PREFACE.

Good wine needs no bush, and this tale needs no Preface. I shall not tell the story of it—let readers go to the verse itself for that; nor shall I repeat to those who begin it the exhortation of the englisher of Sir Generides,

"for goddes sake, or ye hens wende, Here this tale unto the ende."—(ll. 3769-70.)

If any one having taken it up is absurd enough to lay it down without finishing it, let him lose the fun, and let all true men pity him. Though the state of morals disclosed by the story is not altogether satisfactory, yet it is a decided improvement on that existing in Roberd of Brunne's time in 1303, for he had to complain of the lords of his day:

Also do pese lordynges,

pe[y] trespas moche yn twey pynges;

pey rauys a mayden agens here wyl,

And mennys wyuys pey lede awey pertyl.

A grete vylanye parte he dous

3yf he make therof hys rouse [boste]:

pe dede ys confusyun,

And more ys pe dyffamacyun.

The volume containing the poem was shown to me by Mr Stubbs, the Librarian at Lambeth, in order that I might see the version of Sir Gyngelayne, son of Sir Gawain, which Mr Morris is some day, I trust, to edit for the Society in one of his Gawain volumes.¹ Finding the present poem also on the paper leaves, I copied it out the same afternoon, and here it is for a half-hour's amusement to any reader who chooses to take it up.

The handwriting of the MS. must be of a date soon after 1460, and this agrees well with the allusion to Edward the Fourth's accession, and the triumph of the White Rose o'er the Red alluded to in the last lines of the poem. The Garlond,

It was made

Of flourys most of honoure,

Of roses whyte pat wyll nott fade,

Whych floure all ynglond doth glade. . .

Vn-to the whych floure I-wys

The loue of God and of the comonys

Subdued bene of ryght.

For, that the Commons of England were glad of their Yorkist king, and loved Duke Richard's son, let Holinshed's record prove. He testifies:

"Wherevpon it was againe demanded of the commons, if they would admit and take the said erle as their prince and souereigne lord; which all with one voice cried: Yea, yea.

"Out of the ded stocke sprang a branch more mightie than the stem; this Edward the Fourth, a prince so highlie fauoured of the peple, for his great liberalitie, clemencie, vpright dealing, and courage, that aboue all other, he with them stood in grace alone: by reason whereof, men of all ages and degrees to him dailie repaired, some offering themselues and their men to icepard their liues with him, and other plentiouslie gaue monie to support his charges, and to mainteine his right."

¹ The since printing of the Romance in the Percy Folio MS. Ballads and Romances, (*Lybius Disconius*, ii. 404,) will probably render this unnecessary. (1869.)

PREFACE. vii

Would that we knew as much of Adam of Cobsam as of our White-Rose king. He must have been one of the Chaucer breed, but more than this poem tells of him I cannot learn.

3, St George's Square, N.W., 23 November, 1865.

P.S.—There are other Poems about Edward IV. in the volume, which will be printed separately.² One on Women is given at the end of the present text.

PP.S. 1869.—Mr C. H. Pearson, the historian of the Early and Middle Ages of England, has supplied me with the immediate original of this story. He says:

"The Wright's Chaste Wife is a reproduction of one of the Gesta Romanorum, cap. 69, de Castitate, ed. Keller. The Latin story begins 'Gallus regnavit prudens valde.' The Carpenter gets a shirt with his wife, which is never to want washing unless one of them is unfaithful. The lovers are three Knights (milites), and they are merely kept on bread and water, not made to work; nor is any wife introduced to see her lord's discomfiture. The English version, therefore, is much quainter and fuller of incident than its original. But the 'morality' of the Latin story is rich beyond description. 'The wife is holy Mother Church,' 'the Carpenter is the good Christian,' 'the shirt is our Faith, because, as the apostle says, it is impossible to please God without faith.' The Wright's work typifies 'the building up the pure heart by the works of mercy.' The three Knights are 'the pride of life, the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh.' 'These you must shut up in the chamber of penance till you get an eternal reward from the eternal King.' 'Let us therefore pray God,' &c."

With the Wright's Chaste Wife may also be compared the stories mentioned in the Notes, p. 20, and the Ballad "The Fryer well fitted; or

² In Political, Religious, and Love Poems, E. E. Text Soc., 1867.

¹ Chaucer brings off his Carpenter, though, triumphant, and not with the swived wife and broken arm that he gives his befooled Oxford craftsman in *The Milleres Tale*. (1869.)