

**THE RIVERSIDE LITERATURE  
SERIES; VERSE AND PROSE FOR  
BEGINNERS IN READING:  
SELECTED FROM ENGLISH AND  
AMERICAN LITERATURE**

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The Riverside Literature Series; Verse and Prose for Beginners in Reading: Selected from English and American Literature by Horace Elisha Scudder

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**HORACE ELISHA SCUDDER**

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FOR

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By H. E. S.



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## PREFACE.

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THE attentive reader of this little book will be apt to notice very soon that though its title is *Verse and Prose for Beginners in Reading*, the verse occupies nine tenths, the prose being confined to about two hundred proverbs and familiar sayings — some of them, indeed, in rhyme — scattered in groups throughout the book. The reason for this will be apparent as soon as one considers the end in view in the preparation of this compilation.

The *Riverside Primer and Reader*, as stated in its Introduction, "is designed to serve as the sole text-book in reading required by a pupil. When he has mastered it he is ready to make the acquaintance of the world's literature in the English tongue." In that book, therefore, the pupil was led by easy exercises to an intelligent reading of pieces of literature, both verse and prose, so that he might become in a slight degree familiar with literature before he parted

with his sole text-book. But the largest space had, of necessity, to be given to practice work, which led straight to literature, indeed, though to a small quantity only. The verse offered in that book was drawn from nursery rhymes and from a few of the great masters of poetical form; the prose was furnished by a selection of proverbs, some of the simplest folk stories, and two passages, closing the book, from the Old and New Testaments.

The pupil, upon laying down his *Primer and Reader* and proposing to enter the promised land of literature, could find a volume of prose consisting of *Fables and Folk Stories*, into the pleasures of which he had already been initiated; but until now he could find no volume of poetry especially prepared for him which should fulfill the promise of the verse offered to him in his *Primer and Reader*. Be it remembered that he was not so much to read verse written expressly for him, as to overhear the great poets when they sang so simply, so directly, and yet with so penetrating a note that the burden of their song, full, it may be, to the child's elders, would have an awakening power for the child himself. As so often said, a child can



receive and delight in a poem through the ear long before he is able to attain the same pleasure through the eye; and there are many poems in such a book, for example, as Miss Agnes Repplier's *A Book of Famous Verse*, wholly delightful for a child to listen to which yet it would be impossible for him to read to himself.

The agreeable task of the editor, therefore, was to search English and American literature for those poems which had fallen from the lips of poets with so sweet a cadence and in such simple notes that they would offer but slight difficulties to a child who had mastered the rudiments of reading. It was by no means necessary that such poems should have had an audience of children in mind nor have taken childhood for a subject, though it was natural that a few of the verses should prove to be suggested by some aspect of child-life. The selection must be its own advocate, but it may be worth while to point out that the plan of the book supposes an easy approach to the more serious poems by means of the light ditties of the nursery; that there is no more reason for depriving a child of honest fun in his verse than there is for condemning the child's elders to

grave poetry exclusively ; and that it is not necessary or even desirable for a poem to come at once within the reader's comprehension. To take an extreme case, Tennyson's lines "Break, Break, Break!" would no doubt be ruled out of such a book as this by many in sympathy with children ; yet the unexplainable power of the poem is not beyond the apprehension of sensitive natures at an early age.

The contents have been gleaned from a number of sources, and the editor is glad to mingle with the names of the secure dwellers on Parnassus those of some living Americans and Englishmen. He does not pretend that he has made an exhaustive collection, but he hopes the book may be regarded as the nucleus for an anthology which cannot, in the nature of things, be very large.

The prose, as already intimated, is confined to groups of proverbs and familiar sayings. In one aspect these single lines of prose present difficulties to the young reader : they are condensed forms of expression, even though the words may be simple ; but they offer the convenient small change of intellectual currency which it is well for one to be supplied with at

an early stage of one's journey, and they afford to the teacher a capital opportunity for conversational and other exercises.

The order of this book is in a general way from the easy to the more difficult, with an attempt, also, at an agreeable variety. The editor has purposely avoided breaking up the book into lesson portions or giving it the air of a text-book. There is no reason why children should not read books as older people read them, for pleasure, and dissociate them from a too persistent notion of tasks. It is entirely possible that some teachers may find it out of the question to lead their classes straight through this book, but there is nothing to forbid them from judicious skipping, or, what is perhaps more to the point, from helping pupils over a difficult word or phrase when it is encountered; the interest which the child takes will carry him over most hard places. It would be a capital use of the book also if teachers were to draw upon it for poems which their pupils should, in the suggestive phrase, learn by heart. To this purpose the contents are singularly well adapted; for, from the single line proverb to a poem by Wordsworth, there is such a wide range of