

**LITERATURE
PRIMER. ENGLISH
LITERATURE**

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Literature Primer. English Literature by Stopford Brooke

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STOPFORD BROOKE

**LITERATURE
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LITERATURE PRIMER, *edited*

by JOHN RICHARD GREEN, M. A.

ENGLISH.

Literature Primer.

Edited by JOHN RICHARD GREEN, M.A.

ENGLISH
LITERATURE.

BY THE

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PRIMER

OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

WRITERS BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST, 670—1066.

1. English Literature begins in England about 670.
2. War Poems.—*Beowulf*, and *Fight at Finnesburg before 800*.
Song of Brunanburh, 937. *Fight at Maldon, 991*. Odes in A. S. Chronicle.
3. Religious Poems.—*Cædmon's Paraphrase of the Bible, 670*. Poems in the Exeter and the Vercelli book.
4. *The Traveller's Song—the Lament of Deor*—inserted into Exeter book from pagan MSS.
5. PROSE.—*Bæda's translation of St. John, 735*. King *Ælfred's literary and historical work during his two times of peace, 880—893 and 897—901*. *Ælfric's Translations, 990—995*. *The English Chronicle, ends 1154*.

1. **What Literature is.**—Before we can enter on the story of our English Literature we must try to understand what literature itself is. By literature we mean the written thoughts and feelings of intelligent men and women arranged in a way which will give pleasure to the reader. Literature has to do therefore, so far as its subject goes, with all the things about which we learn, and think, and feel. As to its form, it has two large divisions—one of which is called Prose Literature and the other Poetical Literature.

2. **Prose Literature.**—There are many kinds of prose literature. Men write in prose about philosophy, or history, or art, or religion, or science, or manners, or the lives of men. Prose literature then means the written thoughts, learning, and feelings of men on all these subjects. Everything in fact that is written of any kind, except poetry, may be called prose. But we must not think that everything that is called prose is literature. We cannot say, for instance, that a ship's log, or a catalogue, or the daily journal of a traveller, is to be called literature simply because it is written in prose. Writing is not literature unless it gives to the reader a pleasure which arises, not only from the things said, but from the way in which they are said, and that pleasure is only given when the words are carefully or curiously or beautifully put together into sentences. To do this in a special way is to have what we call style. As much art must be used in building sentences up out of words as in building houses, if we wish the prose we write to be worthy of the name of literature. And just as in looking at different kinds of houses, we say that one is built in a strong way, another in a simple way, another in an ornamental way, so we say in reading books written by different men that one is in a simple style, another in a grand, another in an eloquent style. Again, in looking at a large building, we see not only the way in which it is built, but also the character and the mind of the builder. So also in a prose book which is fit to belong to literature we ought to feel that there is a distinct mind and character who is speaking to us through the style, that is, through the way in which the words are put together. Prose then is not literature unless it have *style* and *character*, and be written with *curious care*.

3. **Of Poetical Literature** we may say the same thing. Poetry must be tried by rules more severe even than those by which we judge prose, and