

**LEADERS OF
ENGLISH
LITERATURE**

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Leaders of English literature by A. F. Bell

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A. F. BELL

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TO

MARY FLYNN

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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LEADERS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

IN the series of readings which follow we are not to expect a complete history of English literature. For that, even in outline, a very much larger space would be necessary. Besides, this little book has a different object. Its title to some extent makes this apparent. It is called *Leaders of English Literature*, and accordingly it will touch only on the more remarkable and characteristic writers of each period, particularly on those who brought some new idea or way of expressing an idea into our literature. Over such writers we shall linger, trying to grasp exactly what their ideas or ways of expression were, how they differed from the ideas and ways of expression of other men, and what influence they had upon their own times and the times that came after them. Especially we shall try to understand those great and characteristic writers who were leaders of, or helpers in, important literary movements where new ideas and new ways of expression were the common property of a group of authors, or were caught by enthusiastic young disciples from the teaching and

practice of some great master. We shall, in fact, attempt (as the proverb advises) "to know a man by his friends," and by the effect he produces upon them and their work. We shall trace the friendship of such a pair as Addison and Steele, for example, and see how, from a friendship begun at school, and carried on at Oxford and later in London, there grew the perfect understanding which enabled them to collaborate together in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. We shall see how the scholarly and meditative mind of Addison tempered the natural impetuosity of Steele, and how Steele's quick sympathies and responsive humanity warmed the rather cold and reserved temperament of Addison. As well as of friendships we shall take account of enmities and quarrels, for a man's character may be judged almost as well from the objects of his dislike as of his affection. Each individual writer and each group of writers, with new ideas or with new ways of expression, has had to do battle with those who clung to older methods, and from the study of these conflicts we may learn a great deal. Then, too, there are personal hostilities, and, though these should not, if men were perfect, influence the mind and work of the poet and prose-writer, yet, as a matter of fact, they very often do. We shall find personal animosities of this kind embittering many of the literary conflicts of the Elizabethan age. Later we shall come upon a great poet, Alexander Pope, some of whose finest satire was inspired by what we must truthfully call a rancorous maliciousness and desire to inflict suffering. In Hazlitt, too, one of our greatest critics, we shall discover some of the same unpleasant quality.