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by

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## PREFACE

THE study of literature is, rightly, a pursuit in which the faculties are liberated and disciplined by the freshness and variety of imaginative experience, and are made strong and supple so that they learn to enjoy the pleasure of their own activity. The following pages attempt to present the outlines of English literature in accordance with this ideal. The book is offered as a companion to studies, not as a short cut to a superficial and specious knowledge of the classics of our language. It does not seek to pronounce any final criticism, or to dictate on matters of judgment or taste; for these are the greatest disservices a teacher can render to a student. Its intention is, rather, to prospect in company with the reader, to unearth and investigate clues with him, to lure his curiosity, and to challenge him to thought. The student will eventually discover that certain periods or writers are more to his taste than others; he will require,

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above all, bibliographical guidance. This he will find in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, to which this *Primer* may serve as an introduction.

I am under a debt of obligation to Professor Elton, who read through the proofs of the book, and also to Professor P. G. Thomas, who generously revised the medieval section in minute detail. But I must accept the responsibility for the final form of the statements in the book throughout.

W. T. Y.

*August 1913.*

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*It may be well to explain that the division into prose and verse in each period is fairly rigidly maintained. If this seems sometimes to disperse the work of one writer under several headings, there are compensations for this disadvantage, and the disadvantage is minimised almost to extinction by the index.*