

CHAPTER II.

THE ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

A.D. 1400 to 1500.

THE AGE OF JAMES I. OF SCOTLAND, LYDGATE, AND CAXTON.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

1. ENGLAND IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.—In many respects the story of England in the fifteenth century is a sad one. The throne was occupied at the dawning of that age by *Henry IV.*, the first sovereign of the house of Lancaster. Seven kings ruled during the hundred stormy years that “slowly rolled away.” First, we have the three monarchs of the house of Lancaster, *Henry IV.*, *Henry V.*, and *Henry VI.*, with their unwise and unjust wars against France; Henry the Fifth’s victory at Agincourt; and, finally, the expulsion of the English from that country through the instrumentality of *Joan of Arc*, known as the “Maid of Orleans.”

Joan is one of the most wonderful characters in all history. A country girl but seventeen years of age, pure, pious, patriotic, and beautiful, she headed the armies of her native country, and gave with her own gentle hand the death-blow to English power and English misrule in France.

With some slight intermissions, this unhappy contest lasted over forty years. It taxed the energies and

drained the resources of England; and its unfavorable termination hastened a still more terrible struggle at home—the *Wars of the Roses*.

Scarcely had peace with France been concluded, when the crown began to sit lightly on the head of Henry VI., the last of the Lancasterians. The rival house of York kept an envious eye on the royal bauble. Soon the struggle began. The land resounded with the trumpets of war and the shock of arms. The fierce contest lasted over thirty years. It carries us through the reigns of three kings, *Edward IV.*, *Edward V.*, and *Richard III.*, all of the house of York. It was a bloody and unnatural struggle that made Great Britain one extensive theatre of atrocities, was signalized by twelve pitched battles, cost the lives of more than 100,000 men with eighty princes, and almost annihilated the ancient nobility of England.

The Wars of the Roses, which terminated in 1485, led to two important political results: (1) They partially annihilated the Norman nobility. “Many of these perished on the field of battle or on the scaffold. They mutually broke each other in pieces. . . . The law of Henry VII. forbidding the nobles the maintenance of retainers other than domestic servants shows at once how thoroughly the power of the aristocracy was broken.”* (2) The rival claims of the two houses were united in the family of *Tudor*. The marriage of Henry VII. to his cousin, Elizabeth of York, brought about this union. Thus the power of the sovereign was vastly increased, and as we glide into the sixteenth century the strong hand of Henry VII. sways the destinies of the nation.

* Bascom.

2. SCOTLAND.—At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the second of the Stuart line sat on the throne of Bruce—a shaky and dangerous seat. The nobility, haughty and powerful, were the greatest enemy with which the Scottish king had to contend. Robert III., fearing for the safety of his young and promising son, *James*, prepared to send him to France in 1405. While on the way the royal boy was intercepted by the English, and remained in captivity for eighteen years. For the prince this reverse of fortune was a blessing in disguise. The trials he had to endure developed and moulded his manly character. James I. was perhaps the greatest English poet of his century, and by far the wisest and most accomplished of the Stuart kings. His assassination by a number of his nobles proves—were proof needed—that learning, worth, and wisdom do not always secure the respect of ruffianism.

The fate of his two immediate successors was even more tragic. James II. was killed by the bursting of a cannon. Between James III. and his nobles a fierce contest arose in which both eagerly took the field. The royal army was defeated and James fled. Historians tell that as he rode hastily along he passed through a small hamlet; and at the sight of a woman, who came out for water, his horse took flight, suddenly turned, throwing the king to the ground. Being heavily armed, he was stunned by the fall. Soon people collected and removed him into a mill near by. On recovering, James called for a priest.

Questioned by the miller's wife as to what he was, he replied: "I was your king this morning." The woman, struck with surprise, hastened out and called loudly for a priest to attend the king. Upon this a

stranger rode up and said: "I am a priest; lead me to the king." He was immediately introduced, and kneeling down asked James if he thought he was dangerously injured. The king replied that he did not consider his hurt serious, but in the mean time desired that his confession might be heard, and that he might receive absolution. "This shall absolve you," exclaimed the assassin—for such he was—and drawing a poniard, plunged it into the breast of the unhappy monarch.

James IV. succeeded, and as a ruler was more successful than any of his three namesakes and predecessors. He was a good Christian and an able sovereign. By marrying Margaret, the eldest daughter of Henry VII., he drew the thrones of Scotland and England more closely together. With this event was concluded a perpetual treaty of peace between the two kingdoms, after one hundred and seventy years of war, or of truces little better than war. The reign of James IV. carries us into the sixteenth century.

3. INFLUENCING AGENTS ON THE LITERATURE OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.—The forty years' conflict with France began little more than a decade after the death of Chaucer. This was scarcely over, when a thirty years' fratricidal struggle commenced at home. Those long periods of war blighted literary labor and dwarfed intellectual growth. The camp was not favorable to letters, and in this century the sword took the place of the pen. "The bells in the church-steeple," wrote Fuller, "were not heard for the sound of drums and trumpets."

Hence we must be content if we find no great literary masterpiece in the English prose and poetry of the fifteenth century. True, the names of *seventy*

British poets who wrote in this age have come down to us, but we have room only for the principal of these—JAMES I. of Scotland, and JOHN LYDGATE, a *Benedictine monk*. Both acknowledge Chaucer as their master and model in the art poetic. Still more limited, of course, was the number of prose writers, chief among whom were SIR THOMAS MALLORY and WILLIAM CAXTON, the first English printer. Thus the English literature of the fifteenth century is principally represented by a king, a monk, a knight, and a printer.*

4. THE AGE OF BALLADS AND PROSE ROMANCE.—The chivalrous tales called metrical romances, which were popular in England from the twelfth century, cease about the middle of the fifteenth. The wants of the time and the tastes of the people demanded something else. A change came. *Ballads* and *prose romances* became the favorites. But the riches of the English literature of this age consist mainly in its ballads, many of which have perished. These ballads, in most instances, are simply *abridged romances*—short tales in verse. The hero of many a ringing rhyme was *Robin Hood*,† the bold outlaw. It is the opinion of Hallam that the Scottish ballads of this period are much superior to the English.

* There were, of course, many *Latin* works composed in the various monasteries, but these do not come within the scope of a little text-book on English literature. Over forty monks lived from the twelfth to the fifteenth century who wrote the history of England from the earliest times down to the dawn of the sixteenth century. Those of the fifteenth century were Thomas Walsingham, Thomas Otterbourne, John Whethamstede, Thomas Elmham, William of Worcester, and John Rouse.

† Robin Hood flourished in the reign of Edward II., or the early portion of the fourteenth century. The earliest notice of him is in the *Vision of Piers Ploughman*, a poem composed about 1370. A collection of ballads recounting the deeds and adventures of Robin Hood were printed by Ritson, in 2 vols., in 1795.

Two of the most ancient and beautiful British ballads are *Chevy Chase* and *Sir Patrick Spens*. *Chevy Chase*, which was written in the early part of the fifteenth century, consists of sixty-eight four-lined rhyming stanzas.* It is the soul-stirring, fiery old war-song of which Sir Philip Sidney wrote that he never heard it without feeling himself aroused as by the blast of a trumpet. *Sir Patrick Spens*, which is a true Scottish ballad, consists of twenty-six four-lined rhyming stanzas.† It has been greatly praised. Coleridge calls it a "grand old ballad," and Reed does not hesitate to style it the finest specimen of all the old songs. Though more easily read than *Chevy Chase*, on account of the simplicity of its diction, *Sir Patrick Spens* is commonly considered a more ancient ballad. The authors of both poems are unknown.

* "To drive the deer with hound and horn,
Earl Percy took his way;
The child may rue that is unborn,
The hunting of that day."

As Earl Percy and his English followers went to hunt in the Scottish woods of Earl Douglas without the latter's permission, a bloody conflict was the result. Percy and Douglas were among the hundreds slain on both sides.

"Of fifteen hundred Englishmen,
Went home but fifty-three;
The rest were slain in Chevy Chase,
Under the greenwood tree."

There are two versions of the ballad of *Chevy Chase*, an ancient and a modern. The former is in antiquated English which ordinary readers will find as difficult to peruse as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; the latter is clothed in the language of the age of Elizabeth. Both versions are the same in substance. The two foregoing stanzas belong to the modern version, and are made to conform to our present system of spelling.

† The following is the fourteenth stanza, as in the original:

"They hadna sailed a league, a league,
A league but barely three,
When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud,
And gurly grew the sea."

"Lift," that is *sky*.

5. PROGRESS OF LEARNING, EDUCATION, AND DISCOVERY.—If long years of war and disaster stunted the growth and dimmed the brilliancy of English literature in the fifteenth century, it is but right to add that on the whole it was a very progressive age. The founders of colleges in England were especially active. *Eton*, the most famous of the English public schools, was founded in this century. Scotland added to her seats of learning the universities of *St. Andrews* (1411), *Glasgow* (1450), and *Aberdeen* (1494) —“all,” says Thomas Arnold, “under the authority of different Popes.”

Then most of the great European nations of to-day were rapidly reaching maturity—making really marvellous progress in art, science, and discovery. For glorious achievements the fifteenth century stands the most brilliant in all history. Protestantism was unknown. The nations were all one in faith—Catholic. Their power for good which sprung from this solidity, this massive religious unity, was not weakened and broken by the unhappy dissensions caused at a later period by the so-called Reformation. Printing began its mission, and books were rapidly multiplied. The fall of Constantinople into the hands of the barbarous Turks forced the remains of Greek learning and literature to seek a home in western Europe; and since that time the language of Homer and Demosthenes has been honored with a place in every college programme of studies. The compass was invented, and navigation grew into an art. The immortal Columbus doubled the size of the world's map by the discovery of America. The spirit of faith erected the grand Gothic cathedral with its airy domes and graceful spires pointing heavenward. Sixty-four universi-

ties shed rays of intellectual light over Europe. In short, the foundations of modern European greatness were laid. Our Catholic forefathers were men of labor and vast enterprise. The monuments they left behind bear witness to their lofty achievements.

6. NOTES ON THE PROGRESS OF THE LANGUAGE.—For the English language the fifteenth century was a period of rapid transition from its obsolete state to its more modern form. These changes were especially hastened by two events: (1) The Wars of the Roses; (2) The introduction of printing by Caxton in 1474. The Wars of the Roses, however singular it may seem, had a considerable influence in bringing about a certain uniformity of speech throughout the kingdom by more or less harmonizing its various dialects. The art of printing did much to polish speech and to make reading popular. It gave a new impulse to literature. The number of books and readers was multiplied. Authors were enabled to address a larger reading public than before. For the first time the language of books began gradually to extend its sway and to supplant local forms and provincial usages, except among the wholly uneducated classes, to whom books were not accessible. With printing also came a certain uniformity of spelling, and the division of sentences by points or stops, now called punctuation.

By examining a few words it can easily be seen that great changes have taken place in English spelling since the fifteenth century.

Some words as spelled in the
fifteenth century. As spelled to-day.

<i>syng</i>	sing
<i>sterre</i>	star
<i>certyn</i>	certain
<i>bookes</i>	books
<i>haiff</i>	have
<i>giff</i>	gives
<i>kaute</i>	caught

The unaccented final *e* was generally neglected, and at length wholly lost in pronunciation. The attempt to distinguish *gender* by terminations was abandoned, and the rule was adopted of treating the names of all things *without life as neuter*.

The English of the fifteenth century had nearly reached its stature as a full-grown language, but it wanted polish and maturity as an instrument of thought. No Shakspeare had as yet seized the discordant elements of our speech to stamp upon them the seal of fixity and genius. Latin was still—as it had been for hundreds of years—the only great and polished medium of learning. Men who wished to give their thoughts to the world spoke and wrote in the imperial language of Rome.

LESSON I.

JAMES I. OF SCOTLAND. DIED 1437.

Chief work: *The King's Quire* (or Book).

1. Who was James I. of Scotland?

He was the third and ablest sovereign of the Stuart line, an accomplished scholar, and the most *original* English poet of the fifteenth century.

2. What happened to him in his tenth year?

While on his way to France he was captured by order of Henry IV. of England. This captivity lasted for nineteen years.

3. What benefits did he reap from this seeming misfortune?

For the royal boy it proved to be a blessing in disguise. Adversity strengthened and developed the sterling qualities of his character; and the solitude of those early years inclined him to long and serious study. He excelled in all the learning of his time, and was especially fond of poetry and music.

4. How long did James I. rule over Scotland?

He reigned thirteen years, during which he reformed many abuses; but finally fell a victim to the treachery of a number of his haughty and barbarous nobles by whom he was assassinated.

5. What work has established his literary reputation?

The King's Quire, a poem of nearly 1400 lines, divided into one hundred and ninety-seven seven-lined stanzas.

6. What does this poem describe?

It gives many particulars of the prince's youthful career—the sad thoughts and hopes and fears of his prison life. It also portrays in glowing terms a May-scene in Windsor garden, the power of love, and the grace, beauty, and virtue of the young lady who finally rewarded his devotion with her hand.*

7. What influence can be traced in the writings of James I.?

The influence of Chaucer and Gower, of whose works he was an admirer and diligent student.

8. What may be said of the style of the *King's Quire*, and of its rank in early English literature?

In grace and polish of style many of its stanzas are exquisite. The poem is distinguished by delicacy of feeling and tenderness of expression. It is regarded as one of the most original and meritorious productions of the English muse between the days of Chaucer and those of Spenser.

"James I. of Scotland was a true poet and a true man."—Hart.

* James relates that on a pleasant morning in the month of May he was taking a view from the windows of his prison—the round tower of Windsor Castle. In the garden below, accompanied by her attendants, walked a modest and beautiful girl. This was Lady Jane Beaufort, who afterwards became his wife and queen of Scotland. The *Quire* was written towards the close of his captivity, and evidently while the sunshine of love lit up the poet's breast.

LESSON II.

JOHN LYDGATE. DIED 1462.

Chief works: (1) *The Fall of Princes.*
 (2) *The Story of Thebes.*
 (3) *The Destruction of Troy.*

9. Who was Father John Lydgate?

He was the most prolific writer of the fifteenth century, and in every respect the most remarkable native-born English poet of his age.

10. Of what religious order was he a member?

He was a Benedictine monk of Bury St. Edmunds, and spent a pious, useful, and laborious life in study, teaching, and writing.

11. Where was he educated?

At Oxford University; but he greatly increased his knowledge by travelling in France and Italy.

12. In his own day how was the good monk of Bury regarded?

As the greatest poet and scholar of the age. He was a ready pen, which, for over half a century, supplied the various literary wants of his time.

13. When were his talents especially in request?

On such occasions as religious festivals and court entertainments. For these his versatile quill dashed off with equal ease hymns, songs, and dramas. He left over 250 pieces behind him.

14. Which are his three chief poems?

The Fall of Princes, The Story of Thebes, and The Destruction of Troy.

15. What is the *Fall of Princes*?

It is a versified translation from the Latin of Boe-

caccio, and contains Lydgate's famous reference to his "master Chaucer, the lode-star of our language."

16. What is the *Story of Thebes*?

It is chiefly a translation from *Statius*, a Latin poet of the first century. Lydgate adapts the work of the old Roman to his own times by making it a romance of chivalry, in which adventures, love-scenes, and tournaments take up a large space.

17. Where does Lydgate represent himself as telling the story of Thebes?

He relates that having met Chaucer's pilgrims at an inn in Canterbury, he accompanies them back to London; and on being invited to tell a tale gives the *Story of Thebes*, which is thus represented as an additional Canterbury tale.

18. What is *The Destruction of Troy*?

It is likewise a translation from the Latin, and is very interesting, as it gives occasional pen-pictures of life in the fifteenth century.

19. What may be said of Lydgate's style?

He is very diffuse. This is his chief failing. But the enthusiasm of the good Benedictine often makes the reader forget the length of his poems. His hymns and devotional pieces, however, are generally admired for graceful diction and beautiful sentiment.

"No writer was ever more popular in his own day; but it was a popularity which could not last."—*Thomas Arnold.*

"He is the first of our writers whose style is clothed with that perspicuity in which the English phraseology appears at this day to an English reader."—*Warton.*

LESSON III.

SIR THOMAS MALLORY. DIED 1476.

Chief work: *History of King Arthur*.*

20. Who was Sir Thomas Mallory?

He was a priest and knight of whose personal history we know nothing except that he lived in the fifteenth century, and wrote his famous work about the year 1470.

21. By whom was the *History of King Arthur* first printed?
By *William Caxton*, in 1485.

22. From what source does Mallory tell us he collected the materials of his book?

He states that he compiled his *History* "out of certyn bookes of Frensshe, and reduced it into English."

23. At what period did the romances which relate the wonderful career of Prince Arthur originate?

The origin of the romances of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table is involved in obscurity; but it is generally believed they commenced about the sixth century.†

* This work is commonly called the *Morte d'Arthur*, or Death of Arthur.

† King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table are familiar to all lovers of romance. Arthur was the son of *Pendragon*, King of Britain. After he was crowned king his entire career was one of conquest, either upon a huge scale or in single combat. Nothing earthly, it is told, could withstand the prowess of his stalwart arm; and against the powers of darkness he was fully armed and accoutred by his friend and counsellor, Merlin. He proceeded from

24. Who was King Arthur?

He lives in history and romance as the most celebrated of the British Celtic princes, who made a gallant stand against the Saxon invaders. Arthur, according to tradition, was crowned in 516; and at his death—the date of which is unknown—was buried in the old abbey of Glastonbury.

25. What does Mallory's *History of King Arthur* contain?

It embraces the six distinct romances or narratives of Arthur and his famous Knights of the Round Table.

26. Which is the first of these narratives?

The first is the legend of the *Saint Grail*,* which gives the history of the Chalice used by our Blessed Lord at the Last Supper. Joseph of Arimathea, it is

victory to victory, conquering kingdom after kingdom, slaying innumerable giants, rescuing distressed ladies, destroying "wicked witches," cutting off whole armies of Saracens, and making no more of dragons than greyhounds do of hares—sometimes killing wholesale when alone and unsupported, but more commonly in company with the famous Knights of the Round Table. Arthur's epitaph in the church of the old monastery of Glastonbury runs thus: *Hic jacet Arthurus, rex quondam atque futurus*. His tomb was discovered in the twelfth century. The exhumation took place in 1189. King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table were twenty-four in number—the chosen few among his forces. Around the celebrated table every knight had his appointed seat upon which his name was inscribed in letters of gold. One of these was styled the "seat perilous." It was reserved for the most famous champion of that invincible band. Paulus Jovius relates that when the Emperor Charles V. visited England, Henry VIII. exhibited this table to him as the veritable one of King Arthur. To-day in the chapel of Worcester there is preserved what is affirmed to be Arthur's Round Table. It consists of a stout oak board perforated by many bullets, supposed to have been fired at it by Cromwell's soldiers, who used it for a target. Upon it is painted a royal figure seated beneath a canopy, intended to represent King Arthur. In the centre is painted a large rose, and around it are the words: "Thys is the rounde table of King Arthur and his valiant knyghts." From the centre radiate twenty-four spaces, each one appropriated to a knight who seated himself in front of the one that had his name painted on it.—*Hall's Book of British Ballads*.

* That is, *Holy Cup*, or *Chalice*.

told, carried the sacred vessel with him to Britain; but, too holy to be looked upon by sinful eyes, it after a time vanished from the gaze of men.

27. Which is the second of the narratives?

The second is the story of *Merlin*, which celebrates the birth and exploits of Arthur, and relates how he gathered around him the peerless knights and heroes of the Round Table.

28. Which is the third of the narratives?

The adventures of *Sir Lancelot du Lac* (of the Lake). This is a wild, weird story of a bold and sinful hero; and of the Lady of the Lake, and her fairy realm beneath the waters.

29. Which is the fourth of the narratives?

The fourth is the legend styled the *Quest of the Saint Grail*. This is the touching and beautiful story of the search for the sacred chalice, which could only be seen by *one who was perfectly pure in thought, word, and action*. Many knights engaged in this search. The object was finally achieved by the young and noble knight, *Sir Galahad*, who, while the vision passed before him, prayed that he might no longer live, and was immediately taken to the happy regions of bliss.

30. Which is the fifth of the narratives?

The fifth is the *Death of Arthur*, which relates the tragic end of the incomparable Celtic hero, who for years had bravely battled against the Saxon foe.

31. Which is the sixth and last of these romantic narratives?

The sixth and last traces the adventures of *Sir Tristram*, a hero somewhat similar in character to *Sir Lancelot du Lac*.

32. What poet of our day has clothed those ancient tales in the poetic diction of the nineteenth century?

ALFRED TENNYSON in his *Idylls of the King*.*

"Mallory shows considerable mastery of expression; his English is always animated and flowing, and in its earnestness and tenderness occasionally rises to no common beauty."—*Craik*.

LESSON IV.

WILLIAM CAXTON. DIED 1492.

Chief work: *The History of Troy*.

33. Who is commonly styled the "Father of the English Press"?

William Caxton, a name venerable in the history of English letters.

34. Briefly relate Caxton's early history.

He was born in England in the early part of the fifteenth century, was for a time a merchant in London, travelled much in Europe, and on one occasion was employed by Edward IV. to negotiate a treaty with the Duke of Burgundy.

35. Whose service did he enter in 1468?

That of the English princess Margaret, who, about that time, was married to the Duke of Burgundy.

36. Which was his first literary effort?

The History of Troy, which he translated from the French during his leisure hours at the Court of Bur-

* Few readers of poetry are unacquainted with Tennyson's beautiful poem of *Morte d'Arthur*, a modern rendering of the concluding part of the romance bearing that title. The *Idylls of the King* are renderings of so many particular passages or episodes in the same great romance.—*Arnold*.

gundy. It was at this period that he began to learn the *new art of printing*.*

37. Where did he first begin his labors as a printer?

At Cologne, where, in 1471, he issued the *first* English book ever printed—his own *History of Troy*

38. In what year did he remove to England?

In 1474, carrying with him his press and types. He settled down to his business in one of the apartments of Westminster Abbey, whither he was most probably invited by the abbot.

39. What work did he print in 1474?

The *Game and Play of Chess*—the *first* book ever printed in Great Britain.

40. How many different works is he known to have printed between this and his death?

During the remaining eighteen years of Caxton's life *sixty-five* different works, translated and original, came from his press. Many of these were the products of his own industrious pen.

41. How did Caxton die?

Like the Venerable Bede, he piously breathed his last almost at his work.

42. What was his character as a man and a writer?

Caxton was a man of learning, tireless industry, and spotless character. At fifty years of age he learned the art of printing; and with his head silvered

* The honor of discovering this simple but marvellous art is contested by the Dutch in favor of *Lawrence Coster*, between 1420 and 1426, and by the Germans on behalf of *John Gutenberg*, about the year 1438. It is very probable that the discovery was made by both about the same time. Between 1450 and 1455 Gutenberg succeeded in printing a Bible, copies of which are now exceedingly rare and valuable. *Mayence*, *Strasburg*, and *Haarlem* were the places where printing was first executed. Coster, Gutenberg, and Caxton were good Catholics. It is well to remember that *the Bible was printed seventy years before the so-called Reformation, and that the art of printing is a Catholic invention.*

over with the white hairs of venerable age he might still be seen in his office to the day of his death.* ✓

"Caxton was a man of learning, and wrote many of the works he printed."—*Hart*.

"Few English names of this century will live as long as William Caxton."—*Shaw*.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER II., BOOK II.

1. The stormy political history of England and Scotland, and the almost incessant wars of the time, account for the literary barrenness of the fifteenth century.

2. Ballads and romances make up the great bulk of the English literature of the fifteenth century.

3. Two of the most famous of the ancient ballads are *Chevy Chase* and *Sir Patrick Spens*.

4. The English language and higher education made great progress during this age.

5. The chief poets were *James I. of Scotland* and *Father John Lydgate*; the chief prose-writers, *Sir Thomas Mallory* and *William Caxton*.

6. James I. of Scotland is considered the most *original* writer of the fifteenth century; Lydgate, the most *prolific*.

* His life, writes Henry Reed, is to be thought of like that of the Venerable Bede, as monitory of "perpetual industry;" for as the aged Saxon expired dictating the last words of a translation of St. John's Gospel—

"In the hour of death,
The last dear service of his parting breath,"

so did the old printer carry forward his last labor, on a volume of sacred lore, to the last day of a life that bore the burden of four-score years.—*Lectures on English Literature.*

7. Mallory's *History of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table* is the most remarkable historical romance of the fifteenth century.

8. William Caxton, the "Father of the English Press," was a pious Catholic. He printed the *first* English book in 1471.

CHAPTER III.

THE ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

A. D. 1500 to 1600.

THE AGE OF MORE, DUNBAR, AND SPENSER.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

1. A GLANCE AT ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.—The sixteenth century is the most eventful in English history. It carries us through the reigns of *Henry VIII.*, *Edward VI.*, *Mary*, and *Elizabeth*. Henry VII. died in 1509,* and was succeeded by his son Henry VIII. In the bloom of youth, his mind well stored with knowledge, and bright hopes lighting up his future pathway, Henry mounted the throne of the rich, prosperous, and powerful Catholic kingdom of England. For about twenty years he enjoyed an excellent reputation. Owing mainly to the abilities of his Prime Minister,

* Henry VII. was the *first* of the Tudor family that sat on the English throne; Elizabeth was the *last*.

the famous *Cardinal Wolsey*, his home administration was marked by wisdom; and the success of his arms against the Scots and French added to the glory of the nation.

Even in letters Henry made a name. It was in his reign that *Martin Luther*,* a bold, able, and unprincipled monk of Germany, threw off the mask, raised his hand against the Catholic Church in which he had been educated, and stirred up the baser passions of

* Luther was born in 1483, and died in 1546. He was the father of the Protestant Reformation. "Let us clearly understand," says WILLIAM COBBETT, a Protestant author, "the meaning of these words—*Catholic*, *Protestant*, and *Reformation*. *Catholic* means *universal* and the religion which takes this epithet was called *universal* because all Christian people of every nation acknowledged it to be the *only true religion*, and because they all acknowledged *one and the same head* of the Church, and this was the *Pope*, who, though he generally resided at Rome, was head of the Church in England, in France, in Spain, and, in short, in every part of the world where the Christian religion was professed. But there came a time when some nations—or rather parts of some nations—cast off the authority of the *Pope*, and, of course, no longer acknowledged him as the *head* of the Christian Church. These nations, or parts of nations, declared, or *protested*, against the authority of their former head, and also against the doctrines of that Church which, until now, had been the *only* Christian Church. They, therefore, called themselves *Protesters*, or *Protestants*; and this is now the name given to all who are not Catholics. As to the word *Reformation*, it means an alteration *for the better*; and it would have been hard indeed if the makers of this great alteration could not have contrived to give it a *good name*.

"Now a fair and honest inquiry will teach us that this was an alteration greatly *for the worse*; that this '*Reformation*,' as it is called, was engendered in beastly lust, brought forth in hypocrisy and perfidy, and cherished and fed by plunder, devastation, and by rivers of innocent English and Irish blood; and that as to its more remote consequences, they are, some of them, now before us in that misery, that beggary, that nakedness, that hunger, that everlasting wrangling and spite which now stare us in the face and stun our ears at every turn, and which the '*Reformation*' has given us in exchange for the ease, and happiness, and harmony, and Christian charity enjoyed so abundantly, and for so many ages, by our Catholic forefathers."—*History of the Reformation*.

"If mere dissent from the Church of Rome be a merit," writes the great Edmund Burke, "he that dissents the most perfectly is the most meritorious. A man is certainly the most perfect Protestant who protests against the whole Christian religion."