

**MYSTICS & HERETICS IN
ITALY AT THE END OF THE
MIDDLE AGES. [LONDON]**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649654260

Mystics & Heretics in Italy at the End of the Middle Ages. [London] by Émile Gebhart & Edward Maslin Hulme

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ÉMILE GEBHART & EDWARD MASLIN HULME

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MYSTICS AND HERETICS
IN ITALY

MYSTICS & HERETICS IN ITALY

AT THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

BY
ÉMILE GEBHART

TRANSLATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION,
BY
EDWARD MASLIN HULME



LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET W.C. 1

no vend
available

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First published in 1922*

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER
ANNIE LOUISE HULME
THIS VERSION OF "L'ITALIE MYSTIQUE"
A BOOK THAT REVEALS THE SPIRIT OF AN AGE
IS DEDICATED

Youth fades, love droops, the leaves of friendship fall.
A mother's secret hope outlives them all.

1907

INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH the French historian and man of letters who is the subject of this brief sketch lived almost exactly the traditionally allotted term of three score years and ten, the frost of age had failed to chill the fires of his youth ; his poet's heart still beat high within his breast ; his enthusiasms had lost nothing of their old intensity ; his interests were ever widening and deepening ; and his sympathies, more inclusive than ever with the passing of the years, had but mellowed in the autumnal glow. To have devoted half a century to the writing and teaching of history (for though he sat in a chair of literature he emphasized the historical aspect of his subject), to have written many exquisite historical sketches, one ambitious historical novel impregnated with the authentic spirit of its time, and at least two important historical works unsurpassed in insight and synthetic power in their respective fields, and, in addition, to have created in the minds of many students an understanding of the significance of two great periods in the story of the human past, and to have enkindled in their hearts a deep and abiding love for those times, for the noble men who lived in them, and for the beauty of the art that still gives voice to their ideals, to have done all this, and without stain in the doing, is surely an enviable accomplishment and one well worthy of commemoration. Yet thus far only one of his books has been done into English, and that a minor one ; in no paper published in the English-speaking world did his death evoke more than a brief paragraph ;

and in his own country he seems to be generally underrated as a writer of mere exquisite miniatures rather than esteemed as a scholar of insight and learning as well as of grace.

Nicholas-Émile Gebhart was born in 1839 at Nancy, the old capital of Lorraine, which at that time was not as prosperous and animated as it afterwards came to be, but which could nevertheless boast a grace now vanished. The men of Lorraine, so one of their number has said, have three ruling passions—the army, art, and the forest. Gebhart and his two brothers, although of Alsatian parentage, personified these three passions. The eldest was a soldier and rose to the rank of general; the youngest became a commissioner of forests; and the second was the man of letters whose life we are to narrate and whose work we are to estimate.

The sensitive and imaginative boy proved to be an excellent pupil in the public school at Nancy, and among the prizes he won was a copy of the *Journey from Paris to Jerusalem*. No other writer made a deeper impression upon French literature in the nineteenth century than Chateaubriand. His extraordinary faculty for the description of nature, his exquisite sense of style, his impassioned eloquence, the richness of his imagination, the ardour and the violence of his passions, his *sombre fidélité pour les causes tombées*, and, above all else, the touch of Celtic magic that distinguishes so many of his pages, enchanted the child Gebhart and induced him to dream, beneath the pale sky of his northern town, of the olive and the oleander, of purple seas and purple mountains, of distant lands where the temples are fallen and where the silence of the long summer days is broken only by the hum of the insects. The passion he conceived for Chateaubriand never left him. And, as was the case with little Pierre in *Le Lys Rouge*, from these school days dated a taste for sonorous Latin and elegant French

which he never lost despite the example, and, indeed, if not even the counsel, of many of his more famous contemporaries. In due time he continued his studies at Nancy under the newly-established Faculty of Letters, of which five of the professors had been members of the French School at Athens. When he received the degree of Bachelor of Letters his father, who was himself a provincial magistrate, sent him to Paris to study law. There he became a lawyer, and, although it is not recorded that he ever pleaded a case, he long maintained a nominal connection with the profession.

But even while preparing for his degree in law, young Gebhart did not neglect letters. He frequented the Sorbonne and was in particular attracted by the lectures of M. Saint-Marc Girardin. One day, in speaking of La Fontaine, the famous professor vigorously denounced the idle and improvident grasshopper. The next week he read a letter of protest, received, he explained, since the last lecture, which, pleading the cause of the light-hearted insect, was signed "A Grasshopper of the Latin Quarter." So delighted were the auditors with the cleverness of the reply that they requested the name of the author. Thus did Gebhart enjoy the intoxication of a first literary triumph. Strange that a defender of *la cigale* should be found in a youth whose race has always been noted for its ant-like industry!

Gebhart was not yet twenty-one when he sustained his two theses for the doctorate of letters. In the first one, *De varia Ulyssis apud veteres poetas persona*, he reviewed the various characters lent to Ulysses by the poets of antiquity. The second, *Histoire du sentiment poétique de la nature dans l'antiquité Grèce et Romaine*, based upon his own reading of the classical authors and upon lectures to which he had listened in the Sorbonne and the Collège de France, was a larger theme. It betrays the immaturity of its author, of course, but scattered throughout its paragraphs are