

**A PRIMER OF
SPANISH
LITERATURE**

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A Primer of Spanish Literature by Helen S. Conant

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PREFACE.

IN this little volume an attempt is made to trace the history of Spanish literature, from its rise in the twelfth century to the present time. Ecclesiastical and civil tyranny have at all periods exerted a repressive influence on thought and learning in Spain, and prevented that general expansion of intellect which is the glory of England, Germany, and France; so that, while few nations can boast a greater number of highly cultivated writers, classical scholarship not having fallen under the ban of Church or State, the mass of the people have remained ignorant and superstitious, and the lights of Spanish literature glitter like stars in a dark firmament. In her romantic and chivalrous period, Spain gave to the world the glorious poem of the Cid, and the Moorish ballads; in her classical period, em-

bracing portions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the immortal works of Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Calderon. Then succeeds an interval of comparative intellectual sterility, broken by the general uprising of the peoples of Europe, which marked the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, when many brilliant intellects, casting off the shackles of oppression, blazed forth for a time, and gave promise of a new era for Spain. The modern period boasts of many splendid names: and in proportion as civil and religious liberty gains strength in the Peninsula, we may expect to witness the spread of thought, of knowledge, and of literary activity in the country of Cervantes.

H. S. C.