

SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY
OF
LITERATURE AND LEARNING
IN ENGLAND.

WITH SPECIMENS OF THE PRINCIPAL WRITERS.

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SERIES SECOND (IN TWO VOLUMES).
FROM THE ACCESSION OF ELIZABETH TO
THE REVOLUTION OF 1688.

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C O N T E N T S.

BOOK VI.

	PAGE
Literature of the Seventeenth Century	5
Shirley, and the End of the Old Drama	6
Giles Fletcher—Phineas Fletcher	13
Other Religious Poets.—Quarles—Herbert—Herrick— Crashaw	16
Cartwright—Randolph—Corbet	18
Poets of the French School.—Carew—Lovelace— Suckling	23
Denham	33
Cleveland	34
Wither	45
Browne	59
Prose Writers :—Charles I.	63
Milton's Prose Works	67
Hales—Chillingworth	70
Jeremy Taylor	71
Fuller	72
Feltham's Resolves—Microcosmography	86
Sir Thomas Browne	92
Sir James Harrington	96
Newspapers	97
Classical Learning	99

	PAGE
Literature of the Commonwealth	101
Poetry of Milton	103
Cowley	112
Butler	114
Waller	116
Marvel	119
Other Minor Poets	130
Dryden	132
Dramatists	137
Prose Writers :—Clarendon	140
Hobbes	142
Nevile	146
Other Prose Writers :—Cudworth, More, Barrow, etc.	155
Progress of Science in England before the Seventeenth Century	158
English Science in the Seventeenth Century.—Bacon— Napier	168
Other English Mathematicians of the earlier part of the Seventeenth Century	170
Harvey—The Circulation of the Blood; Anatomy, and Natural History	175
Natural Philosophy	179
The Royal Society	189
The Steam-Engine	205
Other Discoveries and Improvements in Natural and Experimental Science	210
Newton	216
James Gregory and other Contemporaries of Newton .	218
Establishment of the Royal Observatory	222
Medical Science and Natural History	225

BOOK VI.

LITERATURE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

EXCLUDING from our view the productions of the last fifty or sixty years, as not yet ripe for the verdict of history, we may affirm that our National Literature, properly so called, that is, whatever of our literature by right of its poetic shape or spirit is to be held as peculiarly belonging to the language and the country, had its noon-day in the space of time to which our last Book was chiefly dedicated, or that comprehended within the last quarter of the sixteenth and the first of the seventeenth century. But a splendid afternoon flush succeeded this meridian blaze, which may be said to have lasted for another half century, or longer. Down almost to the Revolution, or at least to the middle of the reign of Charles II., our higher literature continued to glow with more or less of the coloured light and the heart of fire which it had acquired in the age of Elizabeth and James. Some of the greatest of it indeed—as the verse of Milton and the prose poetry of Jeremy Taylor—was not given to the world till towards the close of the space we have just indicated. But Milton, and Taylor, and Sir Thomas Browne, and Cudworth, and Henry More, and Cowley, the most eminent of our English writers in the interval from the Restoration to the Revolution (if we except