

Literary.

Geoffrey Chaucer.

IT has been observed in the history of letters that great events have produced great men; that important political issues have given birth to intellectual giants. This has been particularly true in the history of our English literature. It was during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when the Reformation had, after much conflict and bloodshed, gained a firm footing in England, that William Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of modern times, delighted the nation with his poetic philosophy and brilliant dramas. During the reign of Charles I., when the nation was convulsed with civil conflict, and the wars of the Parliament were being carried on with unremitting energy, Milton was revolving many themes as the subject of epic strains, "but had not yet determined 'where to lay the pattern of a Christian hero.'" But after the great Cromwell was dead, and the clouds of battle and of civil discord had rolled away, and England had become once more merry, *Paradise Lost*, the best of modern epic poems, was given to the world.

Perhaps no reign has been more eventful, or has produced more signal effects upon England, than that of Edward III. France and England were then locked in deadly conflict. The old Saxon spirit, which, though long crushed, had never died, was now revived. Norman and Saxon, between whom there had been so many feuds, and such long and bitter animosity, now had a common interest. Together at Calais, Crecy, and Poitiers, they fought and died for the glory of the English name. For fifty years Edward held the throne, and for the greater part of fifty years England was in arms, con-