

**A MEMOIR OF
ROGER ASCHAM**

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A memoir of Roger Ascham by Samuel Johnson & James H. Carlisle

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SAMUEL JOHNSON & JAMES H. CARLISLE

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A MEMOIR
OF
ROGER ASCHAM.

BY
SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL. D.

(ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN LONDON IN 1763.)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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ASCHAM AND ARNOLD.

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MEMOIR OF THOMAS ARNOLD, . . . pp. 55-252.



INTRODUCTION.

ROGER ASCHAM (As'-kam) has a claim on all English-reading people. He is called, by the best critics, one of the fathers of English prose. In his youth, his native language had no great work in poetry, history, or philosophy. The wonderful art of printing was in its infancy. His father may have read the first book printed in England when fresh from the press. Soon after Ascham, a constellation of great writers adorned the latter years of Elizabeth's reign. At his death, Shakspeare was four years old, Bacon seven, Sidney fourteen, and Spenser sixteen.

His first work, "Toxophilus," published in his twenty-third year, was a defence of the bow, which he looked upon as furnishing a manly recreation, as well as a national defence, to Englishmen. The year of publication, 1544, was the date when pistols were first used by English horsemen. The musket was first used a few years before, 1521. Ascham could not know that these strange weapons would soon come to be considered as the strong "arms" of English soldiers. Three years after "Toxophilus" appeared, bows were

used with effect, for the last time, on the field of Pinkie, where the Scotch were forced to give way before the arrows of their invaders.] As a pleasant recreation, Archery, at intervals, comes into fashion for a time, as it did with us a few years ago. The lovers of archery show their gratitude to Ascham by giving his name to the closet in which their weapons are kept.

But the work on the Bow has a permanent value in our history. It marks an era in the growth of our language. He dedicated it to his king, Henry VIII., apologizing for writing in English, and offering to prepare a Greek or Latin version if desired. He says, "To have written in another tongue had been more profitable for my study, and more honest [honorable] for my name; yet I can think my labour well bestowed, if, with a little hindrance of my profit and name, may come any furtherance to the pleasure or commodity of the *gentlemen and yeomen of England*. As for the Latin or Greek tongue, every thing is so excellently done in them, that none can do better; in the English tongue, contrary, *every thing in a manner so meanly both for the matter and handling, that no man can do worse.*"

This little book, on two occasions, turned the current of the author's life. Henry was graciously pleased to reward him on its first appearance; and a few years later, Edward renewed his pension for its sake. His "Report and Discourse of the Affairs of Germany" is the only other work published in his lifetime.

Ascham has an additional claim on all who are interested in educational literature. He is the first who wrote in our language on such subjects. He left, in manuscript, an unfinished work, "THE SCHOLEMASTER," which was published by his widow in 1570. Extracts from this book, and the "Preface to the Reader," will be given in another chapter. It has had a rather singular history. Within twenty years of the author's death, five editions were issued. For more than a century it was then strangely overlooked. In 1711 Rev. James Upton published an edition of "The Scholemaster," with explanatory notes. Again, in 1743, Upton issued another edition, "revised a second time, and much improved." In 1763 the "English Works of Roger Ascham" were published in London by James Bennet as editor. For this edition, Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote a memoir of the author. This is so good a specimen of the great Doctor's peculiar style, and is so instructive every way, that it is now republished entire.

There is something to interest the general reader in this brief record of a life, which had connection, more or less intimate, with four successive English sovereigns, — Henry VIII., Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth. Under the last three, he held the post of Latin secretary, an honorable office, like that which Milton held under Cromwell a century later. While doing much to give beauty and force to his own language, he was a passionate lover of Latin and Greek. Dr. Johnson bears testimony to Ascham's skill in the

manual art of writing. His successors in the "school-room" should avoid the two opposite mistakes that may be easily made in this matter. To be a "good scribe" is not the only qualification needed in a teacher. Yet to write legibly is not so trifling an accomplishment that it may be neglected. Do not schools and colleges in our day dismiss many pupils untaught in this elementary part of a common education?

Very much of the scholarship of that day consisted in the study of Latin, and especially of Greek, then becoming fashionable in literary circles. It is difficult for us to conceive the interest with which scholars then discussed the question of admitting this new study, and the true pronunciation of the alphabet. Wade, in his "British History," says, "Many, both of the secular and regular clergy, railed against the Greek Testament of Erasmus as an impious and dangerous book. At Oxford they were divided into factions, — one assuming the name of Greeks, the other of Trojans. As the Trojans were the most numerous, they were the most insolent. When a poor Greek appeared in the street in any public place, he was attacked by the Trojans with hisses, taunts, and insults of all kinds. But the triumphs of the Trojans were of short duration. Henry VIII. and Wolsey having warmly espoused the cause of the Greeks, their numbers, their credit, and their courage daily increased: the Greek language became a favorite study, and the Trojans were obliged to retire from the field." Ascham left no original work in Greek or Latin, not even a