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BRITISH POETS.

CHAUCER to JONSON.

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LONDON :
Printed by A. & R. Spottiswoode,
New-Street-Square.

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SELECT
WORKS

OF THE

BRITISH POETS,

FROM

CHAUCER TO JONSON,

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

BY

ROBERT SOUTHEY ESQ^R L.L.D.

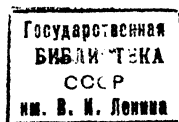


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PREFACE.

WHEN Dr. Aikin published, in the year 1820, the Select Works of the British Poets, I observed, upon the publishers presenting me with a copy of the book, that, if I had been the compiler, it should have ended just where it now began. No one will suppose that this casual observation was meant to disparage the contents of that volume; what it implied was, an opinion that the poets whose works were thus brought together had been, and were still, frequently reprinted in various forms*; but that the elder poets, the fathers of our poetry, were some very scarce, and others to be obtained only in the general collections of Dr. Anderson and Mr. Chalmers.

Some years afterwards the publishers reminded me of what I had said, and asked me to edit such a volume as I had then wished for. It was an indispensable part of their plan that the Faery Queen and the Poly-olbion should be included; and large as the volume is, the introduction of these poems made it necessary to curtail the selection which I would willingly have made from other authors. The reader will, however, find in it Hawes's Pastime of Pleasure, which, not having been reprinted since the middle of the sixteenth century, had become extremely rare. The whole of Tusser is here also; the greater part of Lord Brooke's poems; some selections from Wither (which should have been much more copious if my limits had allowed); and some from Lovelace: none of these are in either of the general collections. Skelton, Gascoigne, and Habington, are not in Dr. Anderson's: Sackville not in Mr. Chalmers's.

It is not to be supposed that I could afford either time or eyesight for correcting the proof sheets of such a volume. But there are two errors of my own which I take this opportunity of acknowledging.

I have said "*it is certain* that Chaucer wrote rhythmically rather than metrically." Dr. Nott has, in my judgement, proved this, and I entertain

* The publishers beg to say that this evidence of the popularity of these poems induced them to desire their being formed into a collection in a single volume to be sold at a low price.