

FABLE AND SONG IN ITALY

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Fable and Song in Italy by E. M. Clerke

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E. M. CLERKE

**FABLE AND
SONG IN ITALY**

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IN ITALY .

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BY
E. M. CLERKE



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To

Dr. Richard Garnett, C.B.

*In grateful recognition of
encouragement and advice without
which this volume would
never have been
written*

Rom. Lang.
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PREFACE

THE aim of this little volume is twofold. First, to trace out some of the influences acting on the more popular forms of Italian song ; and secondly, to offer to English readers, in the shape of translated extracts, specimens of Italian poets whose works difficulties of language have hitherto rendered inaccessible to the general public.

In carrying out the first part of my programme, I have specially dwelt in the early chapters on the survival of classical myths in popular tradition, and on their transformation and modification at the hands of minstrels and poets. As Boiardo is the great exemplar, among the more polished bards, of this species of assimilation, I have illustrated it by following out some of the episodes in which he has thus blended antique and mediæval mythology, so as to present them in consecutive and intelligible form. It is only in this fashion that the chivalric epic can be rendered readable to contemporaries, since its prolixity and discursiveness make it wearisome to pursue continuously as a whole. Its original composition for piecemeal recitation places it in a totally different category from modern literature, addressed primarily to the mind through the eye.

In the chapters on Giusti and Manzoni I have tried to emphasise their position as the two great influences on the growth of modern Italian, the one through his verse, the other through his prose, the unapproached and unapproachable masterpieces of their respective spheres of art.

My second object has been in the selection of passages for translation, to open up as far as possible new ground, choosing works that have not as yet been naturalised in English literature. Since there is no version of the "Orlando Innamorato" in our language, I have drawn largely on it for passages illustrative of my subject, especially as its beauties are, even in Italian, disguised by the obsolescence of the language, and it has therefore the less to lose in the change of dress. In my selections from Ariosto, again, I have borrowed more extensively from his sparkling verse-letters than from his better known "Orlando Furioso," since the latter is available in a very adequate English translation.

My versions are in every case line for line transcripts, that is to say, there is no transposition of the meaning, which is placed clause by clause as in the original. I have made no attempt to reproduce or imitate archaisms of diction, which would in a modern writer be affectation, but have tried to reflect the simplicity and directness of the language of my text. A translation must always be more or less of a compromise between literalness and grace, but I have done my best to make the new medium as transparent a vehicle as possible for the transmission of the original author's ideas and intentions.