

## HISTORY OF LITERATURE IN ENGLAND

Prehistoric tribes of England were like the Indians of America - primitive, aggressive hunting and fishing societies. They included

Celts - who lived in Ireland and Wales;

Gaels - who were in Scotland, Wales;

Picts - in Ireland and Scotland: they were very small in stature; Romans called them the "Populi Picti"= "Painted People", because they covered themselves with blue clay as a spell against harm and ambushed Roman military columns, seeming to appear and disappear because they blended into the landscape; they came into our literature as LEPRECHAUNS;

Beligiques - who lived on the west coast, but vanished;

Britons - the major tribe who gave their name to the island, Britain.

Romans came to the island in about 200 B.C. as traders, and later as invaders.

Julius Caesar led the Roman forces in England in about 55-53 B.C.

Claudius conquered England for the Roman Empire in about 50 A.D.

Romans withdrew toward Rome to try to repel the attacks of the barbarian hordes in about 400 A.D.

European invaders and settlers included the tribes from northern Europe who came seeking the warmer climate and longer growing season provided by the Gulf Stream-

Teutonic ("Germans") came from about 400 - 550 A.D.;

Angles, in about 400, settled in Anglia, Northumbria, Mercia;

Saxons, in about 500, settled Essex, Wessex, Sussex;

Jutes, about 500, settled Kent.

These tribes continued to trade with their "relatives" in Northland; they introduced the STORY OF BEOWULF and the riddles of Norse tradition. The philosophic "mindset" of the Norse formed the base for English traditions. They saw nature as threatening and harsh; their fear of fire (their best friend and worst enemy) produced part of our idea of what Hell is like.

CHRISTIANITY came to Celtic Britain with the early Romans, but was nearly destroyed by the Anglo-Saxon invaders; Saint Patrick (385-461 AD) was a Celtic priest. Christianity was sent to England by Pope Gregory I in 597 with AUGUSTINE and missionaries. Augustine was the first Archbishop of CANTERBURY. He was welcomed as part of a deal that Ethelbert, King of Kent, made with the father of his bride, Bertha, who was a Christian princess from France.

ARTHUR was King of all Britain, c. 600. He was probably a Briton who was trained by, and perhaps related to, the few Romans who remained behind when the main force returned to Rome.

VIKING raids began c. 775;

Vikings attempted conquest, c. 800;

ALFRED, THE GREAT (849-871-899), repelled the Viking invasions, and established the Danelaw (a section of the east-central coast) for "sharecropping" for the Vikings- England paid "protection-money" (HAMLET is sent by Claudius to collect it in about 979 A.D.) Alfred had the monks of the Church collect and write down the folk songs, epics, and stories of the Anglo-Saxon people by using the Latin and Germanic alphabets. This is the EARLIEST WRITTEN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

VIKING CONQUEST succeeded, c. 1015.  
Viking King, Canute, ruled 1016-1035.

Alfred's great-great-great-great-grandson, EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (1002-1042-1066) took the throne. Edward had been educated in Normandy and brought some French customs and practices back to England with him. It is to Edward's court that Malcolm and Macduff go in MACBETH to ask for help in overthrowing the tyrant. Edward died without heirs; his second-cousin, WILLIAM OF NORMANDY, took the throne from another cousin, Harold, at the Battle of Hastings, in 1066- The

#### NORMAN CONQUEST:

When William came from Normandy, he brought French customs, government and social structures, and language. He installed the FEUDAL SYSTEM. He ordered that Alfred's collection of literature be destroyed, so only a few of the works survived in the libraries of old monasteries and churches. He ordered that the official language of the court would be French and that only peasants would speak Anglo-Saxon English (That's why the Anglo-Saxon terms for physiological functions are socially unacceptable and why, when some people use one of those terms, they say, "Pardon my French."). All the writing was in Latin or French. The riddles, ballads, and folk tales were again preserved only in oral tradition.

Norman kings ruled until 1154; however, under the last of them, King Stephen, there was civil war from 1135 - 1154. Henry I (who ruled from 1100 - 1135 and whose wife, Matilda, was the daughter of Malcolm of Scotland) left no son; his daughter, Matilda, had married Geoffrey (Plantagenet) of Anjou and Normandy; Their son was HENRY II, PLANTAGENET (1154-1189).

Henry II appointed **Thomas a'Becket** Archbishop of Canterbury, and after a long conflict between over the relationship which should exist between the Church and the Throne, had him "MURDERed IN THE CATHEDRAL"; Becket was made a saint, with his shrine at Canterbury; it is to his shrine that the pilgrimage described by Chaucer in CANTERBURY TALES is going. These Tales are like the oral literature of the period. The story of Henry and Becket is told in the movie, BECKET. Henry had other problems, too: his wife was ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE, who insisted that she, or at least her sons, had better claim to Henry's throne than he did. She tried to run revolutions against him for most of their married life. The story of Eleanor and Henry's later years is told in LION IN WINTER.

Henry II and Eleanor had four sons. He was succeeded by the eldest,

RICHARD THE LIONHEARTED(1157-1189-1199), who spent most of his reign on the Third Crusade. His friends at home included ROBIN HOOD. While Richard was away, his regent was his brother, John, who was forced by the barons to sign the MAGNA CARTA (1215), the basis of our Common Law. PLANTAGENET Kings ruled until 1399, when RICHARD II was overthrown by

HENRY IV,LANCASTER(1367-1399-1413). The story of Henry IV and his son Henry V is told by Shakespeare in plays of those titles.

**Henry V** had married the daughter of the king of France, so his son, Henry VI, had a claim to the French throne, which was contested in part of the HUNDRED YEARS WAR (1339-1453). A major figure in that war (from 1429-1431) was JOAN OF ARC.

A period of political turmoil and family strife called the WAR OF THE ROSES (1455-1485) had the LANCASTERS (Red rose) and their cousins the YORKS (White Rose) killing each other for the throne. Finally, rumor has it, RICHARD III (York) went so far as to murder his little nephews, the rightful heirs, in the Tower of London, and establish himself as king, ruling very harshly. He was overthrown at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 by his cousin

HENRY VII, TUDOR, (1457-1485-1509) a Lancaster on his mother's side. Henry married ELIZABETH OF YORK,and the War of the Roses was over.

This was part of a time of great change in the world, particularly in England. In 1476, William Caxton introduced the PRINTING PRESS into England; the sudden easy availability of printed material such as ballads, sonnets, and "broadsides" contributed to a great increase of literacy: by 1530 England was about 50% literate. As print literature spread, oral literature began to decline.

The TUDOR family was well aware of the responsibilities of the monarchy. The first responsibility was to produce children; daughters and younger sons were major tools in cementing alliances and foreign policy by contracting marriages with the ruling families of other nations. The oldest son, of course, was the heir to the throne. The existence of a male heir, with younger brothers to take his place if he died young, meant that civil war was unlikely.

Henry VII had four children:

two daughters, Margaret and Mary;

Arthur (1486-1502), who married (1501) Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536), the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain;

HENRY VIII, TUDOR (1491-1509-1547), who was named DEFENDER OF THE FAITH (1521) by Pope Leo X because he wrote a defense of the Catholic Church against the attacks of Martin LUTHER, who posted his NINETY-FIVE THESES on the church door in Wittenburg in 1517. Henry married (1509) Catherine of Aragon, his brother's widow. The Pope had to grant a special dispensation (permission) for the marriage.They had one living child,

MARY (1516-1553-1558), and four children who died in infancy. Henry decided that his marriage was cursed by God because his union with his brother's widow was incestuous, so he demanded that the Pope grant an annulment. The Pope refused, so Henry declared that the Church in England was separate from the Church in Rome and that he, Henry, was the head of it. He declared that his marriage to Catherine was null and void, which did not please her or her Catholic cousins in Europe, particularly Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. Henry sent Catherine to exile in northern England, probably hoping that the damp, chilly climate would not be good for her.

Then Henry married (1532) Anne Boleyn (1507-1536). They had three stillborn sons and one living child, ELIZABETH (1533-1558-1603) (Note the overlap in dates of marriages: Depending on which was considered valid, either Mary or Elizabeth was illegitimate, which complicated things when Henry VIII died.) Since Anne did not produce boy children, either (and he already had his eye on Jane Seymour), Henry had Anne framed for treason and executed (beheaded). (Catherine died in January, Anne in May.)

Then Henry married (1536) Jane Seymour (1509-1537) ; they had one living child, EDWARD (1537 - 1547 - 1553); Jane died from complications of his birth.

Then Henry married (1538) Anne of Cleves (1515-1557), a Protestant princess from Germany who had been paying attention to Henry's habits. She was well educated and very bright, so she had the marriage contract written with an escape clause, which both she and Henry exercised. Henry, especially, wanted out; they never even consummated the marriage.

Then Henry married (1540) Catherine Howard (1521-1542), a young, pretty country girl who had a reputation as an herbal healer; she was framed (probably) for infidelity and executed.

Then Henry married (1543) Catherine Parr (1512-1548), a widow twenty-one years younger than he, who was still closer to his own age than his recent wives had been. She outlived him.

The question of the legitimacy of Henry's marriage to Arthur's widow caused serious problems in the succession.

**EDWARD** (1537-1547-1553), Henry's only son, succeeded his father, but took little part in the actual government of England, since he was very young and sickly. His regents, with his approval, established Protestantism in England and published the first English prayer book, as well as forty two articles of the Church of England. At the urging of his regents, who wanted to keep themselves in power, he attempted to establish the claim of his cousin, Lady Jane Grey (the granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister Mary) to succeed him on the throne. She did take the throne for nine days after the death of Edward, but his will was not followed, and he was succeeded by his older half-sister,

MARY TUDOR(1516- 1553 - 1558) under the terms of the will of their father, Henry VIII. Mary had Lady Jane Grey beheaded. Mary was a devout Catholic and attempted to restore England to Catholicism. She executed people for heresy because they would not become Catholic - so that she earned the nickname BLOODY MARY. Over three hundred people were executed, among them Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, author of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, who had annulled the marriage of Mary's parents, Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. Mary was married to Philip II of Spain, but it was for foreign policy; they had no children. When Mary died, she was succeeded by her half-sister

ELIZABETH (1533 - 1558 - 1603), who never married and who ruled for forty-five years. Elizabeth made England prosperous and Protestant, a world power to be reckoned with. Her Navy defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, and her "privateers" harassed and challenged Spanish supremacy on the seas worldwide.

When the last of Henry's children (Elizabeth) died without issue (no children to succeed her), the line of succession went back to the children of Henry VII, and the great-grandson of Margaret, who was

King JAMES VI, STUART, of Scotland, took the throne. ( His mother was the Catholic Mary Stuart - MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS - who had opposed her cousin Elizabeth's succession to the throne of England on the grounds that Elizabeth was illegitimate and that therefore Mary was the legitimate heir. Elizabeth kept Mary Stuart under her "protection" in various castles in England for nineteen years, but eventually had her beheaded.) Although James was the sixth James of Scotland, he was the first King James of England.

JAMES I (1566-1603-1625) was named by ELIZABETH as her successor in 1603, shortly before her death. James I was a Protestant but not a Puritan. James I commissioned the translation of the Bible that we know as the KING JAMES BIBLE. He was responsible for the commercial settlement of the American Colonies in Virginia (1607); his disagreements with those who would simplify and purify the church resulted in the establishment of the Puritan colonies in New England (1620). Because of James I, we have Thanksgiving. James was succeeded by his son

CHARLES I (1600-1625-1649) who was beheaded by the Puritan forces in the Puritan Revolution. The Puritans closed the theaters, forbade secular entertainments, and restricted various kinds of imaginative literature. England was a PROTECTORATE governed by OLIVER CROMWELL (without a king) until the RESTORATION OF THE STUARTS in 1660.

Authors such as WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564 - 1616) dramatized these histories. History and its people were fascinating to listeners and made good stories.

Literature went through a progression: from literature that was all orally presented and preserved to a literature that was mostly written; from literature that was largely participatory, with the listener

and his imagination actively taking part in its presentation, to a literature that was largely a consumer/ spectator activity, with the reader using his imagination to "bring the words to life". Now our literature is largely oral/performance, like movies and television, and the consumer's role is even more passive, as pictures and sound-effects take over the activities of the imagination.