

the circuit of the globe dropped anchor again in Plymouth harbour.

The romantic daring of Drake's voyage, as well as the vastness of his spoil, roused a general enthusiasm throughout England. But the welcome he received from Elizabeth on his return was accepted by Philip as an outrage which could only be expiated by war. Sluggish as it was, the blood of the Spanish King was fired at last by the defiance with which Elizabeth received all demands for redress. She met a request for Drake's surrender by knighting the freebooter, and by wearing in her crown the jewels he had offered her as a present. When the Spanish ambassador threatened that "matters would come to the cannon," she replied "quietly, in her most natural voice, as if she were telling a common story," wrote Mendoza, "that if I used threats of that kind she would fling me into a dungeon." Outraged as Philip was, she believed that with the Netherlands still in revolt and France longing for her alliance to enable it to seize them, the King could not afford to quarrel with her. But the sense of personal wrong, and the outcry of the Catholic world against his selfish reluctance to avenge the blood of its martyrs, at last told on the Spanish King, and the first vessels of an armada which was destined for the conquest of England began to gather in the Tagus. Resentment and fanaticism indeed were backed by a cool policy. His conquest of Portugal had almost doubled his power. It gave him the one navy that as yet rivalled his own. With the Portuguese

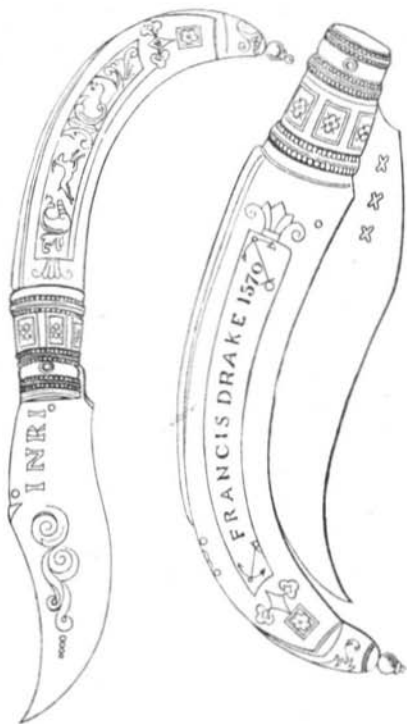
SEC. VI

THE  
ARMADA

1572

TO

1588

The  
Death of  
Mary  
Stuart

CLASP-KNIFE OF SIR FRANCIS DRAKE.

*Journal of Archaeological Association.*

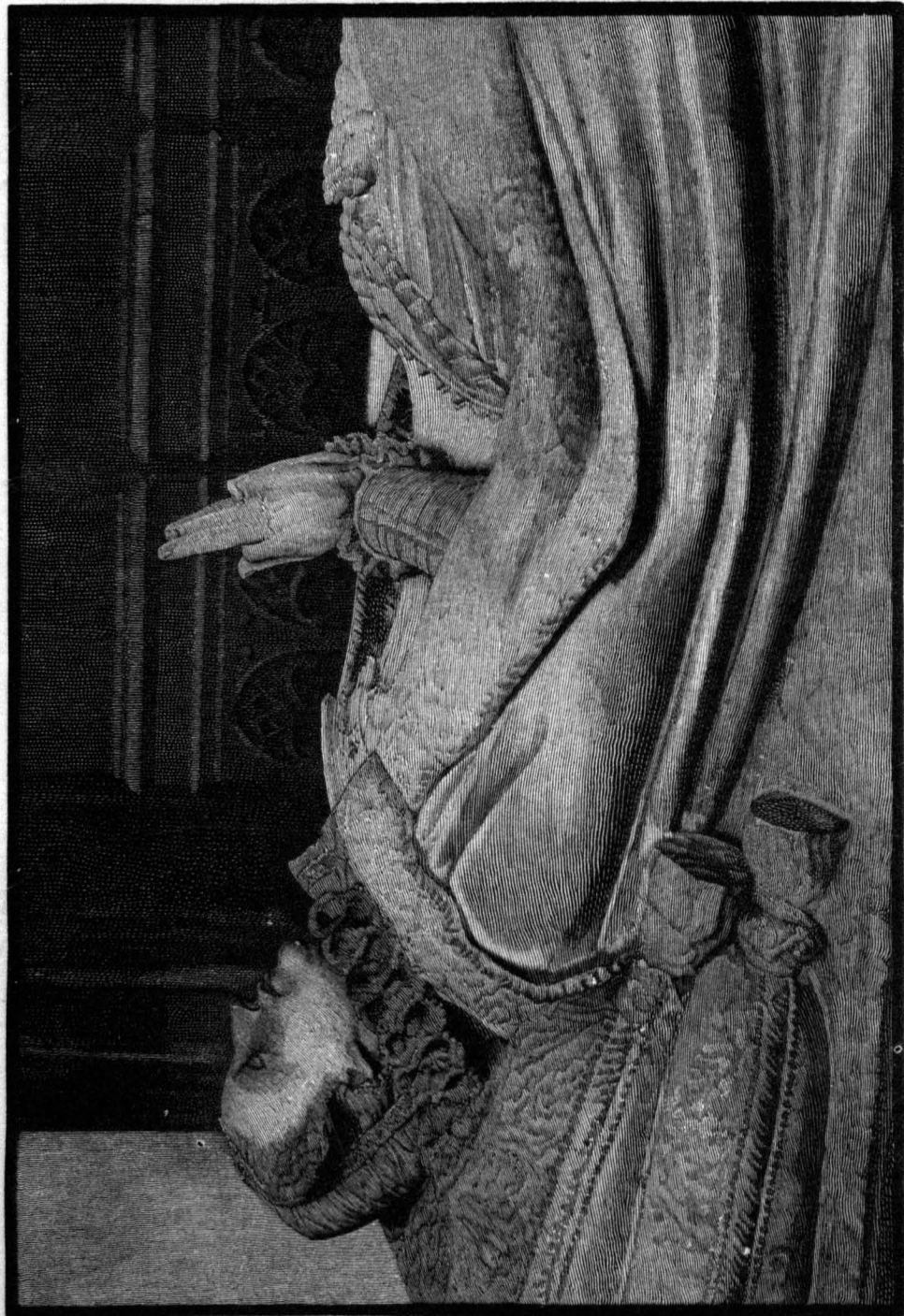
1584

1580

SEC. VI  
THE  
ARMADA  
1572  
TO  
1588

colonies his flag claimed mastery in the Indian and the Pacific seas, as it claimed mastery in the Atlantic and Mediterranean ; and he had now to shut Englishman and heretic not only out of the New World of the West but out of the lucrative traffic with the East. In the Netherlands too and in France all seemed to go well for Philip's schemes. His forces under Parma had steadily won their way in the Low Countries, and a more fatal blow had been dealt at his rebellious subjects in the assassination of William of Orange ; while all danger of French intervention passed away with the death of the Duke of Anjou, which left Henry of Navarre, the leader of the Huguenot party, heir of the crown of France. To prevent the triumph of heresy in the succession of a Protestant king, the Guises and the French Catholics rose at once in arms ; but the Holy League which they formed rested mainly on the support of Philip, and so long as he supplied them with men and money, he was secure on the side of France. It was at this moment that Parma won his crowning triumph in the capture of Antwerp ; its fall after a gallant resistance convinced even Elizabeth of the need for action if the one "bridle to Spain which kept war out of our own gate" was to be saved. Lord Leicester was hurried to the Flemish coast with 8,000 men. In a yet bolder spirit of defiance Francis Drake was suffered to set sail with a fleet of twenty-five vessels for the Spanish Main. Drake's voyage was a series of triumphs. The wrongs inflicted on English seamen by the Inquisition were requited by the burning of the cities of St. Domingo and Carthagen. The coasts of Cuba and Florida were plundered, and though the gold fleet escaped him, Drake returned with a heavy booty. But only one disastrous skirmish at Zutphen, the fight in which Sidney fell, broke the inaction of Leicester's forces, while Elizabeth strove vainly to use the presence of his army to negotiate a peace between Philip and the States. Meanwhile dangers thickened round her in England itself. Maddened by persecution, by the hopelessness of rebellion within or of deliverance from without, the fiercer Catholics listened to schemes of assassination to which the murder of William of Orange lent a terrible significance. The detection of Somerville, a fanatic who had received the Host before setting out for London "to shoot the Queen with his dagger," was followed

by measures of natural severity, by the flight and arrest of Catholic gentry and peers, by a vigorous purification of the Inns of Court where a few Catholics lingered, and by the despatch of fresh batches of priests to the block. The trial and death of Parry, a member of the House of Commons who had served in the Queen's household, on a similar charge, fed the general panic. Parliament met in a transport of horror and loyalty. All Jesuits and seminary priests were banished from the realm on pain of death. A bill for the security of the Queen disqualified any claimant of the succession who instigated subjects to rebellion or hurt to the Queen's person from ever succeeding to the Crown. The threat was aimed at Mary Stuart. Weary of her long restraint, of her failure to rouse Philip or Scotland to aid her, of the baffled revolt of the English Catholics and the baffled intrigues of the Jesuits, she had bent for a moment to submission. "Let me go," she wrote to Elizabeth; "let me retire from this island to some solitude where I may prepare my soul to die. Grant this, and I will sign away every right which either I or mine can claim." But the cry was useless, and her despair found a new and more terrible hope in the plots against Elizabeth's life. She knew and approved the vow of Anthony Babington and a band of young Catholics, for the most part connected with the royal household, to kill the Queen; but plot and approval alike passed through Walsingham's hands, and the seizure of Mary's correspondence revealed her guilt. In spite of her protest a Commission of Peers sate as her judges at Fotheringay Castle; and their verdict of "guilty" annihilated under the provisions of the recent statute her claim to the Crown. The streets of London blazed with bonfires, and peals rang out from steeple to steeple at the news of her condemnation; but, in spite of the prayer of Parliament for her execution, and the pressure of her Council, Elizabeth shrank from her death. The force of public opinion, however, was now carrying all before it, and the unanimous demand of her people wrested at last a sullen consent from the Queen. She flung the warrant signed upon the floor, and the Council took on themselves the responsibility of executing it. Mary died on a scaffold which was erected in the castle-hall at Fotheringay as dauntlessly as she had lived. "Do not weep," she said to her ladies, "I have given my word for you."



EFFIGY OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, ON HER TOMB AT WESTMINSTER.

"Tell my friends," she charged Melville, "that I die a good Catholic."

The blow was hardly struck before Elizabeth turned with fury on the ministers who had forced her hand. Cecil, who had now become Lord Burleigh, was for a while disgraced ; and Davison, who carried the warrant to the Council, was flung into the Tower to atone for an act which shattered the policy of the Queen. The death of Mary Stuart in fact seemed to remove the last obstacle out of Philip's way, by putting an end to the divisions of the English Catholics. To him, as to the nearest heir in blood who was of the Catholic Faith, Mary bequeathed her rights to the Crown, and the hopes of her adherents were from that moment bound up in the success of Spain. Philip no longer needed pressure to induce him to act. Drake's triumph had taught him that the conquest of England was needful for the security of his dominion in the New World. The presence of an English army in Flanders convinced him that the road to the conquest of the States lay through England itself. The operations of Parma therefore in the Low Countries were suspended with a view to the greater enterprise. Vessels and supplies for the fleet which had for three years been gathering in the Tagus were collected from every port of the Spanish coast. Only the dread of a counter-attack from France, where the fortunes of the League were wavering, held Philip back. But the news of the coming Armada called Drake again to action. He set sail with thirty small barks, burned the storeships and galleys in the harbour of Cadiz, stormed the forts of the Faro, and was only foiled in his aim of attacking the Armada itself by orders from home. A descent upon Corunna however completed what Drake called his "singeing of the Spanish King's beard." Elizabeth used the daring blow to back her negotiations for peace ; but the Spanish pride had been touched to the quick. Amidst the exchange of protocols Parma gathered seventeen thousand men for the coming invasion, collected a fleet of flat-bottomed transports at Dunkirk, and waited impatiently for the Armada to protect his crossing. But the attack of Drake, the death of its first admiral, and the winter storms delayed the fleet from sailing. The fear of France held it back yet more effectually ; but in the spring Philip's patience was

SEC. VI

THE  
ARMADA  
1572  
TO  
1588The  
Armada

1587

## SEC. VI

THE  
ARMADA

1572

TO

1588

rewarded. The League was triumphant, and the King a prisoner in its hands. The Armada at once set sail from Lisbon, but it had hardly started when a gale in the Bay of Biscay drove its scattered vessels into Ferrol. It was only on the nineteenth of



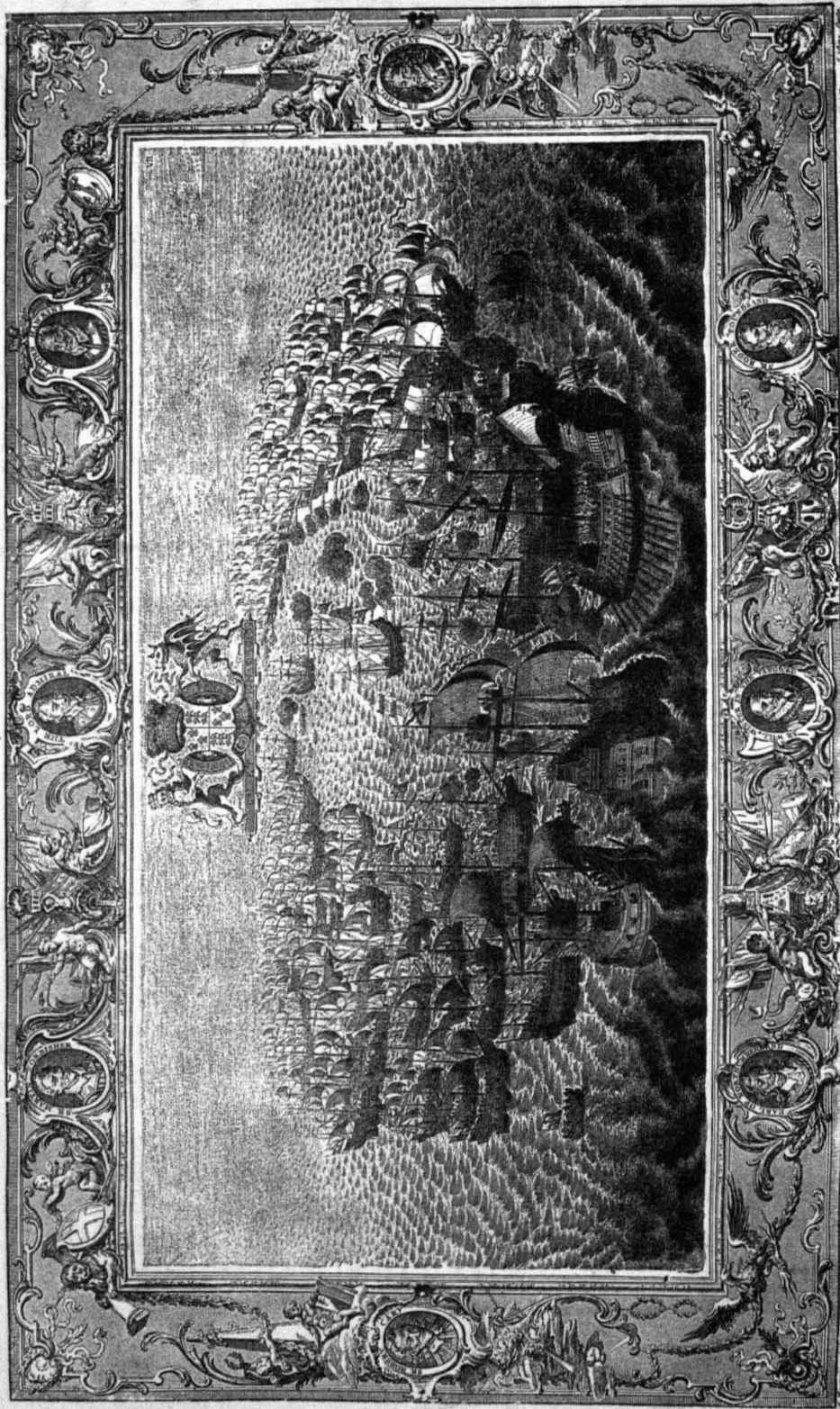
CHART OF THE ARMADA'S COURSE.  
*Pine's Engraving, 1739, of Tapestry then in House of Lords.*

1588

July that the sails of the Armada were seen from the Lizard, and the English beacons flared out their alarm along the coast. The news found England ready. An army was mustering under Leicester at Tilbury, the militia of the midland counties were gathering to London, while those of the south and east were held

in readiness to meet a descent on either shore. Had Parma landed on the earliest day he purposed, he would have found his way to London barred by a force stronger than his own, a force too of men in whose ranks were many who had already crossed pikes on equal terms with his best infantry in Flanders. "When I shall have landed," he warned his master, "I must fight battle after battle, I shall lose men by wounds and disease, I must leave detachments behind me to keep open my communications; and in a short time the body of my army will become so weak that not only I may be unable to advance in the face of the enemy, and time may be given to the heretics and your Majesty's other enemies to interfere, but there may fall out some notable inconveniences, with the loss of everything, and I be unable to remedy it." Even had Parma landed, in fact, the only real chance of Spanish success lay in a Catholic rising; and at this crisis patriotism proved stronger than religious fanaticism in the hearts of the English Catholics. Catholic lords brought their vessels up alongside of Drake and Lord Howard, and Catholic gentry led their tenantry to the muster at Tilbury. But to secure a landing at all, the Spaniards had to be masters of the Channel; and in the Channel lay an English fleet resolved to struggle hard for the mastery. As the Armada sailed on in a broad crescent past Plymouth, moving towards its point of junction with Parma at Calais, the vessels which had gathered under Lord Howard of Effingham slipped out of the bay and hung with the wind upon their rear. In numbers the two forces were strangely unequal; the English fleet counted only 80 vessels against the 149 which composed the Armada. In size of ships the disproportion was even greater. Fifty of the English vessels, including the squadron of the Lord Admiral and the craft of the volunteers, were little bigger than yachts of the present day. Even of the thirty Queen's ships which formed its main body, there were only four which equalled in tonnage the smallest of the Spanish galleons. Sixty-five of these galleons formed the most formidable half of the Spanish fleet; and four galleys, four galleasses, armed with fifty guns apiece, fifty-six armed merchantmen, and twenty pinnaces, made up the rest. The Armada was provided with 2,500 cannons, and a vast store of provisions; it had on board 8,000 seamen, and more than 20,000

SEC. VI  
—  
THE  
ARMADA  
1572  
TO  
1588  
—



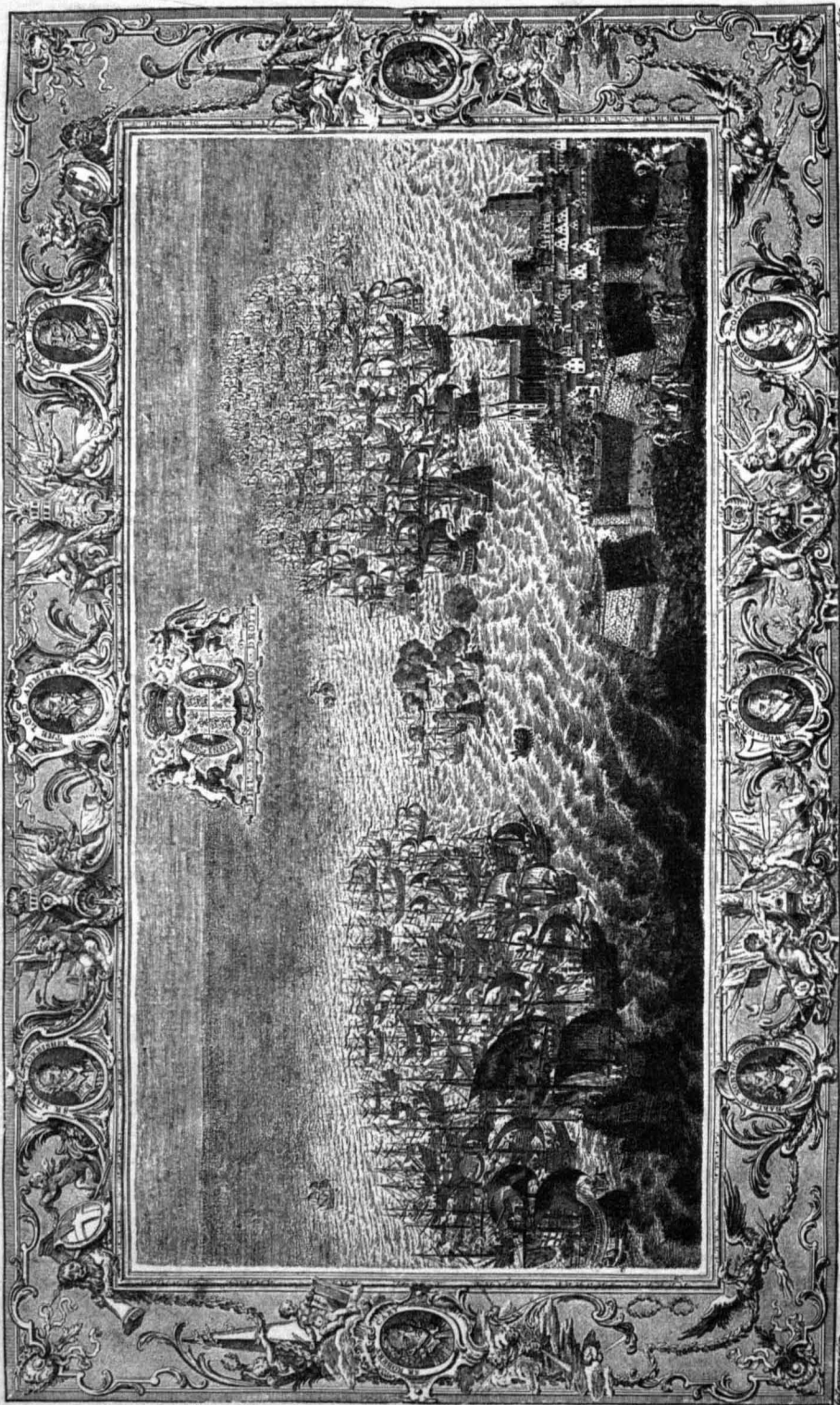
RIGHT BETWEEN THE ARMADA AND THE ENGLISH FLEET OFF THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

Engraved by W. Smith, after a drawing by J. Smith. See also, 1720, according to the original. Printed by J. Smith, in the House of Lords. Price 1s. 6d.

soldiers; and if a court-favourite, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, had been placed at its head, he was supported by the ablest staff of naval officers which Spain possessed. Small however as the English ships were, they were in perfect trim; they sailed two feet for the Spaniards' one, they were manned with 9,000 hardy seamen, and their Admiral was backed by a crowd of captains who had won fame in the Spanish seas. With him was Hawkins, who had been the first to break into the charmed circle of the Indies; Frobisher, the hero of the North-West passage; and above all Drake, who held command of the privateers. They had won too the advantage of the wind, and, closing in or drawing off as they would, the lightly-handled English vessels, which fired four shots to the Spaniards' one, hung boldly on the rear of the great fleet as it moved along the Channel. "The feathers of the Spaniard," in the phrase of the English seamen, were "plucked one by one." Galleon after galleon was sunk, boarded, driven on shore; and yet Medina Sidonia failed in bringing his pursuers to a close engagement. Now halting, now moving slowly on, the running fight between the two fleets lasted throughout the week, till the Armada dropped anchor in Calais roads. The time had now come for sharper work if the junction of the Armada with Parma was to be prevented; for, demoralized as the Spaniards had been by the merciless chase, their loss in ships had not been great, while though the numbers of English ships had grown, their supplies of food and ammunition were fast running out. Howard resolved to force an engagement, and, lighting eight fireships at midnight, sent them down with the tide upon the Spanish line. The galleons at once cut their cables, and stood out in panic to sea, drifting with the wind in a long line off Gravelines. Drake resolved at all costs to prevent their return. At dawn the English ships closed fairly in, and almost their last cartridge was spent ere the sun went down. Three great galleons had sunk, three had drifted helplessly on to the Flemish coast; but the bulk of the Spanish vessels remained, and even to Drake the fleet seemed "wonderful great and strong." Within the Armada itself, however, all hope was gone. Huddled together by the wind and the deadly English fire, their sails torn, their masts shot away, the crowded galleons had become mere slaughter-houses. Four thousand men had fallen,

SEC. VI  
THE  
ARMADA  
1572  
TO  
1588

July 28




THE ARMADA FLYING TO CALAIS.  
*Pine's Engraving, 1739, of Tapestry then in House of Lords.*

Engraved by J. Pine, from a Tapestry in the House of Lords.

Engraved by J. Pine, from a Tapestry in the House of Lords.

Engraved by J. Pine, from a Tapestry in the House of Lords.

and bravely as the seamen fought they were cowed by the terrible butchery. Medina himself was in despair. "We are lost, Señor Oquenda," he cried to his bravest captain; "what are we to do?" "Let others talk of being lost," replied Oquenda, "your Excellency has only to order up fresh cartridge." But Oquenda stood alone, and a council of war resolved on retreat to Spain by the one course open, that of a circuit round the Orkneys. "Never anything pleased me better," wrote Drake, "than seeing the enemy fly with a southerly wind to the northwards. Have a good eye to the Prince of Parma, for, with the grace of God, if we like, I doubt not ere it be long so to handle the matter with the Duke of Sidonia, as he shall wish himself at St. Mary Port among his orange trees." But the work of destruction was reserved for a mightier foe than Drake. Supplies fell short and the English vessels were forced to give up the chase; but the Spanish ships which remained had no sooner reached the Orkneys than the storms of the northern seas broke on them with a fury before which all concert and union disappeared. Fifty reached Corunna, bearing ten thousand men stricken with pestilence and death. Of the rest some were sunk, some dashed to pieces against the Irish cliffs. The wreckers of the Orkneys and the Faroes, the clansmen of the Scottish Isles, the kernes of Donegal and Galway, all had their part in the work of murder and robbery. Eight thousand Spaniards perished between the Giant's Causeway and the Blaskets. On a strand near Sligo an English captain numbered eleven hundred corpses which had been cast up by the sea. The flower of the Spanish nobility, who had been sent on the new crusade under Alonzo da Leyva, after twice suffering shipwreck, put a third time to sea to founder on a reef near Dunluce.



SEC. VI  
THE  
ARMADA  
1572  
TO  
1588

## SEC. VII

THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

## Section VII.—The Elizabethan Poets

[*Authorities.*—For a general account of this period, see Mr. Morley's admirable "First Sketch of English Literature," Hallam's "Literary History," M. Taine's "History of English Literature," &c. Mr. Craik has elaborately illustrated the works of Spenser, and full details of the history of our early drama may be found in Mr. Collier's "History of English Dramatic Literature to the time of Shakspeare." Malone's enquiry remains the completest investigation into the history of Shakspeare's dramas; and the works of Mr. Armitage Brown and Mr. Gerald Massey contain the latest theories as to the Sonnets. For Ben Jonson and his fellows, see their works with the notes of Gifford, &c. The fullest account of Lord Bacon will be found in his "Life and Letters," now published with his "Works," by Mr. Spedding, whose apologetic tones may be contrasted with the verdict of Lord Macaulay ("Essay on Lord Bacon") and with the more judicious judgement of Mr. Gardiner ("History of England"). See also Mr. Lewes's "History of Philosophy."]

The  
Elizabethan  
Poetry

We have already watched the revival of English letters during the earlier half of Elizabeth's reign. The general awakening of national life, the increase of wealth, of refinement and leisure, which marked that period, had been accompanied, as we have seen, by a quickening of English intelligence, which found vent in an upgrowth of grammar schools, in the new impulse given to classical learning at the Universities, in a passion for translations which familiarized all England with the masterpieces of Italy and Greece, and above all in the crude but vigorous efforts of Sackville and Lyly after a nobler poetry and prose. But to the national and local influences which were telling on English literature was added that of the restlessness and curiosity which characterized the age. The sphere of human interest was widened as it has never been widened before or since by the revelation of a new heaven and a new earth. It was only in the later years of the sixteenth century that the discoveries of Copernicus were brought home to the general intelligence of the world by Kepler and Galileo, or that the daring of the Buccaneers broke through the veil which the greed of Spain had drawn across the New World of Columbus. Hardly inferior to these revelations as a source of intellectual impulse was the sudden and picturesque way in which the various races of the world were brought face to face with one another through the universal passion for foreign travel. While the red tribes of the

West were described by Amerigo Vespucci, and the strange civilization of Mexico and Peru disclosed by Cortes and Pizarro, the voyages of the Portuguese threw open the older splendours of the East, and the story of India and China was told for the first time to Christendom by Maffei and Mendoza. England took her full part in this work of discovery. Jenkinson, an English traveller, made his way to Bokhara. Willoughby brought back Muscovy to

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA-  
BETHAN  
POETS



JOURNEY-RING, OR VIATORIUM, 1587.  
*British Museum.*

the knowledge of Western Europe. English mariners penetrated among the Esquimaux, or settled in Virginia. Drake circumnavigated the globe. The "Collection of Voyages," which was published by Hakluyt, not only disclosed the vastness of the world itself, but the infinite number of the races of mankind, the variety of their laws, their customs, their religions, their very instincts. We see the influence of this new and wider knowledge of the world,

## SEC. VII

THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

not only in the life and richness which it gave to the imagination of the time, but in the immense interest which from this moment attached itself to Man. Shakspeare's conception of Caliban, like the questionings of Montaigne, marks the beginning of a new and a truer, because a more inductive, philosophy of human nature and human history. The fascination exercised by the study of human character showed itself in the essays of Bacon, and yet more in the wonderful popularity of the drama. And to these larger and world-wide sources of poetic powers was added in England the impulse which sprang from national triumph, from the victory over the Armada, the deliverance from Spain, the rolling away of the Catholic terror which had hung like a cloud over the hopes of the people. With its new sense of security, of national energy and national power, the whole aspect of England suddenly changed. As yet the interest of Elizabeth's reign had been political and material; the stage had been crowded with statesmen and warriors, with Cecils and Walsinghams and Drakes. Literature had hardly found a place in the glories of the time. But from the moment when the Armada drifted back broken to Ferrol, the figures of warriors and statesmen were dwarfed by the grander figures of poets and philosophers. Amidst the throng in Elizabeth's antechamber the noblest form is that of the singer who lays the "Faerie Queen" at her feet, or of the young lawyer who muses amid the splendours of the presence over the problems of the "Novum Organum." The triumph at Cadiz, the conquest of Ireland, pass unheeded as we watch Hooker building up his "Ecclesiastical Polity" among the sheepfolds, or the genius of Shakspeare rising year by year into supream grandeur in a rude theatre beside the Thames.

Spenser  
1552

The full glory of the new literature broke on England with Edmund Spenser. We know little of his life; he was born in East London of poor parents, but connected with the Spencers of Althorpe, even then—as he proudly says—"a house of ancient fame." He studied as a sizar at Cambridge, and quitted the University while still a boy to live as a tutor in the north; but after some years of obscure poverty the scorn of a fair "Rosalind" drove him again southwards. A college friendship with Gabriel Harvey served to introduce him to Lord Leicester, who sent him

as his envoy into France, and in whose service he first became acquainted with Leicester's nephew, Sir Philip Sidney. From Sidney's house at Penshurst came his earliest work, the "Shepherd's Calendar;" in form, like Sidney's own "Arcadia," a pastoral, where love and loyalty and Puritanism jostled oddly with the fancied shepherd life. The peculiar melody and profuse imagination which the pastoral disclosed at once placed its author in the

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

1579

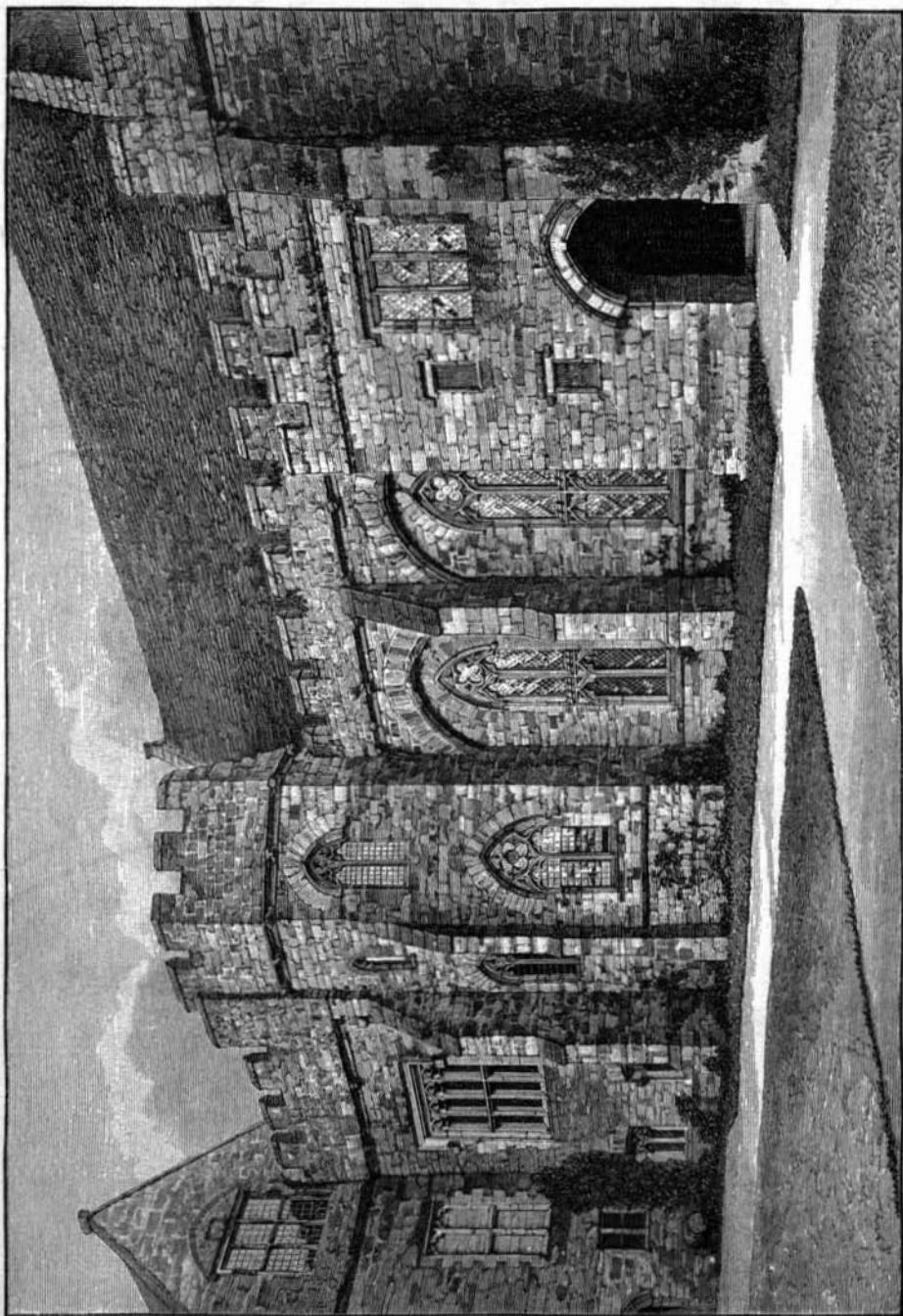


EDMUND SPENSER.

*From G. Vertue's Engraving of a Portrait now at Brethly.*

forefront of living poets, but a far greater work was already in hand; and from some words of Gabriel Harvey's we see Spenser bent on rivalling Ariosto, and even hoping "to overgo" the "Orlando Furioso," in his "Elvish Queen." The ill-will or indifference of Burleigh, however, blasted the expectations he had drawn from the patronage of Sidney or the Earl of Leicester, and the favour with which he had been welcomed by the Queen.

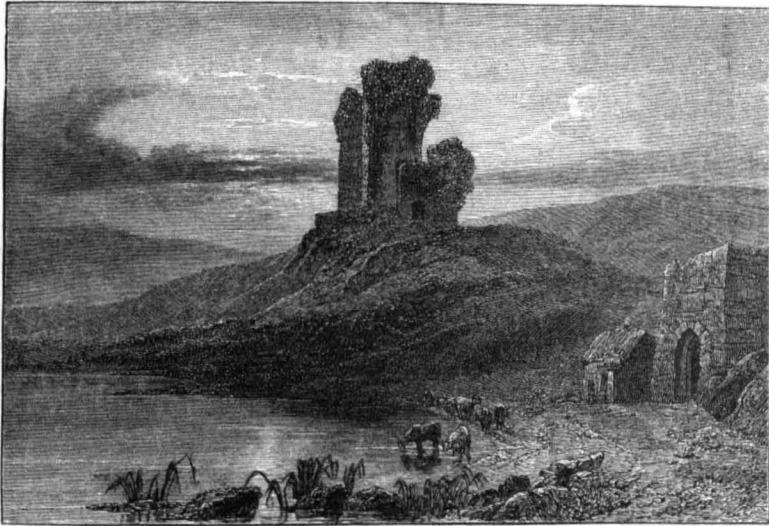
PENSHURST.



Sidney, himself in disgrace with Elizabeth, withdrew to Wilton to write the "Arcadia," by his sister's side ; and "discontent of my long fruitless stay in princes' courts," the poet tells us, "and expectation vain of idle hopes," drove Spenser at last into exile. He followed Lord Grey as his secretary into Ireland, and remained there on the Deputy's recall in the enjoyment of an office and a grant of land from the forfeited estates of the Earl of Desmond. Spenser had thus enrolled himself among the colonists to whom England was looking at the time for the regeneration of Munster,

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA-  
BETHAN  
POETS

1580



RUINS OF KILCOLMAN CASTLE.

*After W. H. Bartlett.*

and the practical interest he took in the "barren soil where cold and want and poverty do grow" was shown by the later publication of a prose tractate on the condition and government of the island. It was at Dublin or in his castle of Kilcolman, two miles from Doneraile, "under the foote of Mole, that mountain hoar," that he spent the ten years in which Sidney died and Mary fell on the scaffold and the Armada came and went ; and it was in the latter home that Walter Raleigh found him sitting "alwaies idle," as it seemed to his restless friend, "among the cooly shades of the green alders by the Mulla's shore," in a visit made memorable by the

## SEC. VII

THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETSThe  
Faerie  
Queen  
1590

poem of "Colin Clout's come home again." But in the "idlesse" and solitude of the poet's exile the great work begun in the two pleasant years of his stay at Penshurst had at last taken form, and it was to publish the first three books of the "Faerie Queen" that Spenser returned in Raleigh's company to London.

The appearance of the "Faerie Queen" is the one critical event in the annals of English poetry; it settled, in fact, the question whether there was to be such a thing as English poetry or no. The older national verse which had blossomed and died in Cædmon sprang suddenly into a grander life in Chaucer, but it closed again in a yet more complete death. Across the Border, indeed, the Scotch poets of the fifteenth century preserved something of their master's vivacity and colour, and in England itself the Italian poetry of the Renaissance had of late found echoes in Surrey and Sidney. The new English drama too was beginning to display its wonderful powers, and the work of Marlowe had already prepared the way for the work of Shakspeare. But bright as was the promise of coming song, no great imaginative poem had broken the silence of English literature for nearly two hundred years when Spenser landed at Bristol with the "Faerie Queen." From that moment the stream of English poetry has flowed on without a break. There have been times, as in the years which immediately followed, when England has "become a nest of singing birds;" there have been times when song was scant and poor; but there never has been a time when England was wholly without a singer. The new English verse has been true to the source from which it sprang, and Spenser has always been "the poet's poet." But in his own day he was the poet of England at large. The "Faerie Queen" was received with a burst of general welcome. It became "the delight of every accomplished gentleman, the model of every poet, the solace of every soldier." The poem expressed, indeed, the very life of the time. It was with a true poetic instinct that Spenser fell back for the framework of his story on the faery world of Celtic romance, whose wonder and mystery had in fact become the truest picture of the wonder and mystery of the world around him. In the ages of Cortes and of Raleigh dreamland had ceased to be dreamland, and no marvel or adventure that befell lady or knight was stranger than the tales which

weather-beaten mariners from the Southern Seas were telling every day to grave merchants upon 'Change. The very incongruities of

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA  
BETHAN  
POETS



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. JANUARY.

the story of Arthur and his knighthood, strangely as it had been built up out of the rival efforts of bard and jongleur and priest, made it the fittest vehicle for the expression of the world of incongruous



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. FEBRUARY.

feeling which we call the Renaissance. To modern eyes perhaps there is something grotesque in the strange medley of figures which

SEC. VII crowd the canvas of the "Faerie Queen," in its fauns dancing on  
 THE ELIZA- the sward where knights have hurtled together, in its alternation  
 BETHAN  
 POETS



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. MARCH.

of the salvage-men from the New World with the satyrs of classic mythology, in the giants, dwarfs, and monsters of popular fancy, who jostle with the nymphs of Greek legend and the damosels of



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. APRIL.

mediaeval romance. But, strange as the medley is, it reflects truly enough the stranger medley of warring ideals and irrecon-

cilable impulses which made up the life of Spenser's contemporaries. It was not in the "Faerie Queen" only, but in the world

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. MAY.

which it portrayed, that the religious mysticism of the Middle Ages stood face to face with the intellectual freedom of the Revival of Letters, that asceticism and self-denial cast their spell



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. JUNE.

on imaginations glowing with the sense of varied and inexhaustible existence, that the dreamy and poetic refinement of feeling which

SEC. VII expressed itself in the fanciful unrealities of chivalry co-existed  
 THE ELIZA- with the rough practical energy that sprang from an awakening  
 BETHAN  
 POETS



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. JULY.

sense of human power, or the lawless extravagance of an idealized friendship and love lived side by side with the moral sternness and elevation which England was drawing from the Reformation and



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. AUGUST.

the Bible. But strangely contrasted as are the elements of the poem, they are harmonized by the calmness and serenity which is

the note of the "Faerie Queen." The world of the Renaissance is around us, but it is ordered, refined, and calmed by the poet's

SEC. VII

THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. SEPTEMBER.

touch. The warmest scenes which he borrows from the Italian verse of his day are idealized into purity; the very struggle of the men around him is lifted out of its pettier accidents, and raised into



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. OCTOBER.

a spiritual oneness with the struggle in the soul itself. There are allusions in plenty to contemporary events, but the contest between

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA-  
BETHAN  
POETS

Elizabeth and Mary takes ideal form in that of Una and the false Duessa, and the clash of arms between Spain and the Huguenots



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. NOVEMBER.

comes to us faint and hushed through the serener air. The verse like the story, rolls on as by its own natural power, without haste or effort or delay. The gorgeous colouring, the profuse and often



ILLUSTRATIONS TO "SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR," 1579. DECEMBER.

complex imagery which Spenser's imagination lavishes, leaves no sense of confusion in the reader's mind. Every figure, strange as

it may be, is seen clearly and distinctly as it passes by. It is in this calmness, this serenity, this spiritual elevation of the "Faerie Queen," that we feel the new life of the coming age moulding into ordered and harmonious form the life of the Renaissance. Both in its conception, and in the way in which this conception is realized in the portion of his work which Spenser completed, his poem strikes the note of the coming Puritanism. In his earlier pastoral, the "Shepherd's Calendar," the poet had boldly taken his part with the more advanced reformers against the Church policy of the Court. He had chosen Archbishop Grindal, who was then in disgrace for his Puritan sympathies, as his model of a Christian pastor; and attacked with sharp invective the pomp of the higher clergy. His "Faerie Queen," in its religious theory, is Puritan to the core. The worst foe of its "Red-cross Knight" is the false and scarlet-clad Duessa of Rome, who parts him for a while from Truth and leads him to the house of Pride. Spenser presses strongly and pitilessly for the execution of Mary Stuart. No bitter word ever breaks the calm of his verse save when it touches on the perils with which Catholicism was environing England, perils before which his knight must fall "were not that Heavenly Grace doth him uphold and steadfast Truth acquite him out of all." But it is yet more in the temper and aim of his work that we catch the nobler and deeper tones of English Puritanism. In his earlier musings at Penshurst the poet had purposed to surpass Ariosto, but the gaiety of Ariosto's song is utterly absent from his own. Not a ripple of laughter breaks the calm surface of Spenser's verse. He is habitually serious, and the seriousness of his poetic tone reflects the seriousness of his poetic purpose. His aim, he tells us, was to represent the moral virtues, to assign to each its knightly patron, so that its excellence might be expressed and its contrary vice trodden under foot by deeds of arms and chivalry. In knight after knight of the twelve he purposed to paint, he wished to embody some single virtue of the virtuous man in its struggle with the faults and errors which specially beset it; till in Arthur, the sum of the whole company, man might have been seen perfected, in his longing and progress towards the "Faerie Queen," the Divine Glory which is the true end of human effort. The largeness of his culture indeed, his exquisite sense of beauty, and above all the

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA-  
BETHAN  
POETS

very intensity of his moral enthusiasm, saved Spenser from the narrowness and exaggeration which often distorted goodness into unloveliness in the Puritan. Christian as he is to the core, his



THE RED-CROSS KNIGHT.  
"Faerie Queen," Third Edition, 1598.

Christianity is enriched and fertilized by the larger temper of the Renaissance, as well as by a poet's love of the natural world in which the older mythologies struck their roots. Diana and the gods of heathendom take a sacred tinge from the purer sanctities

of the new faith; and in one of the greatest songs of the "Faerie Queen," the conception of love widens, as it widened in the mind of a Greek, into the mighty thought of the productive energy of Nature. Spenser borrows in fact the delicate and refined forms of the Platonist philosophy to express his own moral enthusiasm. Not only does he love, as others have loved, all that is noble and pure and of good report, but he is fired as none before or after him have been fired with a passionate sense of moral beauty. Justice, Temperance, Truth, are no mere names to him, but real existences to which his whole nature clings with a rapturous affection. Outer beauty he believed to spring, and loved because it sprang, from the beauty of the soul within. There was much in such a moral protest as this to rouse dislike in any age, but it is the glory of the age of Elizabeth that, "mad world" as in many ways it was, all that was noble welcomed the "Faerie Queen." Elizabeth herself, says Spenser, "to mine oaten pipe inclined her ear," and bestowed a pension on the poet. In 1595 he brought three more books of his poem to England. He returned to Ireland, to commemorate his marriage in Sonnets and the most beautiful of bridal songs, and to complete the "Faerie Queen" amongst love and poverty and troubles from his Irish neighbours. But these troubles soon took a graver form. In 1599 Ireland broke into revolt, and the poet escaped from his burning house to fly to England, and to die broken-hearted in an inn at Westminster.

If the "Faerie Queen" expressed the higher elements of the Elizabethan age, the whole of that age, its lower elements and its higher alike, were expressed in the English drama. We have already pointed out the circumstances which throughout Europe were giving a poetic impulse to the newly-aroused intelligence of men, and this impulse everywhere took a dramatic shape. The artificial French tragedy which began about this time with Garnier was not, indeed, destined to exert any influence over English poetry till a later age; but the influence of the Italian comedy, which had begun half a century earlier with Machiavelli and Ariosto, was felt directly through the Novelle, or stories, which served as plots for the dramatists. It left its stamp indeed on some of the worst characteristics of the English stage. The features of our drama that startled the moral temper of the time

SEC. VII

THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETSThe  
Elizabethan  
Drama

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA-  
BETHAN  
POETS

and won the deadly hatred of the Puritan, its grossness and profanity, its tendency to scenes of horror and crime, its profuse employment of cruelty and lust as grounds of dramatic action, its daring use of the horrible and the unnatural whenever they enabled it to display the more terrible and revolting sides of human passion, were derived from the Italian stage. It is doubtful how



FIGURES FROM TITLE-PAGE OF ACTS OF PARLIAMENT, 1553.  
Showing the influence of the Renaissance art in England.

much the English playwrights may have owed to the Spanish drama, that under Lope and Cervantes sprang suddenly into a grandeur which almost rivalled their own. In the intermixture of tragedy and comedy, in the abandonment of the solemn uniformity of poetic diction for the colloquial language of real life, the use of unexpected incidents, the complications of their plots and intrigues, the dramas of England and Spain are remarkably alike ;

but the likeness seems rather to have sprung from a similarity in the circumstances to which both owed their rise, than from any direct connection of the one with the other. The real origin of the English drama, in fact, lay not in any influence from without, but in the influence of England itself. The temper of the nation was dramatic. Ever since the Reformation, the Palace, the Inns of Court, and the University had been vying with one another in the production of plays; and so early was their popularity, that even under Henry the Eighth it was found necessary to create a "Master of the Revels" to supervise them. Every progress of

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
PORTS



POND AT ELVETHAM, HANTS, AT QUEEN ELIZABETH'S VISIT, 1591.

*Nichols, "Progresses of Queen Elizabeth;" from a tract, 1591.*

Elizabeth from shire to shire was a succession of shows and interludes. Dian with her nymphs met the Queen as she returned from hunting; Love presented her with his golden arrow as she passed through the gates of Norwich. From the earlier years of her reign, the new spirit of the Renaissance had been pouring itself into the rough mould of the Mystery Plays, whose allegorical virtues and vices, or scriptural heroes and heroines, had handed on the spirit of the drama through the Middle Ages. Adaptations from classical pieces soon began to alternate with the purely

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

1576

religious "Moralities;" and an attempt at a livelier style of expression and invention appeared in the popular comedy of "Gammer Gurton's Needle;" while Sackville, Lord Dorset, in his tragedy of "Gorboduc" made a bold effort at sublimity of diction, and introduced the use of blank verse as the vehicle of dramatic dialogue. But it was not to these tentative efforts of scholars and nobles that the English stage was really indebted for the amazing outburst of genius, which dates from the moment when "the Earl of Leicester's servants" erected the first public theatre in Blackfriars. It was the people itself that created its Stage. The theatre, indeed, was commonly only the courtyard of an inn, or a mere booth such as is still seen at a country fair; the bulk of the audience sate beneath the open sky in the "pit" or yard, a few covered seats in the galleries which ran round it formed the boxes of the wealthier spectators, while patrons and nobles found seats upon the actual boards. All the appliances were of the roughest sort: a few flowers served to indicate a garden, crowds and armies were represented by a dozen scene-shifters with swords and bucklers, heroes rode in and out on hobby-horses, and a scroll on a post told whether the scene was at Athens or London. There were no female actors, and the grossness which startles us in words which fell from women's lips took a different colour when every woman's part was acted by a boy. But difficulties such as these were more than compensated by the popular character of the drama itself. Rude as the theatre might be, all the world was there. The stage was crowded with nobles and courtiers. Apprentices and citizens thronged the benches in the yard below. The rough mob of the pit inspired, as it felt, the vigorous life, the rapid transitions, the passionate energy, the reality, the lifelike medley and confusion, the racy dialogue, the chat, the wit, the pathos, the sublimity, the rant and buffoonery, the coarse horrors and vulgar bloodshedding, the immense range over all classes of society, the intimacy with the foulest as well as the fairest developements of human temper, which characterized the English stage. The new drama represented "the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure." The people itself brought its nobleness and its vileness to the boards. No stage was ever so human, no poetic life so intense. Wild, reckless, defiant of all past tradition, of all conventional



SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

have seen, was erected only in the middle of the Queen's reign. Before the close of it eighteen theatres existed in London alone. Fifty dramatic poets, many of the first order, appeared in the fifty years which precede the closing of the theatres by the Puritans; and great as is the number of their works which have perished, we still possess a hundred dramas, all written within this period, and of which at least a half are excellent. A glance at their authors shows us that the intellectual quickening of the age had now reached the mass of the people. Almost all of the new playwrights were fairly educated, and many were University men. But instead of courtly singers of the Sidney and Spenser sort, we see the advent of the "poor scholar." The earlier dramatists, such as Nash, Peele, Kyd, Greene, or Marlowe, were for the most part poor, and reckless in their poverty; wild livers, defiant of law or common fame, in revolt against the usages and religion of their day; "atheists" in general repute, "holding Moses for a juggler," haunting the brothel and the alehouse, and dying starved or in tavern brawls. But with their appearance began the Elizabethan drama. The few plays which have reached us of an earlier date are either cold imitations of the classical and Italian comedy, or rude farces like "Ralph Roister Doister," or tragedies such as "Gorboduc," where, poetic as occasional passages may be, there is little promise of dramatic development. But in the year which preceded the coming of the Armada the whole aspect of the stage suddenly changes, and the new dramatists range themselves around two men of very different genius, Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe. Of Greene, as the creator of our lighter English prose, we have already spoken. But his work as a poet was of yet greater importance, for his keen perception of character and the relations of social life, the playfulness of his fancy, and the liveliness of his style exerted an influence on his contemporaries, which was equalled by that of none but Marlowe and Peele. No figure better paints the group of young playwrights. He left Cambridge to travel through Italy and Spain, and to bring back the debauchery of the one and the scepticism of the other. In the words of remorse he wrote before his death he paints himself as a drunkard and a roysterer, winning money only by ceaseless pamphlets and plays to waste it on wine and women, and drinking the cup of

1587

*Greene*

life to the dregs. Hell and the after-world were the butts of his ceaseless mockery. If he had not feared the judges of the Queen's Courts more than he feared God, he said, in bitter jest, he should often have turned cutpurse. He married, and loved his wife, but she was soon deserted; and the wretched profligate found himself again plunged into excesses which he loathed, though he could not live without them. But wild as was the life of Greene, his pen was pure. He is steadily on virtue's side in the love pamphlets

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS



"GREENE IN CONCEIPTE."

Title-page of a pamphlet, "Greene in Concepte," 1592.

and novelettes he poured out in endless succession, and whose plots were dramatized by the school which gathered round him. The life of Marlowe was as riotous, his scepticism even more daring, than the life and scepticism of Greene. His early death alone saved him, in all probability, from a prosecution for atheism. He was charged with calling Moses a juggler, and with boasting that, if he undertook to write a new religion, it should be a better religion than the Christianity he saw around him. But he stood far ahead of his fellows as a creator of English tragedy. Born at the opening of Elizabeth's reign, the son of a

*Marlowe*

## SEC. VII

THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

1593

Canterbury shoemaker, but educated at Cambridge, Marlowe burst on the world in the year which preceded the triumph over the Armada, with a play which at once wrought a revolution in the English stage. Bombastic and extravagant as it was, and extravagance reached its height in the scene where captive kings, the "pampered jades of Asia," drew their conqueror's car across the stage, "Tamburlaine" not only indicated the revolt of the new drama against the timid inanities of Euphuism, but gave an earnest of that imaginative daring, the secret of which Marlowe was to bequeath to the playwrights who followed him. He perished at twenty-nine in a shameful brawl, but in his brief career he had struck the grander notes of the coming drama. His Jew of Malta was the herald of Shylock. He opened in "Edward the Second" the series of historical plays which gave us "Cæsar" and "Richard the Third." Riotous, grotesque, and full of a mad thirst for pleasure as it is, his "Faustus" was the first dramatic attempt to touch the great problem of the relations of man to the unseen world, to paint the power of doubt in a temper leavened with superstition, the daring of human defiance in a heart abandoned to despair. Extravagant, unequal, stooping even to the ridiculous in his cumbrous and vulgar buffoonery, there is a force in Marlowe, a conscious grandeur of tone, a range of passion, which sets him above all his contemporaries save one. In the higher qualities of imagination, as in the majesty and sweetness of his "mighty line," he is inferior to Shakspeare alone.

Shak-  
spere

A few daring jests, a brawl and a fatal stab, make up the life of Marlowe; but even details such as these are wanting to the life of William Shakspeare. Of hardly any great poet, indeed, do we know so little. For the story of his youth we have only one or two trifling legends, and these almost certainly false. Not a single letter or characteristic saying, not one of the jests "spoken at the Mermaid," hardly a single anecdote, remain to illustrate his busy life in London. His look and figure in later age have been preserved by the bust over his tomb at Stratford, and a hundred years after his death he was still remembered in his native town; but the minute diligence of the enquirers of the Georgian time was able to glean hardly a single detail, even of the most trivial order, which could throw light upon the years of retirement before his

death. It is owing perhaps to the harmony and unity of his temper that no salient peculiarity seems to have left its trace on the memory of his contemporaries; it is the very grandeur of his genius which precludes us from discovering any personal trait in his works. His supposed self-revelation in the Sonnets is so obscure that only a few outlines can be traced even by the boldest conjecture. In his dramas he is all his characters, and his characters range over all mankind. There is not one, or the act or word of one, that we can identify personally with the poet himself.

He was born in the sixth year of Elizabeth's reign, twelve years after the birth of Spenser, three years later than the birth of Bacon. Marlowe was of the same age with Shakspeare; Greene probably a few years older. His father, a glover and small farmer of Stratford-on-Avon, was forced by poverty to lay down his office of alderman, as his son reached boyhood; and stress of poverty may have been the cause which drove William Shakspeare, who was already married at eighteen to a wife older than himself,

1564



AN ENGLISH APPRENTICE FETCHING  
WATER.

Braun, "*Civitates Orbis Terrarum*," 1572.

to London and the stage. His life in the capital can hardly have begun later than in his twenty-third year, the memorable year which followed Sidney's death, which preceded the coming of the Armada, and which witnessed the production of Marlowe's "Tamburlaine." If we take the language of the Sonnets as a record of his personal feeling, his new profession as an actor stirred in him only the bitterness of self-contempt. He "chides with Fortune," "that did not better for my life provide than public means that public manners breed;"

1587

he writhes at the thought that he has "made himself a motley to the view" of the gaping apprentices in the pit of Blackfriars. "Thence comes it," he adds, "that my name receives a brand, and

## SEC. VII

THE ELIZA-  
BETHAN  
POETS

almost thence my nature is subdued to that it works in." But the application of the words is a more than doubtful one. In spite of petty squabbles with some of his dramatic rivals at the outset of his career, the genial nature of the new comer seems to have won him a general love among his fellow actors. In 1592, while still a mere fitter of old plays for the stage, a fellow playwright, Chettle, answered Greene's attack on him in words of honest affection: "Myself have seen his demeanour no less civil, than he excellent in the quality he professes: besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty; and his facetious grace in writing, that approves



ENGLISH MARKET-WOMEN.

Braun, "*Civitates Orbis Terrarum*," 1572.

his art." His partner Burbage spoke of him after death as a "worthy friend and fellow;" and Jonson handed down the general tradition of his time when he described him as "indeed honest, and of an open and free nature." His profession as an actor was of essential service to him in his poetic career. Not only did it give him the sense of theatrical necessities which makes his plays so effective on the boards, but it enabled him to bring his pieces as he wrote them to the test of the stage. If there is any truth in Jonson's statement that Shakspeare never blotted a line, there is no justice in the censure which it implies on his carelessness or incorrectness. The conditions of poetic publication were in fact

wholly different from those of our own day. A drama remained for years in manuscript as an acting piece, subject to continual revision and amendment; and every rehearsal and representation afforded hints for change which we know the young poet was far from neglecting. The chance which has preserved an earlier edition of his "Hamlet" shows in what an unsparing way Shakspeare could recast even the finest products of his genius. Five years after the supposed date of his arrival in London, he was already famous as a dramatist. Greene speaks bitterly of him under the name of "Shakescene," as an "upstart crow beautified



WILLIAM KEMP DANCING THE MORRIS.

Kemp's "Nine Daies Wonder," 1600.

Jusserand, "English Novel."

with our feathers," a sneer which points either to his celebrity as an actor, or to his preparation for loftier flights by fitting pieces of his predecessors for the stage. He was soon partner in the theatre, actor, and playwright; and another nickname, that of "Johannes Factotum," or Jack-of-all-Trades, shows his readiness to take all honest work which came to hand.

With the poem of "Venus and Adonis," "the first heir of my invention," as Shakspeare calls it, the period of independent creation fairly began. The date of its publication was a very memorable one. The "Faerie Queen" had appeared only three years before,

1593-1598

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA-  
BETHAN  
POETS

and had placed Spenser without a rival at the head of English poetry. On the other hand, the two leading dramatists of the time passed at this moment suddenly away. Greene died in poverty and self-reproach in the house of a poor shoemaker. "Doll," he wrote to the wife he had abandoned, "I charge thee, by the love of our youth and by my soul's rest, that thou wilt see this man paid; for if he and his wife had not succoured me, I had died in the streets." "Oh, that a year were granted me to live," cried the young poet from his bed of death—"but I must die, of every man abhorred! Time, loosely spent, will not again be won! My time is loosely spent—and I undone!" A year later, the death of Marlowe in a street brawl removed the only rival whose powers might have equalled Shakspeare's own. He was now about thirty; and the twenty-three years which elapsed between the appearance of the "Adonis" and his death were filled with a series of masterpieces. Nothing is more characteristic of his genius than its incessant activity. Through the five years which followed the publication of his early poem he seems to have produced on an average two dramas a year. When we attempt, however, to trace the growth and progress of the poet's mind in the order of his plays, we are met, at least in the case of many of them, by an absence of certain information as to the dates of their appearance. The facts on which enquiry has to build are extremely few. "Venus and Adonis," with the "Lucrece," must have been written before their publication in 1593-4; the Sonnets, though not published till 1609, were known in some form among his private friends as early as 1598. His earlier plays are defined by a list given in the "Wit's Treasury" of Francis Meres in 1598, though the omission of a play from a casual catalogue of this kind would hardly warrant us in assuming its necessary non-existence at the time. The works ascribed to him at his death are fixed, in the same approximate fashion, through the edition published by his fellow-actors. Beyond these meagre facts, and our knowledge of the publication of a few of his dramas in his lifetime, all is uncertain; and the conclusions which have been drawn from these, and from the dramas themselves, as well as from assumed resemblances with, or references to, other plays of the period, can only be accepted as approximations to the truth. The bulk of his lighter comedies and historical dramas can



TWO PEERS IN THEIR ROBES, AND A HALBERDIER

*Temp. ELIZABETH*

MS. British Museum Add. 28330

be assigned with fair probability to the period from about 1593, when he was known as nothing more than an adapter, to 1598, when they are mentioned in the list of Meres. They bear on them indeed the stamp of youth. In "Love's Labour's Lost" the young playwright, fresh from his own Stratford, flings himself into the midst of the brilliant England which gathered round Elizabeth, busying himself as yet for the most part with the surface of it, with

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA  
BETHAN  
POETS



LADY OF THE COURT AND COUNTRY-WOMAN.

Braun, "*Civitates Orbis Terrarum*," 1572.

the humours and quixotisms, the wit and the whim, the unreality, the fantastic extravagance, which veiled its inner nobleness. Country lad as he is, he can exchange quip and repartee with the best; he quizzes the verbal wit and high-flown extravagance of thought and phrase which Euphues had made fashionable in the court world of the time. He shares the delight in existence which was so marked a feature of the age; he enjoys the mistakes, the contrasts, the adventures, of the men about him; his fun breaks

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
PORTS

almost riotously out in the practical jokes of the "Taming of the Shrew" and the endless blunderings of the "Comedy of Errors." His work is as yet marked by little poetic elevation, or by passion; but the easy grace of the dialogue, the dexterous management of a complicated story, the genial gaiety of his tone, and the music of his verse, promised a master of social comedy as soon as Shakspeare turned from the superficial aspects of the world about him to find a new delight in the character and actions of men. In the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," his painting of manners was suffused by a tenderness and ideal beauty, which formed an effective protest against the hard though vigorous character-painting which the



THE CONSTABLE OF THE WATCH.  
(See "Much Ado About Nothing," Act iii., Scene iii.)  
*Album of G. Holtzschuher of Nuremberg. MS. Eg. 1264.*

first success of Ben Jonson in "Every Man in his Humour" brought at the time into fashion. But quick on these lighter comedies followed two, in which his genius started fully into life. His poetic power, held in reserve till now, showed itself with a splendid profusion in the brilliant fancies of the "Midsummer Night's Dream;" and passion swept like a tide of resistless delight through "Romeo and Juliet." Side by side however with these passionate dreams, these delicate imaginings and piquant sketches of manners, had been appearing during this short interval of intense activity his historical dramas. No plays seem to have been more popular, from the earliest hours of the new stage, than dramatic representations of our history. Marlowe had shown in his "Edward the

Second" what tragic grandeur could be reached in this favourite field; and, as we have seen, Shakspeare had been led naturally towards it by his earlier occupation as an adapter of stock pieces like "Henry the Sixth" for the new requirements of the stage. He still to some extent followed in plan the older plays on the subjects he selected, but in his treatment of their themes he shook boldly off the yoke of the past. A larger and deeper conception of human character than any of the old dramatists had reached displayed itself in Richard the Third, in Falstaff, or in Hotspur; while in Constance and Richard the Second the pathos of human suffering was painted as even Marlowe had never dared to paint it. No dramas have done so much for Shakspeare's enduring popularity with his countrymen as these historical plays. Nowhere is the spirit of our history so nobly rendered. If the poet's work echoes sometimes our national prejudice and unfairness of temper, it is instinct throughout with English humour, with our English love of hard fighting, our English faith in goodness and in the doom that waits upon triumphant evil, our English pity for the fallen.

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

Whether as a tragedian or as a writer of social comedy, 1598-1608 Shakspeare had now passed far beyond his fellows. "The Muses," said Meres, "would speak with Shakspeare's fine filed phrase, if they would speak English." His personal popularity was at its height. His pleasant temper, and the vivacity of his wit, had drawn him early into contact with the young Earl of Southampton, to whom his "Adonis" and "Lucrece" are dedicated; and the different tone of the two dedications shows how rapidly acquaintance ripened into an ardent friendship. Shakspeare's wealth and influence too were growing fast. He had property both in Stratford and London, and his fellow-townsmen made him their suitor to Lord Burleigh for favours to be bestowed on Stratford. He was rich enough to aid his father, and to buy the house at Stratford which afterwards became his home. The tradition that Elizabeth was so pleased with Falstaff in "Henry the Fourth" that she ordered the poet to show her Falstaff in love—an order which produced the "Merry Wives of Windsor"—whether true or false, proves his repute as a playwright. As the group of earlier poets passed away, they found successors in Marston, Dekker, Middleton, Heywood, and Chapman, and above all in Ben

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA-  
BETHAN  
POETS  
1598

Jonson. But none of these could dispute the supremacy of Shakspeare. The verdict of Meres, that "Shakspeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage," represented the general feeling of his contemporaries. He was at last fully master of the resources of his art. The "Merchant of



COSTUMES OF BURGHER-WOMEN AND A COUNTRY-WOMAN.  
In the time of the "Merry Wives of Windsor."

*MS. Add. 28330.*

Venice" marks the perfection of his developement as a dramatist in the completeness of its stage effect, the ingenuity of its incidents, the ease of its movement, the poetic beauty of its higher passages, the reserve and self-control with which its poetry is used, the conception and unfolding of character, and above all the

mastery with which character and event are grouped round the figure of Shylock. But the poet's temper is still young; the "Merry Wives of Windsor" is a burst of gay laughter; and laughter more tempered; yet full of a sweeter fascination, rings round us in "As You Like It." But in the melancholy and meditative Jacques of the last drama we feel the touch of a new and graver mood. Youth, so full and buoyant in the poet till now, seems to have passed almost suddenly away. Though Shakspeare

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA  
BETHAN  
POETS



ARCADIAN SHEPHERDS.

Title-page of M. A. de Dominis "De Republica Ecclesiastica," 1617.

had hardly reached forty, in one of his Sonnets which cannot have been written at a much later time than this, there are indications that he already felt the advance of premature age. The outer world suddenly darkened around him. The brilliant circle of young nobles whose friendship he had shared was broken up by the political storm which burst in a mad struggle of the Earl of Essex for power. Essex himself fell on the scaffold; his friend and Shakspeare's idol, Southampton, passed a prisoner into

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

the Tower; Herbert, Lord Pembroke, a younger patron of the poet, was banished from Court. While friends were thus falling and hopes fading without, Shakspeare's own mind seems to have been going through a phase of bitter suffering and unrest. In spite of the ingenuity of commentators, it is difficult and even impossible to derive any knowledge of his inner history from the Sonnets;



ELIZABETHAN REPRESENTATION OF A  
CLASSICAL WARRIOR.  
Title-page, 1591.

"the strange imagery of passion which passes over the magic mirror," it has been finely said, "has no tangible evidence before or behind it." But its mere passing is itself an evidence of the restlessness and agony within. The change in the character of his dramas gives a surer indication of his change of mood. The joyousness which breathes through his early work disappears in comedies such as "Troilus" and "Measure for Measure." Failure seems everywhere. In "Julius Cæsar" the virtue of Brutus is foiled by its ignorance of and isolation from mankind; in Hamlet even penetrating intellect proves helpless for want of the capacity of action; the poison of Iago taints the love of Desdemona and the grandeur of Othello; Lear's mighty passion battles helplessly against the wind and the rain; a woman's weakness of frame dashes the cup of her triumph from the hand of Lady Macbeth; lust and self-indulgence blast the heroism of Antony; pride ruins the nobleness of Coriolanus. But the very struggle and self-introspection that these dramas betray were to give a depth and grandeur to Shakspeare's work such as it had

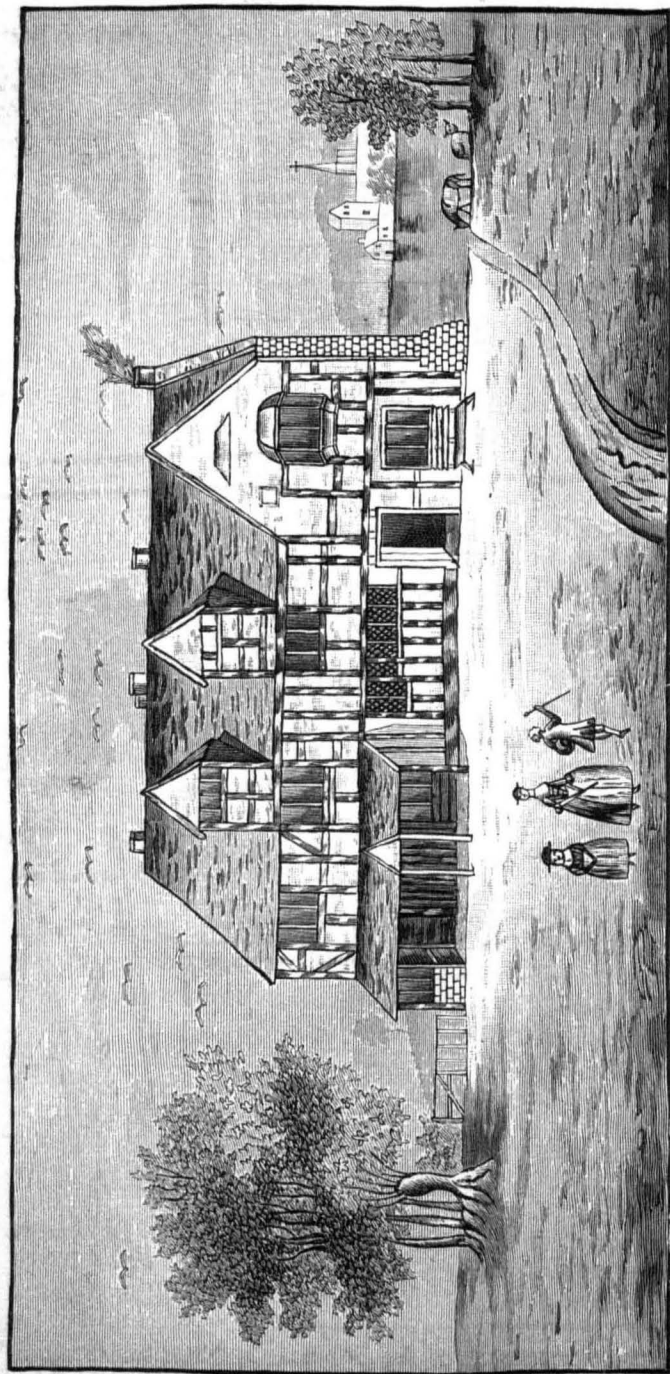
never known before. The age was one in which man's temper and powers took a new range and energy. The daring of the adventurer, the philosophy of the scholar, the passion of the lover, the fanaticism of the saint, towered into almost superhuman grandeur. Man became conscious of the immense resources that lay within him, conscious of boundless powers that seemed to mock the narrow world in which they moved. It is this grandeur

of humanity that spreads before us as the poet pictures the wide speculation of Hamlet, the awful convulsion of a great nature in Othello, the terrible storm in the soul of Lear which blends with the very storm of the heavens themselves, the fearful ambition that nerved a woman's hand to dabble itself with the blood of a murdered king, the reckless lust that "flung away a world for love." Amid the terror and awe of these great dramas we learn something of the vast forces of the age from which they sprang. The passion of Mary Stuart, the ruthlessness of Alva, the daring of Drake, the chivalry of Sidney, the range of thought and action in Raleigh or Elizabeth, come better home to us as we follow the mighty series of tragedies which began in "Hamlet" and ended in "Coriolanus."

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

Shakspeare's last dramas, the three exquisite works in which he shows a soul at rest with itself and with the world, "Cymbeline," "The Tempest," "Winter's Tale," were written in the midst of ease and competence, in a house at Stratford, to which he withdrew a few years after the death of Elizabeth. In them we lose all relation with the world or the time and pass into a region of pure poetry. It is in this peaceful and gracious close that the life of Shakspeare contrasts with that of his greatest contemporaries. Himself Elizabethan to the core, he stood at the meeting-point of two great epochs of our history. The age of the Renaissance was passing into the age of Puritanism. A sterner Protestantism was invigorating and ennobling life by its morality, its seriousness, its intense conviction of God. But it was at the same time hardening and narrowing it. The Bible was superseding Plutarch. The "obstinate questionings" which haunted the finer souls of the Renaissance were being stereotyped into the theological formulas of the Puritan. The sense of a divine omnipotence was annihilating man. The daring which turned England into a people of "adventurers," the sense of inexhaustible resources, the buoyant freshness of youth, the intoxicating sense of beauty and joy, which created Sidney and Marlowe and Drake, were passing away before the consciousness of evil and the craving to order man's life aright before God. A new political world, healthier, more really national, but less picturesque, less wrapt in the mystery and splendour which poets love, was rising

1608-1616



SHAKSPERE'S HOUSE, STRATFORD-ON-AVON.  
*Old Drawing in British Museum.*

with the new moral world. Rifts which were still little were widening hour by hour, and threatening ruin to the great fabric of Church and State, which the Tudors had built up, and to which the men of the Renaissance clung passionately. From this new world of thought and feeling Shakspeare stood utterly aloof. Of the popular tendencies of Puritanism—and great as were its faults, Puritanism may fairly claim to be the first political system which recognized the grandeur of the people as a whole—Shakspeare knew nothing. His roll of dramas is the epic of civil war. The Wars of the Roses fill his mind, as they filled the mind of his contemporaries. It is not till we follow him through the series of plays from "Richard the Second" to "Henry the Eighth" that we realize how profoundly the memory of the struggle between York and Lancaster had moulded the temper of the people, how deep a dread of civil war, of baronial turbulence, of disputes over the succession it had left behind it. From such a risk the Crown seemed the one security. With Shakspeare as with his contemporaries the Crown is still the centre and safeguard of the national life. His ideal England is an England grouped round a king such as his own Henry the Fifth, a born ruler of men, with a loyal people about him, and his enemies at his feet. Socially too the poet reflects the aristocratic view of life which was shared by all the nobler spirits of the Elizabethan time. Coriolanus is the embodiment of a great noble; and the taunts which Shakspeare hurls in play after play at the rabble only echo the general temper of the Renaissance. But he shows no sympathy with the struggle of feudalism against the Crown. He had grown up under the reign of Elizabeth; he had known no ruler save one who had cast a spell over the hearts of Englishmen. The fear of misrule was dim and distant; his thoughts were absorbed, as those of the country were absorbed, in the struggle for national existence, and the heat of such a struggle left no time for the thoughts of civil liberty. Nor were the spiritual sympathies of the poet those of the coming time. Turn as others might to the speculations of theology, man and man's nature remained with him an inexhaustible subject of interest. Caliban was among his latest creations. It is impossible to discover whether his faith, if faith there were, was Catholic or Protestant. It is hard, indeed, to

## SEC. VII

THE ELIZABETHAN  
POETS

say whether he had any religious belief or no. The religious phrases which are thinly scattered over his works are little more than expressions of a distant and imaginative reverence. But on the deeper grounds of religious faith his silence is significant. He is silent, and the doubt of Hamlet deepens his silence about the after-world. "To die," it may be, was to him as to Claudio, "to go we know not whither." Often as his "questionings" turn to the riddle of life and death, he leaves it a riddle to the last, without heeding the common theological solutions around him. "We are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

The  
Later  
Dramatists

## Jonson

1593

The contrast between the spirit of the Elizabethan drama and the new temper of the nation became yet stronger when the death of Shakspeare left the sovereignty of the English stage to Ben Jonson. Jonson retained it almost to the moment when the drama itself perished in the storm of the Civil War. Webster and Ford, indeed, surpassed him in tragic grandeur, Massinger in facility and grace, Beaumont and Fletcher in poetry and inventiveness; but in the breadth of his dramatic quality, his range over every kind of poetic excellence, Jonson was excelled by Shakspeare alone. His life retained to the last the riotous, defiant colour of the earlier dramatic world, in which he had made his way to fame. The stepson of a bricklayer, he enlisted as a volunteer in the wars of the Low Countries, killed his man in single combat in sight of both armies, and returned at nineteen to London to throw himself on the stage for bread. At forty-five he was still so vigorous that he made his way to Scotland on foot. Even in old age his "mountain belly," his scarred face, and massive frame became famous among the men of a younger time, as they gathered at the "Mermaid" to listen to his wit, his poetry, his outbursts of spleen and generosity, of delicate fancy, of pedantry, of riotous excess. His entry on the stage was marked by a proud resolve to reform it. Already a fine scholar in early manhood, and disdainful of writers who, like Shakspeare, "had small Latin and less Greek," Jonson aimed at a return to classic severity, to a severer criticism and taste. He blamed the extravagance which marked the poetry around him, he studied his plots, he gave symmetry and regularity to his sentences and conciseness to his phrase. But creativeness disappears: in his

social comedies we are amongst qualities and types rather than men, amongst abstractions and not characters. His comedy is no genial reflection of life as it is, but a moral, satirical effort to reform manners. It is only his wonderful grace and real poetic feeling that lightens all this pedantry. He shares the vigour and buoyancy

SEC. VII  
THE ELIZA-  
RETHAN  
POETS



BEN JONSON.  
*Picture by Gerard Honthorst.*

of life which distinguished the school from which he sprang. His stage is thronged with figures. In spite of his talk about correctness, his own extravagance is only saved from becoming ridiculous by his amazing force. If he could not create characters, his wealth of striking details gave life to the types which he substituted for them. His poetry, too, is of the highest order; his lyrics of the