

SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY  
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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## BOOK V.

## THE ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE.

OF what is commonly called our Elizabethan literature, the greater portion appertains to the reign, not of Elizabeth, but of James—to the seventeenth, not to the sixteenth century. The common name, nevertheless, is the fair and proper one. It sprung up in the age of Elizabeth, and was mainly the produce of influences which belonged to that age, although their effect extended into another. It was born of and ripened by that sunny morning of a new day,—“great Eliza’s golden time,”—when a general sense of security had given men ease of mind and disposed them to freedom of thought, while the economical advancement of the country put life and spirit into every thing, and its growing power and renown filled and elevated the national heart. But such periods of quiet and prosperity seem only to be intellectually productive when they have been preceded and ushered in by a time of uncertainty and struggle which has tried men’s spirits: the contrast seems to be wanted to make the favourable influences be felt and tell; or the faculty required must come in part out of the strife and contention. The literature of our Elizabethan age, more emphatically, may be said to have had this double pa-