

Western World Literature

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Preface

Of making prefaces there is no end, and all too often they seem more ornamental than useful. However, the compilers of Western World Literature are glad to avail themselves of the traditional means of launching books, hoping to demonstrate with some degree of conclusiveness that they have not been guilty of bringing into the world merely another anthology. They have for the past six years used most of the material herein contained for the purpose of giving students an introduction to World Literature which has proved adequate, not only for those specifically interested in English or American literature, but also for others whose special interests lay in some foreign field. While emphasis is placed on English literature, there are included enough Greek, Latin, French, German, Spanish, Scandinavian, American, and other authors to provide a foundation for study of the writings of all the nations represented. The reason for giving more attention to works originally written in English than their importance in World Literature might justify is that the compilers have prepared this volume to fit the needs of English-speaking students in American colleges. The fundamental idea back of the book is that of providing the student for whom a course in World Literature may be his only introduction to general literature a comprehensive view of the works of English and American authors together with an orientation to foreign literatures.

In compiling this volume the editors have constantly and conscientiously kept in mind the students for whom it was designed. It is in no sense academic, for it represents not only the results of years of experimentation and practice, but also the suggestions of many teachers and students who have been over the material as a whole or in part. It has been possible to meet the needs of students in the field only because the generosity of the publishers has permitted the compilation of the most extensive collection ever offered in a single volume. Four hundred sixty-seven selections present the work of one hundred ninety-two authors. But though the number of authors and selections is large, it has been possible to avoid mere sampling of authors and works. Most of the extracts from long compositions are extensive enough for real study, and in as many cases as possible they constitute complete units or approximate wholes. Nor has the choice of selections been confined to what might be called *belles lettres*. While all the material included has literary merits justifying its presence in an anthology, style has not been the primary consideration; a definite attempt has been made to include selections illustrating the development of ideas, and many have been chosen mainly on the basis of their intrinsic interest. This plan has resulted in the inclusion of all types of literature with the exception of history, oratory, and the novel, which have had to be left out because of the size of the volume. Approximately equal space has been allotted to poetry and to prose; drama receives adequate attention, both as regards quantity and variety; and no type represented has been slighted. Because of the difficulty of appraising recent literature, and to enable users of the book to suit their individual tastes, the representation of writers of the last century has been made especially full, and the whole body of material, although covering nearly three thousand years, tends to be distinctly modern in quantitative and qualitative emphasis. This last result has been achieved by careful revision of classical translations for the purpose of making them more easily understandable, and by the utilization of several translations made particularly for this volume.

Another feature is the flexible arrangement adopted, making possible the use of the book for a study of types of national literatures as well as for the study of World Literature as a whole. The plan is chronological in the main, with national literatures grouped within the periods, and type groups within the national groups. But the works of each author have been kept together, since they are most effectively studied in relation to one another, and works of authors having connections with each other are brought together as far as possible without disturbing too much the general arrangement.

Finally, the book may be considered as a brief history of literature, with period, national, type, and biographical introductions preceding each group of selections. By means of the cross-references provided, national and type introductions may be followed through, if the student desires to gain at one time a complete idea of any particular development in literature. Footnotes have been confined to matters essential to the understanding of the text; additional information about persons and places is given in the Encyclopaedia of Names. A definite attempt has been made to accord full credit to trans-

lators of selections from foreign languages. The date of each translation, when known, is given in a footnote, so that the student may understand peculiarities of style arising from adherence to earlier standards.

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