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Royal English Class-Books

# GREAT AUTHORS

*From Macaulay to Browning.*

MACAULAY—CARLYLE—DE QUINCEY—IRVING—LONGFELLOW  
RUSKIN—DICKENS—THACKERAY—TENNYSON  
BROWNING—CONTEMPORARY

WRITERS.

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## Third Period.

# INTRODUCTION.

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OUR Third Period—from Macaulay to Browning—is the Victorian age of English Literature. Some of the authors included in it began to write before Queen Victoria ascended the throne, just as some of the authors in the previous period continued to write after that event; but the men included in this period belong distinctively, as regards their most important works, to the age of Victoria.

The period has been one of unparalleled literary activity. The number of new works published every year far surpasses the production of any other period; and though many are still-born, the sale of some is enormous.

The leading features of the period have been the development of historical writing in several directions, the extraordinary growth of fiction, and the great increase of periodical literature.

A great impetus was given to Historical literature by Macaulay, who showed first in his brilliant *Essays* and afterwards in his *History of England* that the record of fact may be made as fascinating as fiction. In the pictorial style of writing history—using a large canvas, and covering it with details—Macaulay has been followed by Mr. Froude and Mr. Kinglake, and by the American historian Motley. Another school of historical writing which has come into prominence during the period is that which bases its operations on a careful study of contemporary records, and which uses the help of philology, archæ-

ology, and ethnology, and any other science that may throw light on its inquiries. Excellent work in this field has been done by Freeman, Stubbs, Gardiner, and other writers. Some of the best qualities of this critical school were exhibited by the late J. R. Green in combination with a brilliancy of style and pictorial effect scarcely inferior to Macaulay's.

• Thomas Carlyle was also a great historian, with a keen instinct for discovering the highest and truest elements of human character. His works are in many ways a monument of sound judgment and of patient industry. Through Carlyle and De Quincey the influences of German thought and style were brought to bear on current English Literature. Both of these men were great teachers as well as great authors.

The second characteristic feature of the period referred to above is the extraordinary growth of Fiction. More novels are published now than books of any other class. Although the writers of novels are many, the really good novelists are few. Nevertheless it may be said with perfect truth that fiction is the department of literature in which the Victorian age stands pre-eminent. Other ages have surpassed it in poetry, in philosophy, and in history; but in fiction, especially in the fiction of contemporary life, it surpasses them all. Scott's novels are unrivalled as historical romances; but there are not in the English language, or in any other language, better specimens of the novel of modern life than are found in the works of Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot. The traditions of English fiction have been well maintained by Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, Mrs. Oliphant, George Meredith, and other writers. The difficulty with which modern novelists have to contend most is that of inventing a new plot or a new character. So numerous are the candidates for public favour in this department of literature, and so keen is the competition among them, that there is much danger of attractiveness passing into sensationalism. The danger, indeed, has begun to be realized, not only in written fiction, but also and even more in

the modern drama, which is to a large extent sensational fiction acted on the stage.

Another very remarkable feature of the time has been the growth of Periodical literature. Indeed this feature and the previous one are closely connected; for every magazine, with a few exceptions, has a work of fiction appearing serially in its pages; while some magazines, and even some newspapers, have two or three novels going on at the same time. There are, however, several Monthlies of a high class which devote the whole of their space to the discussion of political, social, and philosophical matters. These magazines are to the present age what the Quarterlies were to the last age—the chief arena of literary debate.

The Poetry of the present period has reached a high, if not the highest level, in the works of Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning. Both are poets of nature; but while both strive after realism, they embody their thoughts in very different forms, the one in smooth and faultless cadences, the other in rugged language and halting rhythm. Of their contemporaries, Dante Rossetti and William Morris resemble Tennyson; while the affinities of Matthew Arnold, in respect of subtle thinking and condensed expression, are rather with Browning. Algernon Swinburne is a disciple of Byron and Shelley. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who became the wife of the poet after she had won her way to fame, holds the first rank among English poetesses.

Never has Science been expounded with more of literary grace and culture than during the present period, by such writers as Hugh Miller, Charles Darwin, Lyell, Tyndall, and Huxley. What these writers have done for science, John Ruskin has done in the case of the Fine Arts. He has shown in the most eloquent language that nature is the mother of true art as really as she is the mother of science.

A very pleasing feature of this period is the appearance of American authors in the field of English letters. Nothing else

was required to prove unity of race and community of sentiment. The appearance of Washington Irving as an English author was thought a phenomenon; but that day is long past. America has its poets in Longfellow, Bryant, Whittier, Walt Whitman, and Lowell; its novelists in Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Wendell Holmes, Henry James, and Howells; its historians in Prescott, Bancroft, and Motley; its essayists in Emerson and Channing; and its humourists in Artemus Ward, Mark Twain, and Bret Harte, who are worthy not only of the great Republic which reared them, but also of the mother country whence they drew their inspiration.

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