

CHAPTER IV. ✓

THE ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

A.D. 1600 to 1700.

THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE, MILTON, AND DRYDEN.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

I. GLANCES AT GREAT BRITAIN IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.—To Great Britain the seventeenth century was an age of political revolutions. The occupants of the English throne were *James I.*, *Charles I.*, *Charles II.*, *James II.*, and *William III.* Of these, one lost his head at the block, and another was forced to fly from his kingdom.

In 1603 began the reign of James I., the son of Mary Queen of Scots, and the first of the Stuart line that ascended the throne of England. Since that day England and Scotland have had a common ruler. James was but a year old when crowned King of Scotland; and he was thirty-seven when he became monarch of England.

His arrogance and silly notions in relation to the royal power and prerogative added to the difficulties of his reign. The "divine right" of kings to govern without control was a theme ever in his mouth. He

fawned on favorites, and despised the nation at large. Even the terrible *Gunpowder Plot** neither opened his eyes nor added wisdom or justice to his character. The Catholics were persecuted with fiendish ferocity,† and unhappy Ireland bled and groaned under his infamous rule.

James was desirous to be thought learned; but he was at best a vain, loquacious pedagogue. He wrote books against witches and the use of tobacco. During his life, flatterers styled him the "British Solomon." The Duke of Sully, however, declared that the royal Scotchman was "the wisest fool in Europe." It was during this reign that the Protestant version of the Scriptures known as *King James's Bible* was translated and published.‡

On the death of James, in 1625, his son, Charles I., ascended the throne. He married a Catholic princess, but to please the Puritans he persecuted the Catholics. The penal laws were enforced with great cruelty. But other difficulties soon arose. Charles had imbibed the arbitrary principles of his father.

* The Gunpowder Plot was the scheme of a few desperate men to blow up the king and the two Houses of Parliament. It was discovered just in time to prevent the catastrophe. Two hogsheads and over thirty barrels of gunpowder had been stowed away in the cellar of the Parliament House. *Guy Fawkes* was the desperado appointed to fire the mine, and when asked by a Scottish nobleman why he had collected so much explosive material, the reply was, "To blow the Scottish beggars back to their native mountains."

† It was at the bidding of James I. that Catholics and all others who did not conform to the Anglican Protestant Church as by law established were excluded from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Laws were framed to that effect, and they were enforced till our own day. "An immortality of mischief," says MacKenzie, "seemed to have been conferred on that foolish king. Two centuries and a half after he was in his grave he had not yet ceased from troubling. His senseless and intolerant edicts still provoked strife among the English people."

‡ The translation was begun in 1607, and was completed and published in 1611. It was the work of forty-seven persons.

It has been remarked with some truth that

"He never said a foolish thing,
And never did a wise one."

Parliament refused to grant him the necessary supplies to carry on a war against France and Spain; and Charles resolved to rule without their aid and to levy money without their authority. Thus began a conflict that led to that most direful of national calamities—a civil war. Both the king and the parliament appealed to the sword. The royalists were named *Cavaliers*,* while the parliamentary forces were called *Roundheads*.† The war raged for nearly five years. One battle followed another, until finally the royal standard went down at Naseby before the desperate charges of *Oliver Cromwell* and his famous *Ironsides*.‡ Charles surrendered himself to the Scottish army, by which he was basely delivered into the hands of the Parliament for the sum of \$2,000,000. He was tried, condemned, and beheaded in 1649.

The moment the head of this royal victim fell on the scaffold at Whitehall, a proclamation was read in Cheapside, declaring it treason to give to any person the title of king without the authority of Parliament; and, at the same time, it was published that the supreme authority in the nation resided in the people's representatives. In a few days the House of Lords and the office of king were abolished. A republican form of government was established. The House

* They were so named on account of the gayety of their dress, manners, etc., as contrasted with the gloomy austerity of the Roundheads, or adherents of the Parliament.

† This nickname was given to the Puritans, or parliamentary party, because they were accustomed to wear their hair cut close to the head. They were so called in opposition to the Cavaliers, who wore their hair in long ringlets.

‡ A term applied to Cromwell's cavalry.

of Commons ordered a new *Great Seal* to be made, bearing the words, "On the first year of freedom, by God's blessing, restored, 1648." The king's statue in the Exchange was thrown down, and on the pedestal was inscribed, *Exit tyrannus, Regum ultimus*—the tyrant is gone, the last of the kings!

The people of Ireland and Scotland, however, were still faithful in their allegiance to the fallen monarch. Cromwell was appointed commander-in-chief to carry on the war against the Irish and Scottish royalists. He landed in Ireland. His course was marked by scenes of blood, butchery, and barbarous massacres; and the unfortunate country was speedily obliged to submit to his fanatical authority. He next directed his steps to Scotland, and, after several sanguinary conflicts, he routed the royalists, and completely established the rule of the Parliament.

Cromwell, the desperate fanatic and master-tyrant of his age, now wielded immense power. He dissolved the Long Parliament, and, after three months, assembled what is known as the *Barebones' Parliament*.* It was composed of a body of out-and-out fanatics. It conferred the title of *Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England* on Cromwell, clothed him with supreme authority, and was soon after dissolved. The Protector's rule, it must be said, advanced the military glory of England. Abroad, his fleets and armies were victorious; he obliged the Dutch to sue for peace, and he humbled the power of Spain. But the fanatical despot was far from happy. Well he knew that he was despised by the nation, when death called him away in 1658.

* So named from one of its members, *Praise-God Barebones*. He was a London leather-dealer.

In less than two years the Stuart line was restored in the person of Charles II., eldest son of Charles I.* The young king was welcomed with joy, but he proved to be one of the most worthless and arbitrary monarchs that had ever ruled England. He soon plunged into a life of licentiousness. His example exercised the most pernicious influence on the morals of the higher classes of his subjects; and his court became a school of vice in which the restraints of decency were laughed to scorn.

During this reign London was visited with a plague which carried off 90,000 of its inhabitants; and in the following year † occurred the great fire by which 13,200 houses in the metropolis were reduced to ashes. Wars and plots were numerous, and the Catholics were persecuted and calumniated with all the fury of insane fanaticism. One of the venerable victims was *Oliver Plunkett*, the saintly Archbishop of Armagh. When, however, the last hour of the weak and erring monarch arrived, he became a Catholic; and a good priest, at much risk, received him into the Church of ages, heard his confession, and gave the Holy Communion to the last of the Charles that occupied the throne of England. ‡

* From the reign of Charles I. to the beginning of the reign of Charles II. was the great period of *pamphlet literature* in England. "Nearly 30,000 pamphlets," says Shepherd, "were published between the close of the year 1640 and the Restoration, 1660." They were the growth of strife and dissension.

† 1666.

‡ By law, the reconciliation of any person to the Catholic Church was an act of high treason. No priest could be privately introduced to the king for that purpose, while the room was crowded with lords, bishops, and medical attendants; and to remove them without a plausible reason could only provoke suspicion and inquiry. Having motioned the company to withdraw to the other end of the apartment, James—the Duke of York and the king's brother—knelt down by the pillow of the sick monarch, and asked if he might send for a Catholic priest. "For God's sake do!" was

As the late king died without leaving any legitimate children, he was succeeded by his brother, James II., in 1685. James was a Catholic. He "wished," says Cobbett, "to put an end to the penal code; he wished for general toleration; he issued a proclamation, suspending all penal laws relating to religion, and granting a general liberty of conscience to *all* his subjects. This was his offence. For this he and his family were set aside forever!"

Bigotry at once became alarmed. Six bishops of the Anglican Church sounded the tocsin of intolerance. As time passed the trouble increased. James became unpopular, and without being suspected, his bitter enemies prepared for a general revolt. They secretly applied for aid to William, the Protestant Prince of Orange and son-in-law of James,* and offered him the throne.

There was little delay. In November, 1688, William sailed from Holland in pursuit of the English crown. The invader, in a few days, was joined by the greater part of the English army; and James suddenly found himself deserted, even by those who owed all to his bounty. Among others who left him in this hour of dark distress was his favorite daughter *Anne*, who secretly withdrew to join the standard of the man who had pushed himself into the dominions

the reply; but he immediately added, "Will it not expose you to danger?" James replied that he cared not for the danger; and, having despatched a trusty messenger in search of a priest, stated aloud that the king required all present to quit the apartment, with the exception of the Earl of Bath, Lord of the Bed-chamber, and the Earl of Feversham, Captain of the Guard. In a short time, Hudleston, a priest, was led through the queen's apartments to a private door on the right hand of the bed; and James introduced him to the king with these words: "Sir, this worthy man comes to save your soul."—*Lingard*.

* He was married to James's daughter, the Princess Mary.

of her father and was about to snatch the crown from his brow.

The unhappy king was unnerved by this ungrateful conduct, and exclaimed, "God help me! My own children have forsaken me in my utmost need." James and his queen fled to France. William and Mary were proclaimed sovereigns.* On the fatal banks of the Boyne James saw his last hopes vanish; and as we pass into the eighteenth century William III., an intruding Dutchman, sits securely on the throne of Alfred the Great.

2. REMARKS ON THE BRITISH LITERATURE OF THIS AGE.—The British literature of the seventeenth century reflects the eventful history of that age. Its chief representative names are SHAKSPEARE, JONSON, MASSINGER, MILTON, BUTLER, DRYDEN, BACON, CLARENDON, and WALTON.

The immortal genius of Shakspeare made him the poet "not of an age but of all time." Milton is the Puritan poet of the Commonwealth, and Clarendon is the royalist historian of the Great Rebellion. The contempt of the royalists for the Puritans was hearty, and it found full expression in Butler's *Hudibras*.

The gloomy morals and grim fanaticism of the Commonwealth, when the theatres were closed † and amusement branded as a crime, were succeeded by the unbridled license of Charles II. and his court. Nor does English letters fail to reflect the new condition of things. The most remarkable illustration of this is to be found in the works of John Dryden.

* It was then settled that the English sovereign *must* be a Protestant. Even in the present state of things, an English king or queen would forfeit the crown by becoming a Catholic.

† They were closed from 1643, when the Puritans became masters of London, until the Restoration in 1660.

Every great event of the time, social, political, and religious, is mirrored in his poems; while unhappily he panders in his plays to the moral degeneracy of the court and the nobility. But his last years were so redeeming, that we may well forget the errors of the Restoration dramatist in the glory of an old age grand and religious.

New religious sects, bigoted, jealous, and warring, sprung up like mushrooms, each loudly claiming liberty of conscience, and all united in hating and persecuting the unfortunate Catholics. The followers of the ancient faith were not to be tolerated, and thus, in the words of Arnold, they "became an obscure and persecuted minority, which for a hundred years almost disappears from the public gaze and from the page of history."*

But in spite of its revolutions, follies, and fanaticism, the seventeenth century was *the* great age of

* During the reign of Charles I. and the rule of diabolical fanaticism that followed, the Catholics lost nearly everything which had escaped the destroying hand of the Reformation. Anything bearing the marks of the Catholic religion—be it book, statue, or picture—was burned by the Puritans. "The scarcity of books concerning the Catholics in this country" (England), writes I. D'Israeli, "is owing to two circumstances; the destruction of Catholic books and documents by the pursuivants in the reign of Charles I., and the destruction of them by the Catholics themselves from the dread of the heavy penalties in which their mere possession involved their owners." An impious wretch named Dowsing placed himself at the head of a mob of image-breakers. He kept a diary. "At Sunbury," he grimly writes, "we brake down ten mighty great angels in glass. At Barham, brake down the twelve apostles in the chancel, and six superstitious pictures more there; and eight in the church—one a lamb with cross (†) on the back." At another place they destroyed "six hundred superstitious pictures, eight Holy Ghosts, and three of the Son." And thus this destroying fiend and his party passed over one hundred and fifty parishes. Well did the poet write:

"There might you see an impious clown
Breaking our Saviour's image down;
And there you might behold another
Tearing the picture of Christ's mother."

English literature. The English language reached the full meridian of its splendor in the *Plays* of Shakspeare.* Bacon's *Essays* raised English prose to the pinnacle of condensation and beauty of expression. In *Paradise Lost* Milton gave us our greatest epic, and the genius of Dryden exhibited the riches, force, and flexibility of our speech in such a manner as to place him forever among the great masters of style.

LESSON I.

WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE.† DIED 1616.

Chief works: *Thirty-five Plays*.

1. Which is the greatest name in English literature?

William Shakspeare.

2. Where and when was he born?

At Stratford-on-Avon, England, in 1564. His parents were *John Shakspeare* and *Mary Arden*.

3. Do we know much about his life?

No; it is shrouded in obscurity.

4. State the chief facts which have come down to us in relation to Shakspeare's career.

He was educated at the grammar-school of his native place; married at the age of eighteen; went to London three years later; became an actor, playwright, and part-owner of the Globe Theatre; and,

* Shakspeare wrote some of his *Plays* as early as 1592, but it is pretty well settled that all his great masterpieces—as *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Julius Cæsar*—were written between the year 1600 and his death in 1616.

† Various has the name of the great dramatist been spelled. It is *Shakspeare* in the body of his will. He himself writes it two different ways—*shakspeare* and *Shakspere*.

finally, retired to Stratford a few years before his death.* This, in brief, is the sum of all that is really known of Shakspeare's personal life.†

5. What is the date of his death?

1616.

6. Did Shakspeare before his death collect and publish his plays?

No; but some years after his death this was done by Heming and Condell, two of his professional friends.

7. How are his thirty-five *Plays* classed?

They are commonly classed according to their nature into *tragedies*, *comedies*, and *histories*.

8. How many of them are tragedies?

Eleven.

9. How many are comedies?

Fourteen.

10. How many are histories?

Ten.

* About the year 1610 he retired permanently to Stratford, though he continued to write plays for the company with which he was connected.—*Whipple*.

† Shakspeare, the recorded incidents of whose outward career were so few and trifling, lived a more various life—a life more crowded with ideas, passions, volitions, and events—than any potentate the world has ever seen. Compared with his experience, the experience of Alexander or Hannibal, of Cæsar or Napoleon, was narrow and one-sided. He had projected himself into almost all the varieties of human character, and, in imagination, had intensely realized and *lived* the life of each. From the throne of the monarch to the bench of the village alehouse, there were few positions in which he had not placed himself, and which he had not for a time identified with his own. No other man had ever seen nature and human life from so many points of view, for he had looked upon them through the eyes of *Mast'r Slender* and *Hamlet*, of *Caliban* and *Othello*, of *Dogberry* and *Mark Antony*, of *Ancient Pistol* and *Julius Cæsar*, of *Mistress Tearsheet* and *Imogen*, of *Dame Quickly* and *Lady Macbeth*, of *Robin Goodfellow* and *Titania*, of *Hecate* and *Ariel*. . . . Capable of being all that he actually or imaginatively sees, he enters at will, and abandons at will, the passions that brand or blast other natures.—*Whipple*.

LESSON II.

SHAKSPEARE, CONTINUED.

11. Name the five great tragedies of Shakspeare.

Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, and Romeo and Juliet.

12. Mention some of his best comedies.

The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, and The Midsummer-Night's Dream.

13. Name a few of the most remarkable of his historical plays.

*Julius Cæsar, Richard the Third, Henry the Eighth, and Coriolanus.**

14. Are the plays of Shakspeare well known to other nations?

They have been translated into every language of Europe and into some of the Asiatic tongues.

15. What, it may be asked, is the true secret of Shakspeare's power and universal fame?

His wonderful insight into human nature, the human soul, and the philosophy of life; his unrivalled power in the creation and delineation of character; the boundless reach of his exquisite imagination; and his magic mastery over language. He was poet, dramatist, moralist, and philosopher in one.†

* The above-named twelve plays show Shakspeare, perhaps, in his finest vein; but the student who would know him thoroughly must read him from cover to cover.

† He dissects the human mind in all its conditions. He displays its workings as it lives and throbs. He divines the secret impulses of all ages and characters—childhood, boyhood, manhood, girlhood, and womanhood; men of peace and men of war; clowns, nobles, and kings. His large heart was sympathetic with all, and even most so with the lowly and suffering; he shows us ourselves, and enables us to use that knowledge for our profit. All the vir-

16. What may be said of him as a word-painter?

When Shakspeare describes anything, you more than see it—you feel it too.

17. What can you say of his style?

In the art of writing well Shakspeare arrived at a perfection which places him above all other poets. It resembles no other style. But his language is most simple and natural. He had the happy gift of saying much in a few words, and his bright, pithy sentences often bend under a load of wit or wisdom.

18. Why is Shakspeare, perhaps, more frequently quoted than any other writer?

Because nearly every one of his pages sparkle with gems of thought, where some happy word or phrase conveys to us a whole train of ideas condensed, so to speak, into a single luminous point. Thus it is that writers and orators give point and dignity to their own periods by quoting Shakspeare.*

tues are held up to our imitation and praise, and all the vices are scourged and rendered odious in our sight. To read Shakspeare aright is of the nature of honest self-examination—that most difficult and most necessary of duties.—*Coppée.*

* In reading Shakspeare we feel pleasure in stumbling upon such phrases and sayings as "trumpet-tongued"; "single-blessedness"; "food for gunpowder"; "to the manner born"; "the live-long day"; "as firm as faith"; "the observed of all observers"; "to take arms against a sea of troubles"; "Brevity is the soul of wit"; "Be just, and fear not"; "Dressed in a little brief authority"; "Seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth"; "The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling"; "Upon his brow shame is ashamed to sit"; "The undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns"; "It is a custom more honored in the breach than the observance"; "Beggars that I am, I am poor even in thanks"; "The evil that men do lives after them"; "I am constant as the northern star"; "The valiant never taste of death but once"; "Cowards die many times before their deaths"; "This was the noblest Roman of them all."

"Poor Brutus, with himself at war,
Forgets the shows of love to other men.""He who filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed,"

19. What did Shakspeare write besides his thirty-five plays?

One hundred and fifty-four sonnets and some poems of considerable length.

20. Is our language much indebted to Shakspeare?

It is; it may be said that he moulded the elements of English for the first time into one harmonious whole.*

21. What may be considered the chief defects of Shakspeare's plays?

The style has been criticised for occasional obscurity, flatness, and bombast; some passages are justly accused of immodest coarseness;† and the ending of some of the plots is hurried and imperfect.

22. Was Shakespeare a Catholic?

Nothing absolutely conclusive is known on this point, but it can be truly affirmed that in numberless passages of his plays he gives abundant proof that he

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their lives
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

It has been said that many of the sayings of Shakspeare drop upon the mind "like a splendor out of heaven."

* There are three men in the annals of poetry who may be said to have created, or rather *fixed*, not merely the literature but also the language of their several countries. These three are *Homer*, *Dante*, and *Shakspeare*, and of the three the last is not the least.—*Hart*.

† Shakspeare is often immodest but never sensual, as the learned Cardinal Newman remarks. We must not forget that he lived in an age of great coarseness and corruption. He held "the mirror up to nature"—or rather depraved nature—and it is not surprising that we see reflected in his bright and sparkling pages many a sad truth, over which the pure mind instinctively hurries. It remembers frail humanity. It is charitable. It is prudent. It looks up to heaven. It passes on without shock or fright. In comparison, however, with the other dramatists of his time, Shakspeare is remarkably pure.

held the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church in tender and reverential regard.*

"He was the man who, of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul."—*John Dryden*.

"I profess myself one of Shakspeare's enthusiastic admirers. His language is the purest and best, his verses the most flowing and rich; and as for his sentiments, it would be difficult without the command of his own language to characterize them. No other writer has ever given such periods of sententious wisdom."—*Cardinal Wiseman*.

"Shakspeare is, by the common consent of mankind, the greatest dramatist, and in the opinion of a large and growing number of critics the greatest writer, that the world has ever produced. His writings created an era in literature, and constitute of themselves a special and most important study."—*Dr. J. S. Hart*.

"The name of Shakspeare is the greatest in our literature. It is the greatest in all literature. No man ever came near him in the creative powers of the mind; no man ever had such strength, at once, and such variety of imagination."—*Henry Hallam*.

"A whole world is unfolded in the works of Shakspeare. He who has once comprehended this, and been penetrated with its spirit, will not easily allow the effect to be diminished by the form, or listen to the cavils of those who are incapable of understanding the import of what they would criticise. The form of Shakspeare's writings will rather appear to him good and excellent, because in it his spirit is expressed and clothed, as it were, in a convenient garment."—*F. Schlegel*.

* We know so very little about his personal life that, in any inquiry into his religious opinions, we are forced to fall back upon his works; and it is pretty certain that a careful perusal of his plays—always bearing in mind that they were penned in the barbarously intolerant reigns of Elizabeth and James I.—will leave little doubt as to Shakspeare's having been in his soul a sincere Catholic. In vain may we search his historical plays for a single passage containing a sneer or hostile reflection on the *doctrines* or *ceremonies* of the Catholic Church. It is true that he has few compliments for some of his high ecclesiastical personages. But though the Religious Orders were especially odious to the early Protestant reformers, Shakspeare invariably draws the characters of nuns and the regular clergy with a hand that seems both kind and Catholic. To his gifted mind grim Puritanism was a thing utterly repulsive. He raises the laugh at it in many a passage. In one place he makes a gay good-humored fellow say:

"Let me play the fool;
With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come.
Why should a man whose blood is warm within,
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
There are a sort of men whose visages
Do cream and mantle like a standing pond.

LESSON III.

✓ BEN JONSON. DIED 1637.

Chief works: *Forty-six Plays*.*

23. Who was Ben Jonson?

He was one of the greatest of the English dramatists. Jonson is generally considered as second only to Shakspeare.

24. Give a short account of his early life.

It was rough and varied. The sturdy young fellow was by turns a school-boy, a hod-carrier, a soldier shouldering his pike, and a student at Cambridge. The frowns of fortune induced him to become an actor, and at the age of twenty-two he produced his first comedy.

25. What is the name of Jonson's first comedy, and what are its merits?

It is called *Every Man in his Humor*, and is commonly ranked among the best of his productions. Jonson, however, had little real fun, wit, or imagination, and the characters in his play pass before us more like shadows than live flesh-and-blood personages.

26. Which is the most remarkable character in *Every Man in his Humor*?

Captain Bobadil, a great coward and bouncing braggart.†

And do a wilful stillness entertain,
With purpose to be dressed up in an opinion
Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit;
As who should say, I am Sir Oracle;
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!"

* Two of these are tragedies, eleven are comedies, three are comical satires, one is a pastoral drama, and twenty-eight are masques or other court entertainments.

† "Bobadil, especially," says Whipple, "is one of Ben's master-

27. To what office was Jonson appointed in 1616—the year that Shakspeare died?

He was appointed poet-laureate.

28. Which are his finest comedies?

Every Man in his Humor, *Volpone*, and *The Alchemist*.

29. Name his two tragedies.

Catiline and *Sejanus*, which are founded on two of the darkest pages in Roman history.

30. Where was Jonson buried?

In Westminster Abbey, where the inscription on his tombstone—"O Rare Ben Jonson"—can be seen to this day.

31. How may Jonson's chief characteristics as a writer be summed up?

With much learning, little imagination, and a great deal of vanity, he was one of the most moral playwrights of his time, and, next to Shakspeare, the most original.

"His pieces are in general deficient in soul, in that nameless something which never ceases to attract and enchant us even because it is indefinable."—A. W. Schlegel.

"Jonson possessed all the learning that was wanting to Shakspeare, and wanted all the genius which the other possessed."—Hume.

"He is 'Saxon' England in epitome—John Bull passing from a name into a man—a proud, strong, tough, solid, domineering individual, whose intellect and personality cannot be severed, even in thought, from his body and personal appearance."—Whipple.

pieces. He is the most colossal coward and braggart of the comic stage. He can swear by nothing less terrible than *by the body of Cæsar*, or *by the foot of Pharaoh*, when his oath is not something more terrific still, namely, *by my valor!* Every school-boy knows the celebrated passage in which the boasting Captain offers to settle the affairs of Europe by associating with himself twenty other Bobadils, as 'cunning in the fence' as himself, and challenging an army of 40,000 men, twenty at a time, and killing the whole in a certain number of days. Leaving out the cowardice, we may say there was something of Bobadil in Jonson himself."—*Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*.

LESSON IV.

PHILIP MASSINGER. DIED 1640.

Chief works: *Eighteen Plays*.*

32. What is known of Massinger's personal life?

Almost nothing, but that he was the son of a gentleman, that he studied for a year or two at Oxford, that he became a play-writer, and finally died in poverty and obscurity.†

33. How many of his plays do we possess?

Eighteen.

34. Which of Massinger's famous comedies still keeps the stage?

A New Way to Pay Old Debts; it keeps possession of the stage for the sake of the finely drawn character, *Sir Giles Overreach*.

35. What may be considered his chief tragedy?

The Virgin Martyr; it has telling situations, and was extremely popular in its day. The martyr is Dorothea, a Christian maiden of the age of Diocletian.

* Six tragedies, eight comedies, and four tragi-comedies. "He wrote *thirty-eight* plays," says Whipple, "twenty of which have perished. Eleven of them, in manuscript, were in the possession of a Mr. Warburton, whose cook, desirous of saving what she considered better paper, used them in the kindling of fires and the basting of turkeys, and would doubtless have treated the manuscript of the *Fairy Queen* and the *Novum Organum* in the same way had Providence seen fit to commit them to her master's custody."—*Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*.

† "His death and burial were in harmony with the loneliness of his life. We are told that, on the 16th of March, 1640, he went to bed seemingly in good health, and was found dead in the morning. In the parish register of the Church of St. Saviour's, under the date of March 20th, we read: '*Buried, Philip Massinger, a stranger.*' No stone indicates where in the churchyard he was laid."—*Whipple*.

36. What may be said of Massinger's style?

His style charms by its ease, clearness, dignity, elegance, and flexibility.*

"Massinger is by some critics ranked next after Shakspeare. Assuredly his skill in the representation of character is superior to that of any of the secondary dramatists except Jonson."—*Spalding*.

"The English drama never suffered a greater loss than in the havoc which time and negligence have committed among the works of Massinger; for of thirty-eight plays attributed to his pen, only eighteen have been preserved."—*Drake*.

"In expressing the dignity of virtue, and in showing greatness of soul rising superior to circumstance and fate, Massinger exhibits so peculiar a vigor and felicity that it is impossible not to conceive such delineations—in which the poet delighted—to be a reflection of his own proud and patient soul, and perhaps, too, but too true a memorial of 'the rich man's scorn, the proud man's contumely,' which he had himself undergone."—*Shaw*.

* In spite of their occasional coarseness—which is to be referred rather to the manners of the time than to the author—the plays of Massinger abound in noble passages like the following:

"When good men pursue
The path marked out by virtue, the blest saints
With joy look on it, and seraphic angels
Clap their celestial wings in heavenly plaudits."

"As you have
A soul moulded from heaven, and do desire
To have it made a star there, make the means
Of your ascent to that celestial height
Virtue winged with brave action; they draw near
The nature and the essence of the gods
Who imitate their goodness."

LESSON V.

JOHN MILTON. DIED 1674.

Chief works: (1) <i>Paradise Lost</i> .	} Poems.
(2) <i>Paradise Regained</i> .	
(3) <i>Comus</i> .	
(4) <i>Samson Agonistes</i> .	
(5) <i>Ode on the Nativity</i> .	
(6) <i>Lycidas</i> .	
(7) <i>L'Allegro</i> .	
(8) <i>Il Penseroso</i> .	
(9) <i>Areopagitica</i> .	

37. Who was John Milton?

He was the greatest epic poet of English literature.

38. Give a brief account of his early life.

Young Milton was a native of London, and a handsome, studious boy, who grew up under Puritan influences.* He completed his studies at the University of Cambridge, and after some years made a tour through France and Italy.

39. What appointment did he receive under the iron rule of Cromwell?

That of Latin or Foreign Secretary.†

40. What became of Milton on the restoration of Charles II.?

The restoration brought gloom and terror to the house of the great Puritan poet. He hid himself for a time, and lived in retirement till his death in 1674.‡

41. What ode did Milton compose in his twenty-first year?

The magnificent *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*. It is the earliest of the great English odes, and ranks among the finest specimens of lyric poetry in our language.

* The poet's grandfather was a strict Catholic, but his father became a Protestant.

† Latin was then the language of diplomacy.

‡ Milton was totally blind for the last twenty years of his life.

42. What is the *Allegro*?

It is a poem of mirth, in which we see

“Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides.”

43. What is the nature of *Il Penseroso*?

It is a poetical tribute to Melancholy, represented
as a

“Pensive nun devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkest grain,
Flowing with majestic train.”

44. Are the *Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* popular poems?

These two gems are perhaps the best known and most appreciated of all Milton's works.

45. What is *Comus*?

Comus, though written as a *mask*,* is a noble poem in the form of a drama.† It exhibits the power and glory of Chastity.‡

46. What is *Lycidas*?

It is a poem on the loss of a friend named King.§

* A mask, or masque, is a dramatic performance written in a tragic style, without attention to rules of composition or probability, and introducing such characters that the actors must be masked.

† “Of Milton's early poems,” says Henry Reid, “the most beautiful is the exquisite *Masque of Comus*, one of the last and loveliest radiations of the dramatic spirit, which seemed almost to live its life out in about half a century of English literature, beginning in the times of Queen Elizabeth, and ending in those of Charles I.”—*Lectures on English Literature*.

‡ The following beautiful lines are often quoted:

“So dear to Heaven is saintly Chastity,
That, when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt.”

§ *Lycidas* was written to commemorate the death of a college friend, Mr. King, who was drowned on the passage from England to Ireland. But Milton's grief sets him thinking; and, in this remarkable poem, the monotone of a deep sorrow is replaced by the linked musings of a mind which, once set in motion by grief, pours forth abundantly the treasures of thought and imagination stored up within it.—*T. Arnold*.