PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The former edition of the present work was published in two volumes, with the following title: "A History of English Rhythms, by Edwin Guest, Esq. M.A. Fellow of Caius College, Cambridge. London; William Pickering, 1838." In place of a Preface, it contained a brief "Notice to the Reader," here reprinted, which concluded with the words "two years could hardly pass away, without the author seeing reason to modify much that he had advanced, upon a subject so novel and so extensive as the present one;" and, it may be mentioned, in particular, that (as shown in the note to p. 176) the very strict views upon the subject of elision which were laid down in the first volume seem to have been considerably relaxed in other passages of the work. What further modifications the author may have desired to make, we have, unfortunately, no means of ascertaining; but we may infer, from the long delay in issuing a second edition, that it may well have been his hope and intention to introduce many considerable improvements, though the laborious character of the work rendered it very difficult to do so. But the opportunity for this never arrived; and all that now remained to be done was, to ascertain what improvements could at any rate be made, in the absence of such revision as only an author can effectively give.

In the first place, the former edition was somewhat carelessly printed, and contained a long list of errata, which are now removed. It further appeared that even this list was not exhaustive, and several other printer's errors have now been silently corrected.¹

¹ Even thus, a few of them have escaped detection in the revision; see the List of Errata to the present edition, p. xix.
Secondly, the former edition contained several Notes at the end, some of which would have been introduced into the text, if they had occurred to the author sooner. Advantage has now been taken of doing this in the course of reprinting, wherever it seemed advisable to do so.

Thirdly, the Notes are now considerably augmented (1) by help of some MS. annotations in the author’s own handwriting, made in the copy which was in his own possession; (2) by help of some MS. annotations in a copy formerly belonging to Mr. Edmund Longhall Swifte, and now in the possession of Mr. S. Crompton, who most kindly lent the book for this purpose; and (3) by some additional remarks made by the editor.

Fourthly, whilst the text is substantially the same as before, the editor has added a few remarks, distinguished by being inserted within square brackets, whenever they seemed to be absolutely necessary. For example, at p. 349, the words “Here follows Alfred’s translation, Met. xxvi. 1. 4” have been inserted, for the sake of greater clearness, and in order to give the reference. The same explanation applies to the numerous brief foot-notes within square brackets, the letters “W. W. S.” being further added to the footnotes whenever they supply additional information.

Fifthly, the very numerous well-arranged quotations, which give the book its great and permanent interest and value, have been subjected, as far as it could conveniently be done, to a thorough and searching revision; a matter which has caused the expenditure of considerable time and trouble. In the former edition, many of the references were left vague; so that we find “F. Q.” for Spenser’s Fairy Queen, “W. Scott” for quotations from songs out of the Waverley Novels, and the like. The difficulty of discovering the whereabouts of many of these has been very great, and in a few cases search has been baffled; but the convenience to the reader of finding the references supplied is so obvious that the opportunity was not to be lost. The extremely full index to words occurring in Anglo-Saxon poetry in Dr. Grein’s “Sprachschatz der angelsächsischen
Dichter" has proved of great service; as have also Dr. Schmidt's "Shakespeare Lexicon," Cleveland's "Concordance to Milton," and Abbott's "Concordance to Pope." The edition of the English Poets, published by Chalmers in 1810, has been very useful.

In particular, it must be borne in mind that Dr. Guest was quite a pioneer in Middle-English literature, and had to get together a large number of his quotations by the laborious process of transcribing them for himself from the MSS., and had nothing but these transcripts to trust to; there was not even at that time any edition of Layamon or of the Ormulum, nor was the Early English Text Society founded till nearly thirty years after his book appeared. Hence it often happened that exact references could not be given, nor could the passages cited be revised whilst passing through the press. Hence it will be readily understood that numerous references have now been added to good editions, and that, by help of such editions, a large number of corrections have been made in the passages cited, and many obscurities cleared up. Even of later authors we now possess much better editions; and, in several quotations from Shakespeare, Spenser, and the like, the text of the quotations has been conformed to that of the "Globe" editions of Shakespeare and Spenser, and to the best modern editions of other authors.

It may here be observed that the quotations from Lydgate's "Fall of Princes," from Barclay's "Ship of Foes," from Sir T. More's "Rufus Lamentation" and "Book of Fortune," and from Surrey's "Description of Spring" (p. 298), were taken from the Preface to Todd's edition of "Johnson's Dictionary," published in 1827. This accounts for the reading mockers discussed in the note to p. 225; and may serve to remind us that the author had frequently to work with the very imperfect materials supplied by inaccurate and careless editions, a difficulty which at the present date does not exist; so that we can hardly appreciate at its right value the wonderful industry which reduced such materials to order.

Sixthly, the former edition had no index; and indeed, an
index would not have been of much value, in the absence of reasonably good editions of our older literature. But now that the exact references have been supplied to almost every quotation, and many editions have been cited in the footnotes, the addition of an "Index of Authors quoted and referred to" has become a necessity, and the construction of it presented no difficulty. We can now tell how often, and where, the author has cited any given play of Shakespeare, or any given poem of any other author. The convenience of this is the greater, because Dr. Guest's great work has long been the convenient store-house whence many writers upon prosody have drawn their illustrations, sometimes without any acknowledgment that they have done so.

Lastly, the reader will soon find that, throughout the work, the different "sections" or arrangements of (prosodical) feet are denoted by the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. As those numbers are, from the nature of the case, arbitrarily chosen, it is next to impossible to remember them long without confusion, and it becomes convenient to tabulate them for ready reference. Hence a "Table of Rhythms" has been compiled and added, which will be found following the Table of Contents, on p. xvii.

One more necessary remark will render the plan of the book easier to understand. The mark | so constantly used throughout the book to indicate the scansion, invariably marks the accented syllables; and is not used to mark the division into feet as in the case of Greek and Latin verses. It is, in fact, only another way of marking accent, used in place of the more usual, but far more clumsy method of employing marks of accentuation. Thus it is the same thing whether we write

When | the British war|rior queen |

or whether we write

When the British wárrior queen.

This is an excellent and most convenient notation, and, for English verse, certainly the best, when it is once fairly
understood. It is also extremely easy. Yet, when Dr. Guest correctly scans a certain line thus—

In the hexameter rises the fountain's silvery column,

it is curious to find a M.S. note in Mr. Swifte's copy to this effect: "I think the proper scansion of this line is:—"

That is to say, Mr. Swifte "corrects" the author by scanning the line exactly the same as before; he has merely employed the symbol in a sense of his own, by dividing the line into feet in the usual schoolboy fashion. It is extraordinary that a careful reader could peruse the book without acquiring the sense of a symbol which occurs so many thousands of times.

The remarks upon the values of the English letters should be compared with the later investigations by Mr. Ellis and Mr. Sweet. The study of phonetics has advanced of late years very rapidly; indeed, the most surprising thing is that Dr. Guest was already discussing such matters in 1838, when to pay any heed to them was quite exceptional.

The remarks upon the dialects are particularly interesting as showing how much the author was in advance of many of his contemporaries. We already find him arguing for the existence of three main dialects, in precise accordance with the results obtained long afterwards by Dr. Morris.

It is, of course, a matter for regret that the author found no opportunity for revising the work in that masterly manner of which he alone was capable; still the work has long been well known as giving a useful and serviceable survey of a difficult subject, and a reprint of it has long been desired. The opportunity has accordingly been taken of introducing all such improvements as, under the circumstances, were possible.

I have in general preserved the peculiarities of spelling, &c. of the former edition; I have, however, substituted tie for tye on p. 13, and diphthong for dipthong throughout.
Further, as Dr. Guest rightly rejected the spelling *rhyme*, for which he substituted *rhine*, it became necessary to go a step further, by employing the correct spelling *rime*.

Some account of Dr. Guest and his work, with particular reference to his historical investigations, will be found in the Prefatory Notice to his "Origines Celticae," published for the first time by Messrs. Macmillan and Co. in the present year. A list of his various contributions to philological subjects is appended to the present volume.

*Walter W. Skeat.*

_July, 1882._