# The Renaissance

The "dark" Middle Ages were followed by a time known in art and literature as the Renaissance. The word "renaissance" means "rebirth" in French and was used  to denote a phaze in the  cultural development of Europe between the 14th and 17th centuries.

The wave of progress reached the shores of England only in the 16th century. The ideas of the Renaissance came to England together with the ideas of the Reformation (the establishment of the national Church) and were called the "New Learning". Every year numbers of new books were brought out, and these books were sold openly, but few people could read and enjoy them. The universities were lacking in teachers to spread the ideas of modern thought. So, many English scholars began to go to Italy, where they learned to understand the ancient classics, and when they came home they adapted their classical learning to the needs of the country. Grammar schools (primary schools) increased in number. The new point of view passed from the schools to the home and to the market place.

Many of the learned men in Italy came from the great city of Constantinopole.  It was besieged and taken by Turks in 1453. All the great libraries and schools in Constanstinople had been broken up and destroyed. The Latin and Greek scholars were driven out of the city, glad to escape with their lives and with such books as they could carry away with them.  Being learned men, many of them found a welcome in the cities and towns in which they stopped.  They began to teach the people how to read the Latin and Greek books which they had brought with them and also taught them to read the Latin and Greek books which were kept in many towns of Europe, but which few people at that time were able to read.

 Foreign scholars and artists began to teach in England during the reign of Henry VIII.  In painting and music the first period of the Renaissance was one of imitation.  Painting was represented by German artist Holbein, and music by Italians and French men.  With literature the case was different.  The English poets and dramatists popularized much of the new learning.  The freedom of thought  of English humanists revealed itself in antifeudal and even antibourgeois ideas, showing the life of their own people as it really was.  Such a writer was the humanist Thomas More.

**Thomas More (1478-1535)**

Thomas More, the first English humanist  of the Renaissance, was born in London in 1478.  Educated at Oxford, he could write a most beautiful Latin. It was not the Latin of the Church but the original classical Latin.  At Oxford More met a foreign humanist, and made friends with him.  Erasmus believed in the common sense of a man and taught that men ought to think for themselves, and not merely to believe things to be true because their fathers, or the priest had said they were true.  Later, Thomas More wrote many letters to Erasmus and received many letters from him.

Thomas More began life as a lawyer.  During the reign of Henry VII he became a member of Parliament.  He was an active-minded man and kept a keen eye on the events of his time.  The rich landowners at the time were concentrating on sheep-raising because it was very profitable.  Small holders were not allowed to till the soil and were driven off their lands.  The commons (public ground) were enclosed and fields converted into pastures.  The mass of the agricultural population were doomed to poverty.  Thomas More set to work to find the reason of this evil.  He was the first great writer on social and political subjects in England.

Fourteen years after Henry VIII came to the throne, More was made Speaker of the House of Commons.  The Tudor monarchy was an absolute monarchy, and Parliament had very little power to resist the king.  There was, however, one matter on which Parliament was very determined.  That was the right to vote or to refuse to vote for the money.  Once when the King wanted money and asked Parliament to vote him 800.000, the members sat silent.  Twice the King's messengers called, and twice they had to leave without an answer.  When Parliament was called together again, Thomas More spoke up and urged that the request be refused. After a long discussion a sum less then half the amount requested by the King was voted, and that sum was to be spread over a period of four years.

Thomas More was an earnest Catholic, but he was not liked by the priests and the Pope on account of his writings and the ideas he taught. After Henry VIII quarrelled with the Pope he gathered around himself all the enemies of the Pope, and so in 1529 More was made Lord Chancellor (highest judge to the House of Lords). He had not wanted the post because he was as much against the king's absolute power in England as he was against the Pope. More soon fell a victim to the King's anger. He refused to swear that he would obey Henry as the head of the English Church, and was thrown into the Tower. Parliament, to please the King, declared More guilty of treason, and he was beheaded in the Tower in 1535.

**The Works of Thomas More**

Thomas More wrote in English and in Latin. The humanists of al1 European countries communicated in the Latin language, and their best works were written in Latin. The English writings of Thomas More include:

\* Discussions and political subjects.

\* Biographies.

\* Poetry.

His style is simple, colloquial end has an unaffected ease. The work by which he is best remembered today is "Utopia" which was written in Latin in the year 1516. It has now been translated into all European languages.

        "Utopia" (which in Greek means "nowhere") is the name of a non-existent island. This work is divided into two books.

 In the first, the author gives a profound and truthful picture of the people's sufferings and points out the socia1 evils existing, in England at the time.

 In the second book More presents his ideal of what the future society should be like.

The word "utopia" has become a byword and is used in Modern English to denote an unattainable ideal, usually in social and political matters. But the writer H.G. Wells, who wrote an introduction to the latest edition, said that the use of the word "utopia" was far from More's essentia1 quality, whose mind abounded in sound, practical ideas. The book is in reality a very unimaginative work.

 "Utopia" describes a perfect social system built on communist principles.

"Utopia"

First book While on business in Flanders, the author makes the acquaintance of a certain Raphael Hythloday, a sailor who has travelled with the famous explorer Amerigo Vespucci. He has much to tell about his voyages, Thomas More, Raphael Hythloday and a cardinal meet together in a garden and discuss many problems. Raphael has been to England too and expresses his surprise at the cruelty of English laws and at the poverty of the population. Then they talk about crime in general, and Raphael says:

 "There is another cause of stealing which I suppose is proper and peculiar to you Englishmen alone."

 "What is that?" asked the Cardinal.

 "Oh, my lord," said Raphael, "your sheep that used to be so meek and tame and so small eaters, have now become so great devourers and so wild that they eat up and swallow down the very men themselves. The peasants are driven out of their land. Away they go finding no place to rest in. And when all is spent, what can they do but steal and then be hanged?"

Second Book

The disastrous state of things in England puts Raphael Hythloday in mind of a commonwealth (a republic) he has seen on an unknown island in an unknown sea. A description of "Utopia" follows, and Raphael speaks "of all the good laws and orders of this same island."

There is no private property in Utopia. The people own everything in common and enjoy complete economic equality. Everyone cares for his neighbour's good, and each has a clean and healthy house to live in. Labour is the most essential feature of life in Utopia, but no one is overworked. Everybody is engaged in usefu1 work nine hours a day. After work, they indulge in sport and games and spend much time in "improving their minds" (learning)-All teaching is free, and the parents do not have to pay any schoo1 fees. (More wrote about things unknown in any country at that time, though they are natural with us in our days.)

For magistrates the Utopians choose men whom they think to be most fit to protect the welfare of the population. When electing their government, the people give their voices secretly. There are few laws and no lawyers at all, but these few laws must be strictly obeyed. "Virtue," says Thomas More, "lives according to Nature." The greatest of all pleasures is perfect health. Man must be healthy and wise.

Thomas More's "Utopia" was the first literary work in which the ideas of Cornmunism appeared. It was highly esteemed by all the humanists of Europe in More's time and again grew very popular with the socialists of the 19th century. After More, a tendency began in literature to write fantastic novels on social reforms, and many such works appeared in various countries.

**Second period of the renaissance.**

**The predecessors of shakespeare**

The most significant period of the Renaissance in England falls to the reign of Queen Elizabeth. England's success in commerce brought prosperity to the nation and gave a chance to many persons of talent to develop their abilities. Explorers, men of letters, philosophers, poets and famous actors and dramatists appeared in rapid succession. The great men of the so-called "Elizabethan Era" distinguished themselves by their activities in many fields and displayed an insatiable thirst for knowledge. They were often called "the Elizabethans", but of course the Queen had no hand in assisting them when they began literary work; the poets and dramatists had to push on through great difficulties before they became well known.

Towards the middle of the 16th century common people were already striving for knowledge and the sons of many common citizens managed to get an education. The universities began to breed many learned men who refused to become churchmen and wrote for the stage. These were called the "University Wits", because under the influence of their classical education they wrote after Greek and Latin models. Among the "University Wits" were Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Sackville, John Lyly, George Peele, Roberk Greene, Thomas Kyd and Thqmas Nashe; Christopher Marlowe  being the most distinguished of them. The new method of teaching classical literature at the universities was to perform Roman plays in Latin, Later the graduates translated these plays into English and then they wrote plays of their own.

Some wrote plays for the court, others for the public theatres. But the plays were not mere imitations. Ancient literature had taught the playwrights to seek new forms and to bring in new progressive ideas. The new drama represented real characters and real human problems which satisfied the demands of the common people and they expected ever new plays. Under such favourable circumstances there was a sudden rise of the drama. The great plays were written in verse.

The second period of the Renaissance was characterised by the splendour of its poetry.

Lyrical poetry also became wide-spread in England. The country was called a nest of singing birds. Lyrical poetry was very emotional. The poets introduced blank verse and the Italian sonnet. The sonnet is a poem consisting of fourteen lines. The lines are divided into two groups: the first group of eight lines (the octave), and the second group of six lines (the sestet). The foremost poet of the time was Edmund Spenser. He wrote in a new, English, form: the nine-line stanza.

**Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)**

Edmund Spenser was born in London in 1552.  Though his parents descended from a noble House, the family was poor. His father was a free journeyman for a merchant's company. When  Edmund came of age he entered the University of Cambridge as a "sizar" (a student who paid less for his education than others and had to wait on (to serve) the wealthier students at mealtimes).

Spenser was learned in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French. His generation was one of the first to study also their mother tongue seriously. While at college, he acted in the tragedies of the ancient masters and this inspired him to write poetry.

 Spenser began his literary work at the age of seventeen. Once a fellow-student introduced him to the famous Sir Philip Sidney, who encouraged him to write (Sidney was the author of an allegorical romance in prose called "Arcadia" that had become very popular as light reading among the court-ladies of Queen Elizabeth). At the age of twenty-three, Spenser took his M.A. (Master of Arts) degree.

Before returning to London he lived for a while in the wilderness of Lancashire where he fell in love with a "fair widow's daughter". His love was not returned but he clung to this early passion; she became the Rosalind of his poem the "Shepherd s Calendar". Spenser's disappointment in love drove him southward - he accepted the invitation of Sir Philip Sidney to visit him at his estate. There he finished writing his "Shepherd's Calendar". The poem was written in 12 eclogues. "Eclogue" is a Greek word meaning a poem about ideal shepherd life. Each eclogue is dedicated to one of the months of the year, the whole making up a sort of calendar.

The publication of this work made Spenser the first poet of his day. His poetry was so musical and colourful that he was called the poet-painter.

Philip Sidney introduced the poet to the illustrious courtier, the Earl of Leicester, who, in his turn, brought him to the notice of the Queen. Spenser was given royal favour and appointed as secretary to the new Lord-lieutenant of Ireland. Thus he had to leave England for good.

The suppression of Ireland provoked many rebellions against the English. English military governors were sent confiscate the lands of the rebels and to put English people on them. Spenser was sent to such a place near Cork. He felt an exile in the, lonely castle of Kilcolman, yet he could not help admiring the, changeful beauty of the place.

The castle stood by a deep lake into which flowed a river (the Mulla). Soft woodlands stretched towards mountain ranges in the distance. The beauty of his surroundings inspired Spenser to write his great epic poem the "Faerie Queen" ("Fairy Queen"), in which Queen Elizabeth is idealised.

Sir Walter Raleigh who was captain of the Queen's guard, came to visit Spenser at Kilcolman. He was greatly delighted with the poem, and Spenser decided to publish the first three parts. Raleigh and Spenser returned to England together. At court Spenser presented his "simple song" to the Queen. It was published in 1591. The success of the poem was great. The Queen rewarded him with a pension of 50 pounds, but his position remained unchanged. Poetry was regarded as a noble pastime but not a profession; and Edmund Spenser had to go back to Ireland.

The end of his life was sorrowful. When the next rebellion broke out, the insurgents attacked the castle so suddenly and so furiously that Spenser and his wife and children had to flee for their lives. Their youngest child was burnt to death in the blazing ruins of the castle. Ruined and heart-broken Spenser went to England and there he died in a London tavern three months later, in 1599.

**The "fairy queen"**

The poem is an allegory representing ihe court of Queen Elizabeth. The whole is an interweaving of Greek myths and English legends.

Spenser planned to divide his epic poem into twelve books. The 12 books were to tell of the warfare of 12 knights. But only six books of the "Fairy Queen" were finished. The first two books are the best and the most interesting. The allegory is not so clear in the rest.Prince Arthur is the hero of the poem. In a vision he sees Gloriana, the Fairy Queen. She is so beautiful that he falls in love with her. Armed by Merlin he sets out to seek her in Fairy Land. She is supposed to hold her annual 12-day feast during which

12 adventures are to be achieved by 12 knights. Each knight represents a certain virtue: Holiness, Temperance, Friendship, Justice, Courtesy, Constancy, etc., which are opposed to Falsehood, Hypocrisy and others in the form of witches, wizards and monsters.

Spenser imitated antique verse. One of the features of those verses was the use of "Y" before the past participle, as "Yclad" instead of "clad" ("dressed").  He was the first to use the nine-line stanza. In this verse each line but the last has 10 syllables, the last line has 12 syllables. The rhymed lines are arranged in the following way: a b a b b c b c c.

A gentle knight was pricking on the plain,                     a

Yclad in mighty arms and silver shield,                          b

Wherein old dints of deep wounds did remain,               a

The cruel marks of many a bloody field;                        b

Yet arms till that time did he never wield;                      b

 His angry steed did chide his foamy bit,                        c

As much disdaining to the curb to yield;                        b

Full jolly knight he seemed, and fair did sit,                    c

As one for knightly jousts and fierce encounters fit.        c

**The development of the drama.**

**The theatres and actors**

First Period

The development of the drama in England was in close connection with the appearance and development of the theatre. Since ancient times there existed in Europe two stages upon which dramatic art developed. The chief place of performance was the church, and second to it was the market place where clowns played their tricks.

The church exhibited Bible-stories, called "Mysteries"; they also had "Miracles" which were about supernatural events in the lives of saints. Both, the miracles and mysteries were directed by the clergy and acted by boys of the choir on great holidays. It has become a tradition since then to have men-actors for heroines on the English stage.

Second Period

Early in the 15th century characters represented human qualities, such as Mercy, Sin, Justice and Truth, began to be introduced into the miracle plays. The plays were called "Moral plays" or "Moralities". They were concerned with man's behaviour in this life. The devil figured in every ply and he was the character always able to make the audience laugh. Moralities were acted in town halls too.

Third Period

It was about the time of King Henry VIII, when the Protestants drove theatricals out of the church, that acting became a distinct profession in England. Now the actors performed in inncourt yards, which were admirably suited to dramatic performances consisting as they did of a large open court surrounded by two galleries. A platform projected into the middle of the yard with dressing rooms at the back, There was planty of standing room around the stage, and people came running in crowds as soon as they heard the trumpets announcing the beginning of a play. To make the audience pay for its entertainment, the actors took advantage of the most thrilling moment of the plot: this was the proper time to send the hat round for a collection.

The plays gradually changed; moralities now gave way to plays where historical and actual characters appeared. The popular clowns from the market-place never disappeared from the stage. They would shove in between the parts of a play and talk the crowds into anything.

  The regular drama from its very beginning was divided into comedy and tragedy. Many companies of players had their own dramatists who were actors too.

As plays became more complicated, special playhouses came into existence. The first regular playhouse in London was built in what had been the Blackfriars Monastery where miracle plays had been performed before the Reformation. It was built by James

Burbage and was called "The Theatre" (a Greek word never used in England before). Later, "The Rose", "The Curtain", "The Swan" and many other playhouses appeared. These playhouses did not belong to any company of players. Actors travelled from one place to another and hired a building for their performances.

The actors and their station in life.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth the laws against the poor were very cruel. Peasants who had lost their lands and went from town to town in search of work were put into prison as tramps. Actors were often accused of being tramps, so trave1ling became impossible.  The companies of players had to find themselves a patron among the nobility and with the aid of obtain rights to travel and to perform.  Thus some players called themselves "The Earl of Leicester's Servants", others-"The Lord Chamberlain's Men", and in 1583 the Queen appointed certain actors "Grooms of the Chamber" All their plays were censored lest there be anything against the Church or the government.

But the worst enemies of the actors were the Puritans. They formed a religious sect in England which wanted to purity the English Church from some forms that the Church retained of roman Catholicism. The ideology of the Puritans was the ideology of the smaller bourgeoisie who wished for a "cheaper church" and who hoped they would become rich one day by careful living. They led a modest and sober life. These principles, though moral at first sight, resulted in a furious attack upon the stage. The companies of players were actually locked out of the City because they thought acting a menace to public morality.

The big merchants attacked the drama because players and playgoers caused them a lot of trouble: the profits on beer went to proprietors of the inns and not to the merchants; all sorts of people came to town, such as gamblers and thieves, during the hot months of the year the plague was also spread strolling actors. Often apprentices who were very much exploited by the merchants used to gather at plays for the purpose of picking fights with their masters.

Towards the end of the 16th century we find most of the playhouses far from the city proper.