

SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY
OF
LITERATURE AND LEARNING
IN ENGLAND.

WITH SPECIMENS OF THE PRINCIPAL WRITERS.

By GEO. L. CRAIK, M.A.

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

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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