

INTRODUCTION

Eugène Labiche was born on May 5th, 1815, in the city of Paris, during the memorable hundred days of Napoleon's desperate effort to regain his throne. Like many of his dramatic associates, he began with the study of law, but does not seem to have practised the profession. He commenced his literary career at the age of twenty, by contributing stories to the newspapers, and in 1838, produced his first drama. Though he had very little success at first, the stage exercised an increasing interest for him, and for forty years he continued to produce a series of over a hundred farces and comedies alone or in collaboration with others. Among the best known are:—*Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*, *le Voyage de M. Perrichon*, *la Poudre aux Yeux*, *les Petits Oiseaux*, *la Cagnotte*, *la Grammaire*, and *la Clef*, his last play written in 1877. About this time he retired with a comfortable competence to a country home in the district of Sologne to spend his declining days in ease and enjoyment. The distinguished dramatist, Émile Augier, came to visit him a short time after in his provincial home. To pass the time on an idle day he began reading these comedies and, as a result, obtained with difficulty from their modest author the consent for the publication of a collected edition of his works. This met with such great success that in 1880, he was proposed and elected a member of the *Académie Française*, the highest honour which can be conferred on a French author. His death took place in 1888.