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978-1-107-68018-0 - National Life and Character in the Mirror of Early English Literature

Edmund Dale

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BY

EDMUND DALE, M.A., D.LIT.

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## PREFACE.

THE remote origin of this book was a Paper on the Influence of the School of York read before a society of which the writer was a member some six years ago. From this small beginning sprang the idea of a work on the Inner Life, Thought and Influence of the Early English Church, which came to nothing. The next stage, two years later, was a contemplated thesis on the development of the Anglo-Saxon conscience, but under the direction and advice of Mr A. J. Wyatt, M.A., this became *The Development of the National Character and Social Life as reflected in Early English Literature*. After the completion of this stage occasional intervals of leisure during the last two years have been given to preparation for publication, the present title being finally adopted. To Mr Wyatt the writer is greatly indebted for many excellent hints and searching criticism. Mr Wyatt has also most kindly read the proofs, and the book has greatly benefited by his assistance in the final revision.

The writer's thanks are also due to the learned Master of Peterhouse, Dr A. W. Ward, who has suggested several improvements in the arrangement of the matter and other details.

Acknowledgment must be made of the help afforded by many works upon the literature of the period, chief among which were Mr Stopford Brooke's *History of Early English Literature*, Professor Ten Brink's *Early English Literature*, M. Jusserand's *Literary History of the English People* and *English Wayfaring Life*, Dr Courthope's *History of English*

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*Poetry*, vol. I., Professor Morley's *English Writers*, vols. I.—IV., Professor Ker's *Epic and Romance*, Professor Lounsbury's *Studies in Chaucer*, and Dr A. W. Ward's *Chaucer* in the English Men of Letters Series. These authorities laid the primary foundations for the later work of research.

The idea of the book is that by pricking in, as it were, literary illustrations upon the background of history a study of the period might gain in interest and definition. The writer has tried to keep his modernisations as close as possible to the originals, his primary purpose being to give reproductions which should be at the same time faithful and clear. The marginal references are regarded as an essential part of the book, without which its value in the eyes of the scholar would be diminished, as they practically remove the whole from the domain of pure imaginative fiction to the sure ground of a literary and historic reflection of real life and character. It is hoped that they will be found to give just sufficient direction to the sources of the material without being in themselves unwieldy.

As to the views and opinions expressed, the writer would emphasise the point that it is, in the main, the literature which speaks, and not himself. Though it is almost impossible to be perfectly unbiased or impartial where one's own nation is concerned, still he has ever had before him the ideal of a faithful representation of life and truth. Perhaps he has slipped occasionally, perhaps frequently, and so can only plead that his work has had far more influence upon him than he has had upon the book.

E. D.

*January, 1907.*

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“Ex ejusdem creaturae seminibus et primordialibus causis totius seculi tempus naturali cursu peragitur, ubi Pater usque nunc operatur, et Filius, ubi etiam corvos pascit et lilia vestit Deus.”

BEDE, *De Natura Rerum*, 700 A.D.

“Nature, the Vicar of the Almighty Lord.”

CHAUCER, *Parlement of Foules*, 1381 A.D.

“Nor do I so forget God as to adore the name of Nature; which I define not, with the Schools, to be the principle of motion and rest, but that straight and regular line, that settled and constant course, the Wisdom of God hath ordained the actions of His creatures, according to their several kinds....In brief, all things are artificial; for Nature is the Art of God.”

SIR THOMAS BROWNE, *Religio Medici*, 1635 A.D.