

**FROM OPITZ TO LESSING:  
A STUDY  
OF PSEUDO-CLASSICISM  
IN LITERATURE**

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From Opitz to Lessing: a study of pseudo-classicism in literature by Thomas Sergeant Perry

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FROM  
OPITZ TO LESSING:

*A STUDY OF PSEUDO-CLASSICISM  
IN LITERATURE.*

BY

THOMAS SERGEANT PERRY,

AUTHOR OF "ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY."



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ANNALS OF THE  
MOUNTAIN STATE

STEREOTYPED BY  
C. J. PETERS & SON, BOSTON.

U. S. P. A.  
OCT 25 1908

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P42f

TO

*W. D. HOWELLS.*

## PREFACE.

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THE aim of this book is to give some few of the many available proofs that the different nations of modern Europe have passed through very nearly the same experience in literature since the Renaissance. The course of each separate nation has been described by hosts of writers: in France the early glow of the Pleiad, the chastening correctness of Malherbe and Boileau, the gradual romantic revival; in England, the fading out of the Elizabethan fervour, the precision of Dryden and Pope, and the modifications that led to the revival of poetry; the similar course of events in Germany, — all these things have been set forth in countless volumes. The facts once established, it becomes possible to detect a harmony which it would be rash to call coincidence. The next thing is obviously to



see how closely the various nations kept step together. Until this is done, our knowledge is fragmentary and incomplete; the relation of different authors to one another is often only intelligible when we see it more brilliantly illustrated in another country. After this work is finished, there will remain the task of ascertaining exactly to what extent each nation modified the general course of literary movement; what was the national equation, so to speak, of each country. When this is ascertained, the period treated will be really known; until then it will not be fully comprehended.

This volume is offered to the public as a slight essay to show how like were some of the early movements in different countries.

T. S. P.

Boston, July 28, 1884.

## FROM OPITZ TO LESSING :

### A STUDY OF PSEUDO-CLASSICISM.

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#### CHAPTER I.

WHAT we include in the term "German Literature" may be conveniently assumed to have begun with Lessing ; but, in order to understand what that eminent writer did in the way of clearing the ground for his successors and of laying the foundations on which they were to work, it is important to take a look backwards, and to see what had been done and what left undone before his day. Only in this way can we appreciate him at his proper value, and an examination of this sort may also be of service, by showing us that the study of literature, which is, after all, only the study of one part of his-

tory, is fruitful even when it requires of us that we give our attention to men of moderate merit, to writers who are praised when they are called second-rate. There is something fascinating in studying merely the greatest men, and in passing over the rest without thought ; but literature cannot be understood in that way, any more than botany can be learned by studying nothing but Japanese lilies and Jacqueminot roses, or modern history by giving all our attention to Napoleon Bonaparte, Washington, and Lincoln. In literature, the man who accomplishes anything great is the one man who succeeds where countless others fail ; and our study will be of little profit if it does not teach us how much greater are the long and silently prepared movements than any brilliant performance, how the most striking thing about any genius is its inevitableness, and that it cannot be understood without the comprehension of the whole spirit of the time. It is to the Germans that we owe