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ELIZABETHAN LITERARY FEATURES OF THE AGE

By the time of Elizabeth the Renaissance as, it was called, had made itself strongly felt in England. In particular, there was an ardent revival in the study of Greek, which brought a clarifying light into many dark places of the intellect. The new passion for classical learning in itself a rich and worthy enthusiasm, became quite a danger to the language. In all branches of literature Greek and Latin words began to force themselves upon English, with results not wholly beneficial. It was much for the native sturdiness of English that, after a brief and vexed period of disconsolation, it threw off the worst effects of this deadening pressure. English did not emerge unscathed from the contest. But applied to this slight extent, the new classical influences were a great benefit, they tempered and polished the earlier rudeness of English literature.

After the eleven years of the preceding epoch the prodigal issue of the Elizabethan age is almost embarrassing. As we have foisted out, the historical situation encouraged a healthy production. The interest shown in literary subjects is quite amazing to a more chastened generation. Pamphlets and treatises were freely written, much abuse, often of a personal and scurrilous character, was indulged in and literary questions became almost of national importance. To a great extent the controversies of the day were puerile enough but at least they indicated a lively interest in the literature of the period. The romantic quest was for the remote, the wonderful and the beautiful. All these desires were abundantly fed during the Elizabethan age, which is our first and greatest romantic epoch. On the one hand there was the revolt against the past whose grasp was too feeble to hold in restraint the dusky youth of the Elizabethan age, on the other there was a daring and resolute spirit of adventure in literary as well as in other regions and most important of all there was an unmistakable buoyancy and freshness in the strong wind of the spirit. It was the ardent youth of English literature.

of it. The bold and excellent
attitude of the time was
in keeping with the dramatic
instinct which is analytic and
observant. Hence, after the long
period of incubation detailed in
the last chapter the drama
made a swift and wonderful
leap into maturity. Yet it had
still many early difficulties to
overcome. The actors themselves
were at variance, so much so
that outrageous brawls were
frequent. On more than one occasion
between 1590 and 1593 the theatre
theatres were closed owing to
disturbances caused by the
actors. In 1594 the problem was
solved by the licensing of two
troupes of players the Lord
Chamberlain's (among whom was
Shakespeare) and the Lord Admiral.
Another early difficulty the drama
had to face was its fondness
for taking part in the quarrels
of the time for example in
the burning Marprelate controversy.
Owing to this meddling the
theatres were closed in 1589.
Already also a considerable amount
of puritanical opposition was declaring
itself. The most important anti-
dramatic book of the day was
Gosson's virulent attack

with his Apologie for Poetrie. In spite of such early difficulties the drama reached the splendid consummation of Shakespeare's art but period closed decline was apparent. Though the poetical production was not quite equal to the dramatic it was nevertheless of great and original beauty. No can be observed from the disputes of the time the passion for poetry was absorbing and the outcome of it was times the equal to expectation. For the first time prose rises to a position of a first rate importance. The dead weight of the Latin tradition was passing away. English prose was acquiring a tradition and a universal application and so the rapid development was almost inevitable. A curious minor feature of the age was the disappearance of Scottish literature after its brief but remarkable appearance in the previous age. At this point it took to ground and did not reappear till late in the eighteenth century.