

**MAIN CURRENTS IN NINETEENTH
CENTURY LITERATURE, IN
SIX VOLUMES ILLUSTRATED:
I THE EMIGRANT LITERATURE**

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GEORGE BRANDES

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By GEORGE BRANDES

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To the Memory
of
HANS BRÖCHNER

INTRODUCTION

It is my intention in the present work to trace the outlines of a psychology of the first half of the nineteenth century by means of the study of certain main groups and movements in European literature. The stormy year 1848, a historical turning-point, and hence a break, is the limit to which I purpose following the process of development. The period between the beginning and the middle of the century presents the spectacle of many scattered and apparently disconnected literary efforts and phenomena. But he who carefully observes the main currents of literature perceives that their movements are all conditioned by one great leading movement with its ebb and flow, namely, the gradual fading away and disappearance of the ideas and feelings of the preceding century, and the return of the idea of progress in new, ever higher-mounting waves.

The central subject of this work is, then, the reaction in the first decades of the nineteenth century against the literature of the eighteenth, and the vanquishment of that reaction. This historic incident is of European interest, and can only be understood by a comparative study of European literature. Such a study I purpose attempting by simultaneously tracing the course of the most important movements in French, German, and English literature. The comparative view possesses the double advantage of bringing foreign literature so near to us that we can assimilate it, and of removing our own until we are enabled to see it in its true perspective. We neither see what is too near the eye nor what is too far away from it. The scientific view of literature