

**AN OUTLINE OF THE
HISTORY OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE;
PART II. RENAISSANCE**

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An outline of the history of English literature; Part II. Renaissance by E. C. Longobardi

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AN OUTLINE
OF THE
HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

PART II.
THE RENAISSANCE



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PREFACE

It is hardly necessary to repeat here what was remarked in the preface to the First Part; namely, that this work is written with the exclusive purpose of making it a useful school manual.

It has, therefore, been necessary never to lose sight of the convenience of showing the student the connection between social and political history, on the one hand, and the development of literature, on the other. It was indispensable, also, to give the reader an idea of the succession and development of philosophic, moral and scientific ideas. This circumstance justifies the inclusion of some writers who do not belong to literature proper, when the substance of their works, independently of the form in which they expressed it, had an influence on their contemporaries, or their countrymen in later generations. For the same reason works written in Latin, as More's

Utopia, or even by foreigners, as the Praise of Folly, have not been neglected.

Even when examining the purely esthetic aspects of literature, the purpose of the present book has not been lost sight of. It has been thought advisable to call the reader's attention to the one or two great characters that prevail throughout a writer's work, rather than to enter into details difficult to remember, which find their proper place in studies of a less general nature.

The method constantly followed, of considering literature as the outcome of social conditions, has rendered it impossible to make any mention of Scotch literature. A retrospective account of the history and of the literary production of that nation will be found in the III Part, as an introduction to the study of the great Scotch authors of the eighteenth century.

The length of the first chapter will probably be considered out of proportion with the rest of the volume. Readers will, however, perhaps overlook the fault, considering the chapter also as a general introduction to the rest. To form an adequate idea of all the literature of the period it is, in fact, necessary to understand a great political movement, the struggle between the Crown and the middle class, and the na-

tude and mutual position of two intellectual and moral ones, the New Learning and the Reformation. The first chapter contains an analysis of these elements, which had a decisive action on the history, the feelings and ideas of the English people.

BOOK I.
ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

CHAPTER I.

FROM HENRY VII TO ELIZABETH
(1485-1558)

1.) THE HISTORICAL CHANGE. — In the period covered by the second part of this work England underwent the greatest transformation in its history; it changed the features of mediaeval society into those which are common to modern civilized countries.

During the period the new social forces adapted to their own economic, political, moral and religious needs, the external conditions of society.

At the accession of Henry VII (1485), the greatest power still lay in the Crown and the aristocracy; the tenure of property was still prevalently feudal; the form of government was a monarchy limited in law by the restrictions

of the mediaeval Constitution, but in practice rapidly tending to absolutism; the adherence to the Catholic Church was universal. At the Revolution (1688) the middle class was already the prevailing power in society; property had been freed from the last vestiges of feudal restrictions; a parliamentary monarchy was established, and England unanimously repelled the last attempt which was ever made to subject it anew to the Church of Rome.

The process was long and neither easy nor peaceful. The two great social powers that the dissolution of feudal England created and left to confront each other, almost without intermediaries, the Crown and the middle class, pulled in contrary directions: the two centuries are, politically, almost one long struggle between the English kings and that fraction of their subjects, to decide which of the two should inherit the whole power that belonged to different social fractions, and was exercised by different organs, before the feudal organization of society broke down.

2.) THE TUDOR RULE.—*a*) HENRY VII. The last period of English mediaeval history is characterized by the substitution of the absolute power of the Crown to the limited monarchy which