

Great Epochs in English Literature and their Causes. A Sketch—3. The Shakesperian and Elizabethan Era.

BY HON. A. B. Warburton, D.C.L.

THIS, the second great epoch in our literary annals, is much better known than the first. It is the finest of all periods in English Literature. Great writers in every department are here to be found in numbers. It is pre-eminently the dramatic era. It was also an age of original and profound thinkers. In Francis Bacon, "the wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind" as Pope describes him, it produced, possibly the greatest philosopher the world has seen, a man of such varied and far-reaching genius that some do not hesitate to ascribe even the works of Shakespeare to his pen.

In law, besides the famous Bacon, this age produced the great Common lawyer, Sir Edward Coke, a man harsh to brutality in some of his actions, notably in his conduct of the prosecution of Sir Walter Raleigh, a much better man than himself, yet distinguished by his sturdy independence and great legal erudition. For nearly three centuries, he has been famed as a legal writer, the influence of whose works continued to have a profound effect long after their author had passed away. His great claim, however, to the respect, the admiration, the gratitude of the Anglo-Saxon race for all time to come, is to be found in his sturdy, uncompromising, though perfectly constitutional, resistance to both James I. and Charles I. in their attacks upon the independence of the judiciary, and in their attempts to subvert the rights of the people.

In poetry, apart from the drama, the Elizabethan