According to Plato (in Phaedrus) when Hermes, the alleged inventor of writing, presented his invention to the Pharaoh Thamus, he praised his new technique that was supposed to allow human beings to remember what they would otherwise forget. But the Pharaoh was not so satisfied. “My skillful Theut, he said, memory is a great gift that ought to be kept alive by training it continuously. With your invention people will not be obliged any longer to train memory. They will remember things not because of an internal effort, but by mere virtue of an external device.” We can understand the preoccupation of the Pharaoh. Writing, as any other new technological device, would have made torpid the human power which it substituted and reinforced - just as cars made us less able to walk. Writing was dangerous because it decreased the powers of mind by offering human beings a petrified soul, a caricature of mind, a mineral memory. Plato's text is ironical, naturally. Plato was writing his argument against writing. But he was pretending that his discourse was told by Socrates, who did not write (since he did not publish, he perished in the course of his academic fight.) Nowadays, nobody shares these preoccupations, for two very simple reasons. First of all, we know that books are not ways of making somebody else think in our place; on the contrary they are machines that provoke further thoughts. Only after the invention of writing was it possible to write such a masterpiece on spontaneous memory as Proust's La Recherche du Temps Perdu.
writing), will ensure that no book will ever truly disappear. Discovering obscure works of literature is now easier than ever. The Internet has brought the world many things, but one of the things that really stands out, is making the world's culture more accessible to the population. Projects that would have seemed impossible 20 years ago are now being accomplished in the blink of an eye. Google Books is legally scanning every book they can get their hands on and the Internet Archive is digitizing every public domain movie, song, book, and webpage. But when it comes to books, one of the major players is Project Gutenberg.