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H. A. TREBLE, M.A.



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PREFACE

THE prejudice against a guide to or text-book of English literature still persists, even in face of a number of distressing facts. Educational theorists visualise the English lesson as a delightful *browse* (their pet metaphor) in the green pastures of English prose and poetry and drama. It is a comparatively harmless, Utopian dream, and has at least the merit of amusing the harassed English Master. The truth is that there is only one year in the ordinary four-year secondary school course when any “general” English can be studied, and that year is the third, *i.e.* the period between the “preparatory” years of the second and third forms, and the demoralising analytical set-book era of the fifth. We are still condemning our fifth-formers to the intensive cram of one or two “masterpieces” chosen arbitrarily by University authorities. Our young folk leave school, many of them, thinking that *A Tour to the Hebrides* is the outstanding example of English prose, that *The Golden Treasury*, Bk. III, is representative of English poetry, that *Twelfth Night* was written mainly that examiners should be able to ask for guesses at its date and demand a note on Pignogromitus. Certainly, then, in the fifths there is no opportunity for general study: as far as English literature is concerned a boy’s education is over when once he has passed the fourth.

What then of the fourth? Does the boy or girl in that happy intermediate stage actually *browse*? Rarely,

if ever. Even if the spirit is willing the flesh is bound to be weak because his working day consists usually of seven lessons in subjects that are difficult, followed by a couple of hours' hard work in the evening. He himself is left pathetically with the mere rags and tatters of time. The picture is not unduly exaggerated; it is the solemn and tragic fate of all those boys and girls who are enjoying a secondary education to-day.

It is for these, and for such as having left school to go the easier way of business life suddenly find themselves confronted with a little leisure, that this guide-book has been compiled. Like the maps or guides to a great city it points out a few landmarks so that the traveller may find his way from one to the other, and profit in the journeying. The fourth-former, instead of ruining for ever his pleasure in Scott, Dickens and the rest by a forced and unnatural study of *Old Mortality* or *David Copperfield*, has here at least a chance of peeping over his grim fence into the more spacious fields. And the home-student—who was in the fourth form once—will perhaps a few years afterwards pick up the book again as a pleasant adviser in either the use of the Public Library or the formation of his own.

H. A. TREBLE

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