

**A MANUAL FOR
TEACHERS TO
ACCOMPANY HISTORY
OF ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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A manual for teachers to accompany History of English Literature by William Allan Neilson & Ashley Horace Thorndike

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WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON & ASHLEY HORACE THORNDIKE

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TO ACCOMPANY

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

The difficulties that beset the author and afflict the user of an elementary history of English Literature are due in large part to the richness of the subject. From the dawn when Anglo-Saxon literature passed from the oral to the written word down to our own time, twelve hundred years have passed, each with its harvest of poetry and prose, until now the accumulated mass—even of what has proved worthy to survive—is far beyond the grasp of the ordinary student. The courage to face this fact and to make a rigorous selection among the thousand claimants to notice has been rarely found among the makers of textbooks. As a result, the great names have run the risk of being swamped, and have actually failed to get their due emphasis; while the reader's memory has been burdened with an excess of detail relating to minor figures with whom there is neither necessity nor opportunity for further acquaintance. What the student needs to do on his first survey of this field—and indeed for a long time afterwards—is to gain some familiarity with the authors and works that are the best in their kind, and to be content to ignore all others, except so far as they serve to explain the sources of the models the greater men have used or the range of the influence they have exercised.

The purpose of the study of the history of a literature, even at the stage of the first survey, is a complex one. The first and most important element is that which relates it to the study of literature itself; and it cannot be discussed without a clear understanding of what the student may hope to get out of books. The time-honored phrase, "to edify and to delight," is still comprehensive enough, great though the changes have been, from period to period, in the conception of

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how the edification and delight are to be imparted. The old idea of **An** the moral power of literature as dependent on models **enlargement** to imitate, awful warnings, and the exhibition of a **of life** justice well called "poetic" because it did not correspond to experience, has given place to a realization that literature is a substitute for actual living and a supplement to it. Books are valuable because they increase the amount of our life, refine its quality, and increase its intensity and significance.

*"We see first when we see them painted, things
We've passed a thousand times nor cared to see,"*

and so with things we see first when described in books. Their meanings begin to emerge, we perceive their likeness and unlikeness to what we have observed and experienced, and our range and our personalities are enlarged. We know better than before what men are like and how the world goes. Something of this sort is the modern conception of "edification" through literature.

This process itself has in it an element of delight, but the pleasurable side of literature is more specifically a matter of the senses and the **The** imagination. The music of the melody of verse and the **enjoyment** cadences of prose, the appeal to the mind's eye of noble **of beauty** form and rich color, the sensuous thrill obtained from the imaginative description even of things touched and tasted and smelled, are all part of the aesthetic side of literature, as are the enjoyment of well-built structures, of proportion and symmetry, of just discrimination and selection of the significant features of men, of nature, and of society. For the two aims of edification and delight are not opposed but harmonious, and frequently are served by the same qualities and devices.

Now before literature can accomplish these purposes it must be understood, and the prime object of studying its history is to help **Knowledge** make the literature itself intelligible. Produced by men **and** from all classes of society, often in periods far remote **appreciation** from our own, and expressive of all kinds of temperament, literature demands much information before it conveys to the reader of today what it meant to its authors. Consequently we turn to the history of literature to learn the personality of writers, the atmosphere in which they lived, the audiences which they addressed, in order that the words they employed may signify the same to us as to them. One of the first benefits, then, of the study of the history of literature is to help to cancel the disadvantage under which the reader labors from his remoteness from the author in space and time and social surroundings.

The study of the history of literature, besides being part of the study of literature, is also a part of the study of history. It is a chapter, and one of the most important, in the history of human **History of culture**. Men have expressed themselves in pictures and **civilization** statues and buildings as well as in wars and constitutions, but nowhere so articulately as in books; and through books we gain an entrance not only into the life of individual authors but into the life of nations and epochs. For young people literature affords the most interesting approach to an understanding of the course of civilization. It touches on every side the life and thought of the past and it records the progress of mankind. No study is more surely cultural, for it opens to the mind a view of "the best that has been thought and said," a history of the human spirit.

What men have thought and felt, suffered and enjoyed, is brought to us, with infinite application to our own life, personal and social, today. The history of English literature offers a searching **Vitality for commentary on the literature and on the life of the the present** present. It has no pages which do not offer some application for our reading and thinking and for our conduct. Literature is not merely a collection of books to be admired, it is a long continued and continuing activity which affects every nation, every epoch, and every person. The great ideal for teacher and for textbook is to give to the knowledge and the delight which come from literature a vital significance in the student's preparation for life.

THE TEACHER AND THE TEXTBOOK

How is the teacher to follow these large and ideal aims in the use of this textbook? Manifestly not by any single rigid method, but by a flexible adaptation of methods to the subject matter and **Flexibility to the needs of the class**. The **History**, to be sure, is a **of method** unit and might be read as a whole by the student without any guidance from the teacher. It is divided into chapters, and each chapter is provided with an apparatus in order that both teacher and pupil may be aided in their mutual task. In some chapters the pupil will need a different kind of guidance from that demanded by others. The first two chapters, for example, deal with a long period in which the total amount of literature is small and only a small portion of it interests young people. Instead of being confronted with these chapters as something to be studied and memorized at home, the student should be introduced to them in the class. Let them be read and studied directly under the teacher's supervision and with the teacher's aid. Let the

unfamiliar names be pronounced first by the teacher, and let the opening chapters be explained and understood as a preface and introduction to what is to follow.

A few class hours of sympathetic coöperative study between teacher and class are most helpful with almost any subject and especially with **At the beginning** the history of English literature, which must necessarily begin with the centuries most remote from the pupil's ordinary interests. Furthermore, this introductory class-room study is most desirable with any new textbook. Was enthusiasm in a subject ever aroused by the curt injunction, "Buy such and such a book, and prepare the first ten pages"? Is not the teacher's aid more helpful applied at the beginning of a book than anywhere else? Let us look the book over together in the class. What is its title? Just what does that mean? Who are the authors? What do we learn from the Table of Contents? Is there a preface? Let us hear it read aloud. And when we come to Chapter One, let us examine not only its contents but its form, its arrangement, its divisions, its marginal headings, its summary. The class may be prepared at the outset for an intelligent use and enjoyment of the book. Don't introduce the HISTORY as a taskmaster, but rather help the class to an acquaintance with it as a companion and guide.

The aims which have been set forth for the teaching of the history of literature may be scrutinized again with their application to the **Four aims** HISTORY. First, it has to do with literature itself. There should be no such thing as the teaching of the history of literature apart from teaching literature. Second, it has to do with history, not merely political history, but the history of civilization. Third, it has to do with biography, for our interest in books can only rarely be separated from our interest in the men who wrote them. Fourth, it has to do with the present time, for the literature of the past has a vital meaning for the youth of today.

The HISTORY teaches literature, but it selects the great men and the important works. A large proportion of its pages are devoted to the **x. Literature** analysis and interpretation of the individual books and poems which high school pupils ought to read. It seeks to aid the enjoyment and appreciation of the best. There is very little space given to names and titles and contents that are of interest chiefly to the scholar and the specialist. Take, for example, Chapter XV, on **MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY POETRY**. This is not a chronicle of dates and facts but a history of the poetry of the period in terms of the particular poems that are usually read in high school and which ought to be read and appreciated by everyone. In some periods the proportion

of the literature that can be read by young people is smaller and cannot receive as prominent a place as in Chapter XV, but everywhere the effort is made to connect the history of literature with the pupils' actual contact with literature. The teacher can do what the textbook cannot — find out what the class has read in the literature of a period, what it remembers, and how much more it ought to read. Then every sentence in the HISTORY can be connected with this reading.

It is better to read whole books than selections, but in many cases both an acquaintance with an author and an interest in further reading may be conveniently made through selections. There are **Selections** many in the HISTORY and many others may be provided by the teacher. Reading aloud by the teacher in the class is good for both teacher and pupils. This applies not only to the interpretation of poetry but also to prose selections. An hour may be profitably spent in reading and commenting on selections from Anglo-Saxon Literature, Old Ballads, Pepys's Diary, The Spectator Essays, Boswell's Life of Johnson, Lamb's Letters. The comments by the teacher and the class will help to connect the reading with the history of literature.

Attention should also be called to the classification of literature by types. The chronological arrangement in the HISTORY is everywhere crossed by a grouping of the main literary types. Thus, **Types of literature** the mid-nineteenth century is divided into three chapters, one for poetry, one for the novel, and one for prose. Chapter VII includes a full account of the drama, and Chapter XII of lyrical poetry. It is desirable that pupils should regard these main classes of literature and so form the power to compare drama with drama, lyric with lyric, novel with novel. Exact or subtle definitions and analyses of literary types are, however, of little value for the young reader. Definitions of numerous "types" are indeed given in the HISTORY, but always in order to clarify and explain the use of the term, and the definitions are always accompanied by specific examples. The following partial list of such simple definitions may aid the teacher:

Allegory, page 47, ballad, 61; comedy, 119, see also 87, 88, 182; drama, 118; the familiar essay, 214; exemplum, 35, 50; fabliau, 35, 50; farce, 70, 86, 119; folk literature, 61; folk plays, 66; Gothic romances, 314, 315; history plays, 122, 123; historical novel, 320; interlude, 67; lyrics, 157, see also 10, 35, 104, 105; miracle plays, 67, 69; morality plays, 69, 70; novel, 228; pastorals, 99, 100; romances, 36, see also 34, 35, 102; satire, 189; short story, 427; tragedy 123, 124.

Is not the history of civilization a rather large conception for high school pupils? Possibly, but is it too large for high school teachers of

English literature? Their failure in the past has sometimes arisen from a narrow view of literature that keeps to the interpretation or

2. **History** appreciation of a particular text or author. But in our schools today English is one of the few subjects which can and ought to be genuinely cultural. It is the gateway to art, manners, politics, ideas, to the whole fabric of the past. How much of this can the pupils assimilate and how can it be presented? Pictures are valuable aids, and the numerous illustrations in the HISTORY have been carefully selected with the purpose of adding to the pupil's knowledge of past times, persons, and places. They should be supplemented by photographs and illustrated books. Stories help, and the importance of some person in politics, or the associations of some place in history or literature will often be the better remembered if connected with some anecdote. Accounts of manners and customs will often arouse interest in the ideas of a past epoch. How was a book written in the Middle Ages? How did Chaucer travel to the continent? What were the conditions of life in Stratford in Shakespeare's boyhood? Such detail may come much better from the teacher than from the textbook.

The historical summaries which come at the beginnings of some of the chapters are to be regarded as frame-work. They should not be **Summaries** memorized but should be used to resume what knowledge **and** the class possesses and serve as a frame-work for added **explanations** information. A list of kings or a general statement of characteristics may be filled out to any extent that the teacher desires. They are necessary as guide posts to mark the pupil's progress along the road of advancing civilization. In the HISTORY there will also be found brief discussions of some of the ideas, movements, and events which have been of such importance in the world of thought that they cannot be neglected even by younger students of literature. Among such are feudalism (p. 22), chivalry (p. 26), introduction of printing (p. 56-58), renaissance (p. 72), revival of learning (p. 72-77), puritanism (pp. 149, 150), neo-classicism (p. 191), revolution of 1688 (p. 179), rationalism (p. 192, 193), romanticism (p. 257-8), the reform bill (p. 327), industrial revolution (p. 256, 257), the British Empire (p. 416), the Great War (p. 418). Of course it would be absurd to amplify greatly on these themes, but an effort has been made to make their presentation so concrete and simple that they will have a real significance in the pupil's reading and study.

Biography is not taught as a subject in our schools; yet it is one of the most important and interesting studies for young
3. **Biography** and old. Every course in literature or history in the schools should deal with the lives and characters of the great men and