

**RABELAIS**

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Rabelais by Walter Besant

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**WALTER BESANT**

# **RABELAIS**



*Foreign Classics for English Readers*

EDITED BY

MRS OLIPHANT

**RABELAIS**

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BY

WALTER BESANT, M.A.

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## NOTE.

THE translations in the following chapters are in some cases my own; in others taken from Urquhart and Motteux, after comparison with the original.

W. B.

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

# RABELAIS.



## INTRODUCTION.

THE initial difficulty which presents itself to him who would treat of Rabelais, is that he must refrain from advising his readers, unless they are undertaking a serious study, to follow up his own account by reading the original. Alone among the great writers of the world, Rabelais can be appreciated by students only. To the general reader, to the young, to women in all ages, he is a closed book. For very shame he must be hidden away. His real features are only revealed to those who lift the veil with serious intent to study and not to laugh. To all others the man is a buffoon, and the book is what Voltaire called it in the early days before he understood it, "Un ramas des plus grossières ordures qu'un moine ivre puisse vomir."

Calvin, Luther, Stephen the Printer, La Bruyère, Fénelon, Lamartine, among other wise and learned men, found Rabelais insupportable and abominable. On the other hand, Cardinal Duperron called 'Pantagruel' "*le liere*;"



Bishop Huet annotated Rabelais in four different editions; Coleridge, Victor Hugo, Michelet, Kingsley—a whole chorus of noble voices has been raised in defence and praise of the man and his book. Almost every Frenchman who studies the literature of his own country finds it necessary to produce an essay on Rabelais; almost every French writer of these days endeavours to extenuate his faults and to magnify his name. Among these writers of our own age are Ste Beuve, Villemain, Philarète Charles, Lenient, Prosper Mérimée, Victor Hugo, Guizot, Michelet, Lacroix, and Jules Janin. No other author has been so repeatedly the subject of criticism. But on Rabelais, as on Shakespeare, the last word will never be said. No book on Rabelais has yet appeared, or ever will appear, that can be considered exhaustive.

It is the main object of the present volume to show by what qualities Rabelais has drawn to himself, and continues to draw, the praise and admiration of those who study him. In the preparation of the work I have consulted all those writers named above, and a good many more; and I have reconsidered every point of a previous judgment which I ventured to pronounce on Rabelais five years ago in my book on the French Humourists. I desire, however, especially to call the attention of those who require a more extended study on Rabelais than my limits will allow, to the book, in two volumes, of M. Jean Fleury (Paris: Didier, 1877). There are many points on which I cannot agree with M. Fleury in his conclusions, as, for instance, on the religious belief of Rabelais. But I must acknowledge my great obligations to the book, especially as to the "Voyage of the Divine Bottle." That part of the 'Pantagruel,'—the most important and the most