

Periods of European Literature

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VII.

THE FIRST HALF OF THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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BY

HERBERT J. C. GRIERSON, M.A.

CHALMERS PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

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P R E F A C E.

A WORD by way of preface is requisite, if only to explain to the reader, who may take up this volume without recalling its place in a series, why there is no chapter on Spain in a history of European literature during the first half of the seventeenth century. The present writer undertook his task on the understanding that the Spanish literature of the epoch was covered by Mr Hannay's chapters in *The Later Renaissance*. It was explained there that the principle of overlapping, which must be admitted in any attempt to divide European literature into epochs, is specially applicable to the case of Spain; and the six chapters devoted to the literature of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in that volume preclude the necessity of treatment in this.

The same principle has been applied, to a certain extent, in the chapters on Dutch literature, with which this volume opens. Some passing references there have been to the literature of the Low Countries in previous volumes, but it has been thought well

to give something of a connected sketch of the earlier literature at this point, when that literature forms an important and independent ganglion in the general European system. The mediæval literature of the Low Countries is doubtless sufficiently interesting to deserve fuller treatment; but it is, in the main, a literature of translation and imitation from the French, with some notable exceptions. This fact may serve as an excuse for the slight sketch of the subject given here—a sketch which, to be intelligible, should be read in close connection with what has been written about mediæval and fifteenth-century literature in earlier volumes of the series. I have reserved the larger portion of the space at my disposal for the period in which the Dutch, having shaken off the Spanish yoke, created for themselves a national literature and a national art.

My work in these chapters, as in those on other foreign literatures, is based on the researches of native scholars, whose results I have endeavoured to present in the light which seemed to me likely to prove most useful and interesting to the reader for whom this series is principally intended—the English student of comparative literature. I had begun my work before I realised that Dutch literature deserved a fuller treatment than had been given to it in other volumes, and it was perhaps rash to venture on the task. I felt tempted to undertake it from an interest in the Dutch people dating back to earliest years, when the harbour of my native town was crowded with Dutch fishing-boats every summer, and its narrow streets thronged with their pictur-

esque costumes. If my chapters fail to satisfy a specialist, perhaps a less critical and exacting reader may derive interest from what, in its preparation, has given myself great pleasure. Holland has no Dante or Shakespeare or Goethe, for the sake of whom alone it would be worth while to study the language in which he wrote, but to the lover of lyrical poetry the work of Hooft and Vondel will give some fresh and intense experiences.

I have indicated in the bibliographical notes the authors on whose work mine is based. But I have received in addition personal encouragement and advice. On the occasion of two short calls, Professor Te Winkel of Amsterdam spoke to me regarding books that would be useful. But my chief debt is to Professor Kalff of Leyden. During two visits to Leyden—one of a fortnight's and one of a month's duration—he introduced me to the University library, in which are stored the books of the *Maatschappij van Nederlandsche Letterkunde*, gave me the benefit of his advice on any point regarding which I consulted him, and every possible assistance. He has added to his kindness by reading my pages when in proof, and correcting some errors into which I had fallen. Imperfect as my chapters are, they would have been much more so without his advice and correction. My debt to his written work is clear from the notes. I only regret that the first volume of his new *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Letterkunde* did not reach me until my work was in type.

At the same time, Professor Kalff is not to be held in any way responsible either for the manner in

which I have treated the subject, for my generalisations, or for my criticisms of individual authors and works, with which he would not always be in agreement. These, be they right or wrong, are the fruit of my own reading, at any rate in the case of the principal authors dealt with. When I have not had time or opportunity to make an independent study of lesser authors, I have tried to indicate in the text the source of any criticism passed upon them. As regards quotation, my plan has been to keep to the original when metre was what I wished to draw attention to. When the sentiment is of importance, I have ventured to translate, believing it would be merely pedantic to assume any such general knowledge of the Dutch language as of French and German, or even Italian. The translations are as close as I could make them, while endeavouring to retain something of the spirit and movement of the original.

As to other literatures, I have indicated in the notes my guides and authorities, and need here only mention some personal aiders. My debt to my teacher, the late Professor Minto, is not covered by the references to his printed work. I have known no one with saner views of the aim and methods of literary history. In him the æsthetic, the historical, and the philosophical critic were happily blended, no one usurping upon the other. In studying the Italian literature of the period, I received much assistance, and advice as to recent work on the subject, from Professor John Purves of the Technical Institute, Johannesburg, formerly English Assistant in the University of Aberdeen, who came to Aberdeen straight from Italy,

where he had studied for two years, in Rome and Siena, as Carnegie Scholar. To him, and to others who helped me by reading the proofs, I would express my gratitude. If I do not name them all, it is for fear of making them appear in any way responsible for my errors and oversights. From the outset I have been indebted to the unwearied patience and invaluable criticisms of the general editor. My former pupil, Mr George Herbert Mair, Scholar of Christ Church, Oxford, has supplied the index.

In the last chapter I have endeavoured to indicate some of the forces at work in the period. But I have not felt able to open with a general view, for the epoch does not seem to admit of any such clear general description as does, say, that which follows. All the literatures touched on here have a common debt to Italy and the Classics. In the development, however, which followed the stimulating influence of the Renaissance, each is, in the earlier seventeenth century, at a very different stage. Italy herself is falling into the background, though the superficial influence of Marino is so widespread that a reader might do well to turn to the chapter on Italy among the first. In France, the influence of the Renaissance is practically exhausted, and, despite a taste for Italian and Spanish fashions, the distinctively national movement towards clear thought and symmetrical form proceeds apace. During the first ten years of the century, English literature is still in the full flush of the late Elizabethan efflorescence, but passes, as the century goes on, through a period of very independent and complex changes, determined

in great measure by the religious and political history of the time, which it seems to me impossible to describe by any single term, be it disintegration with Mr Barrett Wendell, or decadence with Mr Gosse. Elizabethan literature was never integral, notwithstanding Spenser's effort at reconciliation; and decadence seems a term hardly applicable to a period which opens with Shakespeare and Bacon, and closes with Locke and Milton. For Holland, the period is that of the rapid ripening—to be followed by a too rapid decay—of a literature inspired, as English had been earlier, by admiration of Italy and France as well as the Classics, but thoroughly national in all its essential features. In Germany, a similar movement is too early checked by “inauspicious stars.” I have tried to outline these different movements, but to bring them under any single expression of real value is beyond my philosophic capacity.

P.S.—The dates in brackets appended to the names of works are those of first publication, except in the case of Corneille's plays, when they are those of performance as given by Marty-Laveaux. Bacon's *Advertisement touching the Controversies of the Church*, though written probably in 1589, when the Martin-Marprelate controversy was at its height, was first issued, as a pamphlet, in 1640, when the quarrel was renewed.

ABERDEEN, *May* 10, 1906.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

HOLLAND—VERSE AND PROSE.

	PAGE
Introductory—Mediæval romance and lyric—The fourteenth century—Maerlant and other didactic poets—Dirk Potter—Fifteenth century—The Chambers of Rhetoric—Anna Bijns—Renaissance—Marnix and Coornhert—Spiegelhel and Roemer Vischer—The “Eglantine” or “Oude Kamer”—Hooft—Song-books—Brederoo and Starter—Vondel—Life and work—Criticism—Literature outside Amsterdam—The Hague: Huyghens—Zeeland: Jacob Cats—Camphuyzen—Stalpert van der Wiele—Followers of Vondel and Hooft—Latin prose and verse—Heinsius and Grotius—Dutch prose—Hooft—Brandt	1

CHAPTER II.

HOLLAND—DRAMA.

Introductory—Mediæval drama—Problem connected therewith—The Moralities, Histories, and Farces of the Chambers—Renaissance secular drama—The “Eglantine”—Coster and Rodenburg—Brederoo—Hooft—“Quarrel of the Players”—Coster’s Academy—The “Amsterdamsche Kamer” and new theatre—Vondel—Development of his drama—Individual tragedies—Characterisation and criticism—Failure of the romantic and classical drama—Jan Vos’s <i>Aran en Titus</i> —Later plays	49
---	----

CHAPTER III.

ENGLISH DRAMA.

Introductory—George Chapman—Ben Jonson—His theory of comedy—Earlier comedies—Tragedies—Mature comedies—Last plays—Masques— <i>Sad Shepherd</i> —Achievement—Marston—Dekker—Middleton—Heywood—Webster—His two tragedies—Tournour—Beaumont and Fletcher—Last phase of Elizabethan drama—Sentimental tragedy and romance—Comedy of incident and manners—Massinger—Ford—Shirley—Lesser dramatists—Conclusion . . .	84
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

ENGLISH POETRY.

Introductory—George Chapman—The younger Spenserians—Protestant and bourgeois—The Fletchers—Browne and Wither—Quarles, More, Beaumont, &c.—Drummond and Sir John Beaumont—Donne and Jonson—Characteristics and influence—Caroline courtly poetry, religious and secular—Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, and Traherne—Carew, Lovelace, Suckling, Herrick—Andrew Marvell—Milton's life and early poems—Poetry of the Commonwealth—Waller and Denham—Davenant and Chamberlayne—Cowley—Milton's later poems— <i>Paradise Lost</i> — <i>Paradise Regained</i> — <i>Samson Agonistes</i> —Conclusion . . .	135
--	-----

CHAPTER V.

ENGLISH PROSE.

"An immoderate hydroptic thirst of learning." Bacon—Jonson. Divines—Anglo-Catholic: Andrewes—Donne—Jeremy Taylor; Puritan: Adams; Latitudinarian: Hales—Chillingworth. Controversialists: Hall—Taylor—Milton. "Characters": Hall—Overbury—Earle. Burton—Drummond—Browne—Urquhart—Fuller. Philosophy: Hobbes. History: Clarendon. Biography: Walton . . .	202
--	-----

CHAPTER VI.

FRENCH VERSE AND PROSE.

Waning of the Pleiad. Malherbe—Purity and correctness—Verse. Disciples—Maynard—Racan. Social forces—Hôtel de Rambouillet—Academy. Independents—Théophile de Viau—Saint-Amant—Mlle. de Gournay and Mathurin Régnier. Vincent Voiture. Heroic poems. Prose-romances—D'Urfé— <i>L'Astrée</i> ; Camus—Exemplary tales; Heroic romance—Gombauld's <i>Endymion</i> —Gomberville's <i>Polexandre</i> —La Calprenède—Elimination of the marvellous—Romantic history—Madeleine de Scudéry—Culmination of "Préciosité"—Boileau's dialogue <i>Les Héros de Roman</i> . Realism and burlesque in romance—Sorel— <i>Le Berger Extravagant</i> — <i>Francion</i> —Lannel—Cyrano—Scarron. Shapers of modern French prose—Balzac and the cult of style; Descartes—Rationalism and lucidity; Pascal—The way of the intellect and the way of the heart. The <i>Memoirs</i> —De Retz and La Rochefoucauld—Philosophy of the <i>Fronde</i> — <i>Les Maximes</i>	244
---	-----

CHAPTER VII.

FRENCH DRAMA.

The formation of French tragedy and comedy—Sixteenth-century drama—Larivey and Montchrestien—The popular drama—Experiments in the provinces—Hardy and Valleran Lecomte—Hardy's tragedies, tragi-comedies, pastorals, and mythological plays—Beginning of polite drama—Théophile and Racan—Influence of Italian pastoral, and of Spanish tragi-comedy—Mairet—The Unities— <i>Sophonisbe</i> and the revival of tragedy—Corneille— <i>Mélite</i> and the development of comedy—Early plays—The <i>Cid</i> and the flowering of tragedy—Battle of the <i>Cid</i> —Triumph of the Unities—Corneille's great tragedies— <i>Le Menteur</i> —Comedy under Spanish influence—Corneille's last plays—Relation of French tragedy of Corneille and Racine to Greek tragedy and to romantic tragi-comedy—Rotrou—Burlesque comedy— <i>Les Visionnaires</i>	285
---	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

ITALY AND GERMANY.

"Secentismo." Marino— <i>La Lira</i> — <i>L'Adone</i> . Followers. Chiabrera—The Italian <i>canzone</i> and the classical ode—Bernardo Tasso—Chiabrera's Pindarics and <i>canzonette</i> . Testi. Tassoni—Criticism of Aristotle and Petrarch— <i>La Secchia Rapita</i> —Prose—Galileo—D'Avila—Bentivoglio. Germany—Late influence of Renaissance. Precursors. Opitz—Theory and practice. Followers—Fleming. Hymns. Drama—Gryphius. Satire—Logau	325
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

Forces at work—End of the enaissance—The Counter-Reformation—Rationalism and classicism	361
---	-----

INDEX	380
-----------------	-----

THE FIRST HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

HOLLAND—VERSE AND PROSE.

INTRODUCTORY—MEDIÆVAL ROMANCE AND LYRIC—THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY—MAERLANT AND OTHER DIDACTIC POETS—DIRK POTTER—FIFTEENTH CENTURY—THE CHAMBERS OF RHETORIC—ANNA BIJNS—RENAISSANCE—MARNIX AND COORNHERT—SPIEGHEL AND ROEMER VISSCHER—THE “EGLANTINE” OR “OUD KAMER”—HOOFT—SONG-BOOKS—BREDEROO AND STARTER—VONDEL—LIFE AND WORK—CRITICISM—LITERATURE OUTSIDE AMSTERDAM—THE HAGUE: HUYGHENS—ZEELAND: JACOB CATS—CAMPHUYZEN—STALPERT VAN DER WIELE—FOLLOWERS OF VONDEL AND HOOFT—LATIN PROSE AND VERSE—HEINSIUS AND GROTIUS—DUTCH PROSE—HOOFT—BRANDT.

ON no country in Europe did the two main influences of the sixteenth century—the Renaissance and the Reformation—set a deeper mark than on the Netherlands. The country which produced Erasmus is not the least important contributor to the revival of learning, while the revolt of the Netherlands was, in Motley's words, “the longest, the

Introductory.

darkest, the bloodiest, the most important episode in the history of the religious reformation in Europe.” Of the greatness of the people which emerged victorious from this struggle, of the high level of culture and learning to which they had attained, of the range and magnificence of their achievement in the art of painting, there has never been any question. But of the Dutch literature of the seventeenth century little is known outside Holland except by a few scholars,¹

¹ Jonckbloet's *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Letterkunde* (4th ed., 1889, C. Honigh), an epoch-making work, is still the fullest history of Dutch literature. The arrangement is at times confusing, and much work has been done since. Penon's *Nederlandsche Dicht-en-Proza-werken*, 1886, forms a companion set of volumes to Jonckbloet's *Geschiedenis*, and contains carefully edited texts, but not always of the works one would most wish to have. A popular sketch is Jan ten Brink's *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*, 1897. A very interesting sketch, from a Catholic point of view, is the late J. A. Alberdingk Thijm's *De la Littérature néerlandaise à ses Différentes Epoques*, 1854. Of the earlier literature a condensed and learned sketch by Professor Te Winkel is contained in Paul's *Grundriss der Deutschen Philologie*, 1900. Delightfully written and indispensable works by Professor Kalff are *Nederlandsche Letterkunde in de XVI^{de} Eeuw*, Brill, n.d.; *Literatuur en Tooneel te Amsterdam in de Zeventiende Eeuw*, Haarlem, 1895,—biographical and critical sketches of Hooft, Vondel, Cats, Huyghens, &c. The first volume of a history of Dutch literature in eight volumes by the same writer has appeared, Groningen, 1905. Busken-Huet's brilliant *Het Land van Rembrandt* and *Litterarische Fantasien* are well worth reading. The work of many scholars is contained in *De Gids*, the great literary periodical founded in 1837. Excellently annotated seventeenth-century texts—and the language presents difficulties which require elucidation—have been issued in the *Nederlandsche Klassieken*, general editor Dr Eelco Verwys, Versluys, Amsterdam, and the *Klassiek Letterkundig Pantheon*, W. J. Thieme & Co., Zutphen. An interesting and representative though small Anthology is Professor Kalff's *Dichters van den Ouden Tijd*, Amsterdam, n.d. English works are some essays in Gosse's *Studies in the Literature of*

and it has not been unusual to speak of Dutch literature as an entirely negligible quantity, because the Netherlands produced no creative genius of that highest class to which Shakespeare and Cervantes belong. But geniuses of such world-wide recognition are the exception. The degree to which a country's literature is studied abroad depends not on intrinsic merit alone, but on the country's political importance and familiarity with its language. The student of Dutch literature in the seventeenth century will not find a drama comparable, strictly as drama, with that of England or France or Spain, nor an epic and narrative poetry comparable to that of Italy, and of England as represented by Milton. But he will find and enjoy a lyrical poetry of singular depth and richness, characterised by that feeling for nature which is such a striking feature of Dutch painting, by what the Dutch critic J. A. Alberdingk Thijm justly entitles "le naturel, la naïveté, la franchise, et le sentiment de la couleur qui paraissent être inhérents au caractère néerlandais." In naturalness, in the sense attached to the word when we speak of the "return to nature," feeling for external nature, interest in the life of the people, the inclination to discard convention and make poetry the simple, direct, and vibrating utterance of the poet's own emotions, Dutch poetry, taken as a whole, partly because it is

Northern Europe, Lond., 1879, and the same writer's article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; Bowring and Van Dyk's *Batavian Anthology*, Lond., 1824; Longfellow's *Poets and Poetry of Europe*, Philadelphia, 1849; an article in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1829.

24

a bourgeois or middle-class product, seems to me in advance of the poetry of any country with which this volume deals. For this simplicity and directness is not characteristic of Renaissance lyric poetry in Italy or the countries which caught their inspiration from Italy. Even in the case of Shakespeare's sonnets it is notoriously difficult to say how far the feeling is sincere, how far conventional. In English poetry one might say that lyrical poetry, as we have come to understand the phrase since Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley wrote, begins with *Lycidas*—in the personal digressions—and Milton's sonnets. But poetry of this self-revealing outspoken character abounds in the literature with which this chapter deals, and although of course in form and style Dutch poetry is not unaffected by the conventions of the century, yet only one poet, Hooft, really mastered the courtly style, and caught the tone of the Italian Petrarchians and the *Pléiade*. Vondel and Brederoo and Huyghens are most effective when most natural and direct, not least so when they express themselves in dialect. The natural runs easily into the commonplace, and of the commonplace there is not a little in Dutch poetry. Its apostle is Jacob Cats; yet even in Cats there is a vein of racy narrative, while in ardour and elevation there are few lyrical poets superior to Vondel.

The space at our disposal to deal even with this greatest period in Dutch literature is so limited that it is impossible to say more than a word concerning the earlier poetry. Mediaeval literature is represented in the Low Countries by all

*Mediaeval
Romances.*

the usual forms—romances, Carlovingian, Arthurian, and Oriental (Alexander and Troy), versified saints' legends, shorter tales or *sproken*, lyrics, and a considerable body of didactic literature. Of the drama something will be said in the following chapter. The Dutch romances of the thirteenth century are mainly, if not entirely, translated from the French. *Moriaen* is probably an exception, and Professor Kalff defends the originality of *Karel ende Elegast* and the fine *Roman van Walewein*. Most interesting of all is the popular *Reindaert*,¹ based on a French work, but much superior to the original, and admittedly the finest version of the Reynard stories.

It was, naturally, the nobility and their followers who were the principal readers of the romances, as it was the "religious" who composed and *Religious and Didactic Poetry.* studied poems such as *Vanden Leven ons Heeren, Beatrijs*, and other saints' legends. The taste of the middle classes, which began to assert itself as the thirteenth century drew to a close, is represented by the didactic writers, at the head of whom stands the prolific Jacob van Maerlant, author of versions of the Alexander, Merlin, and Troy stories, and of various didactic works such as the *Rijmbijbel* and *Spiegel Historiel* (*Mirror of History*). He was followed by a number of verse chroniclers and didactic writers, as Melis Stoke and Jan van Boendale or de Clerk, author of a *Lekenspiegel* (*Mirror for Laymen*), whom it is impossible to enumerate here. The *Roman*

¹ The twentieth branch, *Le Plaid*, of the *Roman du Renart*, ed. Meon and Chabaille. See Jonckbloet's *Geschied*, i. xii.