A History of

ENGLISH LITERATURE

(In Questions & Answers)

Vol. III

BY

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FOREWORD

History-writing in general has seldom been encouraged by critics. John Wolcot advised Sylvanus Urban (E. Cave), the founder of ‘Gentleman’s Magazine’, in the following memorable words:

*Deal not in history, often have I said;
’Twill prove a most unprofitable trade.*

Whether Sri J.N. Mundra’s ‘A History of English Literature’ (in Questions and Answers) will prove a profitable trade or not is yet too early to prophesy, but one thing is certain that Sri Mundra has done greater service to the students of English Literature than to himself by disregarding Wolcot’s advice, and writing a kind of history which is full but not exuberant, precise but not pedantic and short but not skeletal. The form of questions and answers has been used throughout the book in order to provide a conveniently arranged data for the consumption of those students who fail in the University examinations on the score of irrelevancy. Sri Mundra makes catechism easy and unobtrusive and saves himself from the besetting sins of ‘Longer and Shorter Catechists.’

None but a charlatan will pretend that a history of the kind which Sri Mundra has written is thoroughly original. Sri Mundra acknowledges his indebtedness to all standard Histories of English Literature and to eminent Historians and Critics. The chief value of Sri Mundra’s work lies not so much in the matter as in the manner. It never absents itself from felicity and perspicacity.

A seasoned teacher of English Literature in the postgraduate department of English studies at Bareilly College, Sri Mundra is not only gifted with a sense of proportion and balance but also with an unerring instinct for sifting the data at his disposal. He ministers to the advanced students of English Literature, like a skilled physician, neither an ‘Overdose’ nor an ‘Underdose,’ and yet allows him widely to taste the rich flavours of English Literature from the 14th century down to the present day.
I have had occasions of watching the literary progress of Sri Mundra at close quarters, both as my student and (now) my colleague in the Department of English, and I can confidently say that he must have 'scorned delights' and lived 'laborious days' in order to produce a historical account of English Literature in questions and answers, so accurate in detail, perspicuous in style and discriminating in its critical judgments. I hope Sri Mundra's book will get about, and contrary to the ominous prediction of Wolcot for such kinds of literary writings, it will prove to be most profitable at least to those for whom it is intended, if not to the pockets of the writer.

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