

History of English Literature

by EDWARD ALBERT

Revised by J. A. STONE

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ACQUAINTANCES

(2) Michael Drayton (1563-1631)

Michael Drayton (1563-1631) represents the later epoch of Elizabethan literature. He was **born in Warwickshire**, was attached to a noble family as tutor, came to London about 1590, and for the remainder of his long life was busy in the production of his many poems.

His first book, metrical translations from the scriptures, was called *The Harmonie of the Church* (1591); then followed a number of long historical poems which include *England's Heroicall Epistles* and *The Barons' Wars* (1603). His *Poly-Olbion* is the most important of his longer poems, and belongs to a later period of his career. It is a long, careful, and tedious description of the geographical features of England, interspersed with tales, and written in alexandrines. His shorter poems, such as his well-known poem on Agincourt, and his verse tales and pastorals, such as *The Man in the Moon and Nymphidia*, are skilful and attractive. Drayton is rarely an inspired poet – the wonderful sonnet beginning "Since there's no help" is perhaps his only poem in which we feel inspiration flowing freely – but he is painstaking, versatile, and sometimes (as in *Nymphidia*) delightful.

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