

**HEAT'S MODERN
LANGUAGE SERIES.
LE MISANTHROPE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649629657

Heat's Modern Language Series. Le Misanthrope by Molière & Charles A. Eggert

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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MOLIÈRE & CHARLES A. EGGERT

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LE MISANTHROPE**



MOLIÈRE.
(JEAN-BAPTISTE POQUELIN.)

Heath's Modern Language Series

MOLIÈRE'S
LE MISANTHROPE

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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D. C. HEATH & CO., PUBLISHERS
BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO

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1656.523.443

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JULY 2, 1936

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PREFACE

FRANÇOIS COPPÉE has called Molière *le plus grand Français*, and the consensus of modern critical opinion points to the *Misanthrope* as Molière's greatest and most original work.

The higher institutions of learning in this country have long since recognized the *Misanthrope* as one of the indispensable texts in every curriculum which offers a chance for the higher study of French.

The present editor of the work may, therefore, hope to be pardoned for adding this edition to those already in use.

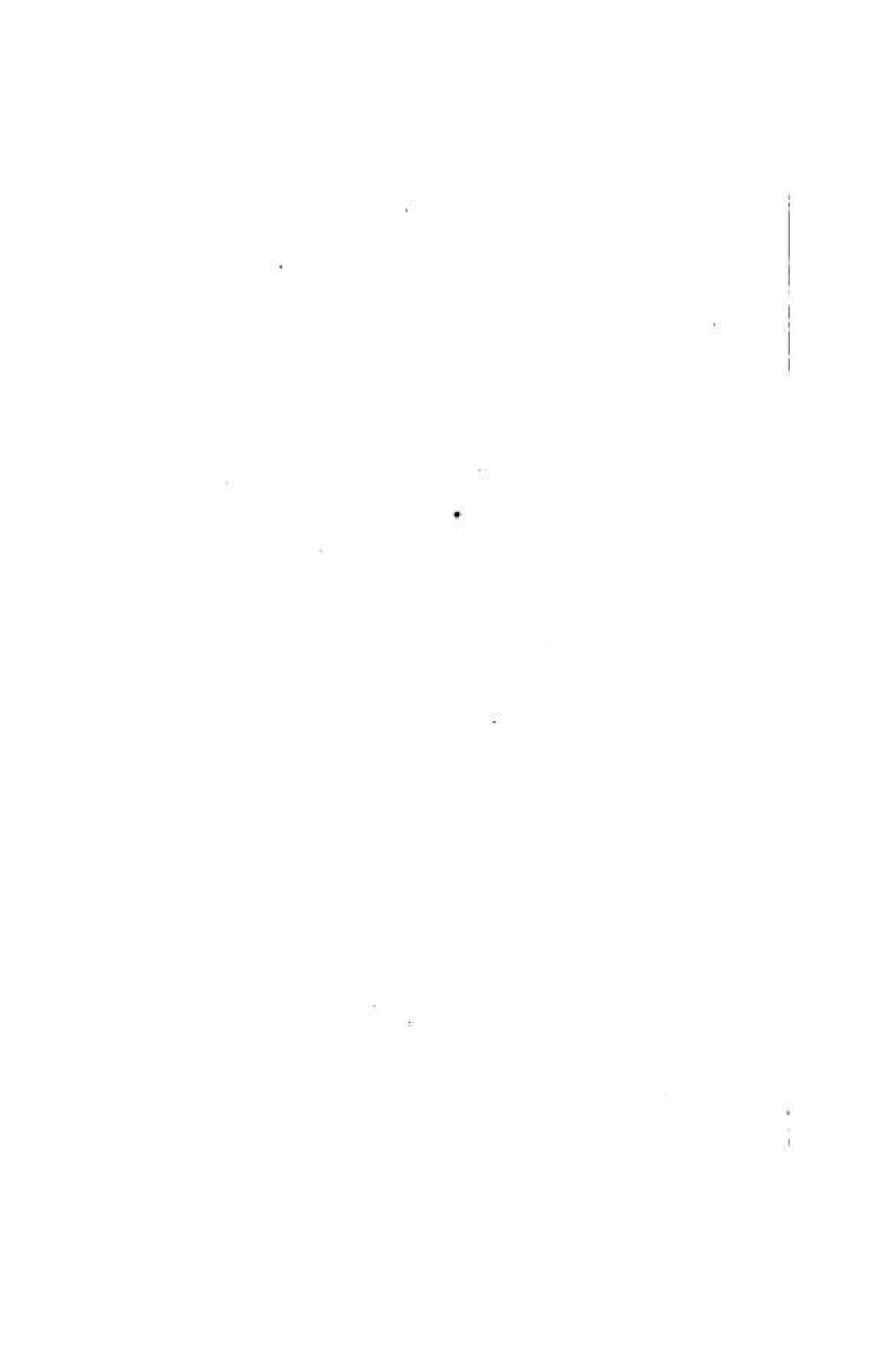
His endeavor has been to meet the wants of advanced students of French. He has accordingly omitted ordinary grammatical and other notes not needed by such students; but he has been careful to supply all necessary help, in the case of obscure or incorrect constructions of words and phrases more or less obsolete, and, in general, in all cases which seemed to call for comment and elucidation, in the interest of a critical and scholarly interpretation and appreciation.

Great care has been taken that the facts stated in the Introduction should fairly present the latest phases in the study of the subject, and no pains have been spared, in the Introduction and Notes, to aid as far as possible the cause of intelligent study and sound scholarship.

With but a slight deviation which usage seemed to demand, the text of the play conforms to the edition of 1666, as produced by E. Despois in the fifth volume of the *Œuvres de Molière*, in the series of the *Grands Écrivains*.

CHARLES A. EGGERT.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, March 21st, 1899.



INTRODUCTION

I. THE POET AND HIS TIMES.

No great man can be understood apart from the times in which he lived. This is as true of the statesman as it is of the author. In any other age a play like *Le Misanthrope* would have taken a different shape. "To witness a performance of *Le Misanthrope*," says Ed. Thierry in the *Moliériste*,* "is to be in presence of the 17th century, imperishable in the immortality of the masterpiece of its masterpieces." No poet of the age of Louis XIV. has so vividly painted that age as Molière. It lives in his comedies, and particularly in his *Misanthrope*. Eugène Despois, the distinguished editor of the works of Molière,† calls this comedy *the noblest of comic masterpieces*. Goethe, the most illustrious of its readers, has said: "I am reading it again and again, as one of the pieces I like best in the world." He speaks of the tragic impression it leaves on the mind of the reader. This impression finds its explanation in the individual experience of the poet, and in the circumstances which influenced him before and during the composition of the work.

The seventeenth century saw the downfall of imperial Germany and the rise of France. The Reformation had intensified and largely increased the divisions and dissensions in the former country, and Richelieu, the ablest statesman of the time, had taken advantage of them to bring about its almost total ruin.

* 1883, p. 170.

† They are incorporated in the series of the "*Grands Ecrivains, etc.*"

While inciting the German Protestants to resist the Catholic imperial power, he kept down with a strong hand the Huguenot aspirations in France. His successor, Mazarin, completed his work, and when Louis XIV. was old enough to assume the reins of the government, he found the road clear towards the most absolute kingship, and to a reign of concentrated splendor such as the world had not beheld since the days of Augustus.

This was due to the fact that all the power of the kingdom was now in the hands of one man, the king, and centralized in one city, Paris. To increase the splendor of his reign Louis XIV. required all his nobles to spend a part of the year at his court. There was a universal tendency which led men of talent, as well as of adventure, to Paris. The king was victorious in his wars with his neighbors, and no one inquired whether these wars were just or not. The expense was met in part by plunder, but in greater part by the taxes which were readily paid while the country was prosperous. It remained prosperous during the life of Molière, who saw in Louis XIV., as G. Larroumet has said,* "the greatest king of the present and of the past, the incarnation of French greatness," and, when he came into closer relations with him, "found him noble with grace, and magnificent with ease." The king was young, fond of pleasure, and on the lookout for men who could contribute to the amusement and the splendor of his court. His shameless sensuality was still covered by a veil of seeming decency. His lavish use of the resources of the kingdom for his private indulgence had the appearance of a benefit conferred on poor artists and deserving artizans whom he employed. His unjust and cruel wars excited no comment, for the armies consisted of mercenaries and, while victory crowned their efforts, all were content and jubilant. A financier and economist of the first rank, Colbert, took care, as minister of commerce, of the financial, commercial, and manufacturing interests of the

* *La Comédie de Molière. L'Auteur et le Milieu.* Gustave Larroumet, 4th edition, Paris.