

FROM MONTAIGNE TO MOLIÈRE

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TO MOLIÈRE

OR

THE PREPARATION FOR THE CLASSICAL AGE
OF FRENCH LITERATURE

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PREFACE

THE change which came over English poetry between the death of Shakespeare and the appearance of Pope has been traced by Mr. Gosse in his well-known volume *From Shakespeare to Pope*. The similar change from a literature of imagination to a literature of reason which took place in France between the death of Montaigne and the production of Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, or, in other words, the transition from the Renaissance to the Classical Age, is the subject of the following pages. I have not attempted to write a complete history of French literature during this period, but rather to give an account of the various forces, political, religious, social, and literary, which helped to bring about this change. Even in those chapters which deal exclusively with the literary forces, such as those on Malherbe and Corneille, there will be found nothing like a complete critical estimate of the writers. The chapter on the Catholic revival is a sketch, necessarily brief and imperfect, of a large and important subject, which still awaits its historian. The chapter entitled "The Reign of Bad Taste" deals with matters which are still the subject of considerable

controversy—namely, the origin of *préciosité* and the influence of Italy and Spain. I have tried to show that true *préciosité*, though it had its germ in the Hôtel de Rambouillet, did not develop into a real malady till the days of Mlle. de Scudéry, and that it was in no way due, as is often stated by English writers, to an influx of Marinism and Gongorism.

Of the authorities on which I have principally relied, a certain number, more especially those of recent date, will be found mentioned either in the text or in the notes. But for the benefit of students, and as a further acknowledgment of my debts, I will mention some others here. The first place is naturally due to vol. iv. of the *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française*, edited by the late L. Petit de Julleville, a volume of high and singularly even excellence. On all historical matters, including the history of the Catholic revival, I have consulted the *Histoire de France*, edited by M. Lavissee, vol. vi., part ii. (by M. Mariéjol), and vol. vii., part i., pp. 1-117 (by M. Lavissee). For ecclesiastical history the Abbé Guettée's sound and impartial *Histoire de l'Église de France*, 12 vols., 1847-56, is valuable. The *Essai historique sur l'influence de la religion en France pendant le XVII^e siècle*, by M.-J.-Picot, 2 vols., 1824, written from the point of view of a devout Catholic, is uncritical, but it is the only account of the Catholic revival as a whole with which I am acquainted. It is hardly necessary to mention Sainte-Beuve's great work on *Port-Royal* (third edition, 7 vols., 1867): "He who does not know the literature of