

**ERASMUS, THE REDE
LECTURE DELIVERED IN
THE SENATE-HOUSE ON
JUNE 11, 1890 PP. 1-52**

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ERASMUS

*THE REDE LECTURE
DELIVERED IN THE SENATE-HOUSE
ON JUNE 11, 1890*

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ERASMUS.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS was born at Rotterdam on the 27th of October, 1467. His father, Gerhard de Praet, belonged to a respectable family at Gouda, a small town of south Holland, not far from Rotterdam: his mother, Margaret, was the daughter of a physician at Sevenberg in Brabant. Gerhard's parents were resolved that he should become a monk. Meanwhile he was secretly betrothed to Margaret. His family succeeded in preventing their marriage, but not their union. After the birth of a son—the elder and only brother of Erasmus—Gerhard fled to Rome.

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A false rumour of Margaret's death there induced him, in his despair, to enter the priesthood. On returning to Holland, he found Margaret living at Gouda with his two boys. He was true to the irrevocable vows which parted him from her. After a few years, during which the supervision of their children's education had been a common solace, she died, while still young; and Gerhard, broken-hearted, soon followed her to the grave.

The boy afterwards so famous had been given his father's Christian name, Gerhard, meaning 'beloved.' Desiderius is barbarous Latin for that, and Erasmus is barbarous Greek for it. If the great scholar devised those appellations for himself, it must have been at an early age. Afterwards, when he stood godfather to the son of his friend Froben the printer, he gave the boy the correct form of his own second name,—viz., *Erasmus*. The combination, *Desiderius Erasmus*, is probably due to the fact that he had been known as Gerhard Gerhardson. It was a

singular fortune for a master of literary style to be designated by two words which mean the same thing, and are both incorrect.

He was sent to school at Gouda when he was four years old. Here it was perceived that he had a fine voice; and so he was taken to Utrecht, and placed in the Cathedral choir. But he had no gift for music. At nine years' of age he was removed from Utrecht to a good school at Deventer. His precocious genius soon showed itself, and his future eminence was predicted by the famous Rudolph Agricola—one of the first men who brought the new learning across the Alps.

Erasmus was only thirteen when he lost both parents, and was left to the care of three guardians. They wished him to become a monk: it was the simplest way to dispose of a ward. The boy loathed the idea; he knew his father's story; and now it seemed as if the same shadow was to fall on his own life also. However, the guardians sent him to a monastic seminary at