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Thomas Wright

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The History of Caricature

A History of Caricature and Grotesque

In Literature and Art

By

Thomas Wright

I have felt some difficulty in selecting a title for the contents of the following pages, in which it was, in fact, my design to give, as far as may be done within such moderate limits, and in as popular a manner as such information can easily be imparted, a general view of the History of Comic Literature and Art. Yet the word comic seems to me hardly to express all the parts of the subject which I have sought to bring together in my book. Moreover, the field of this history is very large, and, though I have only taken as my theme one part of it, it was necessary to circumscribe even that, in some degree; and my plan, therefore, is to follow it chiefly through those branches which have contributed most towards the formation of modern comic and satiric literature and art in our own island.

Thus, as the comic literature of the middle ages to a very great extent, and comic art in a considerable degree also, were founded upon, or rather arose out of, those of the Romans which had preceded them, it seemed desirable to give a comprehensive history of this branch of literature and art as it was cultivated among the peoples of antiquity. Literature and art in the middle ages presented a certain unity of general character, arising, probably, from the uniformity of the influence of the Roman element of society, modified only by its lower degree of intensity at a greater distance from the centre, and by secondary causes attendant upon it. To understand the literature of any one country in Western Europe, especially during what we may term the feudal period—and the remark applies to art equally—it is necessary to make ourselves acquainted with the whole history of literature in Western Europe during that time.

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