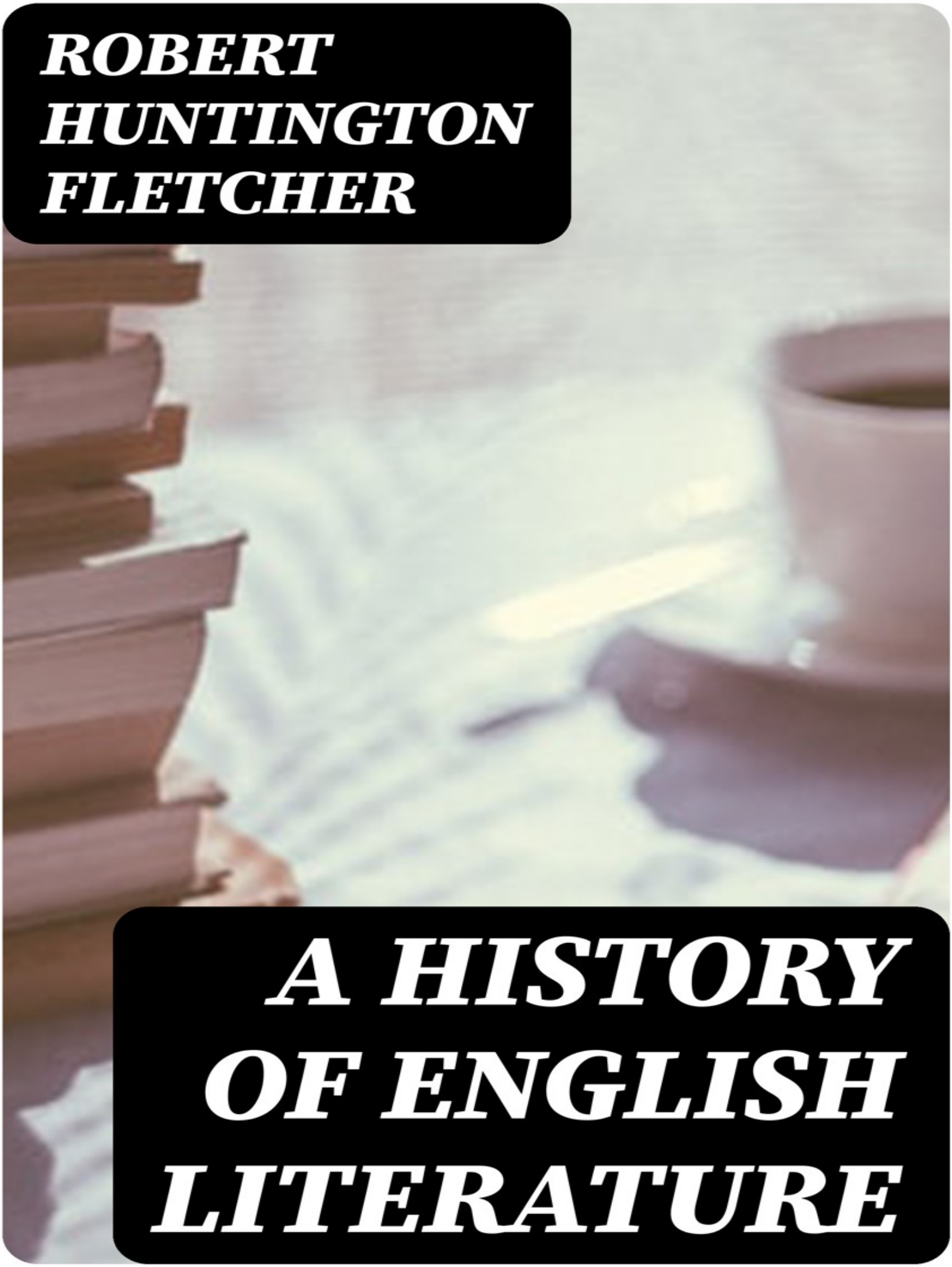

ROBERT HUNTINGTON FLETCHER

A HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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A History of English Literature

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TO MY MOTHER TO WHOM I OWE A LIFETIME OF A MOTHER'S MOST SELF-SACRIFICING DEVOTION

PREFACE

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This book aims to provide a general manual of English Literature for students in colleges and universities and others beyond the high-school age. The first purposes of every such book must be to outline the development of the literature with due regard to national life, and to give appreciative interpretation of the work of the most important authors. I have written the present volume because I have found no other that, to my mind, combines satisfactory accomplishment of these ends with a selection of authors sufficiently limited for clearness and with adequate accuracy and fulness of details, biographical and other. A manual, it seems to me, should supply a systematic statement of the important facts, so that the greater part of the student's time, in class and without, may be left free for the study of the literature itself.

I hope that the book may prove adaptable to various methods and conditions of work. Experience has suggested

the brief introductory statement of main literary principles, too often taken for granted by teachers, with much resulting haziness in the student's mind. The list of assignments and questions at the end is intended, of course, to be freely treated. I hope that the list of available inexpensive editions of the chief authors may suggest a practical method of providing the material, especially for colleges which can provide enough copies for class use. Poets, of course, may be satisfactorily read in volumes of, selections; but to me, at least, a book of brief extracts from twenty or a hundred prose authors is an absurdity. Perhaps I may venture to add that personally I find it advisable to pass hastily over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and so gain as much time as possible for the nineteenth.

R. H. F.

August, 1916.

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PRELIMINARY. HOW TO STUDY AND JUDGE LITERATURE

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TWO ASPECTS OF LITERARY STUDY. Such a study of Literature as that for which the present book is designed includes two purposes, contributing to a common end. In the first place (I), the student must gain some general knowledge of the conditions out of which English literature has come into being, as a whole and during its successive periods, that is of the external facts of one sort or another without which it cannot be understood. This means chiefly (1) tracing in a general way, from period to period, the social life of the nation, and (2) getting some acquaintance with the lives of the more important authors. The principal thing, however (II), is the direct study of the literature itself. This study in turn should aim first at an *understanding* of the literature as an expression of the authors' views of life and of their personalities and especially as a portrayal and interpretation of the life of their periods and of all life as they have seen it; it should aim further at an *appreciation* of each literary work as a product of Fine Art, appealing with peculiar power both to our minds and to our emotions, not least to the sense of Beauty and the whole higher nature. In the present book, it should perhaps be added, the word Literature is generally interpreted in the strict sense, as including only writing of permanent significance and beauty.

The outline discussion of literary qualities which follows is intended to help in the formation of intelligent and appreciative judgments.

SUBSTANCE AND FORM. The most thoroughgoing of all distinctions in literature, as in the other Fine Arts, is that between (1) Substance, the essential content and meaning of the work, and (2) Form, the manner in which it is expressed (including narrative structure, external style, in poetry verse-form, and many related matters). This distinction should be kept in mind, but in what follows it will not be to our purpose to emphasize it.

GENERAL MATTERS. 1. First and always in considering any piece of literature a student should ask himself the question already implied: Does it present a true portrayal of life—of the permanent elements in all life and in human nature, of the life or thought of its own particular period, and (in most sorts of books) of the persons, real or imaginary, with whom it deals? If it properly accomplishes this main purpose, when the reader finishes it he should feel that his understanding of life and of people has been increased and broadened. But it should always be remembered that truth is quite as much a matter of general spirit and impression as of literal accuracy in details of fact. The essential question is not, Is the presentation of life and character perfect in a photographic fashion? but Does it convey the *underlying* realities? 2. Other things being equal, the value of a book, and especially of an author's whole work, is proportional to its range, that is to the breadth and variety of the life and characters which it presents. 3. A student should not form his judgments merely from what is technically called the *dogmatic* point of view, but should try rather to adopt that of *historical* criticism. This means that he should take into account the limitations imposed on

every author by the age in which he lived. If you find that the poets of the Anglo-Saxon 'Béowulf' have given a clear and interesting picture of the life of our barbarous ancestors of the sixth or seventh century A. D., you should not blame them for a lack of the finer elements of feeling and expression which after a thousand years of civilization distinguish such delicate spirits as Keats and Tennyson. 4. It is often important to consider also whether the author's personal method is *objective*, which means that he presents life and character without bias; or *subjective*, coloring his work with his personal tastes, feelings and impressions. Subjectivity may be a falsifying influence, but it may also be an important virtue, adding intimacy, charm, or force. 5. Further, one may ask whether the author has a deliberately formed theory of life; and if so how it shows itself, and, of course, how sound it is.

INTELLECT, EMOTION, IMAGINATION, AND RELATED QUALITIES. Another main question in judging any book concerns the union which it shows: (1) of the Intellectual faculty, that which enables the author to understand and control his material and present it with directness and clearness; and (2) of the Emotion, which gives warmth, enthusiasm, and appealing human power. The relative proportions of these two faculties vary greatly in books of different sorts. Exposition (as in most essays) cannot as a rule be permeated with so much emotion as narration or, certainly, as lyric poetry. In a great book the relation of the two faculties will of course properly correspond to form and spirit. Largely a matter of Emotion is the Personal Sympathy of the author for his characters, while Intellect has a large

share in Dramatic Sympathy, whereby the author enters truly into the situations and feelings of any character, whether he personally likes him or not. Largely made up of Emotion are: (1) true Sentiment, which is fine feeling of any sort, and which should not degenerate into Sentimentalism (exaggerated tender feeling); (2) Humor, the instinctive sense for that which is amusing; and (3) the sense for Pathos. Pathos differs from Tragedy in that Tragedy (whether in a drama or elsewhere) is the suffering of persons who are able to struggle against it, Pathos the suffering of those persons (children, for instance) who are merely helpless victims. Wit, the brilliant perception of incongruities, is a matter of Intellect and the complement of Humor.

IMAGINATION AND FANCY. Related to Emotion also and one of the most necessary elements in the higher forms of literature is Imagination, the faculty of making what is absent or unreal seem present and real, and revealing the hidden or more subtile forces of life. Its main operations may be classified under three heads: (1) Pictorial and Presentative. It presents to the author's mind, and through him to the minds of his readers, all the elements of human experience and life (drawing from his actual experience or his reading). 2. Selective, Associative, and Constructive. From the unorganized material thus brought clearly to the author's consciousness Imagination next selects the details which can be turned to present use, and proceeds to combine them, uniting scattered traits and incidents, perhaps from widely different sources, into new characters, stories, scenes, and ideas. The characters of 'Silas Marner,' for example, never had an actual existence, and the precise

incidents of the story never took place in just that order and fashion, but they were all constructed by the author's imagination out of what she had observed of many real persons and events, and so make, in the most significant sense, a true picture of life. 3. Penetrative and Interpretative. In its subtlest operations, further, Imagination penetrates below the surface and comprehends and brings to light the deeper forces and facts—the real controlling instincts of characters, the real motives for actions, and the relations of material things to those of the spiritual world and of Man to Nature and God.

Fancy may for convenience be considered as a distinct faculty, though it is really the lighter, partly superficial, aspect of Imagination. It deals with things not essentially or significantly true, amusing us with striking or pleasing suggestions, such as seeing faces in the clouds, which vanish almost as soon as they are discerned. Both Imagination and Fancy naturally express themselves, often and effectively, through the use of metaphors, similes, and suggestive condensed language. In painful contrast to them stands commonplaceness, always a fatal fault.

IDEALISM, ROMANCE, AND REALISM. Among the most important literary qualities also are Idealism, Romance, and Realism. Realism, in the broad sense, means simply the presentation of the actual, depicting life as one sees it, objectively, without such selection as aims deliberately to emphasize some particular aspects, such as the pleasant or attractive ones. (Of course all literature is necessarily based on the ordinary facts of life, which we may call by the more general name of Reality.) Carried to the extreme, Realism

may become ignoble, dealing too frankly or in unworthy spirit with the baser side of reality, and in almost all ages this sort of Realism has actually attempted to assert itself in literature. Idealism, the tendency opposite to Realism, seeks to emphasize the spiritual and other higher elements, often to bring out the spiritual values which lie beneath the surface. It is an optimistic interpretation of life, looking for what is good and permanent beneath all the surface confusion. Romance may be called Idealism in the realm of sentiment. It aims largely to interest and delight, to throw over life a pleasing glamor; it generally deals with love or heroic adventure; and it generally locates its scenes and characters in distant times and places, where it can work unhampered by our consciousness of the humdrum actualities of our daily experience. It may always be asked whether a writer of Romance makes his world seem convincingly real as we read or whether he frankly abandons all plausibility. The presence or absence of a supernatural element generally makes an important difference. Entitled to special mention, also, is spiritual Romance, where attention is centered not on external events, which may here be treated in somewhat shadowy fashion, but on the deeper questions of life. Spiritual Romance, therefore, is essentially idealistic.

DRAMATIC POWER. Dramatic power, in general, means the presentation of life with the vivid active reality of life and character which especially distinguishes the acted drama. It is, of course, one of the main things to be desired in most narrative; though sometimes the effect sought may be something different, as, for instance, in romance and

poetry, an atmosphere of dreamy beauty. In a drama, and to some extent in other forms of narrative, dramatic power culminates in the ability to bring out the great crises with supreme effectiveness.

CHARACTERS. There is, generally speaking, no greater test of an author's skill than his knowledge and presentation of characters. We should consider whether he makes them (1) merely caricatures, or (2) type characters, standing for certain general traits of human nature but not convincingly real or especially significant persons, or (3) genuine individuals with all the inconsistencies and half-revealed tendencies that in actual life belong to real personality. Of course in the case of important characters, the greater the genuine individuality the greater the success. But with secondary characters the principles of emphasis and proportion generally forbid very distinct individualization; and sometimes, especially in comedy (drama), truth of character is properly sacrificed to other objects, such as the main effect. It may also be asked whether the characters are simple, as some people are in actual life, or complex, like most interesting persons; whether they develop, as all real people must under the action of significant experience, or whether the author merely presents them in brief situations or lacks the power to make them anything but stationary. If there are several of them it is a further question whether the author properly contrasts them in such a way as to secure interest. And a main requisite is that he shall properly motivate their actions, that is make their actions result naturally from their characters, either their controlling traits or their temporary impulses.

STRUCTURE. In any work of literature there should be definite structure. This requires, (1) Unity, (2) Variety, (3) Order, (4) Proportion, and (5) due Emphasis of parts. Unity means that everything included in the work ought to contribute directly or indirectly to the main effect. Very often a definite theme may be found about which the whole work centers, as for instance in 'Macbeth,' The Ruin of a Man through Yielding to Evil. Sometimes, however, as in a lyric poem, the effect intended may be the rendering or creation of a mood, such as that of happy content, and in that case the poem may not have an easily expressible concrete theme.

Order implies a proper beginning, arrangement, progress, and a definite ending. In narrative, including all stories whether in prose or verse and also the drama, there should be traceable a Line of Action, comprising generally: (1) an Introduction, stating the necessary preliminaries; (2) the Initial Impulse, the event which really sets in motion this particular story; (3) a Rising Action; (4) a Main Climax. Sometimes (generally, in Comedy) the Main Climax is identical with the Outcome; sometimes (regularly in Tragedy) the Main Climax is a turning point and comes near the middle of the story. In that case it really marks the beginning of the success of the side which is to be victorious at the end (in Tragedy the side opposed to the hero) and it initiates (5) a Falling Action, corresponding to the Rising Action, and sometimes of much the same length, wherein the losing side struggles to maintain itself. After (6) the Outcome, may come (7) a brief tranquilizing Conclusion. The Antecedent Action is that part of the characters'

experiences which precedes the events of the story. If it has a bearing, information about it must be given either in the Introduction or incidentally later on. Sometimes, however, the structure just indicated may not be followed; a story may begin in the middle, and the earlier part may be told later on in retrospect, or incidentally indicated, like the Antecedent Action.

If in any narrative there is one or more Secondary Action, a story which might be separated from the Main Action and viewed as complete in itself, criticism should always ask whether the Main and Secondary Actions are properly unified. In the strictest theory there should be an essential connection between them; for instance, they may illustrate different and perhaps contrasting aspects of the general theme. Often, however, an author introduces a Secondary Action merely for the sake of variety or to increase the breadth of his picture—in order to present a whole section of society instead of one narrow stratum or group. In such cases, he must generally be judged to have succeeded if he has established an apparent unity, say by mingling the same characters in the two actions, so that readers are not readily conscious of the lack of real structural unity.

Other things to be considered in narrative are: Movement, which, unless for special reasons, should be rapid, at least not slow and broken; Suspense; general Interest; and the questions whether or not there are good situations and good minor climaxes, contributing to the interest; and whether or not motivation is good, apart from that which results from character, that is whether events are properly represented as happening in accordance with the

law of cause and effect which inexorably governs actual life. But it must always be remembered that in such writing as Comedy and Romance the strict rules of motivation must be relaxed, and indeed in all literature, even in Tragedy, the idealization, condensation, and heightening which are the proper methods of Art require them to be slightly modified.

DESCRIPTIVE POWER. Usually secondary in appearance but of vital artistic importance, is the author's power of description, of picturing both the appearance of his characters and the scenes which make his background and help to give the tone of his work. Perhaps four subjects of description may be distinguished: 1. External Nature. Here such questions as the following are of varying importance, according to the character and purpose of the work: Does the author know and care for Nature and frequently introduce descriptions? Are the descriptions concrete and accurate, or on the other hand purposely general (impressionistic) or carelessly superficial? Do they give fine variations of appearance and impression, such as delicate shiftings of light and shade and delicate tones of color? Are they powerfully sensuous, that is do they appeal strongly to the physical senses, of sight (color, light, and movement), sound (including music), smell, taste, touch, and general physical sensation? How great is their variety? Do they deal with many parts of Nature, for example the sea, mountains, plains, forests, and clouds? Is the love of external beauty a passion with the author? What is the author's attitude toward Nature—(1) does he view Nature in a purely objective way, as a mass of material things, a series of material phenomena or a mere embodiment of sensuous

beauty; or (2) is there symbolism or mysticism in his attitude, that is—does he view Nature with awe as a spiritual power; or (3) is he thoroughly subjective, reading his own moods into Nature or using Nature chiefly for the expression of his moods? Or again, does the author describe with merely expository purpose, to make the background of his work clear? 2. Individual Persons and Human Life: Is the author skilful in descriptions of personal appearance and dress? Does he produce his impressions by full enumeration of details, or by emphasis on prominent or characteristic details? How often and how fully does he describe scenes of human activity (such as a street scene, a social gathering, a procession on the march)? 3. How frequent and how vivid are his descriptions of the inanimate background of human life—buildings, interiors of rooms, and the rest? 4. Does the author skilfully use description to create the general atmosphere in which he wishes to invest his work—an atmosphere of cheerfulness, of mystery, of activity, or any of a hundred other moods?

STYLE. Style in general means 'manner of writing.' In the broad sense it includes everything pertaining to the author's spirit and point of view—almost everything which is here being discussed. More narrowly considered, as 'external style,' it designates the author's use of language. Questions to be asked in regard to external style are such as these: Is it good or bad, careful or careless, clear and easy or confused and difficult; simple or complex; terse and forceful (perhaps colloquial) or involved and stately; eloquent, balanced, rhythmical; vigorous, or musical, languid, delicate and decorative; varied or monotonous; plain or figurative;

poor or rich in connotation and poetic suggestiveness; beautiful, or only clear and strong? Are the sentences mostly long or short; periodic or loose; mostly of one type, such as the declarative, or with frequent introduction of such other forms as the question and the exclamation?

POETRY. Most of what has thus far been said applies to both Prose and Poetry. But in Poetry, as the literature especially characterized in general by high Emotion, Imagination, and Beauty, finer and more delicate effects are to be sought than in Prose. Poetry, generally speaking, is the expression of the deeper nature; it belongs peculiarly to the realm of the spirit. On the side of poetical expression such imaginative figures of speech as metaphors and similes, and such devices as alliteration, prove especially helpful. It may be asked further of poetry, whether the meter and stanza structure are appropriate to the mood and thought and so handled as to bring out the emotion effectively; and whether the sound is adapted to the sense (for example, musical where the idea is of peace or quiet beauty). If the sound of the words actually imitates the sound of the thing indicated, the effect is called Onomatopoeia. Among kinds of poetry, according to form, the most important are: (1) Narrative, which includes many subordinate forms, such as the Epic. (2) Lyric. Lyric poems are expressions of spontaneous emotion and are necessarily short. (3) Dramatic, including not merely the drama but all poetry of vigorous action. (4) Descriptive, like Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village' and Tennyson's 'Dream of Fair Women.' Minor kinds are: (5) Satiric; and (6) Didactic.

Highly important in poetry is Rhythm, but the word means merely 'flow,' so that rhythm belongs to prose as well as to poetry. Good rhythm is merely a pleasing succession of sounds. Meter, the distinguishing formal mark of poetry and all verse, is merely rhythm which is regular in certain fundamental respects, roughly speaking is rhythm in which the recurrence of stressed syllables or of feet with definite time-values is regular. There is no proper connection either in spelling or in meaning between rhythm and rime (which is generally misspelled 'rhyme'). The adjective derived from 'rhythm' is 'rhythmical'; there is no adjective from 'rime' except 'rimed.' The word 'verse' in its general sense includes all writing in meter. Poetry is that verse which has real literary merit. In a very different and narrower sense 'verse' means 'line' (never properly 'stanza').

CLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM. Two of the most important contrasting tendencies of style in the general sense are Classicism and Romanticism. Classicism means those qualities which are most characteristic of the best literature of Greece and Rome. It is in fact partly identical with Idealism. It aims to express the inner truth or central principles of things, without anxiety for minor details, and it is by nature largely intellectual in quality, though not by any means to the exclusion of emotion. In outward form, therefore, it insists on correct structure, restraint, careful finish and avoidance of all excess. 'Paradise Lost,' Arnold's 'Sohrab and Rustum,' and Addison's essays are modern examples. Romanticism, which in general prevails in modern literature, lays most emphasis on independence and fulness

of expression and on strong emotion, and it may be comparatively careless of form. The Classical style has well been called sculpturesque, the Romantic picturesque. The virtues of the Classical are exquisiteness and incisive significance; of the Romantic, richness and splendor. The dangers of the Classical are coldness and formality; of the Romantic, over-luxuriance, formlessness and excess of emotion. [Footnote: All these matters, here merely suggested, are fully discussed in the present author's 'Principles of Composition and Literature.' (The A. S. Barnes Co.)]

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It is not a part of the plan of this book to present any extended bibliography, but there are certain reference books to which the student's attention should be called. 'Chambers' Cyclopedia of English Literature,' edition of 1910, published in the United States by the J. B. Lippincott Co. in three large volumes at $15.00 (generally sold at about half that price) is in most parts very satisfactory. Garnett and Gosse's 'Illustrated History of English Literature, four volumes, published by the Macmillan Co. at $20.00 and in somewhat simpler form by Grosset and Dunlap at $12.00 (sold for less) is especially valuable for its illustrations. Jusserand's 'Literary History of the English People' (to 1642, G. P. Putnam's Sons, three volumes, $3.50 a volume) should be mentioned. Courthope's 'History of English Poetry' (Macmillan, six volumes, $3.25 a volume), is full and after the first volume good. 'The Cambridge History of English Literature,' now nearing completion in fourteen volumes (G. P. Putnam's Sons, $2.50 a volume) is the largest and in most parts the most scholarly general work in the field, but is generally too technical except for special students. The short biographies of many of the chief English authors in the English Men of Letters Series (Macmillan, 30 and 75 cents a volume) are generally admirable. For appreciative criticism of some of the great poets the essays of Lowell and of Matthew Arnold are among the best. Frederick Byland's 'Chronological Outlines of English Literature' (Macmillan, $1.00) is very useful for reference though now much in need

of revision. It is much to be desired that students should have at hand for consultation some good short history of England, such as that of S. E. Gardiner (Longmans, Green, and Co.) or that of J. R. Green.

CHAPTER I

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PERIOD I. THE BRITONS AND THE ANGLO-SAXONS. TO A. D. 1066.

FOREWORD. The two earliest of the nine main divisions of English Literature are by far the longest—taken together are longer than all the others combined—but we shall pass rather rapidly over them. This is partly because the amount of thoroughly great literature which they produced is small, and partly because for present-day readers it is in effect a foreign literature, written in early forms of English or in foreign languages, so that to-day it is intelligible only through special study or in translation.

THE BRITONS. The present English race has gradually shaped itself out of several distinct peoples which successively occupied or conquered the island of Great Britain. The earliest one of these peoples which need here be mentioned belonged to the Celtic family and was itself divided into two branches. The Goidels or Gaels were settled in the northern part of the island, which is now Scotland, and were the ancestors of the present Highland Scots. On English literature they exerted little or no influence until a late period. The Britons, from whom the present Welsh are

descended, inhabited what is now England and Wales; and they were still further subdivided, like most barbarous peoples, into many tribes which were often at war with one another. Though the Britons were conquered and chiefly supplanted later on by the Anglo-Saxons, enough of them, as we shall see, were spared and intermarried with the victors to transmit something of their racial qualities to the English nation and literature.

The characteristics of the Britons, which are those of the Celtic family as a whole, appear in their history and in the scanty late remains of their literature. Two main traits include or suggest all the others: first, a vigorous but fitful emotionalism which rendered them vivacious, lovers of novelty, and brave, but ineffective in practical affairs; second, a somewhat fantastic but sincere and delicate sensitiveness to beauty. Into impetuous action they were easily hurried; but their momentary ardor easily cooled into fatalistic despondency. To the mysterious charm of Nature—of hills and forests and pleasant breezes; to the loveliness and grace of meadow-flowers or of a young man or a girl; to the varied sheen of rich colors—to all attractive objects of sight and sound and motion their fancy responded keenly and joyfully; but they preferred chiefly to weave these things into stories and verse of supernatural romance or vague suggestiveness; for substantial work of solider structure either in life or in literature they possessed comparatively little faculty. Here is a description (exceptionally beautiful, to be sure) from the story 'Kilhwch and Olwen':

'The maid was clothed in a robe of flame-colored silk, and about her neck was a collar of ruddy gold, on which were precious emeralds and rubies. More yellow was her head than the flowers of the broom, and her skin was whiter than the foam of the wave, and fairer were her hands and her fingers than the blossoms of the wood anemone amidst the spray of the meadow fountain. The eye of the trained hawk, the glance of the three-mewed falcon, was not brighter than hers. Her bosom was more snowy than the breast of the white swan, her cheeks were redder than the reddest roses. Who beheld her was filled with her love. Pour white trefoils sprang up wherever she trod. And therefore was she called Olwen.'

This charming fancifulness and delicacy of feeling is apparently the great contribution of the Britons to English literature; from it may perhaps be descended the fairy scenes of Shakspere and possibly to some extent the lyrical music of Tennyson.

THE ROMAN OCCUPATION. Of the Roman conquest and occupation of Britain (England and Wales) we need only make brief mention, since it produced virtually no effect on English literature. The fact should not be forgotten that for over three hundred years, from the first century A. D. to the beginning of the fifth, the island was a Roman province, with Latin as the language of the ruling class of Roman immigrants, who introduced Roman civilization and later on Christianity, to the Britons of the towns and plains. But the interest of the Romans in the island was centered on other things than writing, and the great bulk of the Britons themselves seem to have been only superficially affected by