SAMUEL CHAPPUZEAU AND HIS
“EUROPE VIVANTE,” 1666-71
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Samuel Chappuzeau is scarcely known today except by the historians of the French theatre, who never fail to quote his little book on “Le Théâtre François”, published in 1674, which contains much useful information on the conditions of dramatic production in his day, to which he had contributed several mediocre works, both tragedies and comedies, one of which Molière’s troupe had produced, and from several of which the great master of comedy drew little bits to fit into his own great works.

But this “adventurer in literature”, as he has been called, deserves better of posterity because of some of his ideas and undertakings, the conception of which bear the mark of originality and boldness, even though he lacked that element of genius which has been described as the “infinite capacity for taking pains”. He wrote too rapidly and too much, and distributed his energies over too wide a field.

A mere enumeration of his works fills one with amazement. Born in 1625, he began his literary career in 1649-50 with a novel, “Ladice,” for which he has never received credit, since it was published anonymously. He followed the mode of the day so successfully that the work is frequently quoted in one of the recent histories of the French novel of the 17th century, but without name of author. Then he tried poetry, was for a time a preacher, at least one of whose sermons was published, and later wrote a treatise on “Christian Oratory”—“L’Orateur Chrétien”, which may be read with profit even today. A translator of the “Colloquies” of Erasmus, he wove several parts of these into a little play, “Le Cercle des femmes,” which antedated by three years the “Précieuses Ridicules” of Molière. The same year he brought out the first of his books on contemporary history, “Lyon dans son lustre”, a description of Lyons, with its monuments and civic organizations, and the important people, celebrating the city in which he had lived for five years as a proof-reader. After other dramatic works, and two years as tutor of French to William of Orange, later King of England,
he returned to Paris, and, while conducting a kind of boarding school, he wrote other plays. Removing to Geneva, he taught geography, and languages, and became a sort of prolific hack writer for the publisher Widerhold—producing an "Orbis Physicus" in Latin, a "Histoire des Joyaux," a book of French dialogues for his students (since he was dissatisfied with the available material), a series of French and Latin verses to accompany a re-edition of Bible illustrations, and several minor works. It was then that he conceived the plan of a history of contemporary Europe—which would give a picture of the geography, political and social conditions, and above all, the reigning families and great figures of each country. This was his "Europe Vivante."

He devoted parts of several years to travel in the different countries, collecting his information at first hand, received at court, and making acquaintances from whom he received notes and accounts which he incorporated in his book.

At this time also the appearance of the first volume of Moreri’s "Dictionary" filled him with the ambition to compile a great encyclopedia. This fitted in well with his own fondness for geography and history, and throughout the remainder of his life he was absorbed with the collection of this material. He translated the work of the German Hoffmann, and Widerhold was to bring out a new "dictionary" when lawsuits with other publishers prevented. It seems that much of Chappuzeau’s material was utilized in the later edition of Moreri.

In the meantime Chappuzeau found time to write from notes and dictation the account of the "Six Voyages" of Tavernier, whose travels and explorations to the Near and Far East made him the most renowned traveler of his day.

There are also attributed to Chappuzeau a translation of the "Dialogues" of Mathurin Cordier, also intended for school use, and the preparation of a German-French-Latin Lexicon, and perhaps a Latin-French grammar, though these were not signed and the publisher did not give credit to the compiler.

A poem entitled "Genève délivrée," a sort of epic on the successful defense of the city against the attack of the Duke of Savoy, published posthumously, about completes the list, though, during his later years, while serving as "Gouverneur des pages" of the Duke of Brunschwig-Lunebourg, he published a geographical work—"L’Idée du Monde," and is reported to have prepared each month for the Duke a compendium of the happenings of
the Court, entitled "Le Mercure." As late as 1694 he issued a prospectus for a "Bibliothèque universelle, Dessin d'un nouveau Dictionnaire historique, géographique, chronologique, et philologique, etc." and extant letters show negotiations with publishers, and correspondence asking for special articles, almost to the time of his death in 1701. Unhappily this ambition was not to be realized and just before he died he lost his sight. Our regret that he was not permitted to complete his work is tempered by his own philosophical reflection—"But I shall be satisfied if I never draw from it any other advantage than to have worked at it for my own satisfaction, and to learn a thousand fine things which I should never have known without applying myself to this work."

"L'EUROPE VIVANTE"

This work consists of two volumes, to which two other volumes with separate titles are closely related. The complete title of the first part reads, in translation:

"Living Europe, or a New Political and Historical Account of All its States according to their actual Situation at the End of the Year 1666, Represented in divers Tableaux which disclose their Extent, Quality, Commerce, Strength, Revolutions, Religion, Government, Claims and Interests, followed by Portraits and Alliances of the Kings and Princes, in which are discussed the Condition of their Courts, the Genius of their Peoples, the Universities and celebrated Libraries, Academies of Eloquence, and Illustrious Persons in each Profession, with a Collection of the Most Memorable Things which have happened in Europe since the General Peace; Revolutions, Wonders, Wars, Crimes, Treaties of Peace, Great Projects, New Discoveries, Solemn Ceremonies, Deaths, Births and Illustrious Marriages." Published in 1666, this was republished in 1669, with the change of date to correspond—"According to the situation from the end of the year 1666 to the beginning of the year 1669," and, with a second part, entitled, "Protestant Germany, or a new account of a Journey made to the Courts of the Electors and Protestant Princes of the Empire during the months of April, May, June, July and August of the year 1669," and republished two years later, the title again brought up to date.

The table includes the following courts in the order in which the author had visited them:

Wurttemberg, Baden, the Palatinate, Hessia, Saxony, Anhalt, Brunschwig-Lunebourg, Brandenburg, Holstein and Mecklen-
berg, and, in his “Design of the Author,” he enumerates the same objects of study as in the previous volume, promising, above all, to “display the splendor of the Electoral Houses and the Princes who follow them and to give their portraits along with those of their Families . . .” (pen portraits to be sure), 556 pages.

In 1673 was published an “Account of the Courts of Savoy and Bavaria,” containing 203 pages for the first part—“On the Royal House of Savoy,”—and 178 pages on “The Present State of the Electoral House of the Court of Bavaria.”

In 1667 had been published separately an “Exact Description of Hessa, drawn upon the spot from very good accounts.”

These descriptive titles convey a very good idea of what Chappuzeau was attempting to do. He dedicates his first work to the “Sovereign Princes of Christendom,” and claims that it has been conceived for their honor and glory, and, in other places the author makes clear his admiration and veneration for royalty, as divinely appointed.

In his introduction, Chappuzeau maintains the boldness of his project, though modestly admitting that he may have fallen short in its execution.

“I shall say then, in the first place, that I feel my own weakness, and that I do not pretend to the glory of the Great Authors; that I am not writing for the Learned, but for those who know less than I, and who have not measured on foot so many Provinces. Thus my work should be beneath censure and not deserve the criticism of the Learned.

“I shall say, in the second place, that I am giving here only the plan of a great Work which I am meditating, and in which I should not be sorry to be forestalled by someone else, since anyone else would acquit himself of it better than I. My purpose is doubtless ingenious enough, but perhaps not so successful in execution; I have hurried things too much, or I have not made them sufficiently clear, and I have tried to put the Iliad into a nutshell.

“I confess that I have not received all of the reports which I wished, or that I have not had the patience to wait for them. But, after all, I have not gone far from my subject, and I have purposed only to give Europe in brief and to condense in a few pages the different current accounts of its states. If I have not said all, I have touched on the most essential; or if I have only followed
others, I am persuaded that one takes pleasure in reading different versions of the same work to see the different talents of the translators."

Again,

"I should have had sufficient material—(claims and interests of Princes) to fill a thick volume; but, besides the short amount of time which my affairs leave me, and the pressing demands of the printer, I have had to follow necessarily my own disposition, which avoids long drawn out labor, and which, by running too fast, cannot run very far."

Chappuzeau anticipates both the criticism and the praise which the modern reader might give him. It was a bold and original plan to give a complete sketch of contemporary Europe, and he tries to embrace it all. He had himself travelled extensively. He claims to have gone from one end of France to the other. In his youth he had accompanied a young Scotch lord to Edinborough, and spent several months in Scotland and England, returning twice to the latter country, "after it had been restored to its rightful lord"—(rather a striking sentence from a Protestant, and indicating the royalist convictions of the author). He lived twice in the Netherlands, the second time from 1656 to 1661, during the last two years of which he was preceptor to the Prince, as he lost no opportunity to remind his readers. In preparation for writing "L'Europe Vivante," he had revisited France and England, the Netherlands, and even the Scandinavian countries, or, at least Denmark. He was for twenty years a resident of Geneva, and travelled in northern Italy, and Germany. He writes of Spain and Portugal, Russia, "Muscovy", Poland, and Turkey, in addition to those countries which he had himself seen, but admits that his knowledge of them is more limited. His style is always personal and he likes to bring himself into the picture wherever possible. This is especially true of the volumes on Protestant Germany and on Savoy, in which he narrates his visits to these courts, the reception he received, and his conversations with princes and notable persons; but, along with these details, which have little interest to us today, he gives descriptions of places and people, and observations on the theatre, on manners and characteristics, which have their value, though we must often discount his enthusiasm, or his over-eulogistic remarks about various notables calculated to arouse their generosity toward the writer; for town councils as well as individuals
made him gifts when he could point to his praise of them in his first volume, or promise to include it later.

He recounts himself how he started in 1669, "with all Europe in his saddle-bags," colporting his book, and never fails to mention the munificent presents he received. Bayle in his correspondence refers to someone who had just been "skimming the cream" off of the German princes—"à la Chappuzeau."

Although the "Journal des Scavans" in 1667 criticized the first volume for showing a Protestant bias, Chappuzeau is remarkably liberal and tolerant, both in religion and politics. He says in the text of the first volume (page 124)—

"Do not expect to find here, nor in all the course of my work, that I take sides nor that I undertake to censure men who all believe themselves wise in the conduct of their affairs. I shall blame neither their Religion nor their Politics, nor their customs; because a writer who treats History ought, it seems to me, to be free of all self-interest. Far from giving insulting names to peoples who follow different religions, I do not undertake to touch their maxims, and I shall speak of each with honor."

He takes occasion to rebuke the French for a feeling of superiority and hopes that his book on the German courts will disabuse those who believe that all politeness and gallantry of the age are to be found between Calais and Marseilles.

His view about Germany is of especial interest for the present time—Vol. I, p. 339—

"It is difficult to give a very exact account of all these things, and it is a Labyrinth in which the most intelligent are lost. All these sovereigns, all these cities, all these Diets, have their special privileges, and their jurisdictions are so cut up and intertwined with each other that the Elector of Mayence goes as far as the gates of Heidelberg, and the Elector of Palatinate to the gates of Mayence. The same is true of several other princes of the Empire, and of several cities, and large volumes would not suffice to untangle so many things and give all the detail. I shall merely say that while Germany shall remain well united and all the members of this great body shall move in harmony, there is no power in the world capable of disturbing it and which will not hesitate more than once before making any attack on a liberty which forms all its felicity and all its glory. But, as in the great machines, there is often some piece which happens to fail, and which prevents all the rest from functioning, Germany is not
always fully in accord with itself, and it gives the foreigner sometimes occasion to mingle too much with its affairs, which, for its tranquility it ought to avoid as much as it can. This august republic should have a leader but it ought not really to have a master, and while it flees slavery from within it would be shameful to have the law laid down from without. Therein is its great and principal concern; and it is still advantageous for it that the Sophie is delaying the Grand Seigneur in Asia to turn aside the storm which sometimes falls on its frontiers, and to relieve it of a redoubtable enemy.”

Professors of language, historians, geographers, and men of letters, writers of encyclopedias, all find a colleague in this little-known writer of the 17th century, whose unbounded admiration for the French Academy and for Academies in general would have won mention of the august assembly before me, were he to be re-incarnated and to be describing Wisconsin of today.

CHAPPUZEAU

Partial Bibliography


(Principal Works)

4. Two of Chappuzeau’s comedies, “La Dame d’Intrigue ou le Riche Vilain” (1668) and “L’Académie des Femmes” (1661) have been published in Victor Fournel, “Les Contemporains de Molière,” Vols. I and III, Paris, 1863-1875.
8. “Orbus Physicus, hoc est utriusque sphaerae synopsis, etc.” Geneva, 1665. (in fol. 8 pp.)
10. “Entretiens familiers pour l'instruction de la noblesse étrangère . . .”
“Description exacte de la Hesse, tirée sur les lieux de très bons meoires, . . .” [British Museum, (See Blanc (J). Le grand Atlas, etc. vol. 3, part 2, 1667, fol.]
14. “La Muse Enjouée, ou le théâtre comique du sieur Chapuzeau, . . .”
Lyon, J. Girin et D. Rivi ère, undated, contains four plays in verse, of different dates and printings:
“Le Partisan duppé” (same as Le Riche impertinent or Le Riche mécontent).
“Le Riche vilain, ou La Dame d’intrigue.”
“Les Eaux de Pirmont.”
“Le Cercle des femmes” (same as l’Académie des femmes).