

RABELAIS IN HIS WRITINGS

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Rabelais in his writings by W. F. Smith

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W. F. SMITH

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RABELAIS
IN HIS WRITINGS

BY

W. F. SMITH, M.A.

FELLOW OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE



CAMBRIDGE
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1918

PREFACE

THIS little book is intended to furnish a kind of running commentary on the various phases of the life and writings of François Rabelais in the light of modern research, and to present the opinions expressed by the several characters in his books on matters that arise from the monkish, religious, legal, medical and other points of view, as expressed in the narrative or by interlocutors in the dialogue, and to point out some of the sources of the erudition embodied in the romance.

In order rightly to appreciate the work of this author it is more than usually necessary to examine with minute care the writings themselves, the fortunes and circumstances of the writer at the various times of their composition, and the position and influence of the personages in the political and religious world who encouraged or thwarted his efforts to comfort his patients, support his country, advocate the cause of his friends and requite the ill-usage of his enemies, by his genial humour, his stinging satire and powerful invective.

He had attained this power and the means for these purposes by strenuous work in the humanistic studies so vigorously prosecuted at that time and by thus becoming a learned and skilful opponent of his lifelong adversaries. To follow this up it has been necessary,

among other things, to investigate the sources from which he derived his wide and varied learning, whether from Homer, Hesiod and the Latin poets, the Vulgate, the ancient historians, philosophers, physicians, antiquarians, legists and geographers, and the voluminous humanistic writers and commentators thereon, or again from the poets, satirical writers and romancers of his own times as well as the moralities and mystery-plays, and the fugitive broadsides hawked about by itinerant peddlars. A complete bibliography would occupy many pages.

From such a medley Rabelais composed the four or five "books" which he wrote to forward the interests of his friends and his patients and to exasperate his enemies. He not only succeeded in these purposes, but he has given a book to the world which has instructed, puzzled and amused later writers and has helped to pass on the torch of learning and literature to many leading spirits of other ages and countries, to keep alight for future generations.

W. F. S.

18 August 1917

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