

MOLIÈRE.

“Rien ne manque à sa gloire ; il manquait à la notre.”



“Who is Molière”, answered Boileau, the great critic, when Louis XIV, the Augustus of France, asked him. “Who is the greatest poet of the century?” Considering the brilliant galaxy of poets that were his contemporaries, looking at that pleiade of literary giants: Corneille, Racine, LaFontaine, and Boileau himself, who have won for their age the name of *Le Grand Siècle*, what greater glory could be his, what loftier pedestal of fame could he be placed upon than that from whose height he can look down on those who themselves would have crowned any age with immortality? And this from the lips of the legislator of the French Parnassus, the Horace of the seventeenth century.

Many who prefer the tragic to the comic art, or who are disposed to favor the simple tales of La Fontaine, may find the eulogy unmerited or exaggerated, may say with the the king “I did not think so.” However this may be (it is a matter of taste), one thing is certain, and it rests not on the authority of one man, but on the unanimous verdict of the literary world, Molière is the greatest *comic* poet, not of France, not of the sixteenth century, but of all countries and all ages. While Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton dispute the palm of epic poetry; while Shakespeare, Racine, and Goethe, are placed on an equal footing in tragedy; while it is a question as to who among the lyric poets deserves to be crowned king of the Pindaric realm, Molière stands aloft on his pinnacle admitting of no comparison, suffering no rival.

In a study of this kind it would not be more pertinent to give a biography of Molière than for any modern essayist to tell us that Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon, Napoleon in Corsica; that Alexander was a Macedonian, and Caesar a Roman. With these men the details of their private life are hidden, we might almost say forgotten, in the contemplation of the great works