

INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL DRAYTON was born in 1563, at Hartshill, near Atherstone, in Warwickshire, where a cottage, said to have been his, is still shown. He early became a page to Sir Henry Goodere, at Polesworth Hall: his own words give the best picture of his early years here.¹ His education would seem to have been good, but ordinary; and it is very doubtful if he ever went to a university.² Besides the authors mentioned in the Epistle to Henry Reynolds, he was certainly familiar with Ovid and Horace, and possibly with Catullus: while there seems no reason to doubt that he read Greek, though it is quite true that his references to Greek authors do not prove any first-hand acquaintance. He understood French, and read Rabelais and the French sonneteers, and he seems to have been acquainted with Italian.³ His knowledge of English literature was wide, and his judgement good: but his chief bent lay towards the history, legendary and otherwise, of his native country, and his vast stores of learning on this subject bore fruit in the *Polyolbion*.

While still at Polesworth, Drayton fell in love with his patron's younger daughter, Anne;⁴ and, though she married, in 1596, Sir Henry Rainsford of Clifford, Drayton continued his devotion to her for many years, and also became an intimate friend of her husband's, writing a sincere elegy on his death.⁵ About February,

¹ Cf. Elegy viij, *To Henry Reynolds, Esquire*, p. 108.

² Sir Aston Cokayne, in 1658, says that he went to Oxford, while Fleay asserts, without authority, that his university was probably Cambridge.

³ Cf. the motto of *Ideas Mirrour*, the allusions to *Ariosto* in the *Nymphidia*, p. 129; and above all, the *Heroical Epistles*; Dedic. of *Ep. of D. of Suffolk to Q. Margaret*: 'Sweet is the French Tongue, more sweet the Italian, but most sweet are they both, if spoken by your admired self.' Cf. *Surrey to Geraldine*, ll. 5 sqq., with Drayton's note.

⁴ Cf. Sonnet xij (ed. 1602), p. 42, 'Tis nine years now since first I lost my wit.' (This sonnet may, of course, occur in the supposed 1600 ed., which would fix an earlier date for Drayton's beginning of love.)

⁵ Elegy ix, p. 113.