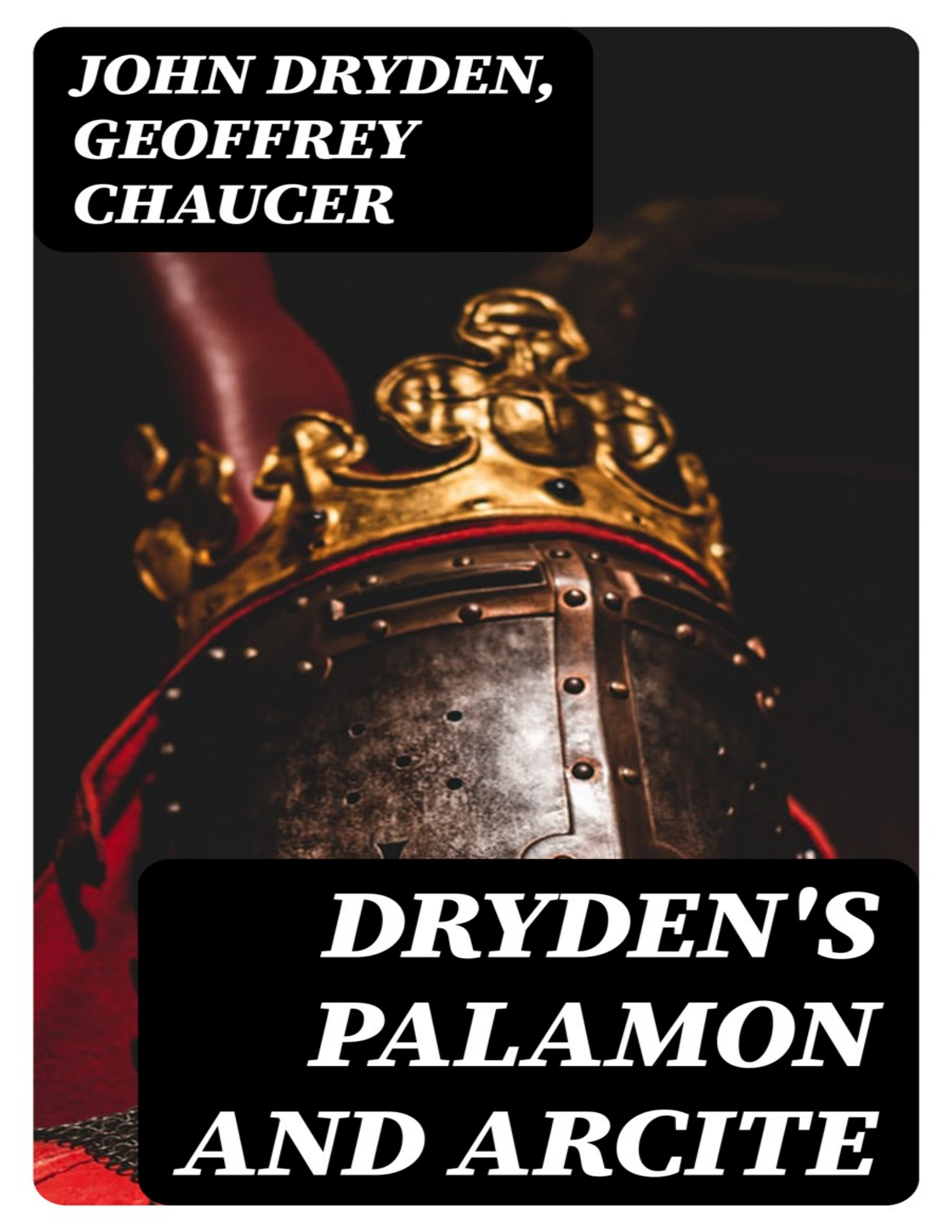


A close-up photograph of a medieval helmet, likely a bascinet or similar, featuring a golden crown with ornate details. The helmet's faceplate is made of dark metal with visible rivets and a central vertical seam. A red velvet lining is visible around the crown and on the left side. The background is dark and out of focus.

***JOHN DRYDEN,
GEOFFREY
CHAUCER***

***DRYDEN'S
PALAMON
AND ARCITE***

John Dryden, Geoffrey Chaucer

Dryden's Palamon and Arcite

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE BACKGROUND.

LIFE OF DRYDEN.

PALAMON AND ARCITE

DRYDEN'S PLACE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

TO HER GRACE THE DUCHESS OF ORMOND,

WITH THE FOLLOWING POEM OF PALAMON AND ARCITE.

MADAM,

PALAMON AND ARCITE;

OR, THE KNIGHT'S TALE.

FROM CHAUCER.

BOOK I.

BOOK II.

BOOK III.

BOOK I.

BOOK II.

BOOK III.

Henry A. Beers
Professor Of English Literature In
Yale University
Who First Aroused My Interest In
Dryden
And Directed My Study Of His Works
This Volume Is Respectfully Inscribed

NOTES.

PREFACE.

[Table of Contents](#)

To edit an English classic for study in secondary schools is difficult. The lack of anything like uniformity in the type of examination required by the colleges and universities complicates treatment. Not only do two distinct institutions

differ in the scope and character of their questions, but the same university varies its demands from year to year. The only safe course to pursue is, therefore, a generally comprehensive one. But here, again, we are hampered by limited space, and are forced to content ourselves with a bare outline, which the individual instructor can fill in as much or as little as he pleases.

The ignorance of most of our classical students in regard to the history of English literature is appalling; and yet it is impossible properly to study a given work of a given author without some knowledge of the background against which that particular writer stands. I have, therefore, sketched the politics, society, and literature of the age in which Dryden lived, and during which he gave to the world his *Palamon and Arcite*. In the critical comments of the introduction I have contented myself with little more than hints. That particular line of study, whether it concerns the poet's style, his verse forms, or the possession of the divine instinct itself, can be much more satisfactorily developed by the instructor, as the student's knowledge of the poem grows.

It is certainly a subject for congratulation that so many youth will be introduced, through the medium of Dryden's crisp and vigorous verse, to one of the tales of Chaucer. May it now, as in his own century, accomplish the poet's desire, and awaken in them appreciative admiration for the old bard, the best story-teller in the English language.

G. E. E. CLINTON, CONN., July 26, 1897.

INTRODUCTION.

[Table of Contents](#)

THE BACKGROUND.

[Table of Contents](#)

The fifty years of Dryden's literary production just fill the last half of the seventeenth century. It was a period bristling with violent political and religious prejudices, provocative of strife that amounted to revolution. Its social life ran the gamut from the severity of the Commonwealth Puritan to the unbridled debauchery of the Restoration Courtier. In literature it experienced a remarkable transformation in poetry, and developed modern prose, watched the production of the greatest English epics, smarted under the lash of the greatest English satires, blushed at the brilliant wit of unspeakable comedies, and applauded the beginnings of English criticism.

When the period began, England was a Commonwealth. Charles I., by obstinate insistence upon absolutism, by fickleness and faithlessness, had increased and strengthened his enemies. Parliament had seized the reins of government in 1642, had completely established its authority at Naseby in 1645, and had beheaded the king in front of his own palace in 1649. The army had accomplished these results, and the army proposed to enjoy the reward. Cromwell, the idolized commander of the Ironsides, was placed at the head of the new-formed state with the title of Lord Protector; and for five years he ruled England, as she had been ruled by no sovereign since Elizabeth. He suppressed Parliamentary dissensions and royalist uprisings, humbled the Dutch, took vengeance on the Spaniard, and made England indisputably mistress of the ocean. He was succeeded, at his death in 1658, by his son Richard; but the father's strong instinct for government had not been inherited by the son. The nation, homesick for monarchy, was tiring of dissension and bickering, and by the Restoration of 1660 the son of Charles I became Charles II of England.

Scarcely had the demonstrations of joy at the Restoration subsided when London was visited by the devouring plague of 1665. All who could fled from the stricken city where thousands died in a day. In 1666 came the great fire which swept from the Tower to the Temple; but, while it destroyed a vast deal of property, it prevented by its violent purification a recurrence of the plague, and made possible the rebuilding of the city with great sanitary and architectural improvements.

Charles possessed some of the virtues of the Stuarts and most of their faults. His arbitrary irresponsibility shook the confidence of the nation in his sincerity. Two parties, the Whigs and the Tories, came into being, and party spirit and party strife ran high. The question at issue was chiefly one of religion. The rank and file of Protestant England was determined against the revival of Romanism, which a continuation of the Stuart line seemed to threaten. Charles was a Protestant only from expediency, and on his deathbed accepted the Roman Catholic faith; his brother James, Duke of York, the heir apparent, was a professed Romanist.

Such an outlook incited the Whigs, under the leadership of Shaftesbury, to support the claims of Charles' eldest illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, who, on the death of his father in 1685, landed in England; but the promised uprising was scarcely more than a rabble of peasantry, and was easily suppressed. Then came the vengeance of James, as foolish as it was tyrannical. Judge Jeffries and his bloody assizes sent scores of Protestants to the block or to the gallows, till England would endure no more. William, Prince of Orange, who had married Mary, the eldest daughter of James, was invited to accept the English crown. He landed at Torbay, was joined by Churchill, the commander of the king's forces, and, on the precipitate flight of James, mounted the throne of England. This event stands in history as the Protestant Revolution of 1688.

During William's reign, which terminated in 1702, Stuart uprisings were successfully suppressed, English liberties were guaranteed by the famous Bill of Rights, Protestant

succession was assured, and liberal toleration was extended to the various dissenting sects.

Society had passed through quite as great variations as had politics during this half-century. The roistering Cavalier of the first Charles, with his flowing locks and plumed hat, with his maypoles and morrice dances, with his stage plays and bear-baitings, with his carousals and gallantries, had given way to the Puritan Roundhead. It was a serious, sober-minded England in which the youth Dryden found himself. If the Puritan differed from the Cavalier in political principles, they were even more diametrically opposed in mode of life. An Act of Parliament closed the theaters in 1642. Amusements of all kinds were frowned upon as frivolous, and many were suppressed by law. The old English feasts at Michaelmas, Christmas, Twelfth Night, and Candlemas were regarded as relics of popery and were condemned. The Puritan took his religion seriously, so seriously that it overpowered him. The energy and fervor of his religious life were illustrated in the work performed by Cromwell's chaplain, John Howe, on any one of the countless fast days. "He began with his flock at nine in the morning, prayed during a quarter of an hour for blessing upon the day's work, then read and explained a chapter for three-quarters of an hour, then prayed for an hour, preached for an hour, and prayed again for a half an hour, then retired for a quarter of an hour's refreshment—the people singing all the while—returned to his pulpit, prayed for another hour, preached for another hour, and finished at four P.M."

At the Restoration the pendulum swung back again. From the strained morality of the Puritans there was a sudden

leap to the most extravagant license and the grossest immorality, with the king and the court in the van. The theaters were thrown wide open, women for the first time went upon the stage, and they acted in plays whose moral tone is so low that they cannot now be presented on the stage or read in the drawing-room. Of course they voiced the social conditions of the time. Marriage ties were lightly regarded; no gallant but boasted his amours. Revelry ran riot; drunkenness became a habit and gambling a craze. The court scintillated with brilliant wits, conscienceless libertines, and scoffing atheists. It was an age of debauchery and disbelief.

The splendor of this life sometimes dazzles, the lack of conveniences appalls. The post left London once a week. A journey to the country must be made in your own lumbering carriage, or on the snail-slow stagecoach over miserable roads, beset with highwaymen. The narrow, ill-lighted streets, even of London, could not be traversed safely at night; and ladies, borne to routs and levees in their sedan chairs, were lighted by link-boys, and were carried by stalwart, broad-shouldered bearers who could wield well the staves in a street fight. Such were the conditions of life and society which Dryden found in the last fifty years of the seventeenth century.

Strong as were the contrasts in politics and manners during Dryden's lifetime, they were paralleled by contrasts in literature no less marked. Dryden was born in 1631; he died in 1700. In the year of his birth died John Donne, the father of the Metaphysical bards, or Marinists; in the year of his death was born James Thomson, who was to give the

first real start to the Romantic movement; while between these two dates lies the period devoted to the development of French Classicism in English literature.

At Dryden's birth Ben Jonson was the only one of the great Elizabethan dramatists still living, and of the lesser stars in the same galaxy, Chapman, Massinger, Ford, Webster, and Heywood all died during his boyhood and youth, while Shirley, the last of his line, lingered till 1667. Of the older writers in prose, Selden alone remained; but as Dryden grew to manhood, he had at hand, fresh from the printers, the whole wealth of Commonwealth prose, still somewhat clumsy with Latinism or tainted with Euphuism, but working steadily toward that simple strength and graceful fluency with which he was himself to mark the beginning of modern English prose.

Clarendon, with his magnificently involved style, began his famous *History of the Great Rebellion* in 1641. Ten years later Hobbes published the *Leviathan*, a sketch of an ideal commonwealth. Baxter, with his *Saints' Everlasting Rest* sent a book of religious consolation into every household. In 1642 Dr. Thomas Browne, with the simplicity of a child and a quaintness that fascinates, published his *Religio Medici*; and in 1653 dear old simple-hearted Isaak Walton told us in his *Compleat Angler* how to catch, dress, and cook fish. Thomas Fuller, born a score or more of years before Dryden, in the same town, Aldwinkle, published in 1642 his *Holy and Profane State*, a collection of brief and brisk character sketches, which come nearer modern prose than anything of that time; while for inspired thought and purity of diction the *Holy Living*, 1650, and the *Holy Dying*, 1651, of Jeremy

Taylor, a gifted young divine, rank preëminent in the prose of the Commonwealth.

But without question the ablest prose of the period came from the pen of Cromwell's Latin Secretary of State, John Milton. Milton stands in his own time a peculiarly isolated figure. We never in thought associate him with his contemporaries. Dryden had become the leading literary figure in London before Milton wrote his great epic; yet, were it not for definite chronology, we should scarcely realize that they worked in the same century. While, therefore, no sketch of seventeenth-century literature can exclude Milton, he must be taken by himself, without relation to the development, forms, and spirit of his age, and must be regarded, rather, as a late-born Elizabethan.

When Dryden was born, Milton at twenty-three was just completing his seven years at Cambridge, and as the younger poet grew through boyhood, the elder was enriching English verse with his *Juvenilia*. Then came the twenty years of strife. As Secretary of the Commonwealth, he threw himself into controversial prose. His *Iconoclast*, the *Divorce* pamphlets, the *Smectymnuus* tracts, and the *Areopagitica* date from this period. A strong partisan of the Commonwealth, he was in emphatic disfavor at the Restoration. Blind and in hiding, deserted by one-time friends, out of sympathy with his age, he fulfilled the promise of his youth: he turned again to poetry; and in *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* he has left us "something so written that the world shall not willingly let it die."

I have said that Milton's poetry differed distinctly from the poetry of his age. The verse that Dryden was reading as a schoolboy was quite other than *L'Allegro* and *Lycidas*. In the closing years of the preceding century, John Donne had traveled in Italy. There the poet Marino was developing fantastic eccentricities in verse. Donne under similar influences adopted similar methods.

To seize upon the quaintest possible thought and then to express it in as quaint a manner as possible became the chief aim of English poets during the first three-quarters of the seventeenth century. Donne had encountered trouble in obtaining his wife from her father. Finding one morning a flea that had feasted during the night on his wife and himself, he was overcome by its poetic possibilities, and wrote:

"This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed and temple is;
Tho' parents frown, and you, we're met
And cloister'd in these living walls of jet."

To strain after conceits, to strive for quaintness of thought and expression, was the striking characteristic of all the poets of the generation, to whom Dr. Johnson gave the title Metaphysical, and who are now known as the Marinists. There were Quarles, with his Dutch *Emblems*; Vaughan, Sandys, Crashaw, and pure-souled George Herbert, with his *Temple*. There were Carew, with the *Rapture*; Wither and his "Shall I wasting in despair"; the two dashing Cavaliers Suckling and Lovelace, the latter the only man who ever received an M.A. for his personal beauty. There was Herrick, the dispossessed Devonshire rector, with *Hesperides* and *Noble Numbers*, freer than were the others from the beauty-

marring conceits of the time. There, too, were to be found the gallant love-maker Waller, Cowley, the queen's secretary during her exile, and Marvell, Milton's assistant Secretary of State. But these three men were to pledge allegiance to a new sovereignty in English verse.

In the civil strife, Waller had at first sided with Parliament, had later engaged in a plot against it, and after a year's imprisonment was exiled to France. At this time the Academy, organized to introduce form and method in the French language and literature, held full sway. Malherbe was inculcating its principles, Corneille and Molière were practicing its tenets in their plays, and Boileau was following its rules in his satires, when Waller and his associates came in contact with this influence. The tendency was distinctly toward formality and conventionality. Surfeited with the eccentricities and far-fetched conceits of the Marinists, the exiled Englishmen welcomed the change; they espoused the French principles; and when at the Restoration they returned to England with their king, whose taste had been trained in the same school, they began at once to formalize and conventionalize English poetry. The writers of the past, even the greatest writers of the past, were regarded as men of genius, but without art; and English poetry was thenceforth, in Dryden's own words, to start with Waller.

Under the newly adopted canons of French taste, narrative and didactic verse, or satire, took first place. Blank verse was tabooed as too prose-like; so, too, were the enjambed rhymes. A succession of rhymed pentameter couplets, with the sense complete in each couplet, was set forth as the proper vehicle for poetry; and this unenjambed