

PREFACE

THIS is not a book of 'elegant extracts.' It is a collection of illustrative readings, prepared primarily as a companion to my *Outline History of English Literature*, but in the hope also that it may prove more generally useful to the literary student. Limitations of space have prevented me from making it as full as I could have wished; to present anything like a complete view of the development of English literature in a manual of this size is obviously impossible. Many authors have perforce been omitted altogether, for whom I should have been glad to find a place, and those chosen are often, I am aware, inadequately represented. The task of preference and exclusion has, indeed, been a difficult one; but I have been guided in it by the principles laid down in the introductory chapter of my *Outline History*. This means that each extract has been selected because it serves to bring out either the distinctive personal features of an author's genius and style, or some feature of importance in the spirit and style of his age.

Where possible, the critical value of the selections has been considered, and a certain amount of connection has been introduced among them. Thus, to illustrate Dryden's prose writing, I have taken the passage on Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, and later, to illustrate Johnson's, have reproduced a part of his estimate of Dryden as a critic.

Some large omissions will be noted. I have, for example, given nothing from Shakespeare's plays or from the nineteenth century novelists. I hope I am justified in taking it