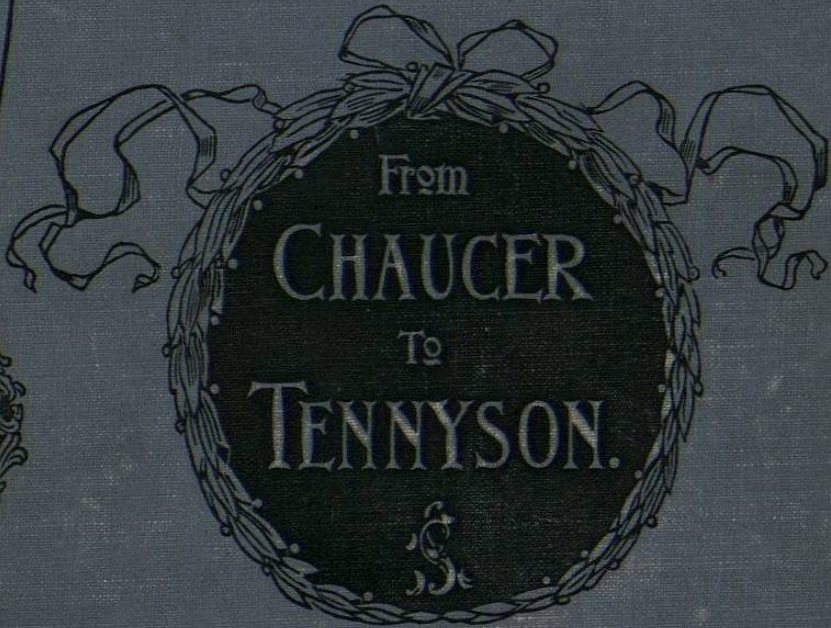


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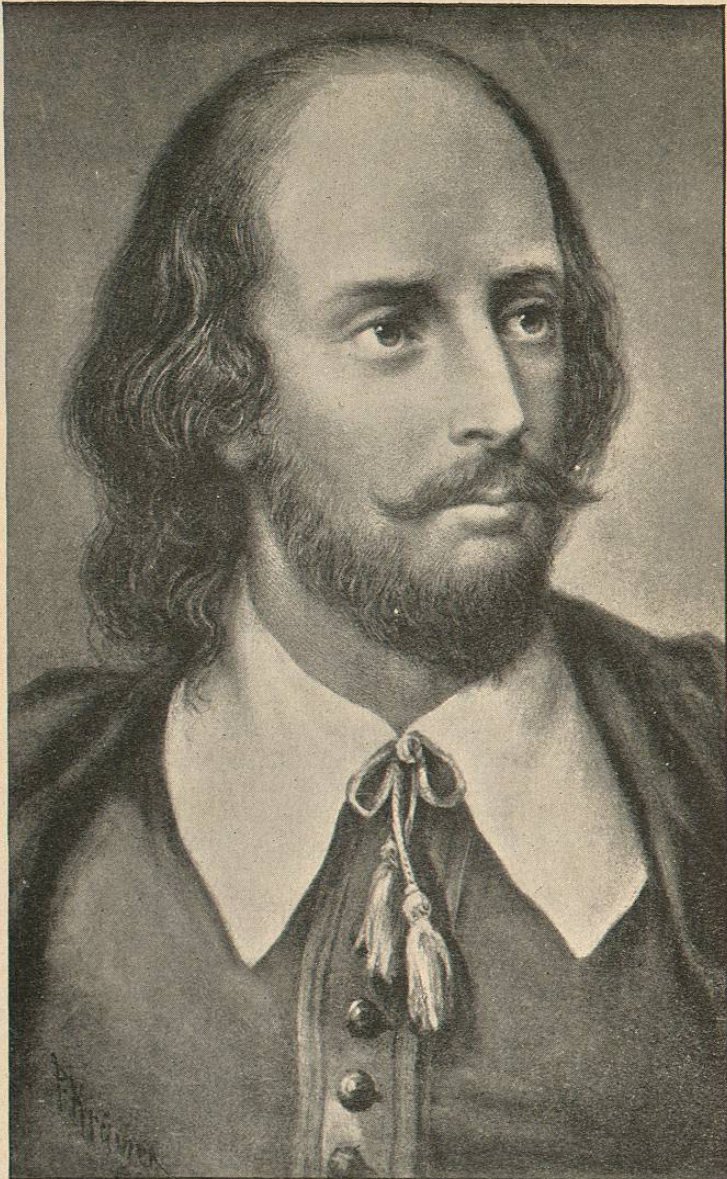
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WITH TWENTY-NINE PORTRAITS
AND
SELECTIONS FROM THIRTY AUTHORS.

BY
HENRY A. BEERS

Professor of English Literature in Yale University.



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The Chautauqua-Century Press
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PREFACE.

IN so brief a history of so rich a literature, the problem is how to get room enough to give, not an adequate impression—that is impossible—but any impression at all of the subject. To do this I have crowded out every thing but *belles lettres*. Books in philosophy, history, science, etc., however important in the history of English thought, receive the merest incidental mention, or even no mention at all. Again, I have omitted the literature of the Anglo-Saxon period, which is written in a language nearly as hard for a modern Englishman to read as German is, or Dutch. Cædmon and Cynewulf are no more a part of English literature than Vergil and Horace are of Italian. I have also left out the vernacular literature of the Scotch before the time of Burns. Up to the date of the union Scotland was a separate kingdom, and its literature had a development independent of the English, though parallel with it.

In dividing the history into periods, I have followed, with some modifications, the divisions made by Mr. Stopford Brooke in his excellent little *Primer of English Literature*. A short reading course is appended to each chapter.

HENRY A. BEERS.

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The required books of the C. L. S. C. are recommended by a Council of six. It must, however, be understood that recommendation does not involve an approval by the Council, or by any member of it, of every principle or doctrine contained in the book recommended.

FROM CHAUCER TO TENNYSON.

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE CONQUEST TO CHAUCER.

1066-1400.

THE Norman conquest of England, in the 11th century, made a break in the natural growth of the English language and literature. The Old English or Anglo-Saxon had been a purely Germanic speech, with a complicated grammar and a full set of inflections. For three hundred years following the battle of Hastings this native tongue was driven from the king's court and the courts of law, from Parliament, school, and university. During all this time there were two languages spoken in England. Norman French was the birth-tongue of the upper classes and English of the lower. When the latter got the better of the struggle, and became, about the middle of the 14th century, the national speech of all England, it was no longer the English of King Alfred. It was a new language, a grammarless tongue, almost wholly stripped of its inflections. It had lost half of its old words, and had filled their places with French equivalents. The Norman lawyers had introduced legal terms; the ladies and courtiers words of dress and courtesy. The knight had imported the vocabulary of war and of the chase. The master-builders of the Norman castles and cathedrals contributed technical expressions proper to the architect and the mason. The art of cooking was French. The naming of the living animals,