

From the Introduction. THIS book sets itself the interesting and intriguing task of writing the erotic history of France and its erotic literature. Perhaps someone will inquire why we choose such a theme, and what profit is to be derived from a knowledge of the numerous piquant and gallant details that we shall meet on our quest. It is possible, too, that some reader will wonder about the latter part of the title: The History of French Erotic Literature. What is the justification for this phrase? Let us spend a few moments now in trying to understand why France should be chosen as the subject of an erotic history; why the history of the vast system of practices connected with the most unbridled and diverse expression of sex life in the land of the Gauls is of importance for us. Then we shall be in a position to realize the tremendous value of French erotic writings, which shall be our guides in our expedition through this land of love. It is a nice question whether there is an essential and an all-pervasive difference between the different races of mankind. But whatever be the truth about this very moot question, it is an indisputable fact that France has for many centuries been renowned as the home par excellence of eroticism, and Frenchmen as the typical representatives of the erotic spirit and practitioners of the erotic art. This by no means implies that there is something inherent in the French which impels them to this type of activity. We are merely stating a fact which can be buttressed by numerous phenomena, historical and sociological. Many investigators have asserted the fundamental unity of all nations, and have even denied that there has been any development through the course of history, by which modern men, for instance, have come into the possession of new traits of character or elements of physical structure. The French critic "Remy de Gourmont" has gone so far as to develop a quasi-law of history which claims that in all ages and in all climes men are alike, and the same diversities which separated classes of men and individuals at a bygone age are still observable today, mutatis mutandis. If this view is true, and we incline to believe that it is, then the sources for the development and importance of the erotic motif in French culture are to be led back not to certain structural peculiarities of the French people but to certain peculiarities in their history and sociological organization. Just at what date these traits first became manifest it is difficult to assert with precision. During the Renaissance period, when new blood began to run in the veins of the awakened and enlightened Europeans, and the first fruits of the new culture became documented in literature, we are already able to discern the strength of this motif. Of course at this time other nations of Europe, the Italians principally and also the Germans, were producing similar works. Indeed, the beginning of this literature as forsooth of the whole drive and potency of the Renaissance is to be seen in Italy; but at any rate this direction manifested in literature was the reflection of tendencies continued, developed, and augmented which at a later date made France the mundane residence of Venus in Europe....

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