of its publication, and I have it still. Night after night I read it, by candle-light; and time after time. It had perhaps its bias. The magical and sensual elements were very much predominant over the intellectual; the Augustan age had not quite a fair show; the latest poets of all were represented rather at haphazard; there was only enough of Davidson, Thompson and Kipling to make one wish for more. But it was the best that had ever been done and it did plunge one breast high into the great writers and the great periods. But as time went on I realized that in such a collection the lesser writers could not possibly get a fair show. An anthologist had a certain number of pages at his disposal. He was bound to begin with an adequate representation of Chaucer and Shakespeare, Milton and Dryden, Shelley and Keats, Tennyson and Browning, and scores of others of unchallenged and unchallengeable position. When he had done with these he was bound to be somewhat pressed for space, in some degree obliged to be cursory in his survey of the better achievements of men who were not among

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

the greatest. And, in the end, it occurred to me that I would make an Anthology of the Minors: that some service to readers might be performed, and that certainly the vast riches of our English poetry would be illustrated, if a book of almost equivalent size were made from which all the greater writers should be omitted.

Here, then, is the book. I began by omitting one hundred poets: Chaucer, Gower and Skelton, all the great Elizabethans, Carolines, Georgians, and Victorians, all the established Americans from Emerson and Lowell to Moody and Tabb, neither of whom is known in this country as he should be. I made a hundred omissions: and even then I had to make more. I included a number of Barnes's poems, and then omitted them. I copied out all the best things of Rochester and had to leave them out, not because he had yet had his due, but because his due, for what he achieved quite apart from his great unfulfilled potentialities, was so considerable. I excluded all living poets; all "war poets"; all who died after I began the book, including such writers as Mrs Meynell, Flecker, Wilfrid Blunt and Herbert Trench, whose mere magnitude must have kept them out anyhow. Even after that my exclusions continued: I had to cut down and, *inter alia*, Ferguson's *The Welshmen of Tyrawley*, Samuel Henley's *Conjugal Love*, *The Ballad of the Brave Lord Willoughby*, had to go. In a general way, however, the reader is asked to imagine my saying to myself "Suppose that whilst still keeping a high standard one were to ignore those writers who have frequently reached a high standard: would it not be worth while to show how luxuriant is the English undergrowth?"

Over one hundred poets have been deliberately excluded. It is conceivably arguable that some of those are not so eminent as some of the poets here included. Certainly I should be

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

prepared to put up a plea for Breton, Habington, and Clare, and even de Tabley and Herman Melville, who are the giants of my book, as against several of those who have occupied more space in the anthologies—and the histories. In borderland cases I have been frankly influenced by what my predecessors have done, or left undone: I don't, for example, think that Clare has ever had his due, though I certainly think him (if one must consider these degrees) a greater poet than Waller or Nash, both of whom (classics acknowledged and ratified) I have left out; and certainly greater than Andrew Lang, who did a few things perfectly. I ask my critics to consider my difficulties sympathetically: not to press borderland cases too hard: and at least to admit that Breton and Clare here occupy the places taken by Shakespeare and Tennyson in the ordinary anthologies of English verse.

I have included many anonymous poems: some of them, and particularly the mediaeval ones, were probably by great, though unidentified, poets. But I have left out all the ballads, the best of which are well known and would have occupied a good deal of the space which is primarily intended for the benefit of neglected men and (in Patmore's phrase) "the lovely which are not beloved." The anonymous poems become scarcer as time goes on: in our own day the taste for anonymity has died out. It would be impossible to mention the hundreds of collections, old and new, which I have consulted, in addition to the books of individual authors. Those of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Palgrave, Arber, Bullen, Locker-Lampson, Mr W. S. Braithwaite, Mr George Beaumont, Mr I. A. Williams, Mr H. J. Massingham, Messrs Sidgwick and Chambers are amongst the modern compilations which I have found useful. I think that a good many poems taken from old miscellanies have never been rescued before. The anonymous poems have been arranged in

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

blocks and placed roughly in the generations from which they came. I know that many familiar beauties will be recognized in the book; I can only hope that the less familiar will give readers as much pleasure in the perusal as I have had in the finding of them. Mistakes of attribution may have occurred; if so I shall be glad to have them corrected; they are not due to carelessness. I must apologize for the absence of notes; had I begun to make them they would have become very voluminous; my sources are at the disposal of anyone who is sufficiently interested to ask for them. Finally, I must emphasize the fact that my texts are meant for the general reader and not for the scholar, and that I have modernized spelling and typography where I thought fit. A few poems have been cut.

For invaluable assistance in this compilation I am gratefully indebted to Miss Dorothy Wooldridge, Mr Osbert Burdett, Mr Iolo Williams and Mr Edward L. Davison. For copyright material I must thank: Messrs George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., for the poems by W. (Johnson) Cory and J. M. Synge; Mrs H. Allingham for the poems by William Allingham; Messrs Angus and Robertson, Sydney, for part of H. C. Kendall's poem "Mooni"; Messrs G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., for the poem by Thomas Ashe; the Century Co., New York and London, for the poems by S. W. Mitchell; Mr R. Cobden-Sanderson for the poems by John Clare (edited by Edmund Blunden and Alan Porter); Messrs Chatto and Windus for the poems by Bret Harte; Mrs Elizabeth D. Dowden for the poem by Edward Dowden; Messrs Elkin Mathews, Ltd., for the poems by John Todhunter and Lionel Johnson; Mr Elliot Stock for the poem by E. C. Lefroy; Messrs T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., for the poems by Amy Levy; the Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, for the poems by T. B. Aldrich, Rose Terry Cooke, R. W. Gilder, and Julia Ward Howe; Messrs John Lane, the Bodley Head,

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

Ltd., for the poems by H. C. Beeching, Ernest Dowson, and Stephen Phillips; Mr C. Leicester-Warren for the poems by John Leicester-Warren, Lord de Tabley; Messrs Longmans, Green and Co., for the poem by Jean Ingelow; Dr Greville Macdonald for the poem by G. Macdonald (from *Collected Poetical Works*, Chatto and Windus); Messrs Macmillan and Co., Ltd., for the poems by T. E. Brown, Richard Garnett, and F. W. H. Myers; Mrs E. Melville Metcalf for the poems by Herman Melville; Mr Wilfrid Meynell for a poem by Aubrey de Vere; Mr John Murray for the poems by R. W. Dixon and Richard Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton; Sir Henry Newbolt for the poem by Mary Coleridge (from *Poems*, Elkin Mathews); the Oxford University Press and the representatives of the author for the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins; the Earl of Rosslyn and Messrs William Blackwood and Sons for the poem by Francis Robert St Clair Erskine; Messrs George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., for the poem by the Hon. Roden Berkeley Wriothlesley Noel.

J. C. S.

1927