

**SELECTED POEMS
OF PIERRE DE
RONSARD**

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Selected Poems of Pierre de Ronsard by Pierre de Ronsard & St. John Lucas

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PIERRE DE RONSARD & ST. JOHN LUCAS

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OF PIERRE DE
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Selected Poems Of Pierre de Ronsard

Chosen by

St. John Lucas

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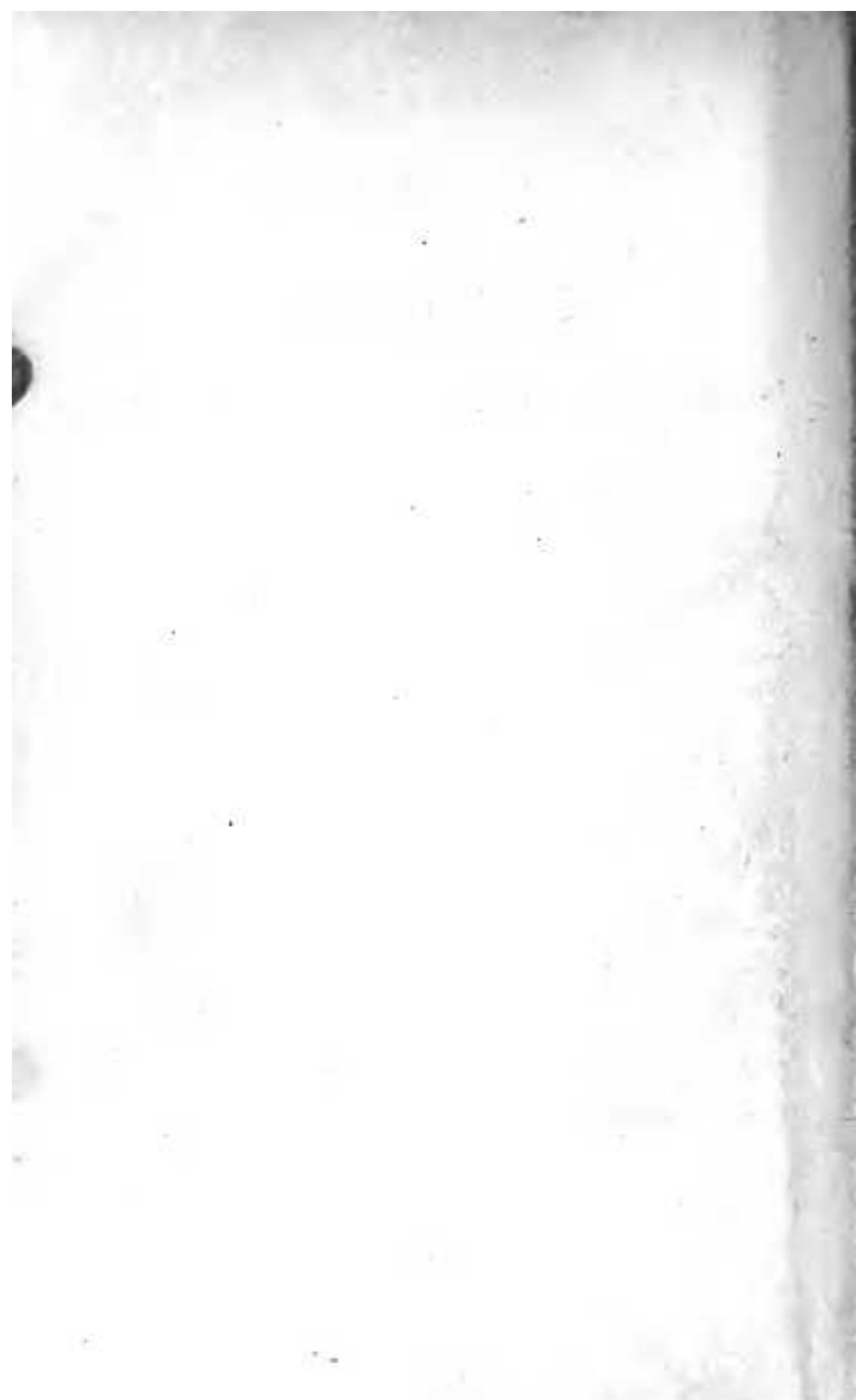
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INTRODUCTION

I

THE fortunate traveller who returns from a visit to Italy through France and has leisure to linger in the country that lies between Chartres and Bourges will be able, if he has a taste for artistic inquiry, to enjoy all the delights of contrasting the splendid memorials of a great epoch in the history of two nations; recognizing their various common elements, and observing the singular felicities of retention or rejection that are visible in the architecture of the northern country when it had begun to study and to adopt the delicate style of its neighbour. And since, after we have visited a city, our constant impression of the place is not of some special building, or picture, or even of a lovely vista of sunburnt roofs and gardens seen for an instant through a dark archway, but rather a haunting vision in which many pictures and churches and palaces are blended with sunlight and flowers, swift streams and the faces of children, into one vague, delicious memory, the fortunate traveller will find incessant occupation in contrasting his general impressions of the essential spirit of Central France with those of the particular places in Italy that he has lately visited; not staring all day at architecture with the wan eye of the specialist, but keenly alive to the peculiar charm or monotony of the landscape, and, we may hope, not neglectful of the poetry—of any form of literature, indeed,—that may add to the vitality and endurance of his recollections, and make his glowing impression perfect and complete.

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If the traveller is on his way north from Venice, where, at the cost of a morning spent in a gondola, you may see all the architecture of the world displayed in a crowded, impossible pageant between sea and heaven, and where you retreat breathless from Veronese only to be blinded by Titian, he will probably be distressed by the formal beauties of the great castles of the Touraine; the last flourishes of the Flamboyant in the church of Brou will seem to him the artifice of a style grown too old to possess natural graces; domestic architecture will be either neat without simplicity or grandiose without dignity. But if he returns from Florence, the inevitable revulsion, the sense of some light lost from the sky or dreamy loveliness from the earth, will be less strong in him; he will observe that behind the brier-like luxuriance of the Flamboyant style no less than amid the urbane splendours of the great châteaux there is a latent quality that he will have dimly realized to be present in all Florentine art before Michelangelo,—a tranquil strength, a restrained rhythm of line. The tree may glow with a thousand flowers, but the dark, sinewy boughs are beneath them, defiant of time and the winds.

For the art of Florence, in the fourteenth century at least, has a certain austerity, a highly intentional economy of line and colour which finds its ultimate expression in the wedded strength and tenderness of the finest work of Raffaele, and is clearly traceable even in such independent painters as Botticelli and Antonio Pollaiuolo. Our memory of that perfect city and her treasures is a vision thrilling with a light so clear as to be almost cold; a sense of broad and tranquil spaces, of an ordered dignity of line and heavenly colour that has Giotto's tower for its triumphant symbol. If we enter the great Tuscan room in the National Gallery we are immediately conscious of the peculiar atmosphere

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that the pictures distil,—a luminous tranquillity, the 'fallen day' that haunts the heart of deep seas. There is nothing tremendous, nothing deeply subtle, in this Tuscan art, so that even Michelangelo, whose giants are so nobly neighboured by the marbles of the Vatican, seems almost an alien in Florence, and the enigmatic faces of Lionardo have an added strangeness. It is primarily an intellectual art, full of the wise accomplishment of definite intentions, but by the side of this quality we may detect another;—a naïve love of curious detail for its own sake; fantastic costumes, delicate armour, dainty castles perched on geologically impossible rocks; a delight in flowers and fruit, in strange-hued birds and grotesque animals, in children, homely or lovely, but always charming. The joy, the colour, the amazing variety of life!—these are the sources of the painter's inspiration, though the main theme of his picture may be of the most gloomy kind: a Martyrdom, an Entombment, or a Synod of the Early Fathers.

Certain writers have attributed this delight in the beauty of earth to the disintegration of the feudal system, to the discovery of the Greek and Latin classics, to the development of astronomy and printing, and to all the other events which combined, as it seems to us when we look back through the sagacious eyes of the historian, to make the old grim world veritably born anew. The Middle Ages, according to them, were a sombre epoch when the wretched inhabitants of Europe spent their brief intervals of respite from the wrath of man in cowering beneath the wrath of God. We need such reminders as the works of Giotto, the songs of the wandering students, the *fabliaux*, and the statues that crowd the façades of the great churches of Northern France, to dispel this gloomy illusion. Mediaeval Art, in spite of its devotion to themes depicting the sufferings