

B. A. English (Honours) Part-I

Paper-I (History of English Literature)

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Edmund Spenser: Life & Works- II

The Faery Queene: -

It is the most important work by Spenser. It appeared in instalments. The first three books were published in 1589, and the next three in 1596. Thus only six published during his lifetime and portions of seventh after his death. According to his own statement his plan was to write twelve books, each of them to be independent and self contained. Each book was to deal with the adventures of a particular knight representing some virtue. He explained his scheme in the preface of the work which is in the form of letter written to his friend Sir Walter Raleigh. Out of six books that we have, the first deals with the Knight of Red Cross, representing Holiness; the second with Sir Guyon, representing Temperance; the third with Britomartis, representing Chastity; the fourth with Cambell and Triamond, representing Friendship; the fifth with Artegall, representing Justice; and the sixth with Sir Calidore, representing Courtesy. Spenser chose Prince Arthur, the hero of the greatest British legend-cycle of chivalry, as the central figure for this work. He is to appear at the critical moments in the poem, and who in the end is to marry Gloriana, the Queen of 'Faerie-londe'. But unfortunately only half of the story completes as we have only six books completed. The poem is a didactic romance in which the poet through his

stories conveys the lessons he wished to do. It also directly represents the political and religious problems of the age.

It must be noted that the language in which *The Faery Queene* is written was not the actual language of Spenser's age. Following Chaucer he employed his own dialect and purposely made it archaic. Not only language, he also invented a new stanza form to suit his purpose, which is now known as Spenserian stanza. It is a nine line stanza comprising eight iambic pentameters lines and one iambic hexameter line. The last line is called Alexandrine. The rhyming scheme of this stanza form is *ababbcbcc*.

Sources:-

Edward Albert's *History of English Literature* (Fifth Edition)

W. H. Hudson's *An Outline History of English Literature*

W. J. Long's *English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the Life of the English-Speaking World*