

collection of letters, in number many hundred, according to the historian Green, "displays a fluency and vivacity as well as a grammatical correctness which would have been impossible in familiar letters a few years before." They mark an epoch in the history of English literature, as showing it had ceased being the exclusive possession of churchmen and nobles, and had begun to appeal to the common people. But moreover they give us faithful accounts of the political, social, and religious life at the time, which show their authorship to have been undoubtedly Catholic.

The introduction of the printing press about this time was a circumstance of great importance and of vast consequences. The example of William Caxton, the first English printer, was quickly followed and a wonderful impetus thereby given to writing. Thus for nearly a century before the advent of the Reformers, the works of Catholic authors, French and Italian as well as English, were widely circulated throughout England, and the first step was taken towards that literary revival which was to attain its greatest height during the Augustan Age.

The early part of the sixteenth century produced the name of one illustrious alike in the field of literature and of politics, of one beatified for faithfulness to the true religion "even unto death"—Sir Thomas More. More is one of the fathers of English prose, his writings being certainly the earliest specimens of dignified English outside the domain of poetry. His "Utopia," written in Latin, has been justly celebrated for the masterly manner in which the author treated all manner of questions, evincing the most admirable forethought and wisdom. The "Life of King Richard III." is the first history worthy the name, of which our literature can boast, and is remarkable as well for its purity and clearness of style as for its weight and authority. Besides these two great works Sir Thomas wrote several religious books which would attest his exemplary piety and firm adherence to the Catholic Church, even if he had not been called upon for that last great act, the sacrifice of his life. Among the authors of the period his influence on the language is only less than that of Chaucer, for by refining and improving it he prepared the way for the great masters that followed. A true knight of the cross, his name will live forever in the hearts of his countrymen, particularly those of his