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UNIVERSITY EXTENSION COURSE.

SYLLABUS

OF

SIX LECTURES

ON

French Literature in the Seventeenth Century

BY

FRED. W. BOATWRIGHT,

Professor of Modern Languages in Richmond College, Virginia.

"To become European the thought of every country must first pass through the mouth of France. From this standpoint, the history of French literature is the history of man, a psychological study of the human race."

—DEMOGEOT.

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Method in this Course.

Bacon says that "reading maketh a full man, writing an exact man, and conference a ready man." It is proposed to combine, as far as practicable, the advantages of these three kinds of exercise.

I. LECTURES AND CONFERENCE.

Each Lecture will occupy about an hour. The Lecturer will then devote half an hour to conference with any auditors who may desire to get more satisfactory explanation, or to propound questions, or to receive suggestions about further study, of the subject treated.

II. WRITTEN ESSAYS.

Appended to each Lecture are certain topics from which every student is requested to select *one*, for a brief, compact essay, to be written on cap paper and handed in at or before the next Lecture. These will be read, valued and returned. A certificate will be awarded for satisfactory essays on a full set of six topics.

III. BOOKS RECOMMENDED.

1. Geschichte der Französischen Literatur im XVII Jahrhundert, von Ferdinand Lotheissen, four vols., \$12.00; Karl Gerold's Sohn, Vienna.
2. Annals of the French Stage, two vols., \$10.00; Chapman and Hall, London.
3. Saintsbury's Short History of French Literature, \$2.25, Macmillan.
4. Wilkinson's Classic French Course in English, (enlarged edition), \$1.00, Chautauqua Press, New York.
5. On lecture II., A Study in Corneille, by L. D. Lodge, \$1.00, Murphy, Baltimore.

LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTION TO FRENCH LANGUAGE, LIFE, AND LITERATURE

I. LANGUAGE.

Between 200 B. C. and 500 A. D., the Celts inhabiting Gaul were completely Romanized. The Celtic language disappeared, leaving very few traces. (Cf. French in Algeria to-day). By the time of the Germanic invasions Roman law and culture were dominant in all Gaul. The language of the barbaric invaders finally succumbed before the superior culture of the Gallo-Romans, but left to modern French a considerable legacy of Teutonic words.

Earliest monument of French language is Strasburg oath, 842 A. D.

Gallo-Romanic early branched into Provencal in the South, where Teutonic influence scarcely penetrated, and Old French in the North. The dividing line was the river Loire, and the Shibboleth the adverb "yes."

Provencal literature developed early and independently, flourished in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and perished with the political independence of Southern France. The political and literary predominance of the province Ile-de-France under Philip II., (1180-1223), gradually spread the dialect of that province, until about the fourteenth century it attained the dignity of a national language. Here Modern French begins.

II. LIFE.

The decline of feudalism under the centralizing policy of the later Valois and the Bourbons. The structure of society. Nobility, Clergy, and the Third Estate. The chasm between first and last not bridged by second. The rise of Paris to be the center and source of all political and social life. The pomp of court life. The growth of absolutism and the loss of interest on the part of nobility and people in politics. Absenteeism and its resultant evils. All intellectual activity centered in the salons. The influence of life on literature.

III. LITERATURE.

French literature, the most brilliant and varied in the world, but deficient in poetry. The charm of this literature is its style. Distinguishing characteristics are a vein of light satire and sociability.

50

1. *Medieval Literature, 900-1450.*

The striking independence and richness of early French literature. The debt of English and other literatures to medieval France.

The *Chansons de Gestes*, or Carlovingian, Arthurian and Alexandrian epics. The *Fabliaux*. The *Trouvères* and *Jongleurs*.

Thibaut de Champagne (1201-1253), one of the first lyric poets.

The great allegorical poems *Roman du Renart* and *Roman de la Rose*.

Froissart (1337-1410), the Herodotus, and Comines (1447-1511), the Tacitus of French history.

The unsurpassed fertility of Southern France in lyric poetry.

2. *The Renaissance.*

Clement Marot (1497-1544), introduced directness and simplicity.

The *Pléiade*, a group of seven writers, chief among whom were Ronsard (1524-'85), and Jodelle (1532-'73), endeavored to mould French language and poetry on classical models. This school the best known representatives of the Renaissance.

Up to the sixteenth century prose had been but little cultivated in France, yet Rabelais (1495-1553), and Calvin (1509-'64), wrote works which to this day remain masterpieces in style and thought.

The last great work before the classical period was the *Essais* of Montaigne (1533-'92).

~~Read~~ Read Saintsbury, pp. 1-273; Wilkinson, pp. 1-54. On French life consult Taine's "Ancient Regime."

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ESSAY.

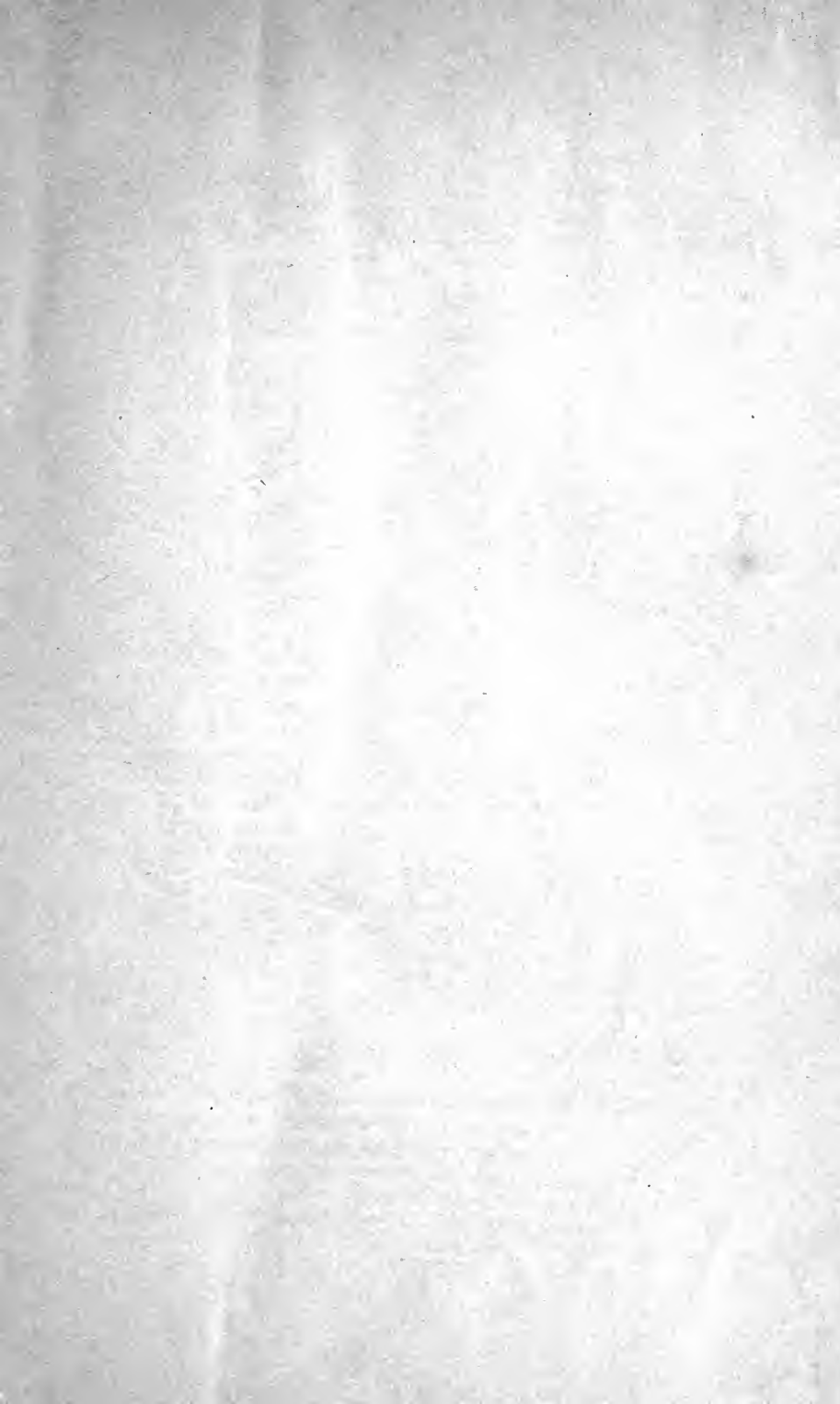
1. Origin and development of French language.
2. Life in the seventeenth century.
3. The *Pléiade*.

LECTURE II.

THE GREAT CORNEILLE.

By the opening of the seventeenth century the French language had attained its growth. Almost every variety of literary style had been cultivated. Malherbe (1555-1628), prepared the way for classicism by purging the language from the excesses of the Renaissance, and insisting upon harmony, regularity, and delicacy of expression.

To three contemporaries, Hardy (1560-1631), Mairêt (1604-'86), and Rotrou (1609-'60), Corneille owed much.





PIERRE CORNEILLE was born at Rouen, June 6, 1606, and died at Paris, October 1, 1684. His father, of the same name, was a royal advocate and master of waters and forests in the viscounty of Rouen. His mother, Marthe le Pesant, belonged to a family of local prominence. For distinguished service the father was ennobled in 1637. Young Corneille was educated for the bar, but after brief practice, "sans goût et sans succès," retired from the profession. The youthful barrister was not insensible to womanly grace, and confesses that love taught him to rhyme.

His first comedy, *Mélite* (1629), succeeded at Rouen and then at Paris. This was followed by the extravagant tragedy *Clitandre* (1632), four comedies, and the tragedy *Médée* (1635), in which is sounded the first note of future greatness. The celebrated "moi" of *Médée*.

Engaged as collaborateur by the minister Richelieu, but soon dismissed because he lacked an "esprit de suite," he retired to Rouen and studied the Spanish language and drama. The young queen, consort of Louis XIII. was making Spanish language and customs fashionable in France.

To this study of Spanish we owe the epoch-making *Cid* (1636). Some reasons why the *Cid* roused the ire of Richelieu, and called forth the savage attacks of Scudéry and other literary hirelings. *Le Cid* before the Academy. (A brief sketch of origin and development of French Academy.) The public right from the first. "Cela est beau comme le Cid" became a proverb. Boileau wrote "For Chimène all Paris has the eyes of Rodrigue." The best known of Corneille's dramas.

Horace (1639), based on Livy, celebrates the heroic patriotism of the early Romans. With this play classicism won undisputed supremacy and reigned triumphant for nearly two centuries. The "Qu'il mourût" of old Horace has never been surpassed in tragic grandeur.

Cinna (1639), a Roman tragedy at the court of Augustus, contains speeches of sublime eloquence. Has been called the breviary of kings. Accorded first rank by the French. The opinion of Napoleon.

Polyeucte (1640), suggested by a passage in Surius, ranks as the greatest Christian tragedy in any language. Condemned by the literary coterie of the Hôtel de Rambouillet at a preliminary reading, this play nevertheless proved immediately successful. An enlightened critic declares "The *Cid* raised Corneille above his rivals; the *Horace* and *Cinna* above his models; the *Polyeucte* above himself."

Le Menteur (1642), the best French comedy before Molière, and *Rodogune* (1644), a tragedy of the highest artistic perfection, about close the list of Corneille's dramas which still retain their popularity on the stage. The whole number of his plays is thirty-three.

The characteristics of Corneille's style are grandeur, and stateliness of thought and language, which, however, are not uniformly maintained. His chief faults are undue fondness for the sterner virtues, and a tendency to depict character and motive as single rather than complex.

Corneille is described as common in appearance, and negligent in dress. His face was agreeable, and he had a handsome mouth and flashing eyes.

His disposition was malancholy, and loss of popularity together with increasing poverty, embittered his old age. His marital relations seem to have been pleasant, but his private life was so retired that not many details are known. His nephew says, "He was a good father, a good husband, and full of friendship."

Read Saintsbury, pp. 274-281, and 290-300; Wilkinson, pp. 117-127. Eclectic Magazine, vol. XLI, pp. 359-362; Consult Lodge.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ESSAY.

1. Malherbe.
2. The excellencies and defects of classic style.
3. Le Cid.

LECTURE III.

RACINE AND HIS CRITIC.

I. The *Critic*, NICOLAS BOILEAU, measured by his influence over his contemporaries, is the greatest critic France has yet produced. Long after his death he was revered as the "Law-giver of Parnassus." Born November 1, 1636, in Paris, he was next to the youngest of fifteen children who were soon left motherless.

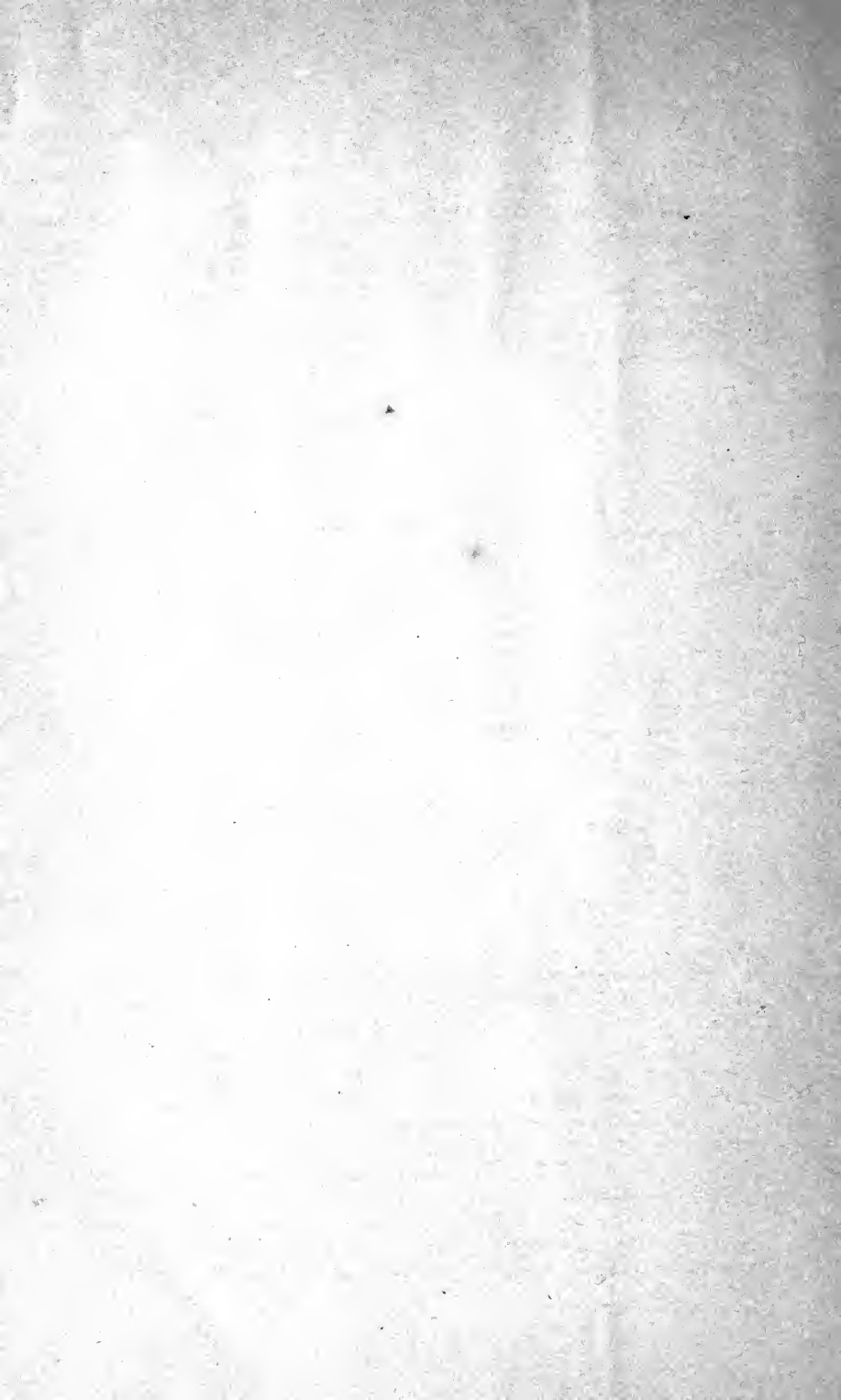
Nicolas was destined for the priesthood and put to studying theology, but changed to law, not, however, until he had reimbursed the Church for his board and tuition as theological student. He passed in his family as a dreamer, and impractical, because he was always reading Latin and Greek and writing verses.

On reaching his majority he retired from the bar, and dedicated his talents to the Muses. At this time he occupied an attic in the house of an older brother, but the rats and mice, together with literary rivalry and general incompatibility, induced him to separate himself from his family and assume the name Despréaux, by which he was generally called until the nineteenth century.

The friendship between Boileau, Racine, Molière, La Fontaine. They generally met in Boileau's house, in the faubourg St. Germain.

Boileau modeled himself on Horace, but wrote less than his master. His *Satires*, which were often offensively personal, appeared in 1666-'69. Mme. de Sévigné complains at this time of the wild life her son is leading with Boileau and Racine.

Between 1669-'77 appeared the *Epistles*, *Ars Poetica*, and the *Lutrin*. Here Boileau shows himself a master of language and reveals rich stores of



thought. The *Ars Poetica* undertakes a theory of poetic composition, and is itself an excellent model.

Boileau enjoyed the favor and bounty of the king, and was an adept in the art of walking upright on the slippery floors of palaces. Appointed Historiographer of France (along with Racine) 1677. Member of Academy 1684.

Boileau was the "literary conscience" of Racine, and gave direction to the tastes of Louis XIV.

The great critic was an invalid all his life. He was never married, and spent the morose old age of a satirist. He died in Paris, March 13, 1711.

RACINE.

II. RACINE realized the literary ideals of his century. Within the limitations decreed by his critic he is unapproachable, and occupies a place apart.

Jean Racine was born near Soissons, December 22, 1639, and died in Paris, April 26, 1699. His parents, Jean Racine and Jeanne Sconin, belonged to the upper middle-class. Left an orphan in infancy, he was reared by paternal grandparents who, though poor, gave him the very best educational advantages, first at Collège Beauvais, then at Port Royal, and finally at Collège d'Harcourt. The young orphan was a diligent and brilliant student, especially of Greek. He is said to have known the dramas of Sophocles and Euripides by heart, and to have memorized a Greek novel he had been forbidden to read.

Friends tried to make a priest of the ardent Hellenist, and then a lawyer, but after some years of indecision he yielded to his inclinations and became a poet. *La Nymphe de la Seine* (1660) brought him to the notice of the king, and gained him a small pension.

The *Thèbaïde* (1664) and *Alexandre le Grand* (1665) were modeled after Corneille in situation and method and showed faults of inexperience, but were sufficiently successful to inspire the author and his friends with the highest hopes.

Racine's ingratitude. His treatment of Chapelain, Port Royal fathers, Molière, and others. Partly explained by his sensitiveness and his fatal gift of wit.

The poet's strength in depicting passion, and especially woman's love, revealed in *Andromaque* (1667) which, like *Le Cid*, marked a new epoch in French tragedy. The character of Andromaque is drawn with extraordinary tenderness, and Hermione is perhaps the most attractive woman of the French stage. To have been able to create feminine types so full of ardour and tenderness, of gloomy majesty and fearful energy, Racine must have fathomed woman's heart and loved and suffered much. We find this explained in his love for the actresses Milles Du Parc and Champmesle. Voltaire said that with a few love scenes left out, Andromaque would be the best French tragedy.

The *Plaideurs* (1668), a farcical comedy, based on the *Wasps* of Aristophanes and a private law-suit, was not well received, but has won permanent popularity. *Britannicus* (1669) based on Roman history of the time of Nero,

was also coolly received, but is now regarded as one of the poet's most interesting tragedies.

Bérénice (1670) grew out of a rivalry between Corneille and Racine instigated by the Duchess of Orléans. The younger poet won an easy victory, and Corneille felt humiliated.

Bajazet (1672) is based on Turkish history. In this year Racine was elected to the Academy.

Mithridate (1673) contains scenes of superb character painting. It was the favorite tragedy of the king. Racine had now reached the height of his fame, and was in high favor with the king and court.

Iphigénie (1674), based on Euripides, scored such success before the nobility of France at Versailles that Boileau wrote "Never did the sacrifice of Iphigenia cost the Greeks assembled at Aulis as many tears as Mlle Champmesle in her name has brought to the eyes of France."

Phèdre (1677), based on Euripides and Seneca, shows the classic regularity and polish at the height of perfection. Through the intrigues of an hostile cabal this tragedy met with an icy reception, while a similar tragedy by Pradon, produced simultaneously on the stage, was loudly applauded. Racine was mortified beyond expression, and announced that he would retire to a monastery and write no more dramas.

He became very devout but was dissuaded from taking orders, and advised to marry. On June 1, 1677, Racine married Catherine de Romanet, a matter-of-fact woman, who never read her husband's poems. Marriage assured him a better position in society. He was appointed Historiographer, and spent much time in the society of the king, from whom he received large bounties.

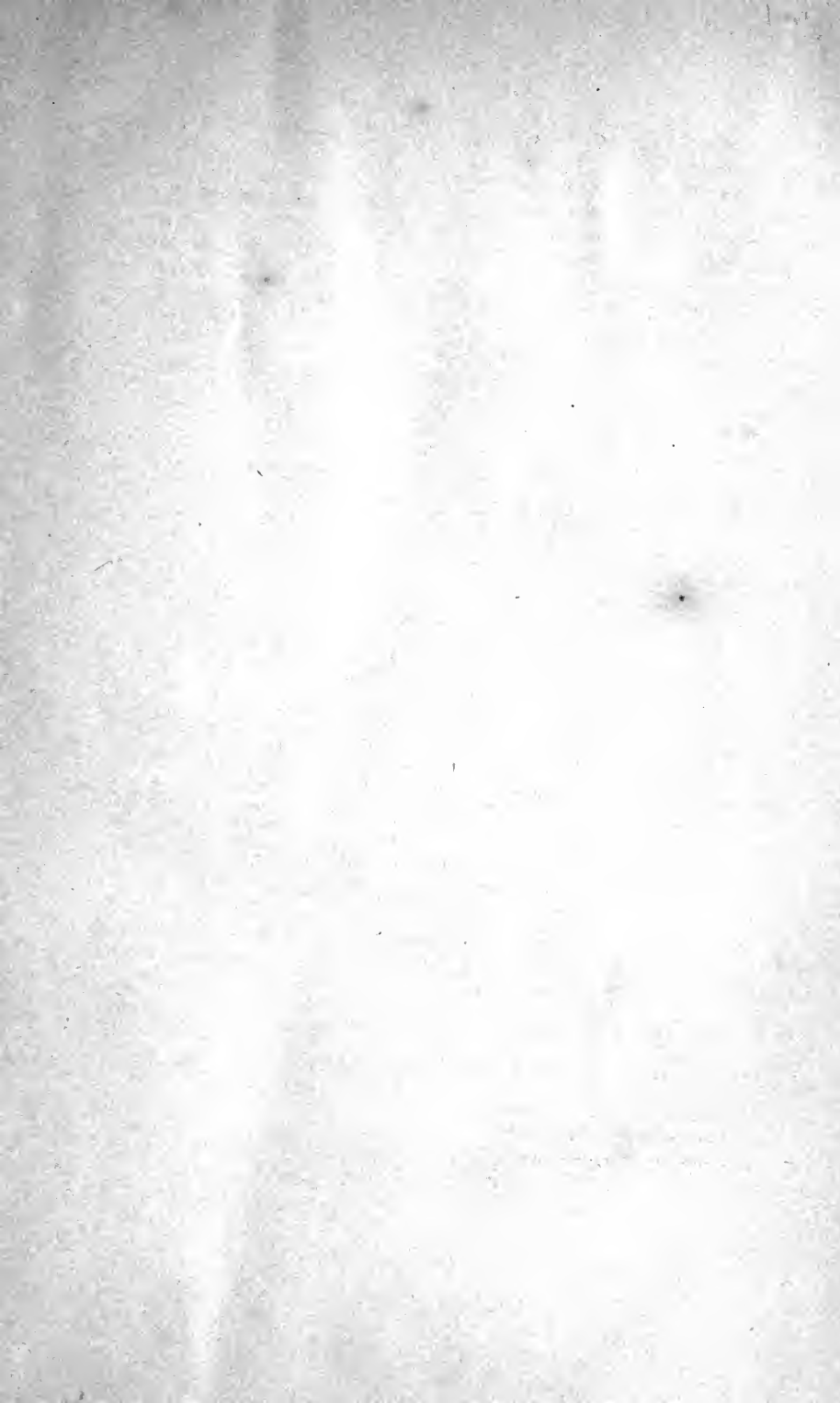
Mme. de Maintenon married Louis XIV. in 1684, and in the same year founded a young ladies' boarding school at St. Cyr. At her request, and in spite of his own objections and the entreaties of Boileau, Racine wrote *Esther*, (1689), a lyrical drama which the school girls acted. The delight of the king and his invited guests was so great that Racine was persuaded to write another play for the school. This was the occasion of *Athalie* (1691) based on II Kings xi. This was the master stroke of the poet's genius, a dramatic epic on fire with Hebrew ardour, and noble in its Greek simplicity.

On account of Jansenistic proclivities Racine lost the favor of the king, and died mourning his fall.

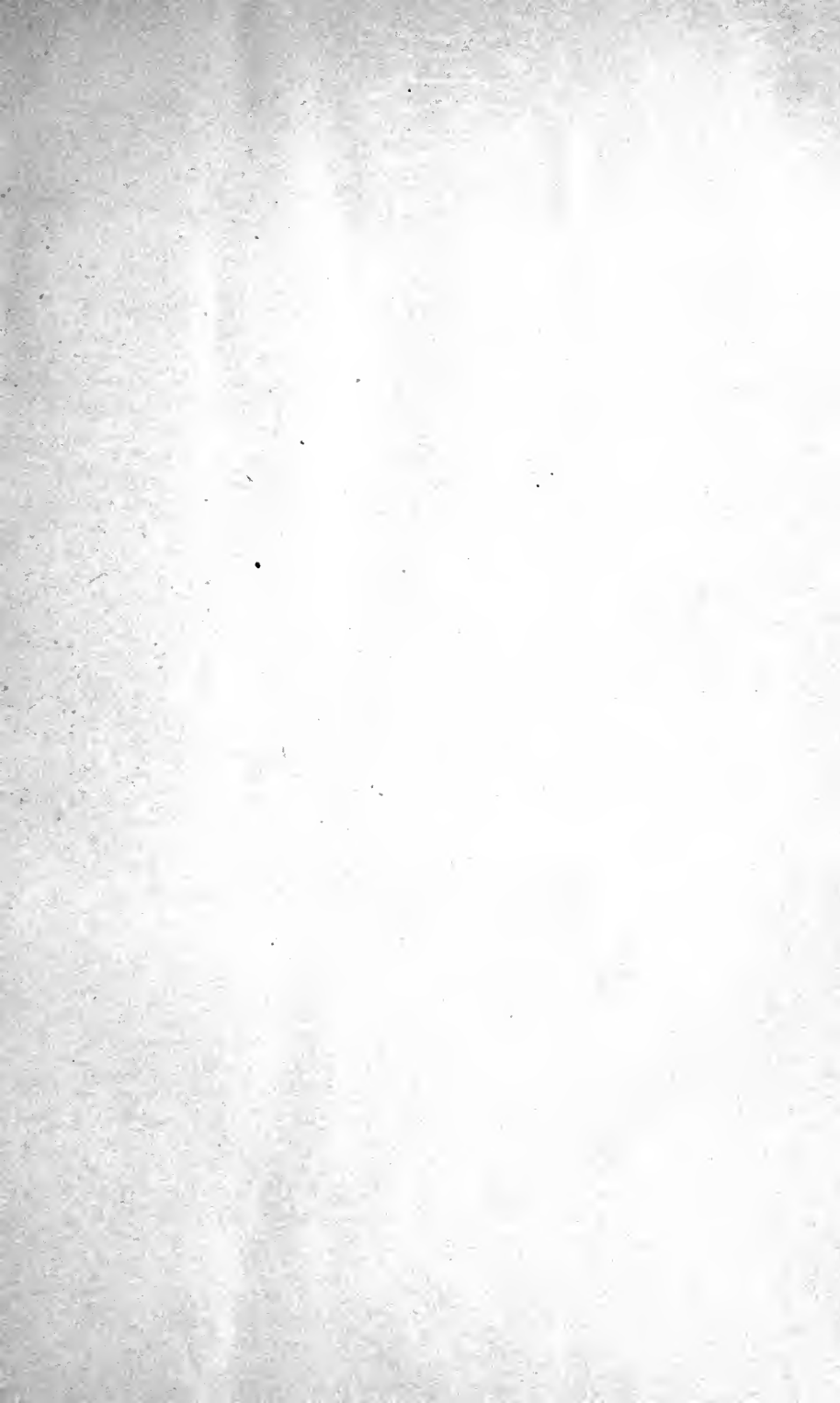
Read Saintsbury, pp. 300-308; Wilkinson, pp. 127-137.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ESSAY.

1. Estimate effects of Boileau's criticism.
2. Discuss Racine's women.
3. Point out Racine's masterpiece, with reasons for choice.









LECTURE IV.

MOLIÈRE.

Jean Baptiste Poquelin, who more than twenty years later assumed the stage name of MOLIÈRE, was born in Paris early in January, 1622. His father was royal upholsterer and gentleman in waiting, and seems to have been prosperous. The boy lost his mother when he was ten years old. There are many fathers, but few mothers in Molière's comedies.

Grandparents showed great interest in the young orphan and had much to do with his training. He was sent to school at the Jesuit Collège de Clermont, in Paris, then took semi-private lessons in philosophy from the celebrated Gassendi, and finally in Orléans, acquired the right to practice law. He was admitted to the bar in Paris, but probably never practiced.

Molière had made the acquaintance of an actress named Madeleine Béjart, and in 1643 renounced his right of succession to his father's business, and in spite of earnest remonstrances, joined her company of players, known as L'illustre Théâtre. The company failed in Paris, but, after many embarrassments, decided to make a tour of the provinces. Molière seems to have gone upon the stage with no thought of becoming more than an actor, but during the eleven years that his company diverted provincial France in the cities of Lyons, Nantes, Grenoble, Rouen, and elsewhere, he became not only the leading spirit and star actor of the troupe, but dramaturg as well. He began by translating and adapting, and then composed after-plays and farces. All but two of these early pieces are lost.

In the autumn of 1658, Molière and his players returned to Paris, and on October 24th, acted Corneille's *Nicomède* at the Louvre in the presence of Louis XIV. After the performance, Molière asked and obtained permission to play one of his own pieces, which, he said, had amused the provinces. The gay little comedy won more applause than the tragedy, and established its author in royal favor. The strolling comedians were assigned a hall in the Palais Bourbon, and allowed to bear the name Troupe de Monsieur.

To the rich and varied experiences of life in the provinces, Molière presently added fruitful observations of life at Paris and Versailles. In the literary activity which now ensues, we may distinguish three periods:

1. The first period, 1659-64, is marked by attacks upon artificiality and affectation in art and life. *Les Precieuses Ridicules*, the first French comedy of manners, *L'Ecole des Maris*, and *L'Ecole des Femmes* characterize this epoch. On February 20, 1662, Molière married Armande Béjart, the nineteen-year old daughter (or sister) of Madeleine Béjart. The marriage was very unhappy, and deeply affected the poet's subsequent life and work. Compare in this connection *L'Ecole des Maris*, Act I, sc. 2, and *L'Ecole des Femmes*, Act. IV, sc. 1. Molière's enemies were now legion.

2. The second period, extending from 1664-67, gave us *Tartuffe*, *Le Festin de Pierre* (or *Don Juan*), and *Le Misanthrope*. These are character dramas, where human nature is portrayed in its essential and changeless attributes. In them, as in the author's life at this time, comedy verges on tragedy. *Tartuffe*, or The Hypocrite, was more studiously revised and aroused greater opposition than any of Molière's plays. By Goethe and many others, the character of Tartuffe is not only considered the psychological masterpiece of Molière, but of human genius. In *Le Festin de Pierre* Molière supplemented his picture of hypocrisy by the portrayal of cynical unbelief, and to this he soon added *Le Misanthrope*, a perennial picture of the world's foibles, heartlessness, and insincerity. These three masterpieces really form a grand trilogy.

3. After the feuds occasioned by *Tartuffe*, Molière returned to the lighter style of his earlier comedies, but with broader conceptions and fuller treatment. From 1667 to his death is the period of the great comedies *L'Avare*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* and *Les Femmes Savantes*. The character of the miser Harpagon ranks with Molière's most successful work.

Although he had amassed a considerable fortune, and was in feeble health, Molière continued his work as actor. On February, 17, 1673, while playing the principal role in *Le Malade Imaginaire*, he was overcome with sudden weakness and in a few hours was dead.

One of Molière's company describes the great comedian as having a good figure, noble carriage, mobile features, grave manners, and a melancholy air. We know that he was unselfish, independent, a true friend, a good conversationalist, and especially generous to youthful talent.

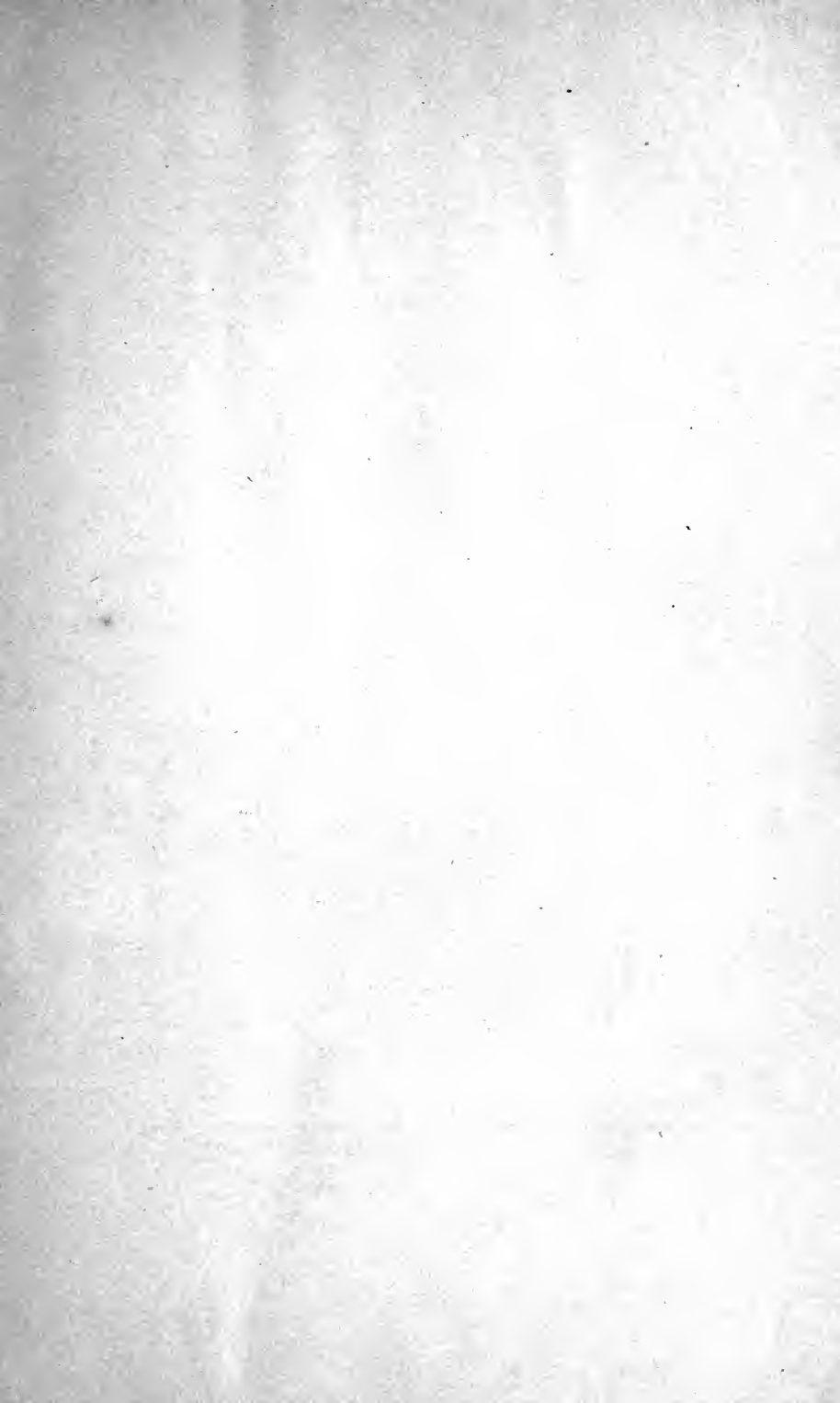
Molière held up the mirror to nature. In his comedies we find not only the court of Louis XIV., but citizen life as well. Moreover, his characters are not merely faithful representatives of their century, but are instinct with human nature and human feeling, which makes them intelligible and interesting for all time and to all nations.

A brief comparison of Molière and Shakspeare (1) as authors, actors, managers; (2) as to environment, development, treatment, aim.

Read Saintsbury, pp. 309-318; Wilkinson, pp. 71-91; Scribner's Magazine, vol. IX. pp. 725-737; Century Magazine, vol. XXXVIII, pp. 819-830.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ESSAY.

1. Give some account of the man Molière.
2. What is the difference between comedy of intrigue and comedy of manners.
3. Compare Harpagon and Shylock.
4. Compare Molière and Shakspeare as writers of comedy.





LECTURE V.

THE GREAT PULPIT ORATORS.

Celtic blood breeds orators. In the latter half of the seventeenth century centralization made political oratory impossible. Judicial oratory was emasculated by pedantry and affectation. But the times favored pulpit oratory, and it flourished as never before. The policy of Mazarin and Richelieu had raised the Gallican church to great dignity, the passions of recent religious wars lent ardour and earnestness to eloquence, and the language had become rich, harmonious, and flexible. The narrow limits of public activity invited, if it did not force, many men of energy and talent into the service of the church.

The sermons which have literary value were almost all preached before the king or some portion of his court. Most of them were delivered during Lent, at funerals, on feast days, or other special occasions. They were carefully written out before delivery, and were generally advertised in advance. Audiences were usually very large, for it was almost as fashionable to attend church as the theatre. The aim of the majority of the preachers is indicated in a remark of the king to one of them: "You have accomplished a hard thing; you have satisfied the court, which is so æsthetic."

JACQUES BENIGNE BOSSUET was born at Dijon September 27, 1627, and died at Saint Roch April 12, 1704. He came of good family and received an excellent education. He was made doctor and priest at Metz in 1652. He soon won fame as a preacher and controversialist, and was called to Paris in 1657. In 1669 he delivered a funeral discourse over Henrietta, Queen of England, wife of Charles I., and, as a reward for his brilliant oration, was made Bishop of Condom. He resigned his bishopric the next year to become tutor to the Dauphin, and about this time preached his second celebrated funeral discourse over the Duchesse d'Orléans. He was elected to the Academy in 1671. When the education of the Dauphin was finished, in 1681, Bossuet was appointed Bishop of Meaux, which position he held at the time of his death.

Bossuet's principal funeral discourses, besides the two already mentioned, were over Marie Thèrese (1683); Le Tellier (1686); Le Grand Condé (1687). The great orator was a voluminous writer, but after his sermons, the "Discourse on Universal History," written for his royal pupil, is his only work much read outside of Catholic circles.

Bossuet has been called the "Corneille of the pulpit," but is best known as the "Eagle of Meaux." He was the classicist among pulpit orators. For majestic periods, soaring eloquence, and serene sublimity, he has found no equal. The darkest blot on his history is his attack on Fénelon.

LOUIS DE BOURDALOUE was born at Bourges in 1632 and died in Paris May 13, 1704, a few weeks after Bossuet. He was of noble family and was well educated. His stainless life has no history—he was simply Jesuit priest and preacher. In 1669 he began to preach in Paris, and attracted widespread attention from the very first. The next year he was called to preach before the king, and the court praised him extravagantly. Mme de Sévigné wrote that everybody who was anything in society attended his sermons, and that in a word he was the greatest of all preachers. He is thought to have had much to do with the strict life of the king's latter years. Bourdaloue kept self in the background, and sought worldly applause less than any preacher of his time. He discussed great moral questions, but in such a plain, earnest, interesting, and convincing manner as to win the attention of all classes. His beauty of style and lucid analysis of human passions give his sermons enduring worth.

JEAN BAPTISTE MASSILLON (1663-1724) must be mentioned here, though he preached his first sermon November 1, 1699. He was a worthy successor to Bossuet and Bourdaloue, and in powers of persuasion and range of thought surpassed both.

Other great names are MASCARON (1634-1703) and FLÉCHIER (1632-1710) among Catholics, and CLAUDE (1619-1687) and SAURIN (1670-1730) among Protestants.

FRANÇOIS FENÉLON (1661-1710) hardly ranks among pulpit orators, but enjoys a reputation as a theologian scarcely second to Bossuet. His literary significance is great, and his *Télémaque* and *Education of Girls* are still widely read at home and abroad. He was tutor to the Duke of Burgogne, heir to the throne, and won lasting distinction as an educator. His last years were profoundly saddened by religious controversy with Bossuet and others, and he died in retirement in the diocese of which he had been appointed archbishop.

Read Saintsbury, pp. 379-390; Wilkinson, pp. 137-173.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ESSAY.

Discuss the literary significance of any one of the great preachers.





LECTURE VI.

SOME PROSE WRITERS AND A POET.

The best prose of the seventeenth century is not to be found in the novels and romances of the time, but in essays and letters. Newspapers were not in vogue, and the memoir-writers and letter-writers were very numerous. Only a few can be maintained.

JEAN BALZAC (1594-1655) holds about the same relation to classic French prose that Malherbe does to classic poetry. Both deserve a place in literature for their attention to the form of expression. Balzac's chief work is *Socrate Chrétien*.

THREE MORALISTS.

I. BLAISE PASCAL was born June 19, 1623, at Clermont, where his father was president of a court. The boy was remarkable for his precocity and the early development of his reasoning powers. He was educated by his father at home. The youthful genius worked out the propositions of Euclid before seeing a book on geometry, and at sixteen wrote a valuable treatise on conic sections.

Pascal was never strong, and from his eighteenth year was never free from pain. Residence in Paris brought him in contact with the Jansenists. He embraced their doctrines, took up his abode in a cell at Port Royal, and became exceedingly ascetic. At the request of his new companions he undertook to defend their views against the strictures of the *Sorbonne*, and in 1656 entered upon the dangerous task with a pseudonymous letter to a friend in the country. This was the beginning of the celebrated *Lettres Provinciales*. Their wonderful success led him from defence to attack, and he assailed the Jesuits as the most prominent, and at the same time most vulnerable, among his opponents. His chief weapon was irony of the most delicate and sharpest kind, and it cut like a damascene blade. The Jesuits have never recovered from Pascal's scathing criticism. His letters have not only been the point of departure of all subsequent attacks upon the order, but have become a grand arsenal upon which later critics and satirists have freely drawn for their most effective weapons. Classic prose was created when the *Lettres Provinciales* appeared.

Pascal died of small-pox August 19, 1662. When his papers were examined the executors found packages of scraps of paper on which were jotted down disconnected thoughts, short essays, and scattered reflections. These form the *Pensées*, and the bond of union between them is the truth and sublimity of the Christian religion. The *Pensées*, though lacking revision and coördination by the author, nevertheless attest a piercing intellect, and make a book the world could ill afford to lose.

2. LA ROCHEFOUCAULD (1613-1680) was a duke and peer of France. He wrote *Memoires* and *Maximes*. In the art of expressing thought clearly in the fewest words he has never been surpassed.

3. JEAN DE LA BRUYÈRE (1645-1696) was a man of one book—*Les Caractères*—modeled on Theophrastus. These character sketches are mostly portraits of living people veiled under fictitious names, but are at the same time delineations of human nature under various conditions. Thus they become brief treatises on morality, and may be compared with the *Pensée* or *Maxime*. Comparing himself with Pascal and La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère said: "Less aspiring than the former, and less acute than the latter, I purposed merely to teach men reason, and that in a plain and simple way, without much method, but just as my theme might point the way."

A MEMOIR-WRITER.

SAINT SIMON (1675-1755) was a duke and peer of France. He entered the army at an early age and rose rapidly, but feeling that he had been slighted by the king, he left the service in 1702. Though not in high favor at court, he spent the next twenty years at Versailles, and with close and even prying gaze observed the king and court. His observations, noted down at random, extend from 1694 to 1723. They were revised before his death and form his voluminous *Memoires*.

Saint Simon was an aristocrat of the bluest blood and could ill brook the humiliation of the nobility by Louis XIV. He was born a century too late, and was out of joint with his times. He was prejudiced and misanthropic, but he wrote a part of French history which his contemporaries left untouched. Others painted the glories, he the miseries of his age. Yet he is not always gloomy and not often unjust. His graphic sketches of leading men and important events greatly enhance the interest and historical value of his writings.

A WOMAN OF LETTERS.

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ (1626-1696) is the most celebrated letter-writer in any literature. A baroness by birth and a marchioness by marriage, she spent her life at court and in the best society of her day. She was left a widow with two children in 1651, and in 1669 her daughter married Count de Grignan and removed to the South of France. Never did mother love daughter more fondly or excessively, and this necessary separation stirred the maternal heart to its depths. At this time began the world-famous correspondence. The letters are generally dated from Paris, and give brilliant sketches of court life and remarkable occurrences; or they are from the Rocks, the writer's country-seat, and depict rural scenes and customs. A mother's love runs through them all, stimulating the author's fancy and brightening her wit. The great bulk of Mme. de Sévigné's correspondence was addressed to her daughter, though she often exchanged letters with distinguished friends. Aside from her vivid descriptions, and the historical value of her letters, Mme. de Sévigné's frank, artless and original style assure her a worthy place in literature.

A PROSE-POET.

JEAN DE LA FONTAINE (1621-1695) was the son of a royal forester, and spent his childhood with the birds and beasts. His early education was neglected, but he made amends by later studies. He seemed to his contemporaries to live without fixed purpose, and was incapable of managing his own affairs or submitting himself to the will of others. Always living on the bounty of friends, untrammelled by public or private cares, absent-minded, egotistic, La Fontaine led an independent, happy existence and found friends even in his old age.

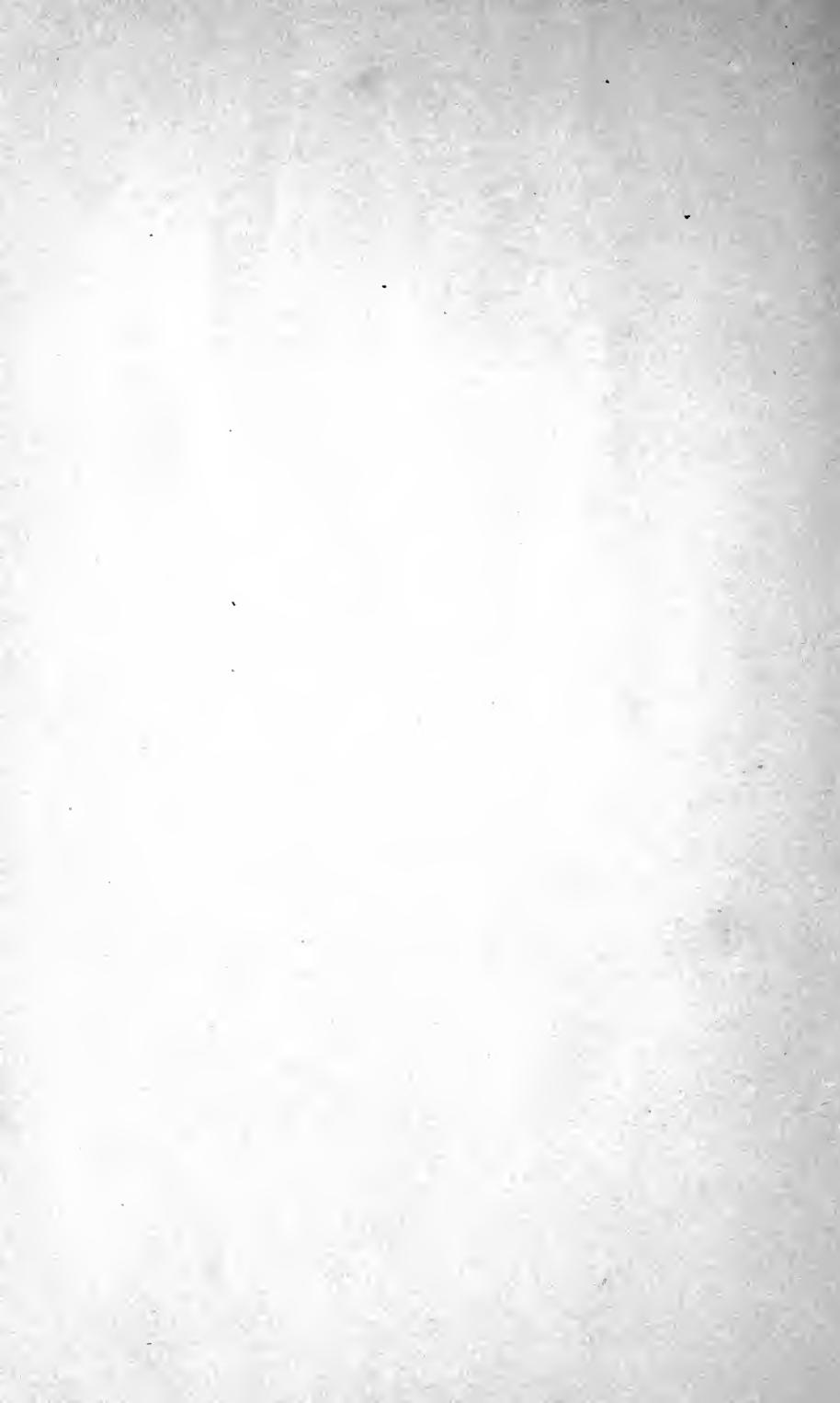
La Fontaine is celebrated for his *Fables* and his *Contes* or Tales. He wrote other poems, but they are forgotten. The tales, like their author's youth, are licentious, and by some were considered immoral even at the time they were written. The *Fables* are untainted, and on these the poet's fame rests secure. As a fabulist he is unequalled, though he entirely lacks the passion of a poet. His language, unlike that of most of his contemporaries, is natural, and sometimes archaic, and his style is easy, naïve and humorous.

Read Saintsbury, pp. 342-367 and 280-284; Wilkinson, pp. 55-75 and 91-117.

TOPICS FOR WRITTEN ESSAY.

1. Who wrote best prose in the seventeenth century? Why do you think so?
2. Find an English counterpart to Mme. de Sévigné and compare the two.
3. Compare La Fontaine with other fabulists.







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