

The World's Classics

XLV

ENGLISH PROSE

FROM

MANDEVILLE TO RUSKIN

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CHOSEN AND ARRANGED BY

W. PEACOCK



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PREFACE

THE object of the present volume of selections is to illustrate the development of English prose. Like the preceding volume of 'Selected English Essays' in the same series, the book is intended mainly for the use of young students, though it is hoped that it will appeal also to the general reader.

The fourteenth century, the age of Chaucer, and of Mandeville and Wycliffe, suggested itself as the starting point; the works produced during that period marking the settlement of the language in the form which, with few differences, and those chiefly of spelling and vocabulary, is that of the present day. Difficulties of copyright and considerations of space, added to the invidiousness of making selections from the more recent authors, have prevented the work from being carried much beyond the first half of the nineteenth century.

In making the selections, there has been no attempt to observe any common standard of length. I have been guided rather by the desire to present such specimens as should be both complete and interesting in themselves, and such as should, at the same time, be characteristic of the style of the various writers represented. The spelling, where necessary in the case of the earlier extracts, has been modernised. The few explanatory notes that have been added relate almost exclusively to words which are now entirely obsolete or not in general use.

PREFACE

My thanks are due to the literary executors of the late Mr. Ruskin for their courtesy in allowing me to include the extract from 'Sesame and Lilies,' and to Mr. George Allen for kindly confirming their permission. I have also to thank Miss Maud Brougham for generous assistance in the preparation of the work.

W. P.

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