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ED. SPENSER.

THE
WORKS
OF THE
ENGLISH POETS.

WITH
PREFACES,
BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL,
BY
SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D.

Re-edited,
WITH NEW BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL MATTER,
BY J. AIKIN, M.D.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. HEATH, RUSSEL-PLACE,
FITZROY-SQUARE;
AND G. KEARSLEY, FLEET-STREET.

1802.



ADVERTISEMENT.

IT is the purpose of the present publication to give a new edition of “Dr. Johnson’s English Poets,” improved in point of selection, and enriched with certain additions. Of the reason and nature of these alterations the editor thinks it necessary to premise a short account.

The collection of works first published under the name of that great critick, and for which he composed his admirable prefaces, clearly appears not to have been formed upon his own choice; for of several of the authors he has, in his remarks, spoken in a very derogatory manner; and, by taking upon himself the responsibility of having recommended four of the articles to the publishers (see his *Life of Watts*, and *Boswell’s Life of Johnson*, vol. ii. p. 181, 4to.), he has virtually disclaimed any share in selecting the rest. No obligation, therefore, seemed

to exist of exactly adhering to the judgment which dictated the selection above mentioned, in a new plan of publication, intended to afford to the English reader a classical library of the most approved poetry of his country, unencumbered with those inferior productions upon which temporary reputation bestowed unmerited consequence. It was thought that there could be no loss in rejecting works characterised by mediocrity and imperfection; and that their place would be advantageously supplied by later performances of acknowledged excellence. In reality, the original collection could with no propriety be regarded as a *body of English poetry*, comprising all the poetical works in the language which had once possessed a degree of fame, and were still occasionally read and quoted. The omission of Spenser, as well as of several other celebrated names, sufficiently proves that the intention of the publishers was of a totally different kind, and that *selection* was their leading principle. To this principle the present editor has still more rigorously adhered; in the persuasion that the interests of good taste, as well as the practicability of publication, essentially require its guidance in touching upon the now immense mass of English poetry.

Much the greater part, however, of Dr. Johnson's collection has been preserved, whence his name has without scruple been continued; especially as the whole of his biographical and critical matter, without the least change or diminution, has been prefixed to each article. The editor has indeed ventured to subjoin, in a separate form, some remarks of his own; in which he thinks himself justified, as well by the common privileges of literature, as by the general opinion, that the criticism of Dr. Johnson, acute and masterly as it is, has occasionally been warped by prejudiced and defective judgments. To the additional articles he has supplied prefaces, written upon the same plan of uniting biography and criticism; of which he can only hope, that they may be thought to combine a portion of that instruction and entertainment which so eminently distinguish the compositions of his great predecessor.

THE
POETICAL WORKS
OF
EDMUND SPENSER.
IN SIX VOLUMES.
FROM
THE TEXT OF J. UPTON.

WITH A
PREFACE, BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL,
BY J. AIKIN, M.D.

VOL. I.

C O N T E N T S

OF THE

FIRST VOLUME.

	<i>Page</i>
ADVERTISEMENT.....	
LIFE of SPENSER; and Criticism of his Works—by J. Aikin, M.D.....	i
GLOSSARY, explaining the old and obscure Words in Spenser's Work.....	xlix
A Letter of the Author's, to Sir Walter Raleigh, expounding his whole intention in the course of this Work, viz. The Faery Queene.....	5
Verses to the Author of the Faery Queene.....	13—18
Sonnets sent with the Faery Queene.....	19—30

THE FAERY QUEENE.

BOOK I.

<i>The Legend of the Knight of the Redcrosse, or of Holinesse,</i>	31
<i>Canto I.....</i>	33
<i>Canto II.</i>	52
<i>Canto III.....</i>	68
<i>Canto IV.....</i>	83
<i>Canto V.....</i>	101
<i>Canto VI.....</i>	119
<i>Canto VII.....</i>	136
<i>Canto VIII.....</i>	154
<i>Canto IX.....</i>	171
<i>Canto X.....</i>	190
<i>Canto XI.....</i>	213
<i>Canto XII.....</i>	232



SPENSER;

ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE, AND CRITICISM OF
HIS WORKS.

BY J. AIKIN, M. D.



THE early efforts in poetry of all nations are necessarily rude and imperfect. Many attempts must be made, before a barbarous language can be so disciplined into correctness of diction, and melody of sound, as to afford a material which even genius itself can work into any thing truly excellent. And when improvement has proceeded so far that lines

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