



A  
STUDENT'S HISTORY  
OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

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## PREFACE

THE problems involved in the preparation of a book like this are many ; their solution is often a matter of experiment. In attempting *A Student's History of English Literature*, the writer makes small claim to originality in the method of his compilation. The admirable text-books of Pancoast, of Moody and Lovett, of Halleck, and of Johnson, as well as the older standard histories, have suggested many points of practical utility ; and the writer hastens to acknowledge his indebtedness to his predecessors.

In the interest of clearness the author has adopted the simplest possible division of his subject — that according to centuries ; and has relied upon the subdivisions of his chapters to emphasize properly the important literary movements of each period. He has assumed that as many as possible of the essential facts in literary history should be presented to his readers. Not only should the student become acquainted with the principal movements and epochs in our literary development — not only should he be given the opportunity to gain the comprehensive view that includes forces and influences which initiate and modify them — but he should also have before him what may be called the mechanical details of the subject, — mere facts of literary record, neither picturesque nor inspiring in themselves, but indispensable even to an elementary knowledge of liter-

ary history. The writer has, therefore, followed the biographical method more closely than some authors who have briefly summarized their biographical studies and enlarged the scope of their technical criticism.

The *suggestions for study* have been prepared in the hope that they will assist both pupil and teacher in the *study* of literature. In their preparation the writer has also kept in mind the not impossible student out of school who, without professional assistance or direction, is ambitious to become really acquainted with literature as well as with its history. In these *suggestions* has been embodied such analysis and criticism as seemed reasonable in a text-book of this grade. It is probable that the courses suggested will be found in some instances more extended than the time allotted will permit; of course the teacher will be guided by his own discretion in their use. Will it not be advantageous occasionally to base the exercise entirely upon these suggested studies without requiring in the classroom a formal recitation of the biographical details given in the preliminary sketch? The author will welcome all criticism based upon practical experience with these notes.

Much of the material used in sections dealing with the romancers and novelists has been taken from chapters in the author's *Introduction to a Study of English Fiction*, published by D. C. Heath and Company. In the biographical sketch of Walter Scott and the study suggestions upon *Ivanhoe*, similar use has been made of material included in the school edition of *Ivanhoe* published by Scott, Foresman and Company. The author has drawn also, in the account of De Quincey,

upon the biographical introduction to his edition of De Quincey's *Revolt of the Tartars*, published by Ginn and Company. For the cordial permission of these houses to use this material, the writer desires to express his thanks.

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# A STUDENT'S HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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## CHAPTER I

### THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

- I. Britain and the English.
- II. Anglo-Saxon Poetry.
- III. Anglo-Saxon Prose.
- IV. The Nation and the Language.

By the term *Literature* is meant those written or printed compositions which preserve the thought and experience of a race recorded in artistic form. The element of beauty must be present in greater or less degree, and such works must be inspired by a purpose to afford intellectual pleasure to the one who reads them or hears them read. Books written to give information merely are not usually included in this term; text-books, scientific treatises, chronicles, reports, and similar compilations hardly belong to *literature*; but works in which the imaginative power of the writer is engaged, those which move or stir the feelings and appeal to the sense of beauty which is found in every intelligent mind — these make up the real literature of a people. Such are poems and dramas, prose works also, in which these elements

may find a place ; works which are distinguished by the quality called *style*, and which reflect more or less of the personality which gave them birth. Hence it has happened frequently that books designed to inform have also partaken of these other qualities as well, and have found a permanent place in the literature of our land ; such, for example, are the reviews of Macaulay, the political pamphlets of Swift and Burke, the histories of Gibbon and Hume, the narrative papers of De Quincey, the essays of Ruskin and Carlyle.

The history of our English Literature begins almost coincidently with the arrival and settlement of large companies of our Teutonic ancestors in Britain about 450 A. D.

#### I. BRITAIN AND THE ENGLISH.

So far as history records, the earliest inhabitants of Britain were a Celtic race, the Cymri. These people were not unknown to the Romans even in very early times ; in B. C. 55 the island was invaded by Julius Cæsar, although at that period no permanent colony was established. In the next century new invasions followed, and for many years the island was a frequent battle-ground for the Roman legions as they advanced in their conquest of the world. Gradually their victories in Britain carried civilization well to the north, until the Roman frontier was marked by a great line of defense, crossing from the Firth of Forth to the Clyde. For four hundred years the Roman occupation continued. Britain became a colony ; native citizens of Rome settled there, and their descendants remained. Permanent camps were established in places of vantage ; splendid military roads were built traversing the island ; the fields were tilled ; the mines were worked ; seaports were developed ; the exports of

Britain  
and the  
Romans.

Britain became an important factor in the commerce of Europe. Even the luxuries of Roman life were not lacking in wealthy fortified towns like York, Lincoln, and London. However, the legions were withdrawn from Britain in 410 A. D. in order to defend the empire in Italy from the incursions of the Goths; and the decay of Roman civilization began. The rapidity of its disappearance is noteworthy. Besides the solid paving of their famous roads and the remains of their massive walls, scarcely a trace of this domination is to be found. Only a half-dozen words remain in our language as the undisputed heritage of that long period to remind us that the Latin tongue was during these four hundred years the native speech of the rulers of the land. The names of many English towns, like Chester, Winchester, Worcester, Gloucester, Lancaster, and Doncaster, preserve the Latin *castra*, a camp; the English *street* (as in *Watling Street*, the name of an ancient Roman road running north from Dover to Chester) represents, doubtless, the Latin *strata via*, a paved way; while *portus*, *fossa*, *villa*, and *vallum* may at this time have supplied the words which give us modern *port*, *fosse*, *villa*, and *wall*. The native Celts had been partially christianized as early as the third century; by the beginning of the fifth the Church in Britain had attained a decided growth, and was an institution of considerable power.

Upon the withdrawal of the Roman arms, the southern part of the island was speedily overrun by fierce tribes from the highlands of the <sup>The Teutons.</sup> north, and by other tribes no less fierce from Ireland on the west. Invasions by the Northmen and by the Germans from the shores of the North Sea and the Baltic were frequent also on the eastern coast. Particularly these last, appearing suddenly and settling

with their white-winged ships, like swift and merciless birds of prey, were a constant menace to the dwellers along the coast, whose homes they burned, and whose property they stole away. In 449 the Britons invited aid from one of these same Teutonic tribes, and in that year a colony from Jutland, under the twin chiefs Hengest and Horsa, settled on the island of Thanet off the coast of Kent. But the Jutes themselves soon turned invaders, and as fleet followed fleet, bringing successive bands of their kinsfolk, Kent also became their possession, together with various tracts along the southern coast. Perhaps because of the success of these first-comers, perhaps because of the crowding of vigorous warlike neighbors, representatives of two other tribes, the Angles and the Saxons, peoples nearly related to the Jutes, joined in the general migration of the tribes. Dwellers originally in the low-coast countries of North Germany bordering on the North Sea, inhabiting a part of the Danish peninsula and territory extending westward as far as the mouth of the Emms, a region beset with fog and damp, and constantly exposed to the incursions of the sea, the life of these hardy Teutons was one continuous struggle with storm and flood. No wonder that in their eyes the island of Britain appeared a bright and winsome land, or that they were attracted to its sunnier shore. The ocean ways had long been familiar to them, and for generations before the final movement their adventurous bands of sea-rovers had pillaged and harried the British coasts. These tribes had much in common: they were of one parent stock, their language was practically one, their social customs and institutions were alike. Their religion was the common religion of the north. The names of our week days preserve still the memory of their gods. Wednesday is the day sacred to Woden,

the head of their mythology and the ancestor of their kings; Thor, the god of thunder and storm, is remembered in Thursday; Frig's name appears in Friday; while Tuesday takes the name of Tiw, the god of darkness and death. Prominent in their mythology is Wyrð, the genius of fate: "Goes ever Wyrð as it will," declares the hero of the epic *Beowulf*. Yet, pagans though they were, savage to cruelty in feud and war, boastful of speech, heavy eaters and deep drinkers, our Teutonic forefathers were at the same time a sturdy, healthful race, maintaining customs that were honest and wholesome, morally sound, and in many ways superior to the more cultured peoples of southern Europe.

As we have seen, the Jutes populated the eastern county of Kent; they also established settle- **The Home-**  
ments here and there on the southern coast. **Making.**

The Angles settled in the country north of that occupied by the Jutes, and built up a great kingdom known as East Anglia, a division of which into Northfolk and Southfolk is still indicated in the shires of Norfolk and Suffolk; still farther north did this English conquest move, until even Northumbria was under the English power. Meanwhile the Saxons had not lagged behind their neighbors in the conquest of the island. Successive migrations of this people had already won more than a foothold upon the southern shore, and different divisions of the tribe shared in the possession of this part of South Britain. East Saxons ruled the district lying between Kent and Suffolk, which is now called Essex; to the south of them lay the domain of the South Saxons, who have left their name in Sussex; while the more powerful kindred of the West Saxons covered the territory as far west as Cornwall, and won in time the dominion of all South England, establish-

ing the great kingdom of Wessex. Thus the history of Britain from the beginning of the fifth century to the beginning of the seventh is a confused and bloody chronicle of invasion and conquest. The Celtic race — that portion of it which was not absorbed by intermingling with the invaders — was enslaved or driven toward the west and north ; those who found an abiding place among the mountains of the west were given by their Teuton conquerors the name of *Welsh*, or strangers. At the beginning of the ninth century there were four principal divisions of the English people : there were (1) the English of the north, covering the whole of Northumberland, and (2) the English of East Anglia in Norfolk and Suffolk ; Kent was fairly included within the borders of (3) the West Saxons, while (4) the central division of the island, also Anglian, surrounded on three sides by these other kingdoms, and on the west by the Welsh, was known as Mercia, the country of the March, or the border.

During the ninth century a new spoiler appeared on the English coasts. The Danes began their forays on these earlier invaders, and the English peoples, who for two hundred years had been contending among themselves for leadership, were finally united into one nation under Ecgberht, King of the West Saxons, and still more securely under the great King Alfred (871–901) through the force of a common peril and common need.

These long centuries of conquest and adjustment in the history of these related German tribes may be designated as the Anglo-Saxon Period ; it extends from the arrival of Hengest and Horsa in 449 to the invasion of the Normans under William in 1066, and thus covers the space of a little more than six hundred years.



## II. ANGLO-SAXON POETRY.

These fair-skinned, blue-eyed English folk were, from the first, lovers of song and story. **The Scop.** The very relics of their earliest art preserve the scene and spirit of their recreation. Fierce in fight, often merciless in the pursuit of a conquered foe, they loved the gleam of their own hearth-fire and the coarse comfort of the great Saxon hall, with its heavy tables and crowded benches. Here at night the troop gathered, carousing, in some interval of peace. The earl himself, at the high table set crosswise at one end of the huge hall, had before him his noisy band of vassals thronging the mead-benches. The blaze of the hearth-fire in their midst lights up the faces of these ruddy, strong-limbed warriors; it flashes on spear and axe, and is reflected from the armor, curiously woven of link-mail, which grotesquely decorates the walls, half hidden by shaggy skins of wolf and bear. The noisy feasting is followed by a lull. The harp appears. Perhaps the lord of the household himself receives it, and in vigorous tones chants in time with the twanging chords some epic of his ancestors, or boasts of his own fierce deeds. Perhaps the instrument is passed from hand to hand whilethane afterthane unlocks the "word-hoard" of his memory as he may. But most frequently it is the professional scop, or gleeman, who strikes the rhythmic notes, and takes up the burden of the tale; he has a seat of honor near his lord; to him the rough audience listens spellbound; he sways their wild spirits at his will.

"There was chant and harp-clang together  
 In presence of Healfdene's battle-scarred heroes.  
 The glee-wood was welcomed, tales oft recounted  
 When Hrothgar's scop, delight of the dwelling  
 After the mead-bout, took up the telling.

. . . . .

The song was sung out  
The gleeman's tale ended. Spirits soared high  
Carousing reëchoed." <sup>1</sup>

*Widsith*, or Far-farer, may have been the name of such a singer, whose fame is preserved in what is apparently the very oldest of Old English poems extant. It is preserved in the so-called *Exeter Book*, a priceless volume of Anglo-Saxon manuscript, presented to the Cathedral at Exeter by Bishop Leofric (1046-73), still in the possession of the cathedral. Sometimes called *The Scop*, or *The Traveller's Song*, this ancient poem catalogues the wanderings of the gleeman.

"Widsith unlocked his word-hoard ; and then spake  
He among men whose travel over earth  
Was farthest through the tribes and through the folks :  
Treasure to be remembered came to him  
Often in hall.  
Among the Myrgings, nobles gave him berth.  
In his first journey he, with Ealhild,  
The pure peace-maker, sought the fierce king's home,  
Eastward of Ongle, home of Eormanric,  
The wrathful treaty-breaker." <sup>2</sup>

Hermanric, the great king of the Goths, died before the close of the fourth century ; and if Widsith told his own story, as parts of the poem indicate, we have here a composition dating from the period before the migration, although the long catalogue of kings and heroes contains some names which mark a later generation and prove the interpolation of a later hand.

"Thus wandering, they who shape songs for men  
Pass over many lands, and tell their need,  
And speak their thanks, and ever, south or north,  
Meet some one skilled in songs and free in gifts,  
Who would be raised among his friends to fame  
And do brave deeds till light and life are gone.

<sup>1</sup> *Beowulf*, ll. 1063-1067, 1159-1161.

<sup>2</sup> Morley's translation, *English Writers*, vol. ii.