The Renaissance, literally "rebirth," is the name given to the European cultural epoch that displaced the Middle Ages and gave rise to the modern world. This extraordinary era of achievement in science and the arts began about 1300 in Italy (much later in northern Europe) and ended with the spread of French neoclassicism in the late seventeenth century. Its gains are usually attributed to a fresh influx of knowledge ("the recovery of the old world and the discovery of the new") and to a secular point of view.

This notion, like most lasting generalizations, contains some truth. Renaissance man, that versatile being, lived in a world of expanding geographical and intellectual vistas. While Portuguese and Spanish explorers were sailing unknown seas in search of new trade routes, Italian scholars were editing newly discovered texts of Plato and Aristotle. In the rush for land and knowledge, excitement ran high. So did ambition. Spain, on papal authority, claimed half the undiscovered world (the Western Hemisphere) plus the Philippines. England's Lord Bacon, on his own authority, claimed the whole realm of knowledge: "I have taken all learning to be my province." Intellectual as well as geographical territory seemed up for grabs. These new vistas in certain ways challenged the world view of the Roman church. The universe of knowledge, like the physical globe, was much larger than many had dreamed.

And yet the Renaissance did not break so sharply with the past as some have thought, and where it did so, it strengthened rather than weakened the Christian world view. The new ideas of the universe are a case in point. First, the older cosmology was not as restrictive as we might suppose. It had been determined in ancient times that the earth is round and, in relation to the universe, quite small—a mere speck. Furthermore, the heavenly bodies, it became apparent, did not circle the earth according to the zodiacal scheme of astrology. Even Renaissance men of science did not regard the new heliocentric astronomy as an enemy of Christian belief but were, by and large, religiously orthodox. In any case, these new ideas did not take hold immediately. The intellectual lag extended throughout most of the Renaissance period. "The new astronomy," which Donne hyperbolically exclaimed "calls all in doubt," had not displaced the old by the time of Milton, who, with hesitation, settled on the geocentric system in Paradise Lost.

Likewise the Renaissance reverence for the past was not new. Medieval as well as Renaissance moral philosophy rested heavily on Aristotle and Cicero. Medieval scholastics were as fanatically devoted to their classical authorities as the humanists were...
to theirs. The difference is that the humanists were acquainted with more authors and works and knew them more accurately. They advocated grammatical and historical interpretation of texts, rather than allegorical, and the literal translation of important writings into the common languages. With the rise of science in the seventeenth century, humanism as well as scholasticism was rejected by Bacon as a form of that blind devotion to authority which holds back the physical progress of man.

Renaissance humanists were scholar-grammarians, devoted to the study of the "humanities" (the seven liberal arts) and convinced of the importance of going back to original sources. They were not secular materialists but men of high moral ideals who held the Biblical view of man. The worldliness often associated with the Renaissance stemmed mostly from the south of Europe. The Italian city-states (including the papal court), located at the commercial crossroads of Europe, showed a preoccupation with the goods of this world and a cynical disregard for the treasure of the next. Their materialism encouraged amoral politics and fostered philosophical speculation and religious skepticism. But they did not set the intellectual tone of Renaissance Europe.

Though the new learning came late to the north, it spread rapidly with the Protestant Reformation. In England and elsewhere, scholars studied Greek not primarily to interpret Plato, as in Florence, but to read the New Testament in the original language and be able to translate it accurately into the vernacular. The basic position of Protestantism—that the common man can interpret Scripture for himself—required an accurate rendering of the Greek text; and an accurate rendering depended in turn upon sound classical scholarship. The work of Tyndale and his successors depended upon the labors of Erasmus, the most learned humanist in Europe, whose edition of the Greek New Testament appeared in 1515.

Furthermore, the new learning provided a field of knowledge that, it was believed, could enrich the interpretation of Scripture and empower the preaching of the gospel. The greatest of the reformers, Martin Luther, wrote, "As for me, I am persuaded that without skill in literature genuine theology cannot stand, just as hitherto in the ruin and prostration of letters it too has miserably fallen and been laid low. Indeed, I see that the remarkable disclosure of the Word of God would never have taken place had He not first prepared the way by the rediscovery of languages and sciences, as by Baptist forerunners." Northern European humanism, allied with the Reformation, helped to expand the spiritual as well as the intellectual and cultural horizons of Renaissance man.

Finally, the spirit of the Renaissance was not, as some have held, libertarian in a political or social sense. Protestant Europe, in rejecting an authoritarian church, was not rejecting authority itself. It was rejecting a false authority for a true. Indeed, one can hardly understand the English Renaissance mind without realizing the strength of its conviction that a hierarchical arrangement represents the will of God in almost every area of human experience. The master theme of English Renaissance literature is the necessity of proper submission for human happiness—for the group and for the individual himself. In northern Europe, the Reformation actually strengthened civil authority by removing its subservience to Rome and by pointing up the Biblical duty of obedience to rulers. The church no longer could dominate the state.
1485-1603

As Tudor England embraced the gospel, it prospered politically, economically, and culturally. The Elizabethans, delivered from foreign invasion and internal subversion, saw their nation as specially favored of God. Special favor, they realized, carries with it special responsibility. England's mission would be to spread spiritual truth throughout Catholic Europe and the undiscovered world.

POLITICAL EVENTS

The Tudor concern for order arose partly from memories of the bloody conflict between the houses of Lancaster and York, a conflict ended by the accession of the first Tudor king, Henry VII (1485-1509). This concern for order was reinforced by an almost constant anxiety about the royal succession. All the Tudor monarchs after Henry VII were plagued by the fear of heirlessness. Since their claim to the throne was not strong, they felt it especially important to produce a suitable male successor. But this, for one reason or another, they were unable to do.

Henry VII, promoting the myth of Celtic royal ancestry, called his first son Arthur. England, however, was never to have a historical King Arthur. The prince died before his father, and the crown passed to his younger brother, Henry VIII (1509-1547), a robust, strong-willed youth of many interests. A series of six queens (two divorced, two executed for infidelity) gave Henry VIII only one son, Edward VI (1547-1553), a sickly child who began his rule under the direction of regents. The most influential of Edward's regents favored the religious reform begun under Henry VIII, and during the boy's short reign Protestantism reached its high tide in England.

Edward's death brought to the throne his half-sister Mary, the daughter of Henry's first queen, the Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon. Henry had divorced Catherine in defiance of the Pope and separated England religiously from Rome. Mary (1553-1558), loyal to the Roman religion and to her mother, tried to destroy the Protestant Reformation in England. Protestant leaders either fled the country or suffered death at the stake. It is a singular evidence of the favor of God toward England and toward the yet-to-be-founded American nation that Mary, wife of Philip II of Catholic Spain, could not bear a child. At her death, Elizabeth, daughter of Henry's second queen, Anne Boleyn, ascended the throne. Elizabeth I (1558-1603), a Protestant by upbringing and personal conviction, lost no time in restoring the Church of England founded by her father and reformed by her half-brother. All political and religious authority were united in her as queen and head of the church.

Physically attractive, vivacious, witty, and erudite (she read widely in Latin and Greek and spoke fluent French, Italian, and Spanish), the young Elizabeth summed up the Renaissance courtly ideal of elegance and learning. Keenly perceptive of character and ability in her courtiers, she surrounded herself with loyal and brilliant advisors. Politically shrewd and skilled in the art of self-preservation by her precarious existence under Mary, she used her intelligence, charm, and marital eligibility to keep England's powerful enemies at bay and hold the nation on a middle course in foreign and domestic policy. She practiced statecraft with the best of her time and was at least
the equal in political ingenuity of any English monarch before or since. But she contributed more to the success of her nation than an unusually capable and committed administration. As a symbol of England’s past and future glory, Elizabeth inspired her subjects to a moderation of their differences in peacetime and to heroic action in war. Her excommunication by papal decree in 1570 united England as never before.

Thus united, England was able to exploit its geographical advantage in the frenzied competition for territory and trade in the New World. From the 1570s to the 1590s, English privateers captained by John Hawkins, Francis Drake, and others harassed Spanish shipping and plundered Spanish ports. Their raids, approved but not officially acknowledged by Elizabeth, did much to weaken the Spanish colonial rivalry. In fact, their success very nearly destroyed Spain’s financial credit in Europe. Meanwhile they were claiming territory for England in the New World and exploring sea routes for trade.

In 1588, England was endangered by a massive naval expedition sent by Philip II of Spain to end this English threat to Spanish shipping and return England to the Catholic fold. As vice-admiral of the fleet charged with defending England against the Armada, Francis Drake more than any other Englishman was instrumental in preventing England from being overrun by Spanish troops. With fire ships at midnight he flushed the bulky galleons from their anchorage at Calais and broke their formation. In the ensuing battle, Drake, Hawkins, Lord Howard, and their fellow seamen, capitalizing on the panic of the night and aided by “Protestant” winds, decimated the Spanish fleet and drove the remaining vessels far into the treacherous North Sea.
It was a victory for English courage and cleverness. Once the unwieldy floating fortresses had lost their battle arrangement, they were at the mercy of the slimmer, more maneuverable English ships designed by Hawkins. It was, more importantly, a victory fashioned by the hand of God, one the Protestant English were to remember as a special evidence of divine favor.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

During the Tudor period England enjoyed a higher standard of living than in medieval times. The new Portuguese sea route around Africa broke the Arabian-Venetian monopoly on oriental trade and lowered the price of Eastern commodities in England as elsewhere. Luxuries were available to more people than before. More importantly, all levels of society were benefiting from a steady accumulation of wealth since the fourteenth century. This wealth, largely from the wool trade, was the foundation of the economic strength and extravagance of Elizabethan England.

In the 1570s gold began flowing into the royal treasuries from the west as English seamen attacked Spanish settlements and shipping. The hold of Drake’s ship The Golden Hind alone contained £1,500,000 worth of Spanish bullion, pearls, and precious stones—more than the annual revenue of the crown. The new abundance of gold improved commercial efficiency. Money replaced barter in business transactions and, concentrated in large banking houses, permitted the rise of modern credit and capital investment.

The new wealth gave the middle class a strong voice in national affairs. Late medieval history had taught that a well-filled treasury was superior to extensive feudal allegiances. The result was a greater recognition of the profit-making part of society and a favoring of their interests, a policy known as mercantilism. Throughout Elizabeth’s reign the Merchant Adventurers, founded in 1407, retained their monopoly on the exporting of wool. In 1600 the East India Company was chartered and became a force in English colonialism.
The middle class exerted influence not only through the trade companies but also through the House of Commons and, especially, through the administration of the burgeoning industrial centers. By 1563 the population of the greatest of these centers, London, had almost doubled from 50,000 in Chaucer’s time and was to double again in the remaining four decades of Elizabeth’s reign. Other cities grew correspondingly. Their interests became a political factor that the crown could not afford to ignore. The industrious, practical, largely Protestant commercial class wielded weight in all matters of national concern.

RELIGION

The rise of the middle class favored the growth of Protestantism. With fewer ties to tradition, merchants and artisans were ready conveyors of new ideas. It was due to the strength of this dynamic part of society in England that the Protestant Reformation took hold there so quickly. Why the Reformation did not last in countries such as Italy, where the middle class was similarly strong, can be understood by examining the Reformation’s beginnings and growth in sixteenth-century England.

When Luther’s doctrine reached England about 1520, three years after the posting of his Wittenberg theses, it found a soil well prepared by 140 years of Lollard preaching. Lollardism, though bitterly suppressed, had never been uprooted. In fact, in the decade preceding 1520 it had become once again a serious threat to English Catholicism. Lutheranism, therefore, was able to build on a foundation of Lollard teaching and sentiment. Soon it was recognized as a greater threat to the church than its predecessor; for Lutheranism, more than Lollardism, attracted the educated. It caught on at the universities, particularly at Cambridge, from which most of the English Protestant leaders were to come.

One of them, William Tyndale, conceived a plan to translate the Bible into English. When the church hierarchy proved hostile toward his project, Tyndale fled to the Continent, where in 1526 he published the first English New Testament translated from the original Greek. (Wycliffe’s version had been translated from the Latin Vulgate of Jerome.) In 1535 Tyndale was betrayed into the hands of the Spanish near Brussels, tried for heresy, and executed by strangling and burning. Ironically his martyrdom occurred a year after England had become safe for translating the Scriptures. Miles Coverdale, who may have been an assistant to Tyndale, produced the first complete English Bible in 1535. He borrowed heavily from several earlier versions, especially Tyndale’s.

How England became safe for Biblical translation is a complicated story. Henry VIII’s desire to divorce his wife Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn, her lady in waiting, led to England’s break with Rome in 1534. For this reason, the success of the Protestant Reformation in England is often attributed to the sensuality of the king. The explanation, however, is not so simple. An incontestable male succession was a matter of national urgency as well as of personal pride. Henry’s heirlessness was a threat to both civil peace and England’s independence from foreign domination.

After twenty-five years of marriage to Catherine, Henry petitioned Rome for an annulment. Popular feeling favored Catherine until she appealed to Rome in 1529.
Then the divorce became an issue of English independence from foreign domination. Parliament, motivated by patriotic feelings, enacted measures that practically destroyed papal authority in England. All church judicial decisions became subject to royal approval, and no appeals could be made from the church courts to Rome (the retention of an old position). Ecclesiastical law would no longer exist independently of civil law in England. When the position of archbishop of Canterbury became vacant in 1533, Henry appointed a man of his liking, Thomas Cranmer, a Cambridge doctor. Cranmer summoned Catherine to court and, when she did not come, pronounced her in contempt and the marriage annulled. The Act of Supremacy in 1534 officially severed the connection with Rome, making the monarch rather than the pope the head of the English church.

Henry's separation from Rome did not in itself bring about the Reformation in England. The power of the Roman church was destroyed and its property confiscated. All monastic goods and lands were in the hands of the crown by 1539. But Henry had no intention of departing from the doctrine and ritual of Rome, and he persecuted those who did. He had simply replaced the pope as head of an English Catholic church.

Henry's view of Catholicism was somewhat more liberal than the Roman view, however. He favored the translation of the Scriptures into the language of the people. In 1537 the second edition of Coverdale's Bible was published "with the King's most gracious license [permission]." In 1540 another version based on Tyndale's and Coverdale's appeared with the imprint "appointed to the use of the churches." This, the first authorized version, became known as the Great Bible because of its size and, in its second edition, as the Cranmer Bible because of the long preface by Henry's archbishop of Canterbury. Some progress was made toward producing a simplified, uniform order of worship in English, but the major work had to wait until Henry's death.

The doctrinal reformation of the church came with the accession of Henry's young son, Edward VI (1547-1553). Encouraged by the Protestant faction, Edward took the English church further from Rome than it had been before or has ever been since. In 1549 the Act of Uniformity imposed on all churches a new liturgy set forth in The Book of Common Prayer. Mainly the work of Cranmer, the Prayer Book instituted public prayers, Scripture readings, and ceremonies to be observed twice daily throughout the year. It contained sections for special times in the church year, such as Easter week, and for important occasions in the life of the people, such as birth, marriage, and death.

King Edward's Prayer Book, to fundamentalists today, would seem to have a Romish flavor. But its general impression on parishioners at the time it was issued must have been one of radical change. They would have been struck by the absence of key Roman doctrines such as transubstantiation ("we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood"), of practices such as withholding the wine from the communicant, and of many trivial rituals. They would have noticed the emphasis upon the reading of Scripture. (Public reading twice daily took the worshiper through the Old Testament once and the New Testament three times a year and through the Psalms each month.) They would have been awed by the rendering of the entire order of worship in English. (Scriptural quotations were taken from the Great Bible.)
The reign of King Edward would be remembered fondly by later Protestants as the high-water mark of church reform in England. The return of Romanism with Mary I (1553-58) gratified traditionalists among the nobility and clergy and a large segment of the commoners. Her savage measures against Protestants, however, eventually alienated the people and earned her the title “Bloody Mary.” About three hundred, including Cranmer, were burnt for their faith. Others fled to Protestant centers in Europe. The Marian exiles, as they are called, did not waste these years. At Geneva, Coverdale and his helpers produced the most accurate and readable English version of the Scriptures to appear up to that time. The Geneva Bible, as it is called, was a small, inexpensive volume designed for private reading and general circulation. At Basel, John Foxe worked feverishly on his Acts and Monuments (Latin version 1559, first English version 1563), a Protestant martyrology emphasizing the Marian persecutions. Foxe’s Book of Martyrs—the name by which it is best known—was by official edict placed in every cathedral church.

In 1558, with the accession of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), the Marian exiles trooped back to England, along with continental Protestants looking for a political climate more favorable to their faith. Elizabeth seemed the hope of European Protestantism. She had ascended the throne because of the failure of two Catholic queens to furnish a male heir. She had survived the reign of her jealous, suspicious half-sister. She was a convinced Protestant, for Lutheranism had been the religion of her mother and her tutors. England, it was felt, would be not only a haven for persecuted Protestants but also a divine instrument for planting religious truth in Catholic Europe and throughout the world.

But Elizabeth, contrary to Protestant hopes, was inclined toward moderation. The returning Protestants were disappointed in 1559 to find the Prayer Book revised in a traditional direction, requiring ecclesiastical vestments, adding saints’ days, and having eliminated expressions offensive to Catholics. Elizabeth would not antagonize
the Catholic faction at home or the Catholic powers abroad by carrying reform as far as Edward's counselors had wished. While trying not to alienate the religious extremes, she insisted on outward acceptance, at least, of the state church. All citizens had to attend services on Sundays and holy days or pay a shilling for their absence.

Elizabeth's determination to follow a via media (middle way) in the affairs of the church affected her political policy, both foreign and domestic. Protestants lamented her halfhearted support of their Dutch brethren against Catholic Spain. They grew frustrated with her unwillingness (until 1587) to execute her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, who had conspired with Spain to overthrow her. Elizabeth's political temporizing, like her religious centrist, resulted from her moderate Lutheran position and her desire to preserve England in troubled times.

This policy of moderation especially exasperated the Puritans, a group of Anglican communicants who believed that the reform of the church had stopped too soon. They desired to "purify" the church of all remaining traces of Catholicism. They opposed traditional observances—holy days, vestments, rituals—that lacked specific Biblical justification and, especially, the rule by bishops. Most Puritans were presbyterian in doctrine and church government, accepting the institution of the state church but wishing to reform it on the model of John Calvin's at Geneva. Some were Congregationalists, opposed to any state church. Increasingly, Puritanism became a political as well as religious cause and strained the unity Elizabeth strove to maintain.

CULTURE

Language

The coming of the Tudors marks the beginning of Early Modern English (c. 1485-1800). Contrary to common belief, Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote in Early Modern English. The change from Middle to Modern English does not seem so great as that from Old to Middle English, but it brought some very significant developments. The most remarkable of these was a strange phenomenon, unique to the English language, known as the Great Vowel Shift. During the late fifteenth century and throughout the sixteenth, the pronunciation of English long vowels was changing from that of Chaucer's day to their present pronunciation. The change is partially illustrated by the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chaucer's spelling</th>
<th>Chaucer's pronunciation: rhymes with modern</th>
<th>Modern form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stables</td>
<td>hobbies</td>
<td>stables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seeken, heath</td>
<td>bacon, faith</td>
<td>seek, heath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ride</td>
<td>need a</td>
<td>ride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roote</td>
<td>vote a</td>
<td>root</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flowr, devout</td>
<td>tour, the loot</td>
<td>flower, devout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While these vowel sounds were changing, spelling stayed mostly the same. Printers followed the example of William Caxton, who based his spelling not on
current pronunciation but on the practice of medieval scribes. The result is that the letters a, e, and i, when representing long vowels, indicate different sounds in Modern English from those they indicated in Middle English and, in fact, from those they still indicate in other languages using the Latin alphabet. The digraphs oo and ou, representing Middle English long o and u, have also changed their values.

A somewhat earlier but partially overlapping development illustrated by the table was the dropping of the final unstressed -e, pronounced by Chaucer as -uh. When the sound to which it referred disappeared from speech, -e was retained by scribes to identify the preceding vowel as long, and in this way it functions today (cf. modern ride and rid). In words in which vowel length was indicated by vowel doubling (e.g., root), the -e was not needed for this purpose and was not kept in spelling. This change was completed by the end of the fifteenth century.

Probably the feature of Early Modern English most evident to readers of the King James Version is the presence of the th- forms of the second-person-singular personal pronouns. Tudor English had the following forms for the second person:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>singular</th>
<th>objective</th>
<th>possessive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td>thou</td>
<td>thee</td>
<td>thy, thine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ye</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>your</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the late 1500s the plural pronoun you began to be used also as the singular form, replacing thou and thee. The cause seems to be as follows. During the Middle English period, the plural forms, following the example of the French, began to be used in respectful address to superiors and in polite conversation among aristocratic equals. (The idea of using the plural to dignify the person to whom it refers appears also in the European royal custom of speaking in the first-person plural. In England the "royal we" was in use through the reign of Victoria.) The th- forms were reserved by the upper classes for intimate conversation and for addressing inferiors. With the rise of the middle class, the courtesy of being addressed in the plural was extended broadly until thou and thee with their possessives were crowded out. Simultaneously you was replacing ye in the subjective-plural function. You, therefore, has prevailed entirely in the second person. The th- forms now appear only in formal public prayer, where they have persisted because of the influence of the King James Version and the Book of Common Prayer.

With the disappearance of thou, the language lost also the corresponding tense endings -est, -st, and -t. The third-singular present-tense endings -eth and -th were superseded by the northern dialectal form -s about the same time. The language meanwhile was gaining a new possessive pronoun, the neuter its, to replace his, which up to that time was both masculine and neuter (cf. "The altar of burnt offering, with his brazen grate, his staves, and all his vessels," Exod. 35:16). In addition, the pronoun who, formerly only interrogative, began to function also as a relative pronoun (cf. "Our Father, which art in heaven," Matt. 6:9).

During the Tudor period the English word stock was vastly enriched by borrowings from other languages, classical and contemporary. The revival of classical
learning produced the largest influx of Latin vocabulary in the history of English. Latin, the language of scholarly and scientific discussion, continued to provide technical vocabulary for expanding areas of knowledge, as it does to this day (e.g., *abdomen, aborigine, axis, edition, education, superintendent*). Greek also contributed to special vocabularies, either directly or through French and Latin (e.g., *drama, lyric, metaphor, rhythm; comma, hyphen, idiom, paragraph, phrase; aristocracy, democracy, oligarchy*). Meanwhile, widening trade and diplomatic contacts encouraged the importation of new words from abroad. From Spain, for example, came *alligator, brocade, cannibal, hurricane, and potato*; from Portugal, *banana, cobra, and molasses*; from Italy, *argosy, balcony, cameo, stanza, and violin*; and from France, *alloy, bizarre, chocolate, comrade, duel, mustache, and volunteer*. Of special value to Tudor literature was the flexibility of the language at that time. There was as yet no prescriptive tradition in English usage, and innovation was much less risky than it is today. Spenser, Shakespeare, and other writers were free to exploit and expand the resources of the language with little danger of reproach. Thus while Spenser revived archaic words, Shakespeare coined new ones.

**Learning**

The New Learning came from Italy to England by means of a group known as the Oxford Reformers. One of them, John Colet (1467-1519), founded St. Paul’s, the first grammar school in England (1512). Another, Thomas Linacre (c.1460-1524), taught Greek at Oxford to Erasmus and Thomas More. Erasmus, a Dutch scholar, became the leading humanist on the Continent; More, the most influential humanist in England.

The northern humanists were not worldly intellectuals. Their enthusiasm for classical studies was matched by their religious zeal. When Colet was invited to address a conclave of English bishops assembled to devise ways to combat Lollardism, he sternly denounced not the Lollards but the bishops, and in terms not unworthy of the Lollards themselves. His Latin sermon, preached at St. Paul’s Cathedral (of which he was the newly appointed dean), recalls Wycliffe’s and Chaucer’s criticisms of the clergy. “Let the laws be rehearsed,” he thundered, “that command personal residence of the curates in their churches, . . . that forbid that a clerk be no merchant, that he be no usurer, that he be no hunter, that he be no common player, that he bear no weapon; the laws that forbid clergys to haunt taverns, that forbid them to have suspect familiarity with women; the laws that command sobriety and a meagerness in apparel and temperance in adorning of the body, . . . that command that the goods of the church be spent not in costly buildings, not in sumptuous apparel and pompes, not in feasting and banqueting, not in excess and wantonness, not in enriching of kinsfolk, not in keeping of dogs, but in things profitable and necessary to the church.”

Erasmus, who also favored reform of the church, unwittingly aided the spread of Protestantism, of which he disapproved. In 1516 he published a scholarly text of the Greek New Testament with Latin translation. The crowning achievement of northern humanism, Erasmus’s New Testament shows the alliance of humanism with the Reform movement in northern Europe. An accurate Greek text was ready when the Reformers needed it.
Erasmus's friend Thomas More is best known today as the author of *Utopia*, also published in 1516. This fanciful satire is the major humanistic document of sixteenth-century England. More was best known during his own time as a fervent religious controversialist. Even less tolerant of Lutheranism than was Erasmus, More contended bitterly with Tyndale and, untypically of humanism, opposed the vernacular translation of the Scriptures. The next generation of English humanists, including Sir John Cheke and Roger Ascham, were also men of strong religious convictions but, unlike More and Erasmus, were staunch Protestants devoted to establishing true religion in the land. A sound classical education was, for them, the means of carrying out their spiritual mission.

The humanists were interested not only in the spiritual recovery of England but also in the moral improvement of society. These they intended to bring about by a properly educated leadership. To produce an educated leadership they established schools for the children of the gentry (lesser nobility) and tradesmen in cities and towns. These schools, conducted by university graduates, taught grammar (Latin grammar and literature) and, to a lesser extent, rhetoric (classical oratory). Logic, the third part of the trivium, was left for the university. School days were spent largely in grammatical analysis of Latin writings and in composition based on the Latin models. In some schools the students spoke only Latin. The hours were long and the regimen was severe. The curriculum included Latin writings for their moral value as well as for their usefulness as models of style. Students were saturated with the advice of the classical moralists and rhetoricians. They were influenced in character as well as style by precepts and examples culled from the standard Latin authors.

**Literature**

The brilliant literary achievement of the age of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare is ultimately beyond explanation, but certain conditions prepared the way. Peace and prosperity created leisure for cultural pursuits and wealth for the patronage of writers. The printing press increased the number and types of readers so that literature had to appeal to a wider range of taste. Elizabethan drama, for example, shows the influence of both court and town, university and marketplace. The growing social mobility resulting from the disintegration of feudal society encouraged personal ambition. Thus, late Tudor literature shows a middle-class interest in self-improvement. Writers such as Spenser channeled this interest toward moral as well as social goals. Their moralism was prompted by the educational aims of the humanists but was also a result of the Protestant Reformation, which encouraged moral earnestness.

**Eclectic** These conditions gave rise to a literature with certain distinctive qualities. It was, first of all, eclectic: composed of ingredients from various sources. It is not surprising that a literature drawing from classical and medieval, continental and native, humanistic and courtly, academic and popular literary traditions would give the appearance of an odd mixture. The result is that the works are often difficult to classify. *The Faerie Queene* is an epic, a romance, and an allegorical moral treatise. Its allegory has historical, contemporary-political, religious, and ethical levels of meaning. In Shakespeare's plays, comic scenes lighten tragedy, and tragic potentialities darken comedy. The genius of the literary giants of the age was eclectic. Their originality consisted largely in the creative synthesis of varied existing materials.
Difficult This synthesis of diverse and distant materials makes special demands on modern readers. The writing is, first, highly artificial. Lyric poetry often exists more as a display of technical skill than as a vehicle of deep personal feeling. The intricate structure of the sonnet, imported from Italy, requires careful arrangement of both language and ideas. The pleasure of reading the sonnet is at least partly attributable to the reader’s awareness of the challenge it poses to the poet.

Similarly, the mode of pastoralism is strange to us today because of its artificiality. The appearance of shepherds as characters and primitive rural surroundings as setting seems quaint and distant from the real world of human experience. However, Tudor poets used the pastoral mode with intellectual and moral seriousness. Pastoralism was a means of detaching the reader from ordinary existence so that he could see himself and his life more objectively. By providing an idyllic surrounding free of the hardships and perplexities of real life, writers located their characters’ problems within themselves rather than in their environment. The pastoral mode, which appears in all the major genres of Tudor literature, was a means of bringing human nature sharply into focus.

Second, Tudor literature is difficult for today’s reader because it is academic. Since education was narrowly classical, writers could draw upon a common body of reading for allusions and parallels to universalize their situations and themes. Their frequent references to classical mythology and history, which puzzle and exasperate modern readers, required little editorial explanation until the twentieth century. While the traditional Latin-based education was still dominant, everyone knew about Hector and Achilles, Ulysses and the sirens, Cupid and Psyche, Hercules and Alcestis, and the Graeco-Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Didactic One of the most striking impressions left by this literature is the boldness with which its authors adapted classical sources for their purposes. These purposes, according to the Roman poet Horace, were two: to teach and to delight. Tudor critics combined them into a single aim: literature delights in order to teach. Tudor writing has then a moral-educational purpose, a purpose it shares with Tudor humanism.

Tudor poets shared with orators the burden of exciting citizens to virtuous action. To this end, they sought to reveal the ugliness of evil and the loveliness of good, for evil in this world may have a counterfeit attractiveness and good appears at times severe. Poetry, argued Sidney, can move men more powerfully than can the bare precepts of moral philosophy. Poetry can show moral consequences more consistently than can the examples of history. Poetry was therefore no mere frivolous pastime but ranked first, in moral utility, among the academic arts. Shakespeare, Spenser, and their fellow poets were not only superb entertainers but also serious teachers.

It is a fascinating consideration that the greatest literature of our English cultural heritage, from almost any point of view, was written for the moral improvement of mankind. This moral improvement rested, for the most part, on a Christian base. It assumed man’s helplessness and unworthiness of God’s favor.

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once;
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. (Measure for Measure, II,ii.)