AN EDITION, WITH FULL CRITICAL APPARATUS, OF THE
MIDDLE ENGLISH POEM PATIENCE.

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CONTENTS

Summary 4
Abbreviations 8

INTRODUCTION
The manuscript

History and general description 14
Forms of the letters 17
Capitalisation 18
Abbreviation 19
Word division 24
Stanza division 24
Editions 26

Relationship of the poem to the other poems in the MS 28

Date 30
Sources 33
Metre and alliteration 35

The poem and its background

Theme and structure 37

Literary quality 53

Relationship to the English homiletic tradition 61
Theological background

Language

Vocabulary

Phonology, pronunciation, and spelling

Accidence

Dialect

Notes to the Introduction

Note on the edited text

PATIENCE

NOTES TO PATIENCE

Note on the Glossary

GLOSSARY

APPENDIX

The Vulgate text of the Book of Jonah, and of the Beatitudes

BIBLIOGRAPHY
SUMMARY

The text of Patience is transcribed from Sir Israel Gollancz's facsimile edition of MS Cotton Nero A.x.; there are some new readings, notably Spynde, 104 (other editors, Sprude), and For-br, 530 (other editors, For Pg). The treatment of the text is conservative. Notes to the text, and a complete glossary, are provided.

The Introduction contains a description of the MS and a summary of what is known of its history. Questions of metre, sources, date, and the relationship of Patience to the other poems of the MS, are considered briefly. A study of the language of the poem reinforces the generally accepted view that Patience (together with the other Gawain-poems) is in a North-West Midland dialect. The phonology of the poem is treated on a phonetic basis.

The remainder of the Introduction is concerned with an examination of the poet's theme, a consideration of those literary (principally religious) traditions which have a bearing on the poem, and with critical discussion. It is held that Patience is fundamentally homiletic in character. The poet introduces his theme of the necessity of patience in his Prologue; then he re-tells the story of the Book of
Jonah, following the details of his Vulgate original faithfully but at the same time elaborating and altering emphases so as to relate the story closely to his homiletic theme. The first half of the poem (to l. 304) is, in itself, very successful, but Jonah's prayer (ll. 305-336) is mismanaged, nor does the last section of the poem at all match the first in subtlety and forcefulness; as a whole, the homily is rather out of balance. It is not in the central tradition of English vernacular homiletic writing, for while this tradition is essentially 'popular', Patience is a cultivated work. In his idea of patience and his treatment of the Jonah-story, the Patience-poet may not be strikingly original, but on the other hand he is not closely tied to the standard interpretations of the great medieval theologians.