

**Cambridge Plain Texts**

SPENSER  
THE SHEPHEARDS  
CALENDER

Cambridge University Press

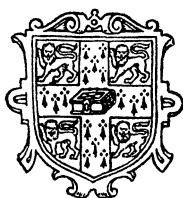
978-1-107-66911-6 - Spenser: The Shepherds Calender

Frontmatter

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## NOTE

*The Shepherds Calender* was published in 1579 over the pseudonym of *Immerito*. The authorship was but thinly concealed; the preface addressed to Gabriel Harvey and signed with the initials of Edward Kirke gave hint enough that Colin Clout, his friend Hobbinol and his learned commentator had met, not in Arcady, but at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge. *Immerito* was soon identified with Edmund Spenser.

This book, so modestly put forth, won for Spenser the title of "the new poet"; his friends claimed, and most critics conceded, that he had given fresh inspiration to native English poetry at a moment when it seemed in danger of being sterilised by too much absorption of foreign and classical influence. Sidney, to whom the book was dedicated, might question Spenser's "forming his stile to an old rustick language," but this archaism drew men back to Spenser's model, his *Tityrus*, our English Chaucer.

Some of the fascination of this book for the Elizabethans has no doubt faded; the charm of the pastoral convention with its Arcadian shepherds learnedly discoursing on controversial theology is little to us compared with the freshness and the music of the poetry. The irregular cadences, which Spenser invented from his mistaken scanning of Chaucer, reveal musical possibilities in our language not yet exhausted, while the more regular metres of the true tradition show us that inexhaustible power of subtle modulation which carried him victoriously through the long march of the *Faerie Queene*. The charm of this tunefulness of his verse can never fade, and when we read the roundel of Perigot and Willie or Colin's dirge for Dido, we must capitulate to it as fully as that contemporary critic, who, in awarding to Spenser the laurel in 1586, named him "the rightest English poet that ever I read."

A. ATTWATER.

CAMBRIDGE,  
 December 1922.

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## TO HIS BOOKE

*Goe, little booke! thy selfe present,  
As child whose parent is unkent,  
To him that is the president  
Of Noblesse and of chevalree:  
And if that Envie barke at thee,  
As sure it will, for succoure flee  
Under the shadow of his wing;  
And asked who thee forth did bring,  
A shepherds swaine, saye, did thee sing  
All as his straying flocke he fedde:  
And, when his honor has thee redde,  
Crave pardon for my hardyhedde.  
But, if that any aske thy name,  
Say, thou wert base-begot with blame;  
For-thy thereof thou takest shame.  
And, when thou art past jeoparddee,  
Come tell me what was sayd of mee,  
And I will send more after thee.*

IMMERITÔ.