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978-1-107-55425-2 - An Anthology of English Prose 1400-1900

Edited by Eirian James

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## PREFACE

THE aim of this anthology is to introduce English prose literature to both foreign and English readers through the medium of the ear in consort with the printed text. It is planned for recording on thirty records and this has of necessity imposed limits on the length of the passages. Poems have their own unity; the form of an extract from prose is to some extent artificially imposed. Nevertheless an idea, an episode, a description, can have its curve of tension, its completed form, and an attempt has been made to achieve this.

Brevity imposes limitations. By-paths, however inviting, have had to be resisted, and dramatic prose and works of a purely scientific or philosophic nature have been altogether omitted. The passages have been arranged in rough chronological order, occasionally violated for purposes of comparison, but the collection of records clearly has a fluidity not revealed by the printed text. The barriers of the centuries can more easily be broken down for contrast and comparison.

Although the historical approach has its pitfalls, the notes are intended to place the writing within the context of its period and the life of the writer. While making decisions on individual authors, the general scheme has been borne in mind, and as many genres and types of writing as possible have been included. If the anthology represents the cadences of English prose in all its variety of style and rhythm, if it titillates the reader to explore the

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#### P R E F A C E

books from which the passages are taken, it will have achieved its purpose.

The recordings were made at Cambridge by members of the University under the direction of George Rylands, Fellow of King's College, to whom I am greatly indebted for his enthusiasm, advice and co-operation.

EIRIAN JAMES

LONDON, 3 February 1956.

#### T E X T S

To help the foreign reader, the spelling and punctuation of the passages have been modernised, though the archaic forms of some words have been retained. Cuts are indicated.

A list of the most accessible editions is given on p. 203. In cases where the text has been taken from a different edition, this is indicated.

For permission to use copyright material we are indebted to the following: the Clarendon Press for an extract from the Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion*; Messrs Secker and Warburg for an extract from O. Lawson Dick's edition of John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*; Messrs P. J. and A. E. Dobell for an extract from Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*; Messrs Constable and Co. Ltd. for an extract from George Meredith's *The Egoist*; the Trustees of the Hardy Estate and Messrs Macmillan and Co. for an extract from Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

E. J.