

**THE LITERATURE OF THE  
FRENCH  
RENAISSANCE: AN  
INTRODUCTORY ESSAY**

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The Literature of the French Renaissance: An Introductory Essay by Arthur Tilley

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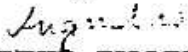
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BY

  
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## PREFACE.

HISTORIES of literature are apt to be confined to biography and criticism. The writers of them concern themselves, not so much with the broad main stream of a nation's literary developement, as with the rivers, sometimes indeed with the tiniest rivulets, which feed it. Thus they produce works, which however interesting and instructive they may be, are hardly entitled to be called histories. For a history, I take it, should have at any rate two features. It should be a continuous story, and it should deal with causes and effects. Into the vexed question of what is the province of History *par excellence*, whether it should confine itself to an account of the organisation of states, or whether it should more fully deserve its preeminence by dealing with the whole life of a nation, I need not happily enter. I will only venture to assert that to every history alike, whether it be a history of politics, or a history of painting, or a history of literature, the

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same principle applies. It should present a connected and intelligible story of growth and development.

There are few periods of literature that seem to lend themselves better to historical treatment than that of the French Renaissance. Though it is illustrated by two of the greatest names on the roll of French literature, Rabelais and Montaigne, the general aspect that it presents to us is the record rather of a great national literary movement than of individual men of letters. Moreover this movement was a faithful reflexion of a corresponding change in the whole social and intellectual life of the people. At all times I believe the literature of a nation to be more or less of an index to its moral and intellectual state. It is especially so in times of great stress and fermentation. It was preeminently so in the time of the Renaissance.

Now in order rightly to understand the meaning of any new movement we must first know what was the old state of things which it replaced. To understand the French Revolution we must know something of the *Ancien Régime*. To understand the Renaissance we must know something of the Middle Ages. I have therefore considered that a necessary prelude to a historical account of the literature of the French Renaissance is a sketch of French mediæval literature, and of the education and thought upon which that literature was based. To

give such a sketch is the purport of the present volume. I have tried to be both clear and accurate, but I am well aware that the subject is too wide, and my knowledge of it far too limited, to make perfect accuracy possible, even while keeping, as I have done, to the broadest outline.

The appearance of this introduction by itself perhaps requires explanation. The greater part of it was already written more than two years ago. But since I exchanged the leisure of a briefless barrister for the duties of a college tutor and lecturer I have only been able to work at it by snatches. Though a few chapters of the main portion of my undertaking are written, a considerable time must necessarily elapse before even the first part, which is intended to deal with the reign of Francis I., can be completed. I have therefore preferred to let this introductory volume appear by itself rather than to keep it back for others which may possibly never be ready. I heartily thank the Syndics of the University Press for enabling me to give effect to this desire.

I must also express my best thanks to my friend Mr F. J. H. Jenkinson, Fellow of Trinity College, for going through the whole of the proof-sheets, and correcting various faults of obscurity and bad English; to my friend, the Rev. H. R. Luard, Registry of the University, for reading through chapter IV., and making some useful suggestions which I have gladly