PREFACE.

The lines on which this edition of Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales is compiled have been determined by a happy conjunction of my own inclination and an external cause. After it had been begun, Dr. Liddell, one of my collaborators in the 'Globe' Chaucer, edited also for Messrs. Macmillan, though primarily for the Macmillan Company of New York, an edition of the Prologue and the Tales of the Knight and the Nun's Priest. When his book was announced, a dislike of even seeming to compete with a friend who had given me such valuable help in a previous undertaking made me wish to abandon my own task. But on studying Dr. Liddell's edition I found that there was no possibility of any work of mine coming into collision with it, and that its existence made my own task easier. While Dr. Liddell has given a useful minimum of illustrative notes, he has put his main strength into an exposition of Chaucer's practice as regards phonology, grammar, and syntax, which seems to me by far the ablest dissertation on the subject yet published. To this, therefore, I can now happily refer all students who desire advanced instruction in the linguistic aspect of Chaucer's poetry. My own interest in Chaucer is not linguistic, but literary and historical. I have, therefore, given (in addition to a full glossary) what
I hope will be found (to repeat the phrase) a useful minimum of information as to Chaucer's grammar, and have devoted myself chiefly to annotating the *Prologue*, more especially those of its allusions which touch on English life in the 14th century. For understanding this life the *Prologue* is by far the most valuable document that has come down to us. But to get back oneself, and to help others to get back, to the standpoint from which Chaucer's contemporaries first read these sketches, are no easy tasks. This must be the excuse, or rather, I am bold to say, the justification, for the length and occasionally the complexity of some of my notes. To meet the case of younger students I have marked off large portions of many of the notes by square brackets, and I hope that no examiner will ever be wicked enough to ask small boys and girls any questions on these bracketed paragraphs. To my thinking it is impossible for children to read the Tales of Grisilde and Constance, and the Little Choir-Boy too early. They appeal to them much more than most of the lyrics they are made to learn by heart, and the language of these Tales presents no difficulty. If the *Prologue* is read simultaneously by these young students it should be read rapidly, merely to get a general idea of what the Pilgrims were like, and the manner of their journey. But for senior boys and girls in English schools, and for the young men and women at the many colleges in the United States of America where Chaucer is studied I venture to think that time spent in working out the precise meaning of line after line of the *Prologue* will be far from wasted. Here, rather than in histories of the wrangles of Richard II. and his uncles, they can learn what sort of a country England was to live in five
centuries ago, and from Chaucer’s Prologue they may start their studies not only of modern English literature but of English social history.

In editing Chaucer’s Prologue on these lines I have incurred many obligations. First of all I would mention those I owe to Dr. Richard Morris, Professor Skeat, and Professor Hales. It is a peculiar pleasure to me to link together these three names, for they are all connected with King’s College School, which has always been honourably distinguished for the attention it has paid to English literature. When I entered the school, nearly three and thirty years ago, it was in Richard Morris’s form. He taught me no Chaucer by word of mouth, but it was in his edition (after he had left King’s) that I studied the Prologue and Knight’s Tale under Professor Hales, and in those of Professor Skeat (an old K.C.S. boy) that I read first of Constance and Grisilde. If the youthful zeal with which I studied these text-books has made the information I gained from them seem so much a part of my general stock of knowledge that I have in any case omitted in later days editorial acknowledgment, I hope this general confession may win me forgiveness. No tribute can be too great either to the pioneer work of Dr. Morris, to the erudition of Dr. Skeat (though here and there in my notes I may be found temerarily criticizing him), or, I may add, to the contagious enthusiasm of Professor Hales and the skill which he has brought to the elucidation of some notable ‘cruxes’ in Chaucer’s text. Professor Hales has added one more to his many kindnesses to his old pupil by reading the proofs of my notes and supplying me with several valuable fresh illustrations. Mr. W. W. Greg has
rendered me a like service. Dr. Furnivall (besides the
general obligations he has conferred on all students of
Chaucer), Abbot Gasquet, Mr. Henry Jenner, Dr.
Wickham Legg, Dr. J. F. Payne, Miss Lucy Toulmin
Smith, and Mr. Robert Steele, have all supplied me with
notes or suggestions on difficult points. To Mr. Jenner
I am also indebted for the little excursus on ‘Chaucer’s
Astrology,’ which is inserted in my Introduction, not, I
may repeat, to be learnt, but solely for reference. I
would also acknowledge my debt to the Oxford English
Dictionary, to two very important collections of Chaucer
Notes contributed by Dr. Ewald Flügel to Anglia, to Dr.
Jusserand’s English Wayfaring Life in the Fourteenth
Century, to Mr. John Saunders’ Chaucer’s Canterbury
Tales, and generally to all my predecessors in editing or
illustrating Chaucer. My final word of gratitude is due
to Messrs. Macmillan for their patience with an editor
who has taken nearly four years over a little book which
he fully expected to finish in as many months.

ALFRED W. POLIARD.

1903.