ANATOLE FRANCE AND HIS CIRCLE

BY PAUL GSELL

ANATOLE FRANCE AND HIS CIRCLE

THE WORKS OF
ANATOLE FRANCE
IN ENGLISH

EDITED BY THE LATE
FREDERIC CHAPMAN
JAMES LEWIS MAY
AND
BERNARD MIALL

35 *Volumes*

THE BODLEY HEAD

ANATOLE FRANCE

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AND HIS CIRCLE · BEING HIS TABLE-TALK COLLECTED & RECORDED BY PAUL GSELL · ILLUSTRATED FROM PAINTINGS BY PIERRE CALMETTES

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION BY

FREDERIC LEES

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TO THE READER

HE familiar conversations of the Abbé Jérôme Coignard were preserved for us by his naive disciple, Jacques Tournebroche.

Our good Master, Anatole France, is not without a certain intellectual relationship with the Abbé Jérôme Coignard. He converses with every bit as much charm. It would be a great pity if his learned and substantial remarks were for ever lost.

Another Tournebroche, it was our good fortune of yore to listen to them, at those morning gatherings at the Villa Saïd which were, before the War, the most brilliant entertainments of the mind.

Scholars, artists, politicians, Spanish anarchists and Russian nihilists were received at that residence. The host, in his keen desire to know the most varied specimens of humanity, welcomed them all with affectionate courtesy. The attraction he exercised

exempted him from hunting his game. The models he desired to depict came to his house to sit unconstrainedly under his very eyes.

He paid them the signal honour of trying upon them some of those ingenious apophthegms which he afterwards set down in writing.

It was this preparatory work in the studio of a great painter which we were permitted to follow during several years.

When speaking of Anatole France, people are in the habit of saying : " He is a charmer indeed, but what a distressing sceptic ! "

We who listened to him sedulously are able to rectify a far too widespread error.

If by sceptic one means a philosopher who doubts what he does not know and what he has no reason to believe, who laughs at baleful prejudices, quizzes inflated glory, scourges stupid and sanguinary ambitions, assuredly Anatole France is the prince of sceptics. But that he is indifferent to everything is precisely the opposite of the truth.

In his slightest repartees we had no difficulty in discovering most strong convictions.

He is, perhaps, the last literary craftsman who has retained a fine superstition for a flowing and pellucid style, a noble prepossession for succulent words and harmonious phrases.

He loves gentle France so piously that, in order

to be merged in his country, he has adopted this tender name as a pseudonym.

Like the most generous intellects of his native land, he professes the religion of sincerity, the cult of tolerance and the devotion of pity. Experience was hardly indulgent to his hopes. Nevertheless, amidst the worst grievances of his day, he has retained his faith in the slow and certain progress of justice and goodness.

When opportunity offered, this nonchalant dreamer has not spared his labours, has not hesitated to descend to the street to defend an Idea.

Certainly it requires a great effort to persuade him to remove his crimson skull-cap, to take off his wadded dressing-gown, to discard his slippers and leave his fireside. Yet with firm step has he many times left his ivory tower to carry the good word to his rough brothers of the faubourgs.

Finally and above all, he is the idolater of friendship.

He who, to many of his contemporaries, symbolizes Unbelief is, then, after his fashion, the most faithful of believers.

Such is the testimony of his own words in the pages you are about to read.

You will find therein not only the first sketch of maxims with which he has adorned his books, but also many excellent and unpublished narratives.

Doubtless these are only the scraps and crumbs of a royal feast. But one does not always find proof of the superiority of great men in their most elaborate works. Rather is it to be recognized in what springs from their brain spontaneously and without effort. That which they do not think of recording, which they utter instinctively and by fits and starts, the long-matured thoughts which, unobserved by their authors, are detached of themselves—there is often the fine flower of their genius.

M. France is, as we know, the most exquisite of conversationalists. In the main his novels are but philosophic dialogues connected by languid plots. Perhaps his most engaging work is the delightful *Jardin d'Épicure*, in which he idly strips the leaves of his fancy. These conversations at his morning gatherings at the Villa Saïd are, as it were, an annex of that little garden. To a certainty it will give less pleasure, because it is not the enchanter himself who holds the pen. However, we have attempted to preserve even the turn of his language.

Already, some time before the War, bitter vexations inclined Anatole France to solitude. The appalling cyclone drove him from Versailles, where, in the nostalgic radiance of the past, he had sought repose. He removed his household gods to the Béchellerie, a small estate he had purchased near

Tours, and where he meditated during the frightful years.

So many catastrophes have cast a gloom over him.

The trial of the interminable butchery was a cruel one to a heart overflowing with human compassion. There is no likelihood that our good Master will ever resume the friendly gatherings at which his satirical fancy formerly sparkled. Consequently, do not let us further delay to set down our many-hued recollections of them.[1]

[1] Most of these conversations were published in fragmentary form in the *Cri de Paris*, to which we have had the honour to contribute for nearly twenty years. Some of them also appeared in the *Grande Revue*.

CONTENTS

A NOTE ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations in this book are reproductions of paintings by M. Pierre Calmettes, a Parisian artist and writer who was given exceptional facilities for depicting Anatole France's home at No. 5 Villa Saïd. A godson of the great writer, he undertook, about 1907, to show that unique meeting-place of literary Paris from almost every point of view, the result being a collection of pictures which, exhibited at the time, attracted considerable attention, since it revealed to the general public the intense love felt by M. Bergeret for ancient art—a characteristic until then not fully appreciated. In brief, M. Calmettes did in pigment for the Villa Saïd what M. Paul Gsell has accomplished in words; and for that reason the conjunction of these pictures (a small selection from a collection long since dispersed) and the following text is singularly appropriate.

It is by courtesy of the *Paris and London Studio*, the owners of the copyright, that these illustrations are now for the first time placed before English readers.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ANATOLE FRANCE AND HIS CIRCLE

ANATOLE FRANCE AND HIS CIRCLE

THE SAGE'S COTTAGE

LONG the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, brisk horsewomen and supple horsemen, descending from the Arc de Triomphe towards the Porte Dauphine, caracole in the silvery morning.

On one side of this dignified road opens a tranquil blind alley, planted with sycamores, which a diligent pruner has trimmed *à la française*. It is the Villa Saïd.

The residences that border it are of modest height and, although within the boundary of Paris, have already the appearance of country-houses.

Behind their railings festooned with ivy, they are smart and trim. They shelter peaceful folk, people of independent means, artists, writers, philosophers.

Anatole France's house is No. 5.

During the War it was long silent; the Master had deserted it. It appeared bereft and melancholy. Bricks and plaster vilely blinded the door and the ground-floor windows. It was the very picture of affliction.

Since then the bays of this morose façade have, like eyes, opened and it is lit up with a fresh smile. And sometimes Anatole France, when he is not sojourning on the banks of the Loire at Saint-Cyr-lès-Tours, or else with friends in the shade of Saint-Cloud, returns to his hermitage.

But we want to describe this little house—this cottage of the Sage—as it was in the happy days when a host of visitors frequented it.

The green-painted door was a museum in itself. The bell-handle was of bronze; a little Florentine head whose grace held forth a friendly welcome to the hand caressing it. The letter-box was held in place by ancient medals.

One day the Master himself did the honours of his house.

We had been received by the old servant Joséphine, the worthy stewardess of M. Bergeret. Her face always expressed a little mistrust. She opened the door barely an inch, regarded the newcomer defiantly, prudently kept him outside during this minute inspection, and allowed him to step inside only when thoroughly satisfied.

ENTRANCE TO NO. 5, VILLA SAÏD, AVENUE DU BOIS DE BOULOGNE

Daily, on the visiting-cards handed to her, she read the names of dukes, marquesses, generals, Academicians, bankers and Ministers. Joséphine was satiated by human greatness. She had estimated the full extent of its vanity.

" Is the Master at home ? " she would be asked.

" The Master ? The Master ? " she would repeat in a muttering tone. " Why do you call him the Master ? He's master only of his soup, when he eats it, and even then only when it's in his mouth."

These piquant remarks she would mumble between her gold-stopped teeth.

It was not unpleasant to hear a philosophic servant utter opinions so quintessential.

The vestibule was crammed with treasures : Persian faiences with blue, green and red flowers, Rhodian pottery with reddish-brown reflections, archaic statuettes on stands and consoles. A fat monk hurriedly told his beads near a German Virgin with prominent forehead and long frizzy hair. A delicate Italian Lucretia eternally pierced her bosom.

The staircase was iridescent with ancient stained glass, spangled with gold.

From the very threshold, one recognized the taste of one of the most learned and subtle of collectors.

This ante-room, decorated so magnificently, recalls an anecdote which was related to us.

The most earnest desire of a young Russian student who had arrived in Paris was to see Anatole France. Through the writer's books and fame, she worshipped this friend of the poor and suffering.

Furnished with a warm letter of introduction, she hastened to the Villa Saïd.

She handed her letter to Joséphine, who ascended a floor to inform her master. He consented to receive the visitor.

" Come up ! " vigorously shouted the servant over the banisters.

But there was no reply. She searched in the dining-room, then in the drawing-room. Not a soul was there !

" Well, Joséphine ? " questioned the Master, who was waiting.

" Well, Monsieur, I don't know where the deuce the young lady has gone."

" What ? "

" She has disappeared."

" What's that tale you are telling me ? "

" Monsieur, I don't understand in the least. I've searched everywhere. I can't find her at all. She's gone ! "

" There's a crazy creature indeed ! "

Later, the enigma was explained. No sooner had the Russian crossed the threshold than she was filled with astonishment at the sight of the display of

luxury which surpassed the opulence of the most magnificent of Crœsuses. Not thus had she pictured an apostle's refuge. This simple soul, this candid child of Scythia, could not admit that a passion for the beautiful is compatible with tenderness of heart. A sort of anguish had seized her. And, suddenly turning round, she had slipped out of the house, quietly closing the door and fleeing much quicker than she had come. Never again was she seen there.

We took good care not to imitate the Russian student. As soon as Joséphine had called to us, we hastened to ascend to the philosopher's study.

Anatole France was about to entrust his head to a barber and, with a good grace which was much appreciated, he made apology for proceeding with his toilette in our presence.

Figaro, who advanced with open razor and soap bowl, let a little lather fall on the table and disturbed a few sheets of manuscript.

France stared at him with a look of comic irritation.

" You always come into my room like a chariot armed with scythes. You are indeed a terrible man."

Doubtless accustomed to these lyrical objurgations, the " terrible man " uttered not a word and

set to work to operate. It was no easy task, for, whilst M. Bergeret was being shaved, he moved and talked incessantly.

Grimm, in one of his tales, tells of a barber who was so skilful that he could shave a running hare. This was child's play compared to the miracle we witnessed.

The bedroom was charming.

Above the Renaissance bed, brown twisted columns supported an Italian tester the green silk of which was made joyful by branches and flowers in tender shades.

Among the objects which pleased him most, France drew our attention to a piece of ancient sculpture on the mantelpiece. It was a female head a little thrown back, the half-closed eyes of which were full of amorous languor.

" I discovered it," he said, " near Naples, on the seashore, in a fisherman's hut, built almost entirely with fragments of masterpieces.

" I had a fairly long way to get back to the hotel. So I added a lire to the price agreed upon, to have this very heavy marble bust carried for me. At first I did not pay heed to the person who undertook to do the work. But, suddenly, I noticed it was a poor woman far gone with child.

" Hastening to relieve her of the burden, I entrusted it to a young fellow, to whom I gave,

there and then, another small piece of silver. Now, observe how kind feelings are unappreciated. That honest fisherwoman was so vexed at having been paid for a service of which I relieved her that she interpreted my compassion as an insult. She did not return me the lire, which I should certainly not have taken back, but she followed me the whole length of the route, heaping coarse abuse upon me.

"Thus I learnt that honesty is deeply rooted in the heart of man—and even in that of woman.

"This is not the only recollection which this voluptuous head awakens in me.

"I left Naples by sea.

"The Italians, you know, take precautions against travellers carrying away works of art in their luggage. A very wise regulation—the Pacca decree—forbids the removal of the artistic marvels on which the peninsula prides itself.

"I was anxious to have this head and resolved on not declaring it. I had carefully packed it in a white wooden box. And to the inspector who asked me what the package contained, I replied with an innocent air: 'Niente! Niente!'

"He accepted this evasive reply and sought to place the box among the objects already examined. But, alas! the bottom gave way, and when the box was raised this head, suddenly appearing with its eyes full of love, seemed to deride the world.

" I was covered with shame.

" The inspector examined the piece of sculpture with the air of a connoisseur, placed himself sideways to be able to see it better, and, with an ineffable smile in my direction, said jeeringly : ' Niente ! Niente ! '

" The wretch put me to torture. But with superior condescension he exclaimed : ' Take it away ! We have too many fine things in Italy.'

" You would have said that this Customs officer had sculptured with his own hands all the antique Venuses in Italy and that he was capable of fashioning them by the dozen."

When shaved, France rose and put on his crimson skull-cap, exactly similar to those of the Florentines of the Quattrocento in the frescoes with which Ghirlandajo has adorned the church of Santa-Maria Novella.

We passed into his study.

On the table an adorable winged Tanagra Cupid raised itself on tiptoe ready to take flight.

" I believe it is authentic," said our host. " And, what is still better, it is delightful."

With reverent hand he took up the little Cupid and, bringing it to his eyes, almost to his lips, caressed it tenderly.

A dialogue without words between a very modern thinker and the naive sculptor who, in the distant

ages, had, without knowing it, perfumed that clay with all the melancholy grace of his day.

M. Bergeret is most eclectic and the purchases he has made prove the diversity of his choice.

Truth to tell, his preferences have changed from year to year and his interior has been modified according to the books he has been writing. Each period of his life brought rich alluvia to his house. To *Thaïs* corresponds the Hellenic mementoes : the heads, torsos, statuettes and amber-coloured marble stelæ ; to *Le Lys Rouge*, the Italian faiences ; to *Jeanne d'Arc*, the fifteenth-century tapestries ; to the novel *Les Dieux ont soif*, the furniture and prints which date from Louis XVI and the Revolution. The style of the end of the eighteenth century has ended by dominating, because it harmonizes with the last avatar of an infinitely capricious sensibility.

The decoration of this abode seems to be the reflection of his soul. It sets that soul in a bezel as a graceful casket enshrines a marvellous jewel.

" I am not wealthy," said France to us, " and yet my collection is pretty creditable. With collectors as with lovers, passion makes up for riches.

" Beautiful women are sometimes more impressed by the fervent and earnest entreaties of poor suitors than by the splendid liberalities of financiers with pockets full of money.

"In the boxes of second-hand booksellers, in half-open portfolios at the back of dark shops, unique documents, which sometimes escape the notice of millionaires, sometimes cast engaging glances at searchers whose purses are ill-garnished but who covet them, pursue them, track them down, implore them with frenzied cupidity.

"However, to gain the victory over woman and masterpieces, it is better to be both rich and passionate."

M. Bergeret showed us his old books.

"I love them tenderly," he said, "because they procure to those who consult them forgetfulness of the present and a little inoffensive madness. This particle of folly affects even those who handle without reading them. Listen. I know no more cheerful person than the excellent Sims, the book-seller of the Rue de Seine, who sold me most of my folios. He has two equally laudable passions: good old authors and the generous wines of France. When he tells me, in confidence, that he has just made an extraordinary discovery, I never know whether he is speaking of dusty old bottles or an exceedingly rare incunabulum.

"Often he goes about garbed in strange fashion; but that is due to a principle deliberately applied. He professes that the order in which we put on our clothes is purely conventional.

VESTIBULE AND STAIRCASE, VILLA SAÏD

"On rising in the morning he takes his clothes from a stool haphazard. And thus it happens that he first puts on his coat, then his shirt, then his waistcoat, and finally, on the top of everything, his flannel garment. 'What matter,' says he, 'provided they are all there? Am I not just as warm?'

"Although this is a specious theory, I do not seek to combat it, for I should have too great a difficulty in setting him right.

"The other day I found him with a terrible cold in his head. He was sneezing, coughing, blowing his nose, sniffing, snorting, and his nose and eyes were converted into fountains. 'Hallo! my good Sims, where did you catch that dreadful pituite?' 'I don't know. For I've not been guilty of the slightest imprudence.'

"Whereupon he informed me that the day before he had bought a host of old books.

"But his shop was chock-full, so he had had to carry them up to his room, which was already very encumbered. He had even been obliged to pile many of them on the end of his bed. The inconvenience of this proceeding was apparent to him when he retired to rest. Fortunately the head of the bed was near the window and the window looked on to the roof. So he could contrive nothing better than to open the casement and drag the mattress just a little towards the spout. And having

done this, good old Sims, with his body in the room and his head outside, slept like a child.

"Alas, in the middle of the night a furious storm broke and all the cataracts of heaven descended on his head! 'Ah! so that is how you caught a cold?' I said. 'Do you think so?' he exclaimed.

"I love Sims because he accepts the most convincing reasons only with extreme circumspection."

With reverent hand, France took from a shelf a very fine book bound in parchment the colour of old ivory and embossed with a whole mythology of fabulous beasts.

"This Vasari," he said, "is as precious to me as the apple of my eye."

He turned the pages and came across the portrait of Paolo Uccello.

"This was the painter," he said, "whose wife gently reproached him with working too slowly. 'I must have time,' replied the painter, 'to establish the perspective of my pictures.' 'Yes, Paolo,' protested the poor woman, 'but the perspective you are tracing for us is that of poverty and the tomb.' She was right, but he also was not in the wrong.

"The eternal conflict between artistic care and hard reality!"

Thus did M. Bergeret, far from contemporary cares, daily vexations and threats on the horizon,

busy himself in the soothing enchantment of past centuries.

Through sculpture, pictures and books he held communion with the dead. By means of written signs, painted or fashioned forms he strove to penetrate the souls of former days. Eager for knowledge, he annexed from his living hours innumerable completed days. In slippers and dressing-gown, in accordance with his habit, he accomplished an immense periplus through Time, bringing back for us from that voyage substantial instruction.

Joséphine came to announce two delegates of a socialist committee.

One was a fat, ruddy man, plainly dressed, but without a tie and in a soft shirt, for his powerful neck would tolerate no other. He was a blacksmith. He apologized for not giving his right hand, which, having been injured during some workshop manœuvre, was bound up. His companion, a puny, sickly man with eager eyes and ruffled hair, was a teacher. One by his stout shoulders, the other by his feverish debility, incarnated the people, given up to the arduous drudgery of the body and the mind.

They congratulated France on his intervention at a recent meeting.

His speech had called forth storms of applause. But it had been continually interspersed with cries

of " Long live Anarchy ! " These compromising words had been uttered in chorus by a group of police spies, easily recognizable by their big moustaches, mean-looking faces and hob-nailed boots.

The two delegates condemned the methods of hirelings.

They asked France to preside over another meeting.

He glanced at his slippers, stroked his Vasari, cast a furtive glance at the little Tanagra Eros.

Then his black eyes lingered for a moment on the blacksmith's bandaged wrist and on the schoolmaster's sunken cheeks.

" I will go," he said.

ACADEMIC VISITS

N the approach of each academic election, candidates pay M. Bergeret their customary visit. They are quite aware that for a long time past he has not been to the Quai des Malaquais and has not taken part in any ballot at the French Academy. Nevertheless, out of deference for his renown, they solicit his vote. It is a touching custom which no one shirks—not even members of the Clergy.

Yet these ecclesiastics would have valid reasons for not compromising themselves with this pope of unbelievers.

But perhaps his conversation has the attraction of forbidden fruit? Perhaps they hope, by means of a few eloquent words, to sow in his soul the seeds of a signal conversion?

Thus did the severe Paphnuce undertake, in days of yore, to win the frolicsome Thaïs to God.

When Cardinal de Cabrières, who was then only Monsignor, but who soon afterwards attained the

title of Eminence, aspired to a seat under the Dome, he came like the others to the hermitage of the Villa Saïd.

Ancient Joséphine with the golden teeth introduced him with great respect.

"Monsieur," said the Bishop, in a supercilious tone, "I must admit quite plainly that I have not read your novels."

"Monsignor," replied France, with sacerdotal unction, "I must confess to you quite frankly that I have not read your charges."

Thus begun, the conversation was cordial. Paternally, the prelate observed to France that a number of great writers had sung the praise of the Most High. He cited Chateaubriand.

France replied that the harmonious Viscount had indeed splendidly celebrated the decorative side of Catholicism, but that he had above all dusted the furniture and polished up the gold and silver articles used in the ceremonies, like a charwoman or a beadle, and that, on the other hand, he had somewhat neglected dogma.

"He loved the majesty of cathedrals and the splendour of ritualistic pomp. But I also love them, Monsignor."

And with a sanctimonious gesture he pointed out the shining stoles, the coruscating chasubles, the bright silver vessels which glittered in his cabinets.

"Chateaubriand venerated sacred authors. But I also, Monsignor, delight in them."

And on his library shelves, in the place of honour, he pointed out the Eagle of Meaux and the Swan of Cambrai reconciled.

Most demure did he look.

Mgr. de Cabrières withdrew, persuaded that, in certain respects, the most sincere believers would lose nothing in receiving lessons from Anatole France.

On the following Wednesday—for it was on that day of the week that M. Bergeret received his intimate friends—the conversation turned on Mgr. Duchesne, who was putting up for election to the Academy against Mgr. de Cabrières. The rivalry of the two prelates amused the gallery. Bets were made. Two to one were laid on Mgr. Duchesne. The sympathies of the Academic Left for the one and those of the Right for the other were placed in the balance.

The abominable trick played by the author of the *Origines de la France Chrétienne* on Mgr. de Cabrières, who is a splendid orator but who has written hardly anything, was related.

Mgr. Duchesne had entered various bookshops in the neighbourhood of the Palais Mazarin and, in his sincerest manner, had said :

"Give me the complete works of Mgr. de Cabrières."

Astonishment on the part of the employés.

" The complete works of Mgr. de Cabrières ? We don't keep them."

" Why yes ! See if you can't find them."

They searched awhile and then announced :

" Monsignor, we cannot find anything."

" But Mgr. de Cabrières is a candidate for the Academy. He has certainly then written something. And I am most anxious to read his works. Will you kindly look again ? "

A great commotion ensued. Employers and employés searched on all sides, removed piles of volumes and climbed ladders to reach topmost bookshelves. But still nothing could be found.

" We are most sorry, Monsignor."

" I also ! I also ! "

And leaving the shop he raised his arms and called the heavens to witness :

" But where, oh, where shall I find the complete works of Mgr. de Cabrières ? "

The story of this practical joke, retailed by the booksellers, filled Academicians with delight.

M. Bergeret, to whom some one had related it piping hot that very morning, licked his lips over it.

" Mgr. Duchesne," he said, " has always displayed infinite wit.

" Before he had received the amethyst ring he lived on the third floor on the Quai Voltaire.

One of his archæological confrères called upon him and, in transports of joy, announced that, whilst deciphering some old cartularies, he had discovered a new saint.

"'Pooh-pooh!' exclaimed the Abbé frankly. 'Your saint is legendary, like many another. He has never existed, my dear sir.'

"And with great learning he set forth the proofs of his opinion.

"But these only exasperated his guest.

"'Monsieur l'Abbé,' he exclaimed in a fury, 'your discourtesy reveals your Breton origin. You remind me of your ancestors, those fierce Armorican pirates who infested the sea-shores. Let us leave off there! I will only beg of you to indicate to me the nearest landing-stage for the steam-boats.'

"'Monsieur,' replied the Abbé proudly, 'it would be an insult to the dignity of my ancestors to occupy myself over inland navigation.'

"Admit there was keenness in this repartee of an offended archæologist."

One of us recalled certain jokes attributed to Mgr. Duchesne. This, for instance, on the naive policy of Pope Pius X:

"He is a Venetian gondolier in St. Peter's boat. He directs it with a boat-hook." [1]

[1] "Il la conduit à la gaffe." A play upon the word *gaffe*, which means both "boat-hook" and "mistake." One may therefore also

And again this other one :

" Have you read the last bull : *Digitus in oculo ?* "

" It is not altogether certain," continued Anatole France, " that these witticisms are his. But one lends only to the rich.

" Mgr. Duchesne has certainly an excess of wit for a priest, and such sallies, perhaps, do him harm. But that is the least of his cares.

" One day, when walking in Rome with the famous archæologist Rossi, they came to a halt before a fine marble plaque, newly affixed, and on which was engraved in Latin : ' Here the apostles Peter and Paul met.'

" The historical improbability of the event made them shake their heads.

" Above the inscription was to be read, in Italian : ' No rubbish to be shot here.'

" ' A very wise regulation,' remarked Rossi.

" ' But very ill observed,' added the Abbé, pointing to the hagiographic inscription with his stick.

" And our two cronies passed on."

Anatole France continued :

" The physical resemblance between Mgr. Duchesne and Voltaire is striking. I conclude—that Voltaire was a holy man."

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interpret the words as meaning : " He directs it towards disaster."—*Translator's note.*

" But how," asked some one, " can Mgr. Duchesne conciliate faith and erudition ? "

France. " He does not conciliate them. He is at one and the same time very learned and a firm believer. His archæology and his catholicism are side by side in his mind without knowing each other. A water-tight bulkhead separates them. And do not think his case is a rare one. In the cranium of every one of us dwell a host of contradictory ideas to which we are equally attached and which agree together quite well because we never confront them."

∴

At this moment M. Edmond Haraucourt, the truculent poet of the *Légende des Sexes* and curator of the Cluny Museum, entered the room.

He began with compliments.

" Mon cher Maître," he said, " I am delighted to find you looking so youthful."

France. " Alas, I'm getting old all the same ! "

" O Master," gracefully exclaimed a very young man who had not yet opened his mouth, " if you are growing old, one can hardly perceive it from your last books."

France (roguishly). " Egad ! from my books ! . . . The only things still not lacking ! . . . It is by other signs, alas ! that I feel the approach of that enemy, old age. You will recognize them

later, much later, young man whose mornings are triumphant."

(Addressing M. Haraucourt.)

"Well, my dear curator, what about your Museum?"

HARAUCOURT. "I am sifting it, clearing it of caterpillars . . ."

FRANCE. "How so?"

HARAUCOURT. "It is swarming with forgeries."

FRANCE. "Indeed! I suspected so."

HARAUCOURT. "Thanks to a severe control, I am separating the tares from the wheat. Everything which appears to be doubtful I am withdrawing from the collections to put it in my curatorial apartment."

FRANCE. "An excellent idea!"

HARAUCOURT. "Thus, the furniture I am getting together for my own use is numerous and hideous. My apartment has become the sanctuary of spurious antiques, the Pantheon of all that is false. But I shall have to moderate the rigour of my criticism, for my drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom and even the *buen retiro* are now crammed with Boulle cupboards, Louis XIII clocks, and Henri II sideboards which are all most authentic nineteenth-century work." [1]

[1] This anomalous furniture has since been re-distributed in the Museum, for M. Haraucourt no longer lives there.

GREEK TORSO AND VIEW OF THE MUSEUM

We held our sides.

"Recently I experienced the greatest and most tiresome surprise. You know well our celebrated fourteenth-century coffer, so much praised in all the art manuals?"

FRANCE. "Certainly."

HARAUCOURT. "It's a forgery."

FRANCE. "Really!"

HARAUCOURT. "This is how I discovered it. I had an idea of extolling this coffer in a poem, for it had inspired me. On the wood panels are sculptured subjects which seemed to me to represent the JOYS OF MARRIAGE. Married couples are squabbling and abusing each other. Dames are adorning the heads of their husbands with luxuriant antlers. I had tuned my lute and was about to begin when I noticed, on two of the sides, heroic scenes which have nothing in common with the others. They represent knights, lance in hand, setting out for the wars. I am well aware that soldiers may gallantly intervene in civilian households. But really these knight-errants were too numerous.

"They set me thinking. I discovered that my coffer was a cunning combination of various pieces. Only a third of the lid dates from the fourteenth century.

"You may imagine how quickly I put down my lute. But, for Heaven's sake, Messieurs, be discreet.

For this coffer is the glory of our museum. It is so celebrated that I could not make up my mind to deprive the public of it."

France laughed heartily.

"One would hardly surmise," continued Haraucourt, "that I am visiting you as a candidate for the Academy."

France. "Are you not aware that I never set foot in the Palais Mazarin?" [1]

Haraucourt. "Come now, mon cher Maître, cannot you . . ."

France. "Listen, mon cher ami, the ushers would not even recognize me. Indeed, here is an ingenious plan. . . . My Russian friend Semenoff, to whom I introduce you . . ."

Semenoff (a giant with a big black beard, bows to M. Haraucourt). "Monsieur . . ."

Haraucourt (likewise bowing). "Monsieur."

France. "My friend Semenoff will go in my stead to the Academy and say he is Anatole France. . . . No, seriously, it would be bad grace on my part to go there merely to vote."

Haraucourt. "Well, I thank you for your platonic suffrage."

France. "Pauvre ami! . . . You certainly have more efficacious ones. Let us see, on whom can

[1] During the War, in order to do homage to the "sacred union," M. Anatole France appeared at the Academy. But he soon again forgot his way there.

you count? Let us go through the names of Academicians. The misfortune is that one hardly knows them."

HARAUCOURT. "I know them all."

FRANCE. "Impossible!"

HARAUCOURT. "On my word! On the occasion of every vacancy there are half a dozen poor devils in Paris who learn the complete list of the Immortals and go from house to house pulling the bell."

FRANCE. "In order to console you, shall I remind you of the adorable pages on which Vigny, in the *Journal d'un Poète*, has recorded his visit to Royer-Collard?"

HARAUCOURT. "I know them by heart. What a delightful piece of drollery! Old Royer-Collard, enveloped in Géronte's dressing-gown and with a black wig on his head, half-opens the door to Vigny and says: 'I'm not visible, Monsieur; I've just taken a black draught.' And he adds: 'Between ourselves, you've not a ghost of a chance. . . . Moreover, I'm not acquainted with your works, for I've read nothing for the past thirty years. . . . At my age, Monsieur, one reads no more, one reads over again.'"

FRANCE. "Well, mon cher ami, you see to what mortification the noble Vigny's candidature exposed his pride. May his example assist you in patiently supporting your own tribulations."

ACADEMIC VISITS

(*continued*)

T is certain," continued Haraucourt, "that nothing has changed since Vigny's day. He complains that Royer-Collard had not read his works, and I perceive, in the course of my visits, that very few Immortals are acquainted with *my* literary baggage. It is distressing!"

France. "What are you thinking of? Never, never have Academicians opened the books of candidates.

"Listen. Leconte de Lisle, the blasphemer who wrote *Poèmes Barbares*, was elected as a Christian poet. I assure you. I tell you this with complete knowledge of the fact. I assisted at his election, minute by minute. I was secretary of the Senate library, of which he was curator.

"It was thanks to the Duc de Broglie that he was elected.

"The Duc de Broglie knew that Leconte de Lisle was a poet. How did he learn that? I'm still trying to discover.

"'A poet has been mentioned to me,' he confided to his colleagues."

Here France spoke in a low, harsh, tremulous voice, in imitation of the Duc de Broglie.

"'This poet is certainly a spiritualist; for all poets are. Spiritualism and Christianity are one and the same thing. My Leconte de Lisle is, therefore, a Christian, a good Christian, an excellent Christian. I am voting for him. Follow my example.'

"I must explain to you that the Duc de Broglie was a Christian even to the point of crime. He had been of a fiery disposition. One day his doctor advised him to find a mistress in order to spare his wife, who was in a very precarious state of health.

"The Duke reflected and suddenly replied:

"'Ma foi, doctor, I would much rather lose my wife than my soul.'

"Leconte de Lisle's election was, moreover, facilitated by a happy confusion. Most of the Immortals who voted in his favour attributed to him, so I am told, Sully-Prudhomme's *Le Vase brisé*."

M. Haraucourt's face expressed stupefaction.

France. "But, mon cher ami, you know as well as I do that, in the majority of cases, the elections are purely political."

Haraucourt. "However, mon cher Maître, yours was not!"

France. "On the contrary, more than any other. But that is worthy of being related in detail.

"Ludovic Halévy, who had a brotherly friendship for me, repeated to me incessantly: 'Why shrink from the Academy? You must belong to it. It looks well on the cover of books. Offer yourself. Do it for my sake. I am ashamed to be an Immortal when you are not.'

"So much so that I drew up my candidature. I went to read it to him.

"'Fie!' he exclaimed. 'Your letter is not according to the usual form. Hand it to me, so that I can make it all right.'

"And of set purpose he stuck in two or three big mistakes in French which shone like poppies in a wheat-field.

"'There,' he said, 'that's the right style. But this is not all. The question is, who will you have in your favour?'

"He drew up a list and proceeded to make innumerable calculations.

"'Hum! hum!' he exclaimed. 'It will be hard. These confounded dukes will not swallow you without a grimace.'

"I began my visits. Halévy directed the operations. Every morning I received a letter telling me to go to this person's, or return to that person's house.

"Nevertheless, he was devoured by anxiety.

"At last, one day, I beheld him radiant.

"'All goes well!' he said, rubbing his hands. 'We've got them!'

"'Whom do you mean?'

"'The dukes. Listen! There are two chairs vacant. You are the candidate of the Extreme Left of the Academy for one of them. In the case of the other, the dukes are supporting a worthy nobleman who is of the old stock but quite illiterate. They will not impose him without difficulty.

"'What we said to them was this:

"'"Would you like the Extreme Left to vote for your nobleman? Well then, vote for the anarchist Anatole France. Hand us the cassia and we will pass you the senna."

"'Done! They have agreed. I am jubilant. Pay your visits to the dukes: they are apprised. But above all talk neither politics nor religion. The devil! Remark: "The sun is shining"; or else "It is blowing! It is raining! It drizzles!" Ask the mistress of the house for news of her dog and her brats. The same recommendations have been given to the nobleman.'

"Everything proceeded as he had foreseen. The anarchist and the noble were elected on the same day and by the same vote. It was quite shameless."

HARAUCOURT. "No matter! The Academy did itself great honour in electing you."

FRANCE (taking his hand). "Thank you, cher ami. I continue, for there is a sequel.

"Among the votes which had been promised me one was missing—that of Henri de Bornier. As this little act of treason had been divulged, he wished to apologize to me.

"'Cher Monsieur France,' he began, 'I did not vote for you.'

"'I beg your pardon, Monsieur de Bornier, you did vote for me.'

"'No, no,' he exclaimed, nonplussed.

"'Yes, yes; are you not a nobleman, Monsieur de Bornier?'

"'Certainly, but . . .'

"'Are you not the poet of honour?'

"'Undoubtedly, but . . .'

"'It is therefore impossible that you have broken your engagement. You did vote for me, Monsieur de Bornier; you did vote for me.'

"He left me with an air of dejection. But I had not been sufficiently revenged and only waited for an opportunity of satisfying my rancour.

"It came at a meeting devoted to work on the dictionary.

"My dear Haraucourt, you will certainly take part in the meetings given up to the dictionary. For

you will be elected to the Academy. One always obtains what one greatly desires."

HARAUCOURT. "Verily!"

FRANCE. "Doubt me not. And I wish you a right merry time at those famous meetings.

"We were still at the letter A; for they work short hours under the Dome. They were defining the word *anneau*—ring.

"It was the Duc de Broglie who presided.

"By a majority of votes the following definition was adopted:

"'Ring, a piece of metal circular in form.'

"'Smoke ring,' I whispered insidiously.

"These words caused some confusion. But a grammarian broke in with assurance:

"'Well, we will put: "by catachresis: smoke ring."'

"'Catachresis' appeared sublime.

"As an example some one cited 'Saturn's ring.'

"'Astronomers have discovered several,' I pointed out. 'One ought, therefore, to write: Saturn's rings.'

"'No,' was the reply, "it is customary to say: Saturn's ring; and our part is but to ratify usage. So much the worse for your astronomers.'

"I was vexed.

"Then an infernal idea came to me.

"My neighbour happened to be good little Père

Bornier, snoring in his academic chair like an organ pipe. Nudging him with my elbow, I said :

" ' They are forgetting Hans Carvel's ring.'

" ' What's that ! ' he exclaimed, rubbing his eyes."

Here France made a parenthesis.

" All of you, my dear friends, know that most immodest story. You have read it in the third book of *Pantagruel*. The worthy Hans Carvel, having, late in life, married a brisk lass, was tortured by jealousy. One night, when sleeping at his wife's side, the devil, in a dream, offered him a fine ring, saying : ' Put this ring on your finger. As long as it is there your companion will be faithful to you.'

" In his joy, the worthy man woke up, whereupon he heard his wife say : ' Enough ! Enough ! I entreat you ! '

" Henri de Bornier, accustomed to unsheath Durandal, to blow the Olifant, to bestride Pegasus and caracole on the clouds, had never read Rabelais.

" I repeated to him :

" ' They are forgetting Hans Carvel's ring. They must be told.'

" And immediately the worthy little old man innocently cried out :

" ' Messieurs, you are forgetting Hans Carvel's ring.'

" Laughter arose here and there.

" The Duc de Broglie, who knew his Rabelais very

well indeed but who possessed soberness of character, immediately repressed this ill-placed hilarity :

" ' Let us continue, Messieurs,' he said peevishly.

" A moment afterwards I leant towards Bornier and said to him :

" ' They didn't hear you.'

" ' Messieurs, Messieurs,' he repeated, bestirring himself, ' you are forgetting Hans Carvel's ring.'

" This time there was a veritable storm of gaiety.

" ' What's the matter with them ? ' Bornier asked me.

" ' Don't know,' replied I hypocritically.

" Furious, the Duc de Broglie broke up the sitting.

" As he went out he passed near me and remarked :

" ' A queer fellow that Bornier. Fine name, good lineage, ancient Périgord family ; but he drinks like a fish. And, forsooth, when he's had a drop too much he relates obscenities such as would make an ape-baboon blush.'

" That, my dear Haraucourt, is the very veracious narrative of my election to the French Academy and of the curious episode connected with it."

France continued :

" The Immortals read nothing. They consecrate their new confrères without having ever opened their books. They bestow prizes for literature

according to the same method, for it appears to them to be a good one. Sometimes, however, it lays them open to strange blunders.

"Do you know, my dear Haraucourt, the story of the poetry prize awarded to Louise Collet?"

"No," he replied.

Had he known it he would have said "No" all the same, for he is courteous.

France. "Louise Collet was, under the Second Empire, a very beautiful and majestic woman, somewhat of a virago, with the voice of a major-domo and eyes which she took no pains to hide.

"She was married to a very wretched little shrimp, a violinist at the Conservatoire.

"The great philosopher Victor Cousin, who saw her, discovered in her the True, the Beautiful and the Good. So he put the little violinist's nose out of joint. That was quite in the natural order of things.

"Louise Collet wrote verse. So she asked her metaphysician to obtain for her prizes, awarded by the French Academy for poetry.

"How could Cousin have refused so modest a recompense for divine hours?

"So every year Louise Collet received her crown. It was as regular as clockwork.

"Once, however, the good lady started on her competition poem somewhat late. Indeed, on the

very eve of the last day for sending in she had not yet written a single line.

"She was greatly embarrassed. That evening a number of writers and artists were at her table, and by chance Flaubert and Bouilhet were among them. They were friendly with her because she was a good sort and placed every one at his ease.

"After dinner she got them in a corner of her drawing-room.

"'Darlings,' she said, 'you must save my life.'

"And revealing her anxiety:

"'You are going to be very nice. Follow me into my study. . . . This way. . . . Make yourselves comfortable in these two good armchairs, and before midnight dash me off two hundred lines on Immortality. That's the subject of the competition. Here's paper and ink. . . . Ah! I was forgetting. You'll find my tobacco and Schnapps in this cupboard.'

"She was, indeed, in the habit of smoking and drinking like a trooper.

"She then returned to her other guests.

"The two friends smoked, drank and chatted. About eleven o'clock Bouilhet exclaimed:

"'I say! What about Immortality?'

"'Zut!' replied Flaubert.

"And they settled themselves down again to drink Schnapps.

" At a quarter to twelve Bouilhet begged Flaubert to think at last of the poem on IMMORTALITY.

" Flaubert was still reluctant to make a start, until suddenly he seized a volume of poems by Lamartine from a shelf and opened it haphazard.

" ' Now write ! ' he ordered tyrannically.

" And with well-oiled tongue he dictated two hundred lines from *Les Harmonies*.

" When this was done he said :

" ' Now add the title : IMMORTALITY ! . . . Perfect ! '

" He was putting *Les Harmonies* back in its place when Louise Collet reappeared.

" ' Is it finished, my treasures ? '

" ' Yes, yes,' they replied, bubbling over with joy.

" She glanced over the sheets without recognizing Lamartine's verses.

" ' You've not killed yourselves,' she said. ' However, it will pass all the same. You are angels.'

" And she kissed them.

" She presented the poem and gained her usual prize amidst many congratulations.

" Lamartine's verses were printed under the name of Louise Collet. Nobody was dazzled thereby, for nobody read them.

" Flaubert did not reveal his hoax until very much later."

ACADEMIC VISITS

(*concluded*)

"  E it so as regards academic prizes," said M. Haraucourt. "It is a matter of no consequence. And I quite agree with the Immortals in not reading the elucubrations of competitors. But as regards the choice of Academicians, that is quite another matter."

The intervention of politics especially ruffled him.

He returned to the subject to deplore it.

France. "Your regrets surprise me. For, after all, what happens under the Dome is by no means new. And the success of writers was almost always political."

Haraucourt. "Yet you will agree with me that the grace or force of their style counts for something in their reputation?"

France. "It may be, my dear friend, that, on that point, we have retained academic ideas.

"When our good old spectacled schoolmasters made us, at college, translate some Greek tragedy

or other, such as *Œdipus at Colone*, they said to us :

" ' Note, Messieurs, the elegance of that second aorist. Observe the conciseness of that absolute genitive. Admire the majesty of that optative.'

" They repeated over and over again a hundred similar remarks. And we ended by believing that Sophocles had delighted his contemporaries by his grammatical perfection.

" But our pedagogues forgot one thing. That is, that in celebrating Œdipus, the Theban hero who had been mobbed by his compatriots and generously welcomed by the Athenians, Sophocles wished to glorify his city at the expense of Thebes, which, during the Peloponnesian War, had been the implacable enemy of Athens.

" Thanks to this information, we can immediately imagine what the first performance of *Œdipus at Colone*, shortly after the old poet's death, must have been : all the spectators on their feet, interrupting every verse with acclamations, heaping scorn on the Thebans, punctuating the praise of their city with wild transports of joy. And we then discover the deep reasons, the political reasons for that frenzy.

" When our venerable pedagogues commented on the *Knights of Aristophanes* they curiously analysed the parabasis, distinguished the comation and the anapests. And they informed us that this play

was a finished model of the class called 'Old Comedy.'

"But you may well imagine that it offered other attractions to the sailors of the Piræus. What delighted them was to see Aristophanes catch comrade Cleon by the seat of his breeches. The performance was interspersed with laughter, shouts and thumps, for I suspect there was some hard hitting there. In short, it was politics.

"You must make up your mind, my dear Haraucourt. More often than not, politics and literature are mingled.

"Did not gentle Virgil, at Rome, undertake propaganda for Augustus?

"And with us did not the author of the *Cid* become, in spite of himself, Richelieu's adversary? Is not his censorious Emilie a flattering likeness of the Duchesse de Chevreuse? Was not Molière the champion of the young king and the laborious middle-classes against the restless and discontented marquesses?

"People praise Voltaire's irony, Diderot's sensibility, Montesquieu's penetration and Rousseau's harshness. Their style is excellent. But would they have received so much praise if their works had not been inexhaustible arsenals of political argument?

"And has Victor Hugo's amazing juggling, his

tintinnabulous jewellery of rhymes, his bold opposition of black and white done as much for his glory as his invectives against Napoleon the little? Come now, mon cher ami, confess that, in literary reputations, literature hardly counts."

HARAUCOURT. "Well, but is it not absurd?"

FRANCE. "Why, no; it is not so absurd after all. "Do you believe, then, that it is an act of superiority on the part of those who sling ink to isolate themselves in a little corner to scratch syllables, patch up epithets and polish periods, without ever concerning themselves with humanity surrounding them?

"That is rather, I think, an infirmity."

Whilst he was speaking we were thinking of the part he had taken in the then recent famous Dreyfus Affair, of his *Études d'Histoire Contemporaine*, and of the vehement speeches which he was incessantly delivering at democratic meetings.

"It is good," he continued, "that a writer should feel a thrill of common anguish and should sometimes take part in the strife of the public square.

"Not that I advise him to palaver with a party and lose his way amid electioneering.

"I demand that he retain the independence of his soul, that he always dares to speak the truth, and that he denounce even injustices committed by his friends of yesterday. I wish him to soar. I

hope that his opinions, severe towards egoistic interests, may usually be called chimerical and have no chance of being adopted before several lustrums.

"Courage, far from injuring his style, will make it more virile and nobler.

"That is why, my dear Haraucourt, I do not regard the French Academy as so guilty for taking part in politics."

"Pardon me, Master," said one of us, "it does wrong to connect itself with bad politics."

France pushed his crimson skull-cap on to the corner of one ear.

"Will you tell me," he asked, "the exact distinction between good and bad politics? As a matter of fact, I know . . . good politics is that of our friends, bad, that of the others."

THE CREED OF AN UNBELIEVER

NATOLE FRANCE was about to publish his *Jeanne d'Arc*.

It had cost him twenty years' work . . . Every page had been corrected, remodelled, cut up with scissors.

Such is the Master's method.

On looking at his manuscripts, one is amazed to see what labour has been expended on that apparent ease and unconstrained grace. It is a fine lesson for literary apprentices.

He multiplied the corrections, interpolated phrases, arranged fresh transitions, cut up his sheets until they resembled a puzzle, put at the beginning what was at the end, at the top what was at the bottom, and fixed the whole together with the gum-brush.

Certain parts, already set up by the printer, had been rewritten, then recomposed eight to ten times in proof.

France suppressed a number of pretty passages. He aspired to and attained the most ample simplicity.

On reading his first text his friends had said to him :

" But this is charming ! This is exquisite. Don't touch it any more, or you will spoil everything."

However, proof after proof, they had been obliged to recognize that there was continual progress towards perfection.

Yet France could not make up his mind to let this *Jeanne d'Arc* take flight.

He suspected that the work, written without leaning towards one point of view or another, with sole respect for the truth, would satisfy but few readers.

It was on that day we found him in a melancholy mood.

He was conversing with Pierre Champion, the learned biographer of Charles of Orleans and François Villon.

He has transferred to this young scholar the deep friendship he showed his recently deceased father.

The worthy publisher Honoré Champion, established on the Quai Malaquais, had, indeed, known Anatole France's father, the bookseller Thibault, who, quite near, on the Quai Voltaire, had also kept a book-shop, with the sign " Aux armes de France."

Pierre Champion is at one and the same time

smiling and disillusioned. He has a caressing and distant voice. A ceaseless dreamer, he lives not with his contemporaries, but with the shades of former times. Almost invariably he is enveloped in a big muffler, doubtless through fear of catching cold amidst the damp shadows of History.

As the fifteenth century is his canton, all the roads, paths and lanes of which he has explored, he assisted Anatole France to reread the proofs of *Jeanne d'Arc*.

" Well," he asked, " when is it going to appear ? "

France. " I should like it to be soon. But, as you know, my dear friend, hepatic attacks have greatly retarded me lately and I fear being stopped anew."

Whereupon Jean Jacques Brousson, the Master's secretary, enquired in a filial tone :

" Do you still suffer ? "

France. " Suffer, no ; but I am anxious. You are aware how much this evil impedes work ; for you yourself have experienced it. That is the reason, moreover, why you pity me : for we commiserate ourselves through others."

Brousson. " Why, no, mon cher Maître, I do not pity you. If Dame Nature, who has lavished the treasures of the mind on you, martyrizes your body just a little, that is only justice."

France. " Really ? "

BROUSSON. "Had I your genius I would joyfully support the most cruel infirmities."

FRANCE. "This child knows not what he says."

CHAMPION. "There is something in his remarks. But to return to the question of your *Jeanne d'Arc*, I long to applaud its triumph."

FRANCE. "Your friendship leads you into error. They will not like my book . . . No, I assure you, they will not like my book. They will not find in it what they are looking for. Oh! I know quite well what they expect of me: a narration chock-full of sanctimonious blackguardisms. They will be disappointed.

"I might, for instance, have insisted on my heroine's virginity, on the tests to which they submitted her, on the examination by the matrons whom her judges entrusted with that duty.

"But I did not wish to do so.

"And yet the temptation was a strong one.

"Among the documents of the rehabilitation suit there are some savoury depositions regarding the chastity of the Maid.

"The captains who were her comrades in arms and who slept side by side with her on the straw in the camps call Heaven to witness that no evil desire stirred them. They candidly express astonishment at this. These men, who made it a point of honour to be always gallant towards the opposite sex,

were amazed at their reserve towards the holy girl. In her presence, as they say, 'leur aiguillette était nouée.' To them, that was the most astonishing of miracles and a manifest sign of divine intervention."

HYACINTHE LOYSON.[1] "So, Master, it appears to you to be certain that she retained her purity?"

FRANCE. "Really, there is not the shadow of a doubt.

"The dames of Poitiers make peremptory affirmation in her favour, although on that score Solomon, in his prudence, advises the wise never to pronounce judgment.

"Remember, moreover, that to her contemporaries virtue preserved in the midst of the most worthless vagabonds was a great subject for astonishment. The least lapse would have been talked about immediately.

"Finally, when Joan was in the hands of the English she fell ill. And the doctors who attended her certainly did not omit to verify that which so much interested the judges.

"Had this control turned to her confusion her accusers could legitimately, according to the ideas of the period, have declared her to be a sorceress and possessed by Satan. Beelzebub's strategy was, indeed, simple and infallible. When he wanted to

[1] Hyacinthe Loyson, who has just died, was the son of the celebrated dissenting priest.

dominate a woman, he began by depriving her of her most essential thing. It appears that after this first sacrifice she could not refuse him anything. She became his most devoted slave.

"And in this superstition there was indeed a grain of truth. For women blindly obey those who circumvent their senses."

LOYSON. "But, in brief, mon cher Maître, what is your opinion of Joan?"

FRANCE. "That she was a valiant girl, most devoted to her king. I am full of enthusiasm for her bravery, of horror for the abominable barbarity of the theologians who sent her to the stake."

DREYFOUS.[1] "Do you, then, entirely share Michelet's opinion?"

FRANCE. "Why not?"

DREYFOUS. "At any rate you are not in love with Joan? Michelet dreamt of her. He saw and heard her. He was not surprised at her visions. She appeared to himself.

"Listen. Here is a fact of which I was a witness.

"One day, when passing through Rouen, I saw the aged Michelet sitting on a post at the base of the big tower in which Joan had been a captive.

"On drawing near to greet him, I saw that his eyes were filled with tears.

"'What is the matter?' I asked him, much moved.

[1] Dreyfous, since dead, was an authority on ancient documents.

"'She is in there,' he replied, pointing to the tower.

"Then, suddenly, as though awakening, he exclaimed: 'Oh, pardon me, mon ami, my head was wandering.'"

FRANCE. "I like that anecdote, for it depicts our good Michelet completely. When writing history he deliberately guided himself by hallucinations."

CHAMPION. "An excellent description!"

Loyson once more began to cross-question our host.

"Frankly," he asked, "is not your admiration for Joan diminished by her Voices?"

FRANCE. "Not at all."

LOYSON. "What! her visions do not seem to you to be unreasonable?"

FRANCE. "But, my friend, we all have them."

LOYSON (nonplussed). "How do you make that out?"

FRANCE. "Would you like contemporary instances? Remember the Dreyfus Affair. Our friend Francis de Pressensé was then continually invoking Justice and Truth. He spoke of them as of living creatures. I am sure that he saw them.

"And did not Zola proclaim that Truth was on the move? He also regarded it as a living person.

"I believe that she appeared to him with the

lineaments of a beautiful dark woman with serious face. Perhaps she resembled Madame Segond-Weber. She was dressed in a white peplum, like the actresses of the Théâtre-Français when they represent ancient goddesses, and she raised a shining mirror on high.

"No, I am mistaken. Zola's Truth must have been more naturalistic. Perhaps she recalled Mouquette showing . . . you know what!

"In any case, he saw her as I see you.

"Well, now, mon ami, let me ask you if Justice and Truth exist?"

LOYSON. "Evidently not in flesh and blood, but they do exist."

FRANCE. "Listen! you also are becoming a visionary.

"Justice and Truth, my dear Loyson, exist only inasmuch as men desire them. And they are but lukewarm in their desire.

"But if Pressensé and Zola allowed themselves to be guided by imaginary divinities, ought we to laugh at Joan of Arc on account of her Saints and the whole of her celestial host?"

Loyson was about to make another objection when France immediately added:

"You will tell me that she beheld ten million angels around her and that that is a great many. Certainly that is more than either Pressensé or

Zola ever saw. But, after all, why quibble about the number ? "

We all began to laugh.

France resumed :

" In the fifteenth century all minds were haunted by chimeras. If little Joan ' saw her voices,' as she naively said, her judges, who wanted to convict her of sorcery, had a most firm belief in demons.

" But whereas little Joan's reveries were radiant and impelled her towards the noblest undertakings, those of her tormentors were obscene, infamous and monstrous.

" But rest assured, my dear Loyson. If I make apology for, if I admire the visions of the poor little shepherdess, it does not follow that, when writing her history, I myself placed faith in miracles.

" On the contrary, I have incessantly borne in mind that the duty of a savant is to explain all facts by natural causes.

" And I have striven to make perfectly clear that which made Joan's mission logically possible.

" First and above all, there was the general credulity of the epoch. It was strengthened among the Armagnacs by the prophecies of Merlin and the Venerable Bede concerning a Maid who was to deliver the kingdom.

" Joan, to the troops of the Dauphin and the armies, was a mascot whose very presence aroused

their fanaticism, made them forget danger and gave them victory.

"On the other hand, her reputation for being an enchantress inspired terrible fear in the English, who until then had been so much feared by the people of France, and who were commonly called 'les Coués,' that is to say, devils with tails. They believed, indeed, that they had little tails at their behinds.

"Joan's whole power, which doubtless was very great, arose from the ascendancy she assumed, without realizing it, over the mental weakness of her contemporaries. Add to this the example of heroism which the very brave girl showed on every occasion.

"When we minutely analyse her marvellous adventure, it provokes the same surprise as a very brilliant star seen through astronomical telescopes of increasing power: whatever the magnification may be, the star is never anything more than a point without diameter.

"Joan, in herself, was only a little thing, but the legend which was immediately created around her was splendid and has not ceased to shine with brilliant lustre.

"One must also say that her mission was perhaps easier than we think; for the English were fatigued and not very numerous.

"Do not let us forget, also, the great ability of Charles VII and his advisers. For everything leads one to think that Charles VII, if he was in no respect a warrior, was at least a very cautious negotiator, gaining more with the burgesses of the towns by gentleness than by compulsion, counting more on diplomacy than on arms—in short, one of those good sovereigns who, by their prudence, their acuteness and their tenacity in council, made the grandeur of ancient France."

CHAMPION (in a very soft voice). "Do not doubt, mon cher Maître, that you will be blamed for having explained this pious story humanly, and for having rid it of charisms—to use a theological term.

"I can hear your usual adversaries at this very moment. They will say that the hands of such a sceptic as yourself had no right to touch this sacred image."

FRANCE (with sudden vivacity). "Sceptic! Sceptic! Yes, indeed, they will again call me a sceptic. And in their opinion that is the worst of insults.

"But to me it is the highest praise.

"Sceptic! Why, all the masters of French thought have been sceptics. Rabelais, Montaigne, Molière, Voltaire, Renan . . . All the finest intellects of our race have been sceptics, all those

whom I venerate, tremblingly, and whose most humble scholar I am."

At this moment France's voice lost its customary indolence; it suddenly became vibrant, and his features, ordinarily so roguish, were now tense and quivering.

He continued:

"Scepticism! They make this word a synonym of negation and impotence.

"But our great sceptics were sometimes the most affirmative and often the most courageous of men.

"It was only negations they denied. They attacked everything which put the intelligence and the will in bondage. They struggled against ignorance which stupefies, against error which oppresses, against intolerance which tyrannizes, against cruelty which tortures, against hatred which kills.

"They are accused of having been unbelievers. It is necessary to know, first of all, whether credulity is a virtue and whether true firmness does not consist in doubting what we have no reason whatever to believe.

"But it would not be difficult to prove that the Frenchmen of genius called sceptics professed the most magnificent Credo.

"Each of them expressed some clause or other of it.

"Rabelais, a merry-andrew full of gravity, proclaimed the majesty of tolerance.

"Like him, the Pyrrhonic Montaigne devoutly bowed down before ancient wisdom. Forgetting the wavering of his 'What do I know?' he appealed to pity against the ferocity of the wars of religion and against the barbarity of judicial tortures. Above all, he rendered homage to the holiness of friendship.

"Molière was ablaze against those passions and eccentricities which make human beings odious, and he preached the gospel of sociability.

"Amidst his wildest pirouettes, the unbeliever Voltaire never lost sight of his ideal of reason, science, goodness . . . yes, goodness. For this great satirist was unkind only towards the malicious and foolish.

"Finally, Renan always remained a priest and merely purified religion. He believed in the divine, in knowledge; he believed in the future of man.

"Thus, all our sceptics were full of fervour, all strove to deliver their fellow-creatures from the chains which bound them. In their way, they were saints."

Some one said:

"St. Renan: that is the title of one of the chapters of *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*. But

nobody has yet spoken either of St. Voltaire or of St. Rabelais."

Without replying to this quibble, France continued :

"These giants are blamed for having presumed too much on human reason.

"For my part, I do not place excessive confidence in reason. I know how weak and unsteady it is.

"But I remember Diderot's witty defence: 'All I have,' he said, 'to guide me at night in a dense forest is a flickering little light. A theologian comes and blows it out for me ! '

"Let us first of all follow reason, the surest guide. Itself, it warns us of its weakness and tells us its limitations.

"Moreover, far from being incompatible with feeling, it guides us, on the contrary, to it.

"When the most sceptical of thinkers have long meditated face to face with the uselessness of the eternal flux of the Universe, face to face with the little thing sad humanity is, face to face with the absurd sufferings men inflict on each other during the brief dream of their existence, they are filled with deep commiseration for their fellow-creatures.

"From this compassion to brotherly love, it is but a step—quickly taken. Pity becomes active, and he who thought he was for ever detached from

everything, passionately throws himself into the fight to aid his unfortunate brothers.

"Yes, my friends, these are the feelings of the sceptics."

We listened in silence to this fervent profession of faith.

Almost excusing himself, France continued:

"I allow myself to be carried away, eh? . . . But the poor sceptics are really too unappreciated.

"In brief, they are the most idealistic of mortals. Only they are disappointed idealists.

"As they dream of a very beautiful humanity, they grieve to see men so different from what they ought to be. And their habitual irony is but the expression of their discouragement. They laugh, but their gaiety always masks terrible bitterness. They laugh so as not to weep."

Whereupon Pierre Champion said somewhat banteringly:

"If Joan of Arc had been a sceptic of the good school, who knows?—perhaps she would have accomplished, through love of humanity, the magnanimous actions which faith inspired in her."

"No, without a doubt," replied France, smiling, "for visionaries alone accomplish very great things.

"But, O roguish Pierre Champion, note that the most irreligious of men, Voltaire, could also be very brave by prosecuting, against the whole of the

ecclesiastical and judicial powers, the rehabilitation of Calas, Sirven, the Chevalier de la Barre and Lally-Tollendal.

"Note that if he committed the sin of writing *La Pucelle*, this miscreant was the first to demand altars for Joan of Arc.[1]

"Also note that if Joan of Arc's judges, instead of being fanatical devotees, had been sceptical philosophers, they would certainly not have burnt her.

"Draw the conclusion, my dear friend, that scepticism suggests the most humane feelings and that in any case it forbids crimes.

"I have said my Credo. Amen!"

[1] Anatole France alludes to the following passage in the *Histoire Universelle:*

"Finally, accused of having on one occasion resumed male attire, which had been left with the express intention of tempting her, these judges, who had certainly no right to judge her, since she was a prisoner of war, declared her to be a heretic, a back-slider, and did to death by slow fire the one who, having saved her king, would have had altars dedicated to her had she lived in those heroic days when men raised them to their liberators."

PROFESSOR BROWN IN SEARCH OF THE SECRET OF GENIUS

RAPPED in his beige dressing-gown with brown stripes, and with his eternal little flaming skull-cap on his head, France was seated at his work-table.

He was turning the pages of a very old book, bound in pigskin.

Through the window, ornamented with those bottoms of bottles which—enframed by strips of lead—are called by French gentlemen glass-makers *sives*, there streamed on to the writer a soft and variegated light.

It was like a scene by Rembrandt : a philosopher meditating in a garret, or, better still, a Doctor Faust consulting a tome of occult lore.

Our host rose to welcome us.

" You ask," he said, " for the name of this venerable book ? It is the *Chronologie collé.* I am looking for a portrait of Rabelais."

He turned over a few pages.

" Ah ! here it is. It was engraved by Léonard Gaultier, some fifty years after the death of the

great satirist. We do not possess a portrait drawn in his lifetime, and this little picture is the oldest which represents his features.

"In all probability, moreover, it resembles him.[1]

"What do you think?"

Rémy de Gourmont,[2] who was with us, looked at the vignette and replied :

[1] As a matter of fact, L'Estoile, who bought the *Chronologie collé* at the time it appeared in 1601, wrote above Rabelais' head the criticism : "Which depicts him in no wise." He thus testifies against the resemblance of this engraving.—Cf. H. Clouzot, *Les Portraits de Rabelais*, "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," 1911.

But perhaps the legend which had already formed around Maître Alcofribas had substituted in L'Estoile's mind the conventional type of a genial jester for the recollection of the grave personage he had known long before.

[2] Rémy de Gourmont was fond of visiting Anatole France.

These two rare and charming minds, on coming into contact, emitted sparks like flint and steel, and it was a divine pleasure to hear them.

Rémy de Gourmont was paradox in human form, but his paradoxes were often more judicious than vulgar common sense.

He was sensibility itself, but a hideous leprosy eating away his face isolated him, amidst the torture of unexpressed tenderness.

Out of spite, he often indulged in irony, and sometimes even against love.

On this particular morning, we had met him in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, before his arrival at Anatole France's.

With us, he had gazed for a few moments on some iridescent doves billing each other on a lawn. And suddenly he spoke :

"The ancients made presents of doves to Venus, because they are very voluptuous. They were wrong, however, for there are creatures still more gallant."

"Which?" we asked, all attention.

"What a surly-looking face! A veritable Père Fouettard! His forehead is lined with deep wrinkles and rolls as thick as cables. A melancholy ardour shines in those sunken eyes.

"Certainly one imagined more joviality in the Curé of Meudon, for Ronsard says:

> "'Jamais. . . .
> . . . le soleil ne l'a veu,
> Tant fust-il matin, qu'il n'eust beu.
> Et jamais, au soir, la nuit noire,
> Tant fust tard, ne l'a veu sans boire.
> . . . . . .
> Il se couchait tout plat â bas
> Sur la jonchée, entre les taces;
> Et parmi les escuelles grasses,
> Sans nulle honte se souillant,
> Allait dans le vin barbouillant
> Comme une grenouille en la fange. . . .'

"But this Bacchic epitaph must be mendacious. For *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* are not comic. And Léonard Gaultier is right."

"Snails."

We gave a start of disgust and incredulity.

"Yes, snails," he continued. "Zoologists tell us, indeed, that Dame Nature, full of generosity for these small animals, has loaded them with happiness. To each she has given, at one and the same time, the attributes of male and female. And thus, in a couple of slugs, each little creature experiences a double pleasure: it is both a lover and a sweetheart.

"It is a pity these animals walk so slowly, for they are more worthy of drawing the chariot of Cypris than doves."

With such droll remarks as this did he entertain us until we reached M. Bergeret's door.

FRANCE. "I think as you do. Rabelais is not the joyous companion he has been represented to be. His expressions and phrases are sharp and sprightly, but his inventions are thoughtful. He preaches austere sermons.

"In brief, his gaiety is only apparent. His laughter is but a poor mask for profound gravity."

"His surly air cannot surprise us," said some one, "since he was a savant."

FRANCE. "I beg your pardon. Rabelais was not what we call a savant, for he never wearies us.

"He is not cheerful, but he does not fatigue.

"It happened that he produced an edition of the *Aphorisms of Hippocrates*. Well, he neglected to preserve the commentaries of the manuscript. Why? Doubtless because he did not find them interesting.

"Now, what is a savant? A tiresome being who studies and publishes out of principle everything which is radically lacking in interest.

"Rabelais is not therefore a savant.

"One must admit, however, that he had a fairly solid erudition.

"And in the case of a man whose science was his least merit, his was already respectable.

"Do not some of his fanatical admirers attribute universal competence to him?

"For instance, apropos of the military operations

of Gargantua against Pichrochole, they affirm that Rabelais was a great strategist.

"But that is absurd.

"At that rate any writer could be shown to be a consummate tactician.

"Thus, I'll wager that I'll write, when you like, a pamphlet of a hundred and fifty pages on *Paul de Kock: Tactician.*

"I should find my text in *Le Cocu.* In this novel there is an old soldier who trains a cockatoo to shout through its nose: 'Carry arms! . . . Present arms! . . . Shoulder arms! . . .' etc.

"My comments would be based thereon:

"'Behold! what a marvellous warrior this Paul de Kock was. He was thoroughly acquainted with the military art. "Carry arms!" is, in fact, the order given to a soldier when he must raise his rifle.'

"I should continue as follows:

"'On this matter we have collated a military manual of 1830; and on page 25, paragraph 3, we find the command: "Carry arms!" This movement consists in raising the weapon with the right hand to the height of the shoulder, seizing it with the left hand, etc. . . .'

"Thus I should exploit the whole psittacism of the learned bird.

"Conclusion: in tactics, Paul de Kock could trace his origin to Napoleon I.

ANATOLE FRANCE'S DESK AND STUDY

"And there you are, the trick would be played.

"Truth to tell, Maître Alcofribas was no more versed in the military art than Paul de Kock.

"Have not allusions to the wars of Francis I and Charles V also been discovered in *Gargantua?*

"Pure imagination!

"The processes of Rabelais' imagination have been reconstituted. It was not at all great contemporary events which inspired him but, on the contrary, very minor ones he had remembered from his youth.

"Certain proper names he uses are those of persons he knew.

"I won't guarantee, however, that reality furnished him with those of Humevesne and Baisecul. But the episode of these two litigants was suggested by a lawsuit in which he was involved.

"The disagreements between Grandgousier and Pichrochole likewise reproduce quarrels which brought the peasants of Touraine into conflict, and the burlesque echoes of which had amused him.

"Doubtless he wished to make it clear to us that, at bottom, the wars of the proudest sovereigns recall, in an astonishing degree, the affrays of rustics. A truth exquisite in its irony!

"No, friends, Rabelais was not a great strategist. He contented himself with being a great writer."

. . .

Joséphine announced Mr. Brown, Professor of Philology at the University of Sydney.

He was a stout robust man of florid complexion with close-shaven lips and chin. The vigour of his muscles proved that he had assiduously cultivated golf and polo. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles. His red hair, brushed to the front, was as stiff as the bristles of a wild boar.

We were struck by his Anglo-Saxon elegance.

Near to, his suit was a mass of thick threads with all the colours of the rainbow; but at a certain distance he assumed the greenish and indefinite colour of pea-soup.

Around his soft collar, cut low on a bull-like neck, was a narrow red tie which somewhat paraded a conquering disposition.

Yellow shoes, as long and as broad as steamboats, completed the get-up of this learned and solid Australian.

FRANCE. "What do you desire of me, Monsieur le Professeur?"

As Mr. Brown expressed himself in French with great difficulty and was, moreover, embarrassed in the presence of an illustrious man, he could only stammer:

"Je . . . vô . . . Je voulais voir vô."

FRANCE. "You do me too great an honour, Monsieur le Professeur, and the pleasure is mutual. Pray be seated and satisfy your desire."

When Mr. Brown had sat down, he continued, uttering his words piecemeal:

"I am searching . . . I want to know the mystery . . . the secret of literary genius . . ."

FRANCE. "If I understand you correctly, you are preparing a thesis on the subject of genius in literature."

"Yes," shouted Professor Brown, beaming with delight at being understood. "Yes, yes."

FRANCE. "Well, when you entered, our conversation, by a happy chance, turned on one of the greatest geniuses of France and of the world—on Rabelais."

"Yes, Rabelais! Yes!"

Mr. Brown's eyes sparkled with joy.

FRANCE. "What is the secret of his genius? That is a thorny question you are asking me.

"By what qualities does he surpass other writers?"

"Has it not been said that he wrote badly?" some one objected.

FRANCE. "All great writers write badly. That is well known.

"At least pedants say so.

"Great writers are impetuous. The vigour of their vocabulary, the intensity of their colouring, the boldness of their expressions disconcert the pedantic lot.

"In the opinion of purists, to write well is

apparently to write according to rule. But born writers make their own rules, or rather they have none. They are constantly changing their manner, under the dictation of inspiration—now harmonious, now abrupt, now indolent, now impetuous.

"They are unable, then, according to common opinion, to write well.

"And why not admit it? Rabelais is not free from faults. His strings of substantives, his series of epithets, his lists of verbs assuredly bear witness to inexhaustible animation, but his style is made heavy thereby. His phrases often lack suppleness, rhythm and balance.

"It would not be difficult to find among ancient authors more regularity, limpidity and harmony.

"*Le Ménagier*, for instance, which was composed long before *Gargantua*, contains adorable passages on the subject of bread, wine and bees. No doubt the old language deceives one; for remoteness lends an exquisite variety of colour to things of the past, and we discover charm in that which hardly offered any to the men of former times.

"However, I do not believe I am mistaken, *Le Ménagier* is delightfully written. It would be good Rabelais, if it was Rabelais . . . that is to say, if it was not lacking in genius.

"And in the same way, the *Contes* of Seigneur des Accords are full of charm. His style is flowing and

rings well. It is better than Rabelais'. Nevertheless, Rabelais is the great writer and not Seigneur des Accords."

One of us suggested :

"Molière also wrote badly."

FRANCE. "Well, yes, Molière also wrote badly. And Saint-Simon and Balzac, and all of them, I tell you.

"In Molière's day, certain writers far less illustrious, such as Saint-Evremond and Furetière, used a more chastened syntax. They were purer. Only Molière is Molière—that is to say, not a good but a great writer."

PROFESSOR BROWN IN SEARCH OF THE SECRET OF GENIUS

(*continued*)

ROFESSOR BROWN lost not a word of the conversation.

He listened, to be sure, with both ears, but also with eyes very wide open and especially with gaping mouth.

Suddenly, he courageously plunged into the conversation :

" I thought that great writers were always those who worked the most."

We followed his halting and incorrectly pronounced French—" Je . . . avais . . . cru . . . toujours que les grands écrivains étaient celles . . . ceux qui travaillaient le plous "—with anxious courtesy.

In the politest manner in the world, France asked him :

" You are perhaps thinking, Monsieur le Professeur, of Buffon's famous adage : ' Genius is infinite patience ' ? "

"Oh!" eagerly exclaimed the Australian, with a look of boundless gratitude.

France. "Well, I have a strong suspicion that that sentence is untrue."

An expression of sadness spread over Mr. Brown's features; but he stretched forth his mouth still more eagerly.

France. "Yes, that is a false maxim. Geniuses are not the most scrupulous of mortals. Or rather there is no rigorous law.

"Some men of genius are, I admit, very sedulous.

"Our Flaubert was one of them.[1] He experimented with a hundred sentences in order to write one of them. Dumas *fils* said of him with justice: 'He was a cabinet-maker who cut down an entire forest in order to make a cupboard.'

"But other geniuses are neglectful beyond measure. And this category is perhaps the least rare.

"To return to Rabelais, in his case we discover many inadvertencies.

"He himself has told us that he devoted to his work 'no other time than that fixed for attending to his bodily needs: knowledge is drinking and eating.'

"He didn't write. He dictated. His imagination rode with a loose rein.

[1] Anatole France also belongs to this category of writers, and he has all the more merit for recognizing in others the beauties of improvisation.

"Consequently, the proportions of his giants vary incessantly. Sometimes they are bigger than the towers of Notre Dame; sometimes they barely exceed the height of man.

"At the end of his second book he announces that Panurge will marry and be made a cuckold within a month, that Pantagruel will discover the Philosopher's Stone and will marry the daughter of Priest John, King of India. But nothing of all this happens in the following books. Rabelais had completely forgotten his fine programme.

"In short, he was the most careless of men of genius."

Rémy de Gourmont. "Oh, but the finest Spanish writer was perhaps still less careful. He displays his thoughtlessness everywhere.

"The day after Don Quixote left home, his housekeeper tells the Curé that he has been gone six days.

"Sancho weeps over the loss of his ass, stolen by the thief Gines del Passamont, and a few pages further on he is again astride his beast, which has returned one knows neither whence nor how.

"Sancho's wife is called first Joan and then Teresa.

"But, stranger still, the Knight of La Mancha's stout squire does not appear immediately as he is depicted in the course of the novel; it is only after several chapters that the author attributes to him,

for instance, the very amusing mania of discharging torrents of proverbs.

"These are, then, signs of hasty work in many parts of Saavedra's masterpiece."

France. "What was I telling you, Monsieur le Professeur?

"And to take a genius of your own country, cannot even your own Shakspeare be caught in the act of inattention?

"Listen. He says and repeats that the witches made three prophecies to Macbeth.

"It is true they hail him under three titles: Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor and King.

"But as Macbeth was already Thane of Glamis when they appeared before him, there are but two predictions and not three, with all respect to the great Will.

"I will pass over the port in Bohemia, the striking of the hour by a clock in ancient Rome, and many other pretty little things you will remember.

"Ignorance or inattention?

"In any case, you see with what ease men of genius botch their sublime works.

"Whatever may be said, patience is the least of their virtues. They don't take trouble. They are great in the same way as beautiful women are beautiful: without effort.

"This thought, I admit, somewhat clashes with

current moral philosophy. People want glory to be attained at the cost of a certain amount of labour. On holding up to young people the lives of men of genius as models, it is customary to say to them : ' Work hard ! Hammer away ! You will become like them.'

" And, indeed, it would be more just.

" But nature laughs at justice. Men of mediocre talent labour hard to produce trifles. Men of genius scatter marvels whilst they are playing.

" In brief, it is much easier to produce a masterpiece than a rhapsody.

" For everything is easy . . . to the predestined mortal."

. . .

Mr. Brown looked thunderstruck.

Nevertheless he persisted in his inquiry.

" Don't you think, then, Mr. France, that the principal quality of great writers is the beauty of their imagination ? "

France. " The wealth of their imagination ? "

Mr. Brown. " Oh ! "

France. " Perhaps."

Rémy de Gourmont. " Upon my word ! Nothing is less certain. On the contrary, almost all celebrated writers have cut their finest coats out of cloth which others have woven. As Molière puts it, they have taken their treasure wherever they could

find it. The more one rereads Rabelais, Molière and La Fontaine—to mention only those—the smaller one sees their share of invention."

France. "Quite true, mon cher ami. Rarely does the raw material belong to them. They borrow it and merely throw it into a new form.

"Moreover, nowadays it is the rage to pick men of genius to pieces. The fashionable game!

"Search is made for the sources of their works. Detractors denounce their plagiarisms. Enthusiastic admirers do the same; but they are at great pains to say that, when the peacock steals from the jay a few blue feathers to mingle them with the eyes in his tail, the jay has no reason to complain, because the peacock does him great honour.

"And when the enemies and the devotees of a cult have quarrelled for some twenty years over an idol, only dust remains, it appears.

"What remains of Rabelais after the researches of the Rabelaisians? and of Cervantes after those of his admirers? and of Molière after those of the Molièrists?

"In truth, I believe they remain what they always were—namely, very great men.

"But modern criticism, by pointing out to us where they picked up every little stone of their mosaic, may end in persuading us that their reputation is usurped.

"In the case of Rabelais, for instance, there is nothing left of him. We are told: 'This page belongs to Tory, this one to Lucian, this to Thomas More, this to Colonna.'

"And that is correct.

"In addition to this, Rabelais seems to be even less intelligent than the authors who inspired him—yes, less intelligent.

"Compare the episode of the *Limousin Scholar* in Tory's writings with that in *Pantagruel*.

"I will briefly recall it.

"Pantagruel, the good giant, meets a young rascal who boasts of having studied in Paris and whose French is strangely sprinkled with Latin.

"To express that he is in the habit of crossing the Seine morning and evening, he says: 'Nous transfrétons la Séquane au dilucule et au crépuscule.'

"And being in a mood to make lively disclosures he relates that the Parisian students delighted to 'inculquer leurs vérètres ès pudendes de mérétricules amicabilissimes, etc., etc.'

"Pantagruel listens to him for some time in astonishment. Then, suddenly losing patience, he seizes him by the throat and shakes him like a plum-tree. Then the student, in his fright, dirties himself and begins to beg for pardon in the Limousin dialect.

"That is the story.

"Well, Tory begins by explaining why his character first of all spoke Latin. The reason was that this provincial youth did not know French. The only living language he knew was his native dialect. And if he had recourse to Latin, it was by no means through affectation, but because Latin was the universal idiom—the Esperanto of the period.

"Then, suddenly, when in the giant's grasp, he returns to his natural tongue, which was that of Limousin.

"Rabelais, on the contrary, gives us no explanation, and consequently in his case the adventure is less intelligible.

"But, as he does not limit our conjectures, we suppose that if the scholar spoke a pedantic jargon into which far less French than Latin entered, it was because he was conceited and wanted to flabbergast Pantagruel.

"And we laugh with all our heart when, under the influence of fear, this pedant by his provincial gibberish suddenly reveals the commonness of his origin.

"Thus he marvellously symbolizes the pretentious incapacity of spurious scholars with the gift of the gab.

"The story whose motive is least explained acquires thereby much greater strength.

"Similarly, compare Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and

the episode of the woodman in the Prologue to the Fifth Book of *Pantagruel*.

"You will see that Rabelais appears to be less intelligent than Lucian.

"In *Icaromenippus*, Jupiter, having contrived a little trap-door at the foot of his throne, leans forward to listen attentively to the wishes of mortals.

"Full of equity, the father of the gods and of men carefully places the reasonable demands in reserve, in order to grant them, and blows furiously on the swarm of unjust prayers to divert them from him.

"Rabelais' Jupiter, on the contrary, follows no method. As the terrible hubbub of supplications, rising from the entire universe, puts his brain in a whirl, he entirely loses his head and mixes everything up. And it is quite by chance whether he heaps blessings on humans or overwhelms them with disgrace.

"Now, note that, in this extravagant form, drollery reaches the sublime.

"With Lucian it was an amplification of rhetoric. But in the case of our Rabelais it is a profound satire on blind Destiny.

"That is how great men cannot go wrong. Whatever they do they are always right, because their invention, instead of being coldly calculated, is a powerful natural instinct.

"They create just as mothers give birth to

children. All the statues they form breathe without them knowing why. Even distorted and bandy-legged, they palpitate with life. They are born viable, whilst images more regularly modelled by other sculptors remain dead."

. . .

Mr. Brown was more and more discouraged because he could not succeed in grasping why men of genius surpassed ordinary mortals.

Every time he thought he had discovered a superiority in them, it vanished on examination.

With the energy of despair he declared :

" If great writers . . . do not themselves imagine things . . . they compose better, perhaps . . ."

France. " They possess, you say, the merit of good composition.

" Frankly, Monsieur le Professeur, I believe that here again you are mistaken.

" I am well aware that composition is usually considered to be a prime necessity of the art of writing.

" It is one of the fundamental truths our wise University teaches its nurslings as intangible dogmas.

" Without a plan, no salvation !—such is the doctrine.

" They consider a literary work as a sort of big theorem, the propositions of which are at command, are linked together and hasten towards the Q.E.D.

"But with many men of genius we see nothing like that.

"Rabelais, Cervantes and Swift took very little care to 'compose' their novels.

"It is too evident that Maître Alcofribas was in absolute ignorance whither he was going.

"When he began *Pantagruel*, he probably did not know exactly what he was going to cram into it. The episodes follow each other without any order, and all are exquisite. What more do you require? It is a capricious and divine excursion.

"Panurge desires a wife, but is very much afraid of being a cuckold.

"On that subject he questions the wise and the foolish. Then he embarks to consult the oracle of the *Divine Bottle*. And off we go with him on the cerulean waves. We zigzag from shore to shore. Fresh adventures which have not the slightest connection with Panurge's poignant ambition are unceasingly related to us.

"Where can plan be found in all that?

"The finest masterpieces consist of a number of drawers into which anything you like has been slipped. They enlarge, swell out, distend in proportion as they are written.

"Encouraged by the success of a first book, the author continues . . .

"Thus it happened with *Pantagruel* and also with

A CORNER OF A LITTLE SALON CROWDED WITH WORKS OF ANCIENT ART

Don Quixote, of which Gourmont was just now speaking.

"Like Rabelais, Cervantes follows but his fancy. He walks, returns on his footsteps, runs, stops, rests in a meadow, plunges into the woods. He frequents the society now of shepherds, now of noblemen, now of robbers. He is without a goal.

"He showed so much indifference in his *Don Quixote* that any other writer assuredly would have lost the game. But he won it. Such natural gifts there are.

"Theoretically, the interest in his narrative ought to have decreased.

"The first order of the comic spirit exploited by Cervantes is indeed much more lively, at any rate in principle.

"At the beginning of the book, it is the mere folly of the hero which provokes laughter. He is his own victim. He is the dupe of his own insane imagination, which leads him to mistake windmills for giants and sheep for an army.

"In what follows, on the contrary, he has almost recovered his common sense. It is no longer his own fault that misfortunes are heaped upon him. Idle lords play him a thousand abominable tricks. They frighten him out of his wits by all sorts of fireworks. They perch him, blindfold, on a wooden horse, which they then shake about, persuading him

that he is travelling through the air. Into his room they hurl furious tom-cats, which scratch his face. In short, there is not a mischievous prank they do not contrive against him.

"One might fear that the drollery of these jokes would be compromised by the reprobation they provoke.

"Not at all. This fine novel captivates more and more until the very last page. It is akin to the miraculous."

RÉMY DE GOURMONT. "But do not good authors show supreme skill in indolently following their caprice, which guides them so well?"

FRANCE. "Mon cher ami, everything is charming in the case of writers we love. Our complaisance towards them is unbounded. We praise them for what we blame in others.

"Since we foresee they are excellent, they appear to us to be always so.

"Listen. One day a rather amusing adventure happened to myself.

"I had handed the manuscript of a novel to a newspaper.

"As I was going on a journey, I had divided it up into sections, each of which represented a feuilleton.

"These sections had been distributed in a set of pigeon-holes, consisting of several rows.

Unfortunately the printer made a mistake. He

took the instalments from the pigeon-holes from top to bottom instead of from left to right, as he ought to have done.

"My novel had neither head nor tail. But nobody noticed it. And even a few clever folk complimented me on the delightful meandering of my imagination.

"Their warmth of devotion pleased me immensely.

"Assuredly, my dear Gourmont, your reasons for admiring the disorder of Rabelais and Cervantes are infinitely more legitimate.

"What does it matter to us, indeed, to know whither they lead us? Are we not only too glad to tarry with them in the thousand flowery halting-places scattered along their path?

"Moreover, as we must admit, one recognizes in their work a unity otherwise robust than that of an adroitly combined plot.

"That is the cohesion of their mind.

"The episodes are scattered; but the thought playing around them is ever honest and strong.

"It is a splendid interior refulgence which illumines, vivifies and harmonizes the most diversified adventures.

"Thus, what nobility there is in *Don Quixote!* What generous elation of heart! What smiling bitterness! What lofty poesy! And what goodness!

"In order to appreciate these rare merits still better, one has only to read Avellaneda's insipid imitation.

"This Spanish contemporary of Cervantes, you know, had the effrontery to write a continuation of *Don Quixote*, to rob the author of part of his glory and profit.

"Cervantes flew into a passion. And he was in the right. For this plagiarism, published during his lifetime, must have been prejudicial to him.

"But I should greatly desire to see, to-day, the lifeless elucubration of the imitator published in the same edition as the masterpiece : the caricature would serve as a set-off to the radiant model.

"And precisely, whilst Cervantes displays his genius by giving rein to his wholly spontaneous fancy, the other adopts a plan, proposes to attain a goal.

"Avellaneda took pen in hand merely to show the excellence of the faith.

"All his stories tend towards that.

"What stories too ! You shall judge for yourselves.

"Sancho, for instance, meets a beautiful Moresque, and, in his enthusiasm, cries :

"'Heaven grant that all the fleas in my bed were similar to that young Mohammedan !'

"'What's that !' murmured Don Quixote at once. 'Is that you who speaks so lightly, you, the husband

of Teresa? Certainly your wife is terribly ugly. But she is a good Christian, Sancho. And our Holy Mother the Church enjoins you to find her more seductive than the finest-made Musulmans.'

"But what Avellaneda specially recommends is devotion to the rosary.

"He is inexhaustible on the subject of the favours reserved to devotees who assiduously tell their beads. Among the edifying and preposterous homilies with which he embellishes his narrative is one fairly well known, because Nodier has made a story out of it. How this story-teller succeeded in giving any charm whatsoever to so poor an affabulation is a mystery to me.

"The subject is as follows:

"A nun, a young attendant of the turning-box whom an elegant gentleman had noticed when passing the half-open door of a convent, corresponded with the charmer and decided to join him.

"Notwithstanding her guilty passion, she never ceased to give evidence of the most fervent piety towards the Holy Virgin. At the moment of fleeing from the convent, her heart impelled her to bend her steps to Mary's Chapel. And there, on the steps of the altar, she laid her religious clothes, which she had replaced by laical ones.

"At her lover's side, she experienced, as you may

imagine, nothing but disappointment, suffering and torment. That was only to be foreseen.

" After the lapse of several years, full of bitterness and with remorseful soul, she passes before her old convent.

" She enters, and directs her footsteps towards the Chapel of the Virgin.

" What a miracle ! Her dress is on the steps of the altar, at the very spot she had laid it down. She puts it on again.

" A moment later she meets a young Sister who, without being in the least astonished at her return, speaks to the stray sheep as though she had never abandoned the fold :

" ' Ma Sœur, the Mother Superior asks for the bunch of keys she entrusted to you this morning.'

" And the repentant transgressor finds, indeed, the keys asked for, hanging from her girdle.

" Her mind is suddenly flooded with light.

" During the whole of her long and lamentable adventure, the good Virgin, touched by her fervour and full of mercy for her weaknesses, had assumed her resemblance, worn her clothes, and carried out her duties at the convent.

" Oh, great is the virtue of the Rosary ! "

France then addressed Mr. Brown point blank :

" Listen, Monsieur le Professeur. If the Rosary inspired you with devotion—very great devotion—

well, the Virgin, at this very hour, would be delivering your lecture on philology at the University of Sydney."

Mr. Brown began to roll his globular and bewildered eyes behind his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"However, mon cher Maître," objected Jean Jacques Brousson, France's secretary, "the Virgin would undoubtedly have some difficulty in replacing a person of another sex than her own."

France. "You are quite mistaken. Nothing is difficult for her. It suffices that the devotion be great.

"As is proved by this other story by Avellaneda:

"A very brave knight dedicated admirable piety to the Rosary.

"At dawn, on a feast day, he entered a church of the Virgin to take part in the mass.

"He took such pleasure in it that he wished to hear a second, then a third.

"Afterwards, he long remained buried in prayer.

"About mid-day a sense of reality returned to him. Suddenly, he recollected that that very morning he ought to have been at a solemn tournament to measure himself with his peers.

"He had issued many challenges. What had they thought of his absence? Undoubtedly they had concluded he had backed out of it. What would become of him? His honour was lost!

"He walked out of the church.

"Hardly had he stepped outside when frantic cheering greeted him.

"He thought they were jeering at him. He reddened with shame. He struggled against his admirers.

"'Leave me alone! Leave me alone!' he said. 'I do not merit your raillery.'

"'Raillery! But never was ovation more sincere!'

"'Stop! I tell you. Soon I will have my revenge.'

"'What do you mean by speaking of revenge—you, the conqueror of conquerors?'

"At that moment a sturdy fellow with broken armour advances and says to him:

"'Allow me to shake you by the hand. One can bear no ill-will against so courageous a rival!'

"Then the pious knight had no further doubt. A great prodigy had been accomplished in his favour!

"Whilst he had been praying with so much earnestness, it was the Virgin, the Virgin herself, who had taken his appearance, mounted on horseback, broken lances, overthrown half a score of Hectors head-over-heels in the sand of the lists, and gained for her faithful follower a magnificent harvest of laurels."

Whereupon France, turning towards his secretary, exclaimed:

" For shame, little unbeliever ! "

Then, to the Professor of Sydney, he said :

" You see, dear Mr. Brown, it would be child's play for the Holy Virgin to replace you—that is, if we are to believe Avellaneda."

Mr. Brown. " But my religion does not authorize devotion to the Holy Virgin."

France. " Well, Monsieur le Professeur, that is indeed a great pity for you."

PROFESSOR BROWN IN SEARCH OF THE SECRET OF GENIUS

(*concluded*)

ROFESSOR BROWN was not satisfied.

His eyes were directed to the floor with a look of dejection.

"Monsieur le Professeur," said Anatole France, "tell me, I beg of you, wherefore the concern depicted on your face?"

Mr. Brown (in imperfect French). "Oh, Mr. France, I'm less advanced now than when I arrived. For, if I understand you rightly, great writers possess no merit, neither style, nor ability to do good work, nor imagination, nor the faculty of arranging their stories."

France. "Let us clearly understand. Some writers possess these qualities. But many others do not, and yet are men of genius. That proves that these qualities are not indispensable to great writers."

Mr. Brown (emphatically). "Then will you tell me what qualities *are* indispensable?"

His distress was comical. He had the air of a shipwrecked man seeking a life-belt in a stormy sea.

FRANCE. "Dear Mr. Brown, what is a good quality and what is a defect? That is the first thing we have got to discover."

For a moment he remained pensive; then, addressing us all:

"But it is true. These terms are quite relative. What is good in the opinion of one judge is bad in that of another. And, above all, that which is a good quality to one generation of men becomes a defect to the next.

"Listen. Brossette makes a very curious observation. He quotes an opinion of Despréaux on Malherbe.

"'Malherbe,' declared the author of *L'Art Poétique*, 'was not exempt from those defects with which he reproached his predecessors. Thus, we sometimes find him using unexpected rhymes.'

"Such was the theory current in the Great Century. In order to be good, a rhyme had to be foreseen by the reader or listener.

"An example:

> "'Puisque Vénus le veut, de ce sang *déplorable*
> Je péris la dernière et la plus *misérable*.'

"In these two verses by Racine, the rhyme was excellent in the opinion of his contemporaries

because it was foreseen : ' déplorable ' naturally called for ' misérable.'

" Now, this rhyme seems to us to be bad exactly for the same reason.

" Note well that in Racine certain rhymes appear to us to be excellent. This one, for instance :

" ' Ah ! qu'ils s'aiment, Phénix, j'y consens. Qu'elle *parte !*
Que charmés l'un de l'autre, ils retournent à *Sparte !* '

" But it was precisely these rhymes which his contemporaries considered bad, because they were unexpected.

" In the eyes of we Parnassians, on the contrary, a rhyme had to be rare and surprising.

" We were ready to die with joy when the charming Théodore de Banville put such comicalities as this side by side :

'. . . des *escaliers*
Qu'un Titan, de sa main gigant*esque*, *a liés.*'

" I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Professeur. These remarks on French versification are doubtless too subtle to interest you.

" But I am going to choose more striking examples, in order to show you that the qualities of yesterday are often the defects of to-day.

" Let us return to your Shakespeare, if you will be so kind."

" Oh ! " exclaimed Mr. Brown.

FRANCE. "Juliet says to Romeo:

"'If they do see thee, they will murder thee.'

"To which Romeo replies:

"'Alack! there lies more peril in thy eye,
Than twenty of their swords. . . .'

"We call that affectation and to us it is a defect.

"Another example:

"In *Hamlet*, Laertes, weeping for the death of his sister Ophelia, who has just drowned herself, cried out sorrowfully:

"'Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. . . .'

"Now, does not that, instead of moving us, compel laughter?

"These conceits, as you know, abound in the works of the great Will. We criticize them. In our opinion they are errors in taste: blemishes which sadly tarnish Shakespeare's splendour.

"But one must point out that all the authors of the Court of Elizabeth wrote in the same manner. Bombast was rife in poetry. It was the triumph of euphuism. Rhymers expressed themselves only in lively turns of thought. Love, hatred, hope, affliction, all the passions were put into the form of rebuses and charades.

"On the subject of Alexander the Great, who had fallen in love, Lyly, Shakespeare's most celebrated

contemporary, made the following remark, which he thought smart :

"'A mind whose greatness the entire orb of the world cannot contain is now imprisoned in the narrow orbit of a seductive eye.'

"Well, reflect a little.

"If mannerism was then a defect of all writers, it was not one. On the contrary, it was a good quality.

"The more a poet was entangled, confused, over-refined, the more was he applauded.

"Shakespeare's principal merit in the eyes of the English of his day was precisely what we regard as his greatest defect.

"All illustrious writers are in the same predicament.

"That which their contemporaries admired in their writings is exactly what displeases us.

"Dante sometimes fatigues us by a sort of abracadabra, which is very common with him. He attributes virtues to numbers. He explains the mysterious influence of the number 9 and its root 3.

"He develops a whole abstruse symbolism, in which a forest represents passions, a panther lust, a lion pride, a she-wolf avarice, and Beatrice Portinari triumphant theology.

"These affected obscurities disconcert us. They

A QUIET CORNER IN THE ART GALLERY

would spoil Dante for us, if anything could spoil him.

"Why, the scholastic thirteenth century was passionately fond of these enigmas. And it was by the abuse of conundrums that Dante attained almost all his glory.

"Similarly, when Rabelais crams himself with Greek and Latin, when he heaps up references and quotations, he wearies us. Yet in the sixteenth century it was this pedantic equipment which above all delighted the reader. This ancient sauce then seemed to be as necessary in writings as the Roman profiles in the monuments of Philibert de L'Orme, the pagan ruins in the stained-glass windows of Jean Cousin, and the dancing satyrs in the enamels of Pénicaud.

"But I see you are dreaming, mon cher Gourmont."

Rémy de Gourmont. "I am thinking that, if the reasons for appreciating great writers change in this way, the traditional admiration we have for them is, in truth, very mysterious."

France. "Indeed, very mysterious. After all, if we continue to love them, it is perhaps only because we have got into the habit."

This time Mr. Brown was scandalized and, with a start, exclaimed :

"Oh, Mr. France! Don't say that! Don't

say that! I'm sure that good authors possess good qualities which are always good qualities. Yes, always! always!"

. . .

Anatole France stared at his interlocutor ironically and then said slowly, in a tone of concession:

"Well, perhaps you are right, Monsieur le Professeur."

Looking at Rémy de Gourmont he added:

"Oui, sans doute, n'est-ce pas? Tout de même! . . ."

This is a customary string of expressions with Anatole France.

When, in a discussion, he has carefully weighed the pros and cons, when he has long wavered and seems at last to suspend his judgment, then he often grasps at some probability of common sense, some re-comforting likelihood.

"Oui, sans doute, n'est-ce pas? Tout de même! . . ."

That means that the thing is not absolutely certain, but that it may be true, and that in any case it is good to consider it so.

"Yes, doubtless, eh? All the same . . . great writers do possess eternal good qualities."

Here Mr. Brown's curiosity redoubled and he opened his mouth wider than ever.

France. "If the slightest splashes of their pen delight us, it is because a sound head and a sensitive heart always guide their hand.

"It is quite a matter of indifference if their syntax stumbles somewhat, since its very errors bear witness to the flights of the mind which maltreat it. Theirs is the syntax of passion.

"It is quite a matter of indifference if they pilfer right and left, and sometimes entangle the skein of their stories. For what signifies most with them is not the story, however prettily it may be told, but the sentiments and ideas with which they envelop it.

"Like nurses lulling their charges, they spin for us haphazard, adorable narratives which come from days too remote to be remembered.

"We stretch forth our lips for the bait. And with these honeyed fables they offer us wisdom.

"Thus, in the succession of centuries, the same anecdotes serve to express the undulating thought of the most clear-sighted of mortals.

"The first virtue of all really great men is that they are sincere. They eradicate hypocrisy from their hearts; they bravely unveil their weaknesses, their doubts, their defects. They dissect themselves. They lay bare their soul, so that all their contemporaries may recognize themselves in this image and cast from their lives the lies which corrupt them.

"They are courageous. They boldly ride a-tilt against prejudices. No civil, moral or immoral power overawes them.

"But sometimes, it is true, frankness is so dangerous that it costs them their liberty, or even their existence.

"Under régimes whose label is the most liberal, as under the most tyrannical, it suffices to declare that which will be recognized as just and good fifty or a hundred years after, to incur prison or the scaffold.

"As it is better to speak than to retain silence, wise men often act the fool in order to avoid being gagged.

"They skip about, wave their three-cornered caps, and shake their baubles, whilst shouting the most reasonable extravagances.

"They are left to dance because they are taken for fools. One must not bear them malice for this stratagem.

"Concerning opinions which were dear to him, Rabelais said banteringly: 'I shall uphold them up to the stake . . . exclusive of that.'

"Was he wrong? And if he had mounted the stake, would it be allowable for us to-day to enjoy his pantagruelism?

"Great writers do not possess meanness of soul. That, Mr. Brown, is the whole of their secret.

"They love their fellow-men profoundly. They are generous. They allow their heart to expand. They have compassion for all forms of suffering. They strive to assuage them. They pity the poor actors who play the comic tragedy or the tragic comedy of Destiny.

"Pity, Monsieur le Professeur, is the very foundation-stone of genius."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, whose eyes now sparkled with joy behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. "Let me shake you by the hand, Mr. France."

And he inflicted upon him a hand-shake that almost dislocated his shoulder.

THE PRETTY DOLL AND THE REAL WOMAN

N that particular morning, Joséphine informed us that her master was receiving in his library.

So we mounted to the second floor, that is to say, to the top of the little house. For M. Bergeret had installed his *bibliothèque*—his "library," as Montaigne would have said—in the garret of his residence.

You pushed open an old padded, leather-covered door—an ancient door from some church vestry.

On entering, you might have imagined yourself in a chapel. Through stained-glass windows, emblazoned with coats of arms, streamed a dim religious light.

This attenuated light poured languidly on to a low ceiling, covered with embossed and gilded leather. Its rays glinted on pyxes, chalices, monstrances, patens and censers, with which many a cabinet was filled to overflowing.

Anatole France is an enthusiastic collector of religious objects.

There is no mortal on earth whose tastes are more ecclesiastical.

Primarily, like a pious anchorite, he inhabits the outskirts of a forest. It is true it is a pretty little forest—the Bois de Boulogne. More female fauns and she-devils than wild beasts are to be seen there.

He is enveloped in a long clerical dressing-gown. True, it is delicate in colour and soft in texture.

On his head, like Abbés in churches, is an eternal skull-cap, which—true again—is of a seditious red.

Sometimes, also, he wears a white cap figured with roses and resembling an Indian turban. He borrowed this head-dress from the Bordeaux district, where he often sojourns. The servants of those parts wear handkerchiefs thus twisted around their heads, acquiring an Eastern grace thereby.

But M. Bergeret much prefers his crimson velvet cap.

This cap plays a great part in his conversation and manners.

Unconsciously he makes it reflect his thoughts.

When he is joyful, his cap has a provocative air. It is like a caricature of a tiara or of a Venetian *corno ducale*.

At times, when he raises the tone of his voice

ironically, it affects the majesty of the *pschent*, on which the Pharaohs so much prided themselves.

When listening to an interlocutor, he pushes it back on to his neck, as though to allow the ideas greater ease of penetration to his brain; whilst reflecting, he pulls it back again, almost on to his nose, as though to concentrate his thoughts under this vizor.

His profile, with its high forehead and aquiline nose, is very long, and his small beard elongates it still more. The outlines of his face are more delicate than vigorous. They give the impression of an ample and paternal gentleness; but the black eyes—terribly black and prodigiously sharp, watching and searching on all sides—give the lie to this serenity of countenance.

This roguish look in an almost impassive face is France completely. It is the keenness of his mind breaking through the fine cadence of melodious phrases.

The dull ivory-like skin, the silvery hair, moustache and beard, the red velvet cap form a harmony which would inspire any colourist with an ardent desire to seize his palette and brushes.

The Master is tall and thin. His natural nonchalance, which increases his charm, gives him the appearance of being very slightly round-shouldered. Sylvestre Bonnard, member of the

Institute, had a *dos bon*, to use the words of the Princess Trépof. Anatole France has a *dos affable et ironique*—an affable and ironical back—like Voltaire in Houdon's statue.

To the young writers and old friends who come to enjoy his conversation, he preaches his indulgent philosophy in a somewhat slow and nasal tone of voice.

And never did sacred orator display so much unction in recommending belief as France does in condemning superstition.

His sallies are so much the more deadly as his voice is more indifferent. When he seems to be talking to himself, when he hazards some remark or other in a wholly inoffensive tone, looking the while at the tips of his fur-topped, bishop's purple list-slippers, he is then most redoubtable; and suddenly his black eyes dart like two sword-points.

Discoursing, he loves to be enframed in a huge renaissance chimney-piece, in which a man can easily stand upright.

The chimney funnel of this fireplace is ornamented with Italian pictures: saints around a Virgin nursing a child. Also to be seen are two little angels in painted wood who fly and frolic.

Let us complete our description of the decoration of this library.

Indeed, have we not omitted the principal thing—books ?

These fill a large number of shelves, reaching from floor to ceiling.

The majority of them are very ancient books bound in leather, the colour of the rind of smoked ham, or else covered with yellowish-white pig-skin, or, again, enveloped in antiphonary parchment figured with illuminated letters and red and black notes of music. The last-named kind of binding was conceived by Anatole France, and almost all his friends have copied this charming invention.

* * *

A fastidious critic was interviewing the father of *Thaïs*. He wished to publish, in a very serious review, a most detailed article on the writer's intellectual formation.

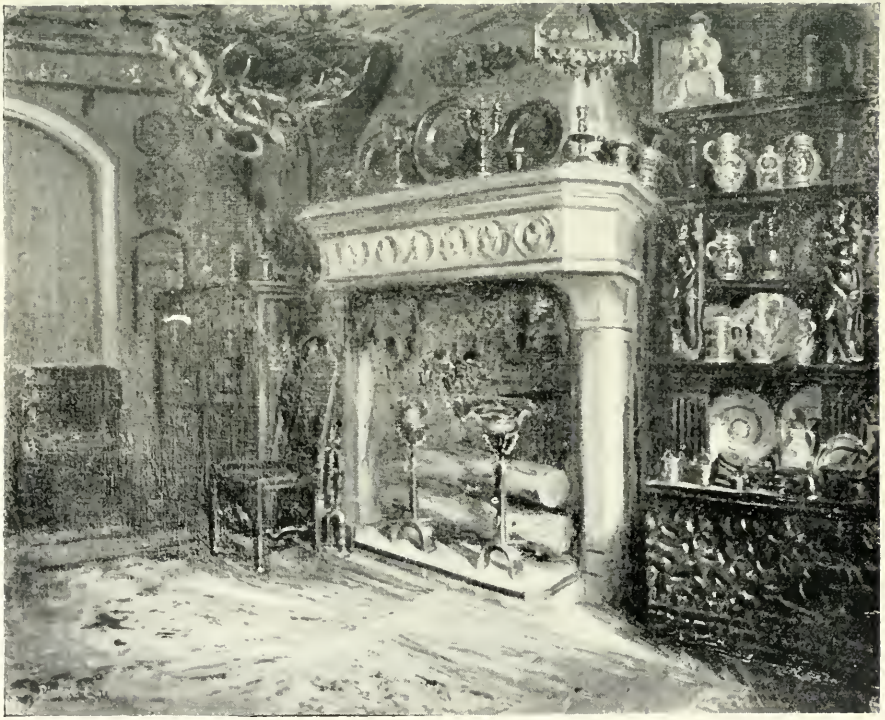
The Master submitted with good grace to the visitor's curiosity.

Over his college years they passed rapidly.

Anatole France was educated at Stanislas. Nothing to be said on that score, unless it is that he has retained in his outward sanctimoniousness something of the religious education.

Not altogether bad, after all, since it fashioned Voltaire, Diderot, Renan and M. Bergeret.

" Note, Monsieur," said our host banteringly, " that I was ploughed in the examination for the



A RENAISSANCE CHIMNEY PIECE AT THE VILLA SAÏD

bachelor's degree. That is an important point. Yes, Monsieur, I got a zero in geography.

"This is how it happened.

"It was Père Hase who was examining me. This honest German, a very learned Hellenist, had been appointed professor at the Collège de France by the Empire, which was internationalist after its fashion.

"He was occasionally entrusted with the preliminary examination of undergraduates, and this drudgery horrified him.

"'Mein young friend,' he said to me with wholly Germanic good-nature, 'you are highly recommended to me.'

"And he continued—sparing you his pronunciation and accent—as follows:

"'Let me see . . . I will ask you a few easy questions. The Seine flows into the Channel, does it not?'

"'Yes, sir,' I replied with a charming smile.

"'Good! That is very good! . . . And the Loire flows into the Atlantic Ocean, does it not?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Excellent! . . . The Gironde also flows into the Atlantic, does it not?'

"'Certainly, sir.'

"'You reply admirably! . . . The Rhône flows into Lake Michigan, does it not?'

" Full of confidence, I had not even listened to the insidious phrase.

" ' Yes, sir,' I exclaimed, still smiling.

" ' Ah! Ah! The Rhône flows into Lake Michigan,' growled Père Hase. ' My friend, you know nothing. You are an ass. I shall put you down a zero! ' "

We began to laugh.

But this anecdote did not at all please the critic, who desired more serious information.

" I should much like," he said, " to know your sources. In many of your works, and especially in *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, you show deep scientific knowledge. For instance, you are very familiar with astronomy. Can you tell me in what text-books you learnt it? "

" Certainly. That is quite easy. I consulted a book by Camille Flammarion called, I believe, *Astronomy Explained to Little Children*. No, I am mistaken : the exact title was *Popular Astronomy*."

The critic almost fell off his chair.

France. " I also borrow my most solid erudition from the *Dictionnaire Larousse*. Yes, sir, the *Dictionnaire Larousse* is a very useful publication."

The critic was amazed.

Our host, assuredly, was diverting himself over the visitor's stupefaction and intentionally provoking it.

" Cher Monsieur," he said, " the important thing is not, perhaps, my scientific baggage, which is light, but rather the reaction of modern discoveries upon a sensibility formed by long commerce with the gentle, subtle and human authors of our country."

He pointed to the old books loading the shelves of his library.

" There are my sources. You will find there nothing save great or charming writers who spoke good French—that is to say, who thought clearly. For one cannot exist without the other.

" I have striven to say as well as possible, on what I have seen and learnt in my time, what these fine minds of yore would have said had they seen and learnt the same things."

. . .

Joséphine handed her master a visiting-card. He put on big horn spectacles, for he has some enormous pairs, like those we see in certain portraits painted by Greco or Velasquez.

" Introduced by my friend B——? Show him in ! "

A very young man—fair, pink and beardless—made his appearance.

" What may you desire ? " asked France.

The Young Man (bowing, with his immaculate

top hat pressed to his stomach).—"Oh! Ah! Oh! . . . M. France . . . Maître . . . you . . . I . . ."

France (very paternally). "Come! Pray be seated, my friend."

The Young Man (crimson). "I've come in order . . . The fact is my little cousin collects autographs. . . . Do . . . you . . . I . . . she . . ."

France. "She sent you to ask me for one?"

The Young Man (radiant). "Yes, yes, Maître. It will give me such pleasure to be able to give my cousin pleasure."

France (touched). "A praiseworthy object, mon enfant. But where the deuce has my pen gone to?"

The Young Man. "Oh! Maître! I don't want to trouble you at present."

France. "Very well. I will send you what you desire. I have your address. . . . What does your charming cousin prefer, verse or prose?"

The Young Man (in the seventh heaven). "Oh! verse! . . ."

France. "Good! Understood then: I will send you some verses."

Whereupon the blushing youth bowed himself out.

"Autograph three and four times blessèd," said some one, "since it will gain for this amiable young man the favour of his fair cousin."

FRANCE. "In asking me for verse, he flattered me; for I am not a poet."

Exclamations were heard, and some of us mentioned *Poèmes dorés* and the *Noces Corinthiennes.*

"I have written verse," he said. "Yet I am not a poet. I do not think in verse but in prose, and I convert my prose into verse.

"True poets think directly into verse. That is the sign.

"I knew one who sometimes even spoke in verse: Antony Deschamps. He was not without merit, and in my opinion deserved a greater reputation.

"I am haunted by my recollection of him, because I saw him amid striking surroundings.

"He had been insane. After being cured, he no longer wished to leave the asylum, because he had fallen in love with the manager's wife.

"We went to hear him recite his poems in the courtyard of the hospital.

"At every hemistich some lunatic or other would come and stare him in the face, snigger and make off. Others were squatting in front of him, putting out their tongues, walking on all fours, or moving rapidly around us. The poet gently warded them off with his hand and continued to declaim.

"It was for all the world like Torquato Tasso with the insane, or Dante with the damned.

"This fantastic vision still pursues me.

"Victor Hugo also sometimes spoke in verse."

Suddenly our host said in the most innocent way in the world:

"What is poetry, in brief? Child's play . . . The *jeu du corbillon*,[1] neither more nor less:

"'Que met-on dans mon corbillon?
Un melon, des oignons, des citrons, des cornichons.'"

He corrected himself:

"It is wrong of me to jest.

"No, rhyme is not an amusement. In our language, in which the difference between long and short syllables is so very slight, it is the only natural means of strongly marking the cadence.

"The repetition of the same sounds divides the phrases into series with a determined number of syllables and thus makes the rhythm more apparent.

"Rhyme, moreover, is not a difficulty to true poets. As they think in metaphors, they have at their disposal a much more extensive vocabulary than prose-writers and can easily find all their rhymes therein.

"What is a metaphor? A comparison. Now, one can compare everything to anything: the moon to a cheese and a bruised heart to a cracked pot. The metaphors therefore furnish an almost unlimited provision of words and rhymes.

[1] Crambo: a game in which the question "Que met-on dans mon corbillon?"—"What do you put in my basket?"—is answered by a word rhyming with *on*.—Translator's note.

" Better still, the rhyme draws attention to the metaphor as though by the tinkling of a bell.

" Add that each poet has his own metaphors, his own variegated epithets and, consequently, an immense reserve of rhymes which is the peculiar quality of his genius.

" Corneille rhymes by means of heroic words : *front*, *affront*, *outrage*, *rage*. . . .

" Racine rhymes by means of tender and sorrowful adjectives : *déplorable*, *misérable*. . . .

" La Fontaine's rhymes are satirical. Those of Molière jovial, etc.

" In fact, every great poet discovers a new region. In the case of one it is the land of heroism ; in that of another, of burning passion ; in that of a third, of jeering and banter ; in that of a fourth, of generous gaiety.

" Rhymes full of imagery are, as it were, the flowers of those mysterious shores. They abound under the steps of the explorer. He has but to stoop to choose those whose colours blend.

" The bouquet of rhymes is the perfume, the adornment of the shores on which each dreamer has landed. It is the shade of his imagination.

" And, truth to tell, with excellent poets, imagination and sensibility make up for everything, even intelligence."

. . .

"According to Renan," one of us remarked, "Victor Hugo was as stupid as the Himalaya."

FRANCE. "Yes, certainly. Agreed, he was stupid. But he was the most vibratory of men, and, willing or unwilling, we still thrill in response to his music. We have been accused—we Parnassians—of wishing to upset his apple-cart. That is incorrect. We had great respect for him.

"We even thought of him as a patron for our little group.

"That was at the time we were founding *le Parnasse*. We had met many times—Coppée, Leconte de Lisle, Catulle Mendès and myself—at the Librairie Lemerre, and the first number of our review was about to appear.

"We sought a means of drawing the attention of the universe to our new-born child.

"One of us—I forget who it was—suggested we should ask Victor Hugo (then in exile at Guernsey) for a preface in the form of a letter.

"The idea was received with enthusiasm; and we immediately wrote to the illustrious proscript.

"A few days afterwards we received an extraordinary epistle:

"'Young men, I am the Past; you are the Future. I am but a leaf; you are the Forest. I am but a candle; you are the rays of the Sun. I am but an ox; you are the wise men of the East. I am but

a brook; you are the Ocean. I am but a mole-hill; you are the Alps. I am but. . . .'

"And so on to the extent of four big pages, signed Victor Hugo. Together, we read this perturbing missive. At the second line we burst into laughter; at the fourth we were holding our sides, and by the time we had reached the tenth we were in convulsions.

"Catulle Mendès exclaimed that we were the victims of an odious hoax. This funambulatory reply could not possibly have come from the great man. Imperial police spies had undoubtedly intercepted our request and wanted to play us a trick. But we were not going to be taken in.

"We consulted as to what we had better do. The result of our conference was that we entered into correspondence with Juliette Drouet, who was then living at Guernsey, near her god. We confided our misadventure to her and our impatience to obtain a letter which was really from Victor Hugo.

"Six days later, we received Juliette Drouet's reply. The poor woman was most distressed. The letter was indeed from Victor Hugo: his faithful friend assured us of that. She was quite astonished at our doubt, for, she said, his genius in those four pages stared one in the face.

"However, we did not publish the sublime poet's epistle. We thought, piously, that it would

dishonour him. How naive we were! Nothing dishonours the gods."

Anatole France continued:

"That which, above all, is his, are those intimate impressions which had never before been so profoundly analysed: those of lovers, those of a father at his daughter's tomb, those of a mother by the cradle of her child:

> "'Sa pauvre mère, hélas! de son sort ignorante,
> Avoir mis tant d'amour sur ce frêle roseau,
> Et si longtemps veillé son enfance souffrante,
> Et passé tant de nuits à l'endormir pleurante,
> Toute petite en son berceau!'

"That is what belongs to him. And by insisting on the price which each of us attaches to the secrets of his heart, he has modified our soul. He has contributed to the renewal of our sentimental life.

"Oh, I know that many others have reaped in the same field; but he it was who bound the sheaves. He was the vigorous binder.

"When you vibrate with so much intensity as that, you have no need to be intelligent. You have more influence than the most skilful reasoners.

"Moreover, reasoners perhaps do no more than put into well-balanced syllogisms the flights of the prophets who pass for being devoid of intelligence."

"I am very glad," said the critic, "to hear you praise Victor Hugo's formidable originality."

France. "Original he was indeed. . . . However, take care. . . . There must be no exaggeration in anything."

Suddenly, after celebrating the personality of the Colossus with so much fervour, M. Bergeret, in the customary backward and forward way of his changing dialectic, began to point out what the author of the *Légende des Siècles* owed to tradition.

"Truth to tell, that which the finest poets, the greatest writers bring back from their voyage in the realms of fancy is small in comparison with the treasures accumulated before them.

"Victor Hugo is reputed to be a marvellous innovator. But reflect. He borrowed from others ninety-nine hundredths of his genius.

"However personal his metre may be judged, it is traditional. It is the Alexandrine. Liberty as regards division and encroaching on the next verse to complete a phrase, I admit. But Alexandrine all the same.

"And did he invent his language?

"Let us delve still deeper. The alphabet he uses. . . ."

Escholier.[1] "Oh! Oh! if you are going to speak of language and alphabet!"

[1] Raymond Escholier, who, by this interruption, defended Victor Hugo's originality, has since become the official priest of the demi-god. He is curator of the Victor Hugo Museum of the Place des Vosges.

France. "Why then! We must indeed do so.

"What would our thoughts be without words? What would words be without the letters which enable us to represent them easily?

"We do not think enough, my dear friends, on the subject of the men of genius who imagined the representation of sounds by signs. They it was, however, who made the dizzy cerebral gymnastics of Europeans possible.

"And what about those who, by degrees, invented languages? Have they not supplied the very fabric of our reasoning?

"Grammatical constructions command the habits of the mind. Thus, we cannot escape from the imprint of those who, before us, spoke French, modelled it, illustrated it. With their words, syntax and rhymes we inherited their thought and we hardly enrich it at all.

"I was wrong in saying that Victor Hugo owed others ninety-nine hundredths of his genius. I ought to have said ninety-nine hundred thousandths."

. . .

At this moment Captain X—— entered.

He is a lean Israelite with a knife-blade face, curved nose, hollow feverish eyes, smoke-dried and as though burnt complexion,—a man with the physique of a locust-eater.

A proselyte of humanitarianism, he is the modern guardian of that flame which most nobly animated the ancient nabobs against reigning institutions. Like them, he is incessantly marching towards a Promised Land where nothing recalls the abominable past.

Having shaken hands with Anatole France, he said :

" You are acquainted with several of my hobbies, including Pacifism and Negrophily. Well, I've got a new one : Esperanto.

" Yes, I'm one of those who are working to establish between all men a common language and thus reconcile the workers of the Tower of Babel."

Whereupon the Captain began his propaganda work in the form of a little speech :

" For merchants, Esperanto is the best means of communication. After a week's practice, Esperantists are able to correspond."

France. " Then Messieurs les Commerçants will do well to learn this language."

The Captain. " But it has higher ends in view. We have translated a selection of the masterpieces of all countries. Your *Crainquebille* is among them. And I have come to ask for your authorization to publish another of your works in Esperanto."

France. " I don't like to discourage a friend, but I should have preferred not to have had such a request from him."

THE CAPTAIN. "With what then do you reproach Esperanto, mon cher Maître?"

FRANCE. "Mon Dieu, nothing! On the contrary, I highly approve of your zeal in facilitating commercial relations. I should be delighted if it were possible for all mortals to understand each other without it costing them long study. And I am certain that a universal language would disperse their cruel misunderstandings.

"But then! is your Esperanto, which undoubtedly would render great practical service, capable of interpreting the most fugitive aspects of thought?"

THE CAPTAIN. "I assure you that——"

FRANCE. "Ah! no. For it is not born of suffering or joy. It has not been wailed or sung by human souls. It is a mechanism constructed by a scholar. It is not life.

"Come now, my dear Captain, I will suppose you are presented with an admirable doll. Its very large and very sweet eyes are shaded by long and divinely curved eyelashes. Its mouth is delightfully pink and similar to the pulp of cherries. Its hair resembles the rays of the sun, finely spun. It is able to laugh at you. It can speak to you. It can call you 'Dearie!'

"Would you love it?

"Let us suppose that you had long been face to face with her on a desert island, and that suddenly

there appeared to you a real woman, even rather ugly, but after all a real woman, would you address your madrigals to the doll?

"Your Esperanto is the doll.

"The French language is the real woman.

"And this woman is so beautiful, so proud, so modest, so bold, so touching, so voluptuous, so chaste, so noble, so familiar, so frolicsome, so wise, that we love her with all our soul and are never tempted to be unfaithful to her."

We burst into a peal of laughter. The Captain appeared just a little nettled.

Brousson remarked to him roguishly:

"Pygmalion brought his statue to life. Perhaps passion would work a similar marvel in favour of your doll?"

"Young man," exclaimed the Captain, with a spice of ill-temper, "you are doubtless witty, but hadn't you better put a little water in your champagne?"

"And you, Captain," replied Brousson, "a little champagne in your water?"

Anatole France turned the matter off by saying:

"My dear Captain, I propose to you a test."

THE CAPTAIN. "Any you like."

FRANCE. "Here are two verses by Racine. I choose the most harmonious, so I warn you. They are celestial music.

" ' Ariane, ma sœur, de quelle amour blessée,
Vous mourûtes aux bords où vous fûtes laissée ! '

" Come now, translate that for me into Esperanto ! "

Boldly, as though he had drawn his sword to charge at the head of his company, the Captain uttered, in a loud voice, a few words of the language he extolled with so much ardour.

" Come now ! Come now ! " said France to him, very softly, whilst tapping him on the arm. " The suit is heard, my dear friend.[1]

" Once more, how can the work of a grammarian, however learned it may be, rival a living language, to which millions upon millions of men have contributed their sighs and their groans—a language in which we perceive at the same time the great guttural cry of the people and the chirping of the pretty linnets who twitter in drawing-rooms,—a language in which we hear the humming of every craft, the roar of every revolution, the sound of every form of despair and the murmur of every dream ?

" How beautiful are words which, through the recollection of their long usage, are crowned with a halo of glory !

[1] M. Anatole France has, however, desisted from this rigorous point of view. Philosophically, he has ended by authorizing the translation into Esperanto of several of his admirable short stories, in addition to *Crainquebille*.

"This one has sounded clear in a verse by Corneille. That has languished in a hemistich by Racine. This other is perfumed with wild thyme in a fable by La Fontaine. All are iridescent with the infinite shades they have assumed along the centuries.

"Think now, my dear friend. The words *rire* and *pleurer* have not the same meaning in French as in other languages, because no man elsewhere has laughed as Molière, Regnard or Beaumarchais laughed; no woman has wept as such or such a great French *amoureuse* has wept: Mlle. de Lespinasse, for example.

"Well, I want my ideas to rest on those words in which the feelings of all our dead palpitate."

THE CAPTAIN. "But in that case you condemn all translations?"

FRANCE. "Not at all. Are you forgetting the apologue of the doll? Other living languages are real women. And I am not over-repugnant in confiding my thoughts to them.

"However, I love my sweetheart better. I love my dearest better. I prefer my dear French tongue.

"Happy, too happy am I, if, having received it most limpid, most luminous, most bounteous and most human, I have been able to make a few new reflections shine upon it!"

MONSIEUR BERGERET COLLABORATES WITH THE DIVINE SARAH

BERGERET loves and does not love the theatre.

He loves it because comedians arouse his curiosity.

Actors amuse him by reason of their brain and their peacock-like vanity.

Actresses charm him by their grace, their manners modelled on those of princesses, their superb incapacity or malignant cunning; because, too, of the court of followers, fops and political puppets who flutter around them.

He does not love the theatre—because he does not love it.

Theatrical art seems somewhat inflated to this subtle logician, to this shepherd of light and variegated clouds.

He has written very little for the stage.

When he composed *Les Noces Corinthiennes* he certainly did not think that one day they would be performed.

Yet they were. First at the Odéon, before the war; then at the house of Molière, in 1918. And it

will perhaps be recollected that, on the night of the first performance at the Comédie-Française, Gothas came and laid their eggs of terror on Paris. The uproar of the sirens, bombs and guns accompanied the harmonious verses heroically. This anachronism in an antique subject, far from militating against success, on the contrary increased it. The venerable M. Silvain announced that the performance would continue. And the spectators, delighted at their own courage, vehemently applauded the actors and the author, who, derogatory to his contempt for these vain solemnities, was present at the performance.

Anatole France is also named as the author of a farce entitled *La Farce de celui qui épousa une femme muette.*

It is the reconstitution of a pretty fabliau mentioned in the third book of *Pantagruel.*

He published it in *L'Illustration,* but would not allow it to be performed, except at a meeting of Rabelaisians.

However, out of affection for Lucien Guitry, he based on *Crainquebille* an exquisite little play, in which the great artist triumphed.

Besides, industrious adapters have often displayed the glorious name of Anatole France on theatre bills.

Le Lys Rouge had a long run at the Vaudeville.

Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard was performed at the Théâtre Antoine with Gémier (excellent as usual) in the title rôle.

It is also Gémier who will shortly produce *Les Dieux ont soif*. Amidst the yelling of the *Ça ira* and the *Carmagnole*, there will be a whirl of blazing revolutionary prints.

Musicians have sometimes tuned their fiddles in accord with M. Bergeret's fancy.

Massenet devoutly offered his quavers and arpeggios to the courtesan *Thaïs*.

And recently, in the comic opera *La Reine Pédauque*, the good Abbé Jérôme Coignard astonished us by his agreeable trills and fluent roulades.

When spoken to on the subject of the libretto of *Thaïs*, M. Bergeret smiled roguishly.

"Gallet told me in confidence," he said, "that he could not retain my hero's name, Paphnuce, because it was difficult for him to find noble words to rhyme with it. He could, indeed, think of *puce* and *prépuce*. But that did not satisfy him.

"Therefore he chose another name—Athanaël, which rhymes with *ciel*, *autel*, *irréel*, *miel*, all fine words received in society.

"'Athanaël let it be then,' I said to him."

M. Bergeret added *mezza voce :*

"Between ourselves, I prefer Paphnuce."

. . .

At the Villa Saïd, one morning, one of the princesses of the footlights, Mme. M——, was among us.

Naturally the dramatic art came under discussion.

A young poet announced that he was completing a play.

France. "I congratulate you, my friend, on working for comedians.

"Since they gabble lamentably,—with a few exceptions, such as our dear M——, who recites verse as divinely as the Muses themselves—since none can hear nothing of what they are saying, you are free to display your genius."

The Young Poet.—"I fail to see, Maître, what advantage I shall derive from their jabbering."

France.—"What advantage? Ungrateful one! . . . Just think, you need have no fear of shocking the public, which will not catch a single word of your text. You are not bound by any concession whatsoever. You can say anything. You are free to express in the most original language the newest and the boldest ideas. Is that not the height of felicity for a writer?"

The young poet made a grimace.

France resumed:

"At the theatre, one must admit, every shade is lost. Only what is pompous has any chance of reaching the ears of the public.

" Corneille knew this well. His lapidary cues are models of scenic style. But I do not praise him so much for having hit upon those sublime words which arouse applause as for having employed them with a certain circumspection.

" For, after all, in that kind of exercise, the most difficult thing is to stop.

—" ' Que vouliez-vous qu'il fît contre trois ?
—Qu'il mourût ! '

" It is very fine and might continue indefinitely.

" Valère objects :

" ' Mais c'était votre fils.'

" To which the aged Horace replies in a loud voice :

" ' Mon fils, il ne l'est plus ! '

" Imagine a long jingle of such abrupt cues and the delight there is among the audience.

" The method is easy and one must confess that the great Corneille indeed employed it with discretion."

France continued :

" The language of the theatre is not that of books.

" Is it inferior ? Impossible for me to say. Listen ! It is often said that Molière wrote badly. The fact is that he wrote, not to be read but to be heard—that is to say, to triumph over the inattention of the spectators, their lassitude, and the bad elocution of mediocre actors.

" He often repeats the same thing three or four times, in order to be sure they have understood him.

" Out of six or eight verses, there are sometimes only two that count. The others are but a purring, which enables the auditor to rest his mind and come in a few moments to essential words.

" Hear what Alceste says :

" ' Non, non, il n'est point d'âme un peu bien située,
Qui veuille d'une estime ainsi prostituée.'

" The meaning is complete and sufficiently rich to cause one to reflect.

" Then we have the continuation :

" ' Et la plus glorieuse a des régals peu chers
Dès qu'on voit qu'on nous mêle avec tout l'univers.'

" That is pure jargon. . . . But it appertains to the stage."

Mme. M——. " How hard you are on our poor stage ! "

France. " Not at all. Let me explain myself.

" It is certain that these last two verses are detestable. What is the meaning of : ' les régals peu chers de la plus glorieuse estime ' ?

" What is the meaning of : ' Dès qu'on voit qu'on nous mèle avec tout l'univers ' ?

" These repetitions of ' que ' are terrible. The meaning we can vaguely discern is exactly that of

the two preceding verses. Why, then, we ask ourselves, this redundancy?

"Well, it is useful for the very reason that it is useless, that is to say, because these empty words, which are not heard, give the spectators time to meditate on the two very fine verses preceding.

"In that admirable distich, however, a purist might point out a weakness: the expression '*un peu bien*.'

"But what matter! Neither is this expression heard. The words that tell are those which, placed at the cæsura, or at the end of the lines, are brought into prominence by the rhythm: '*Âme, bien située, estime, prostituée*.'

"These notes ring so clearly that one is forced to hear them and they satisfy the mind.

"Through the instinct of genius, Molière always wrote his best verses in that way. Their cadence gives a swing to the principal terms, which are where the cæsura or the rhyme comes. For instance, Dorine says to Tartuffe:

> "'Et je vous verrais *nu*, du haut *jusques en bas*,
> Que toute votre *peau* ne me *tenterait pas*.'

"Notice the vigour given to the words *nu*, *jusques en bas*, *peau* and *tenterait pas*.

"On the other hand, Molière has often stuck weak words into the interstices solely in order that the measure should be there.

MANTELPIECE IN THE DINING-ROOM, VILLA SAÏD

" I prefer his prose, which is no less substantial, and which does not oblige him to resort to this padding.

" But perhaps I am wrong, because in a theatre poetical rhythm, attained even at the cost of a few blemishes, launches the words with more vigour."

Some one marvelled at the fact that France, when quoting, was served by an infallible memory.

" The reason for that," explained our jovial Master, " is that I was a very bad scholar. The impositions I wrote have engraved many verses on my brain."

A moment afterwards :

" It is incontestable : Molière forces us to hear him, and he forces us to laugh ; because it is stupid to say he is sad.

" It was the writers of the Romantic school who attributed to him their own melancholy. They turned him into a fine gloomy fellow—a Manfred, a Lara, an Obermann. They misrepresented him.

" He wished to be comic and truly he is.

" Even his Alceste is cheerful. Yes, indeed, cheerful. He is pleasant in a superior degree. Only we understand him badly nowadays.

" My friend Pelletan, the publisher, one day asked me for a preface for the *Misanthrope*.

" I promised to let him have it.

" A promise of which he reminded me more than once.

"'My preface!' he begged whenever I visited him in his shop.

"Wearied, I had to tell him that, positively, I would not write it.

"Such a look of despair then appeared on his face that I thought he was on the verge of suicide, so I corrected myself by saying:

"'I will not write a preface but a dialogue.'

"The fact is that I had just read the word *dialogue* on the cover of a translation of Lucian exposed in his shop-window.

"He jumped with joy. His tuft of hair, like a flame from a punch-bowl, touched the ceiling and his eyes sparkled as he said:

"'A dialogue! Famous! Three colours for the title-page. The characters in thick face, the text in italics. A masterpiece! It will be a masterpiece!'

"He meant to say a masterpiece of typography; for he is convinced that the whole talent of writers depends on typography.

"So I imagined a conversation between Alceste and a critic.

"'You are sad, Alceste,' says the commentator.

"'No, indeed,' he replies, 'I am a laughing-stock.'

"And he explains that he is not more than twenty-three to twenty-five years old. He is in love.

He wants to find a wife. Now, in the seventeenth century, it was at the age of twenty-five, at the latest, that noblemen married. Beyond that limit they departed from the recognized custom.

"At forty years of age one was a greybeard, and to wish at that age to light the torch of Hymen was to brave ridicule.

"Arnolphe is forty and his pretension to marry Agnès is considered unreasonable.

"With Molière, an old man of forty is destined to be cuckolded. An invariable rule.

"Alceste, is, therefore, a greenhorn, and the drollery consists in this young prig, who ought to be entirely absorbed in the heedlessness of youth, undertaking to utter moral tags to every one he meets.

"It is the contrast of his blond wig and morose air which is the very basis of the comedy.

"Moreover, note well that, if he grumbles, it is only when personally wounded: when he hears the sonnet which Oronte intends for Célimène, when he is about to lose a lawsuit, or when rivals forestall him in paying court to his belovèd.

"Misanthropy is but a form of egoism: such is the profound and laughable moral of the play.

"But modern actors distort the character by making him forty or fifty years of age.

"Instead of a beau and grumbler in one, which is

comical, they present us with an ill-licked old bear who fails to excite laughter.

"Behold how an error in detail makes the whole masterpiece unintelligible and gives Molière the air of Heraclitus.

"It is also the custom to represent Molière's cuckoldom in sombre colours, thereby staining his work. He is the tragic cuckold.

"But how can his cuckoldom be sad when all the matrimonial misfortunes he puts on the stage excite gaiety?

"Sometimes, certainly, he has celebrated sensual desire with almost dolorous austerity.

"Recollect Tartufe's declaration of love. What a mysterious tremor!

> "'Et je n'ai pu vous voir, parfaite créature,
> Sans admirer en vous l'auteur de la Nature.'

"That is Baudelaire before his day.

"But Baudelaire is tortured, whereas Molière quizzes the torture of Tartufe."

. . .

After this little excursion in Molière's garden, Anatole France returned to the subject of comedians.

France. "In their desire to shine, they sacrifice everything, and their art is more often than not but dust in the eyes."

Mme. M——. "Hum! Hum!"

France. "I beg your pardon, chère amie. But you—a star without a blemish—are not in question. . . .

"Provided that the actor is starred on the bills and is under the limelight on the stage, he cares not a rap about the play! And doubtless he is right. For the public comes to applaud him, and not the author.

"Also, what conceit! Sardou justly caught his interpreters at that game. The cunning blade! I can see him at work at rehearsals.

"In order to mortify the stars and keep them in hand, he sometimes pretended to forget their names.

"To the most famous actor he would say:

"'You, M., what do you call yourself? . . . In short, you who play Napoleon. . . . You are execrable!'

"And to a wretched player of the twenty-fifth rank, acting the part of a fifer or a drummer:

"'Good! Very good, M. Evariste Dupont! I am delighted!'

"This nominal praise of a mediocre actor cut the gentlemen of the boards to the quick and made them as supple as a pair of gloves."

Mention was made of the liberties which great actors and actresses take with their texts.

France. "Once more, what matter, since one

cannot hear them? It suffices if they have the air of saying something.

"Have I not been assured that an illustrious actress of tragedy sometimes interlarded her part with observations to the stage-machinists?

"In her golden voice, she droned:

"'Dieux, que ne suis-je assise à l'ombre des forêts!'

"And suddenly, in the same clear tone:

"'Trois lampes sont éteintes à la deuxième frise
L'électricien sera mis à l'amende.'[1]

"Then, without interruption:

"'Quand pourrai-je, au travers d'une noble poussiée,
Suivre de l'œil un char fuyant dans la carriére!'

"The public failed to perceive anything abnormal and the electrician saw to the lighting of his bulbs."

We burst out laughing at this anecdote.

FRANCE. "One day, I am told, the supers followed the example coming to them from on high, and themselves began to talk on the stage.

"It was at a performance of *L'Aiglon*.

"At the brilliant ball given in the Imperial palace at Vienna, a number of hangers-on of the Central Markets, bedecked with gold and silver lace, tin

[1] "Three lamps are out on the second frieze
The electrician will be fined."

decorations and paste jewellery, personified marquesses, archdukes and princes.

" Unfortunately, as they were somewhat lacking in Court manners, the illusion was not complete.

" Consequently the great actress did not neglect, in the interval, to reprimand them sharply :

" ' Vous avez défilé comme des cochons,' she shouted at them. ' Comme des cochons, comme des cochons ! '—' You walked like pigs ! like pigs ! like pigs ! '

" The next scene was the battlefield of Wagram.

" The market men, who had stripped off their fine gala costumes, now impersonated the dead and the dying with which the plain was scattered. They had been ordered to utter groans, the mournful concert of which was to reach the skies.

" The curtains had hardly risen before they were modulating their moans.

" First of all there was a confused sound. But soon certain sonorous syllables could be distinguished : ' . . . ons, . . . é, . . . omme, . . . ons. . . .'

" Then the dying concluded by scanning, lamentably, a phrase which they pronounced and repeated in perfect unison :

" ' Nous avons . . . figuré . . . comme des cochons . . . comme des cochons . . . comme des cochons. . . .'

" The great actress, listening behind the scenes,

feared that a phrase scanned in so loud a voice would reach beyond the footlights.

"'Curtain! Curtain!' she ordered peremptorily."

Whereupon the genius of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt was extolled.

France. "She was often sublime. Without betraying Racine, she was an entirely new Phèdre. In the case of great authors, each generation admires beauties hitherto unknown. Sarah was our Phèdre.

"Are you aware that formerly I collaborated with her?

"Why, yes! A very long time ago, she asked me to come to her house to talk about a scenario she had conceived.

"In the studio where she received me, Maurice Bernhardt, still a child, was frolicking with a Great Dane.

"The divine actress was speaking. Maurice, seeing the dog's eye shine, stretched out his little fist to seize that brilliant object. Naturally the good animal did not find this game quite to its taste, so turned away, and in so doing, but without any ill intention, sent Maurice rolling on the carpet. Maurice set up a howl. His mother stopped to pick him up and console him.

"Having done this, she recommenced her narrative, in order to be quite sure she was understood.

" Maurice again sought to catch the dog's eye. And again the Great Dane rolled him over. Once more Mme. Sarah Bernhardt wiped away her offspring's tears and recommenced her recital.

" Maurice fell four times and his mother narrated the opening of her scenario an equal number of times.

" A few days later she was leaving for America.

" ' Good-bye to our fine collaboration,' I told her.

" ' Not at all ! ' she replied. ' We will continue our play by correspondence.'

" ' By letter ? ' I asked.

" ' By telegram.'

" ' But you are crossing the ocean.'

" ' Telegrams will be cablegrams, that's the only difference ! '

" ' But you are travelling in America,' I once more objected. ' I am assured that you intend to go even to the Far West.'

" ' You are correctly informed. But that won't prevent us continuing our collaboration. Amidst the solitudes of the Far West, I shall despatch to you Redskins, who, astride their wild steeds, bare back, will ride full gallop to the nearest city, carrying the text of my cablegrams. . . .'

" ' But . . .' I ventured.

" ' You're letting a mere nothing trouble you,' she cried, laughing.

"I took leave of her.

"Despite her willingness and mine, we did not succeed in establishing correspondence so easily as she had said. Our collaboration ceased.

"I regretted it very much. I suspect those darned Redskins of having lost Mme. Sarah Bernhardt's missives."

"Maître," said Mme. M——, "you are delightful! But your irony will certainly make this young author, who has confided his hopes to you, disgusted with the stage."

France. "That is not my intention. Nay, to prove to him my sympathy, I will give him precious advice.

"My young friend, if you would have your plays performed, find a very poor actress for your chief part."

The Young Author. "Indeed! . . ."

France. "Certainly. An author's whole difficulty is to find a very poor actress of celebrity.

"Understand me. In order to make up for want of talent, she must be very beautiful. If she is very beautiful Heaven will send her magnificent protectors. If she has magnificent protectors she can act in all the plays to which she takes a fancy. Look out, then, for a very poor actress."

Whilst saying this, M. Bergeret was toying with a book he had just received.

It was *La Pisanelle*, by Gabriele d'Annunzio.

His eyes fell on the dedication, which he read aloud :

" A Anatole France, à qui tous les visages de la Vérité et de l'Erreur sourient pareillement.

" Gabriele d'Annunzio." [1]

" It's a back stroke," he exclaimed, " but very prettily given, upon my faith !

" Since he scratches me, here, in revenge, is an anecdote I was told yesterday.

" At the time *La Pisanelle* was being rehearsed at the Châtelet, a reporter came to interview the author, who willingly consented to answer his questions.

" The journalist chanced to notice an ancient cameo on one of the poet's fingers.

" ' What an admirable stone ! ' he exclaimed.

" ' You like it ? ' replied Gabriele d'Annunzio. ' It is yours.'

" And immediately removing the ring, he royally slipped it on to the visitor's finger, despite the man's refusal to accept so generous a gift.

" Our reporter counted on keeping this rare jewel in memory of the great writer.

" But he was longing to know its value. So he

[1] " To Anatole France, to whom all the faces of Truth and Error smile in like manner.

" Gabriele d'Annunzio."

entered the first good lapidary's and showed him the engraved stone.

"The jeweller did not even take the trouble to take up his magnifying glass.

"'That thing?' he said. 'It's a piece of glass. Worth about twopence.'

"From which I conclude that Gabriele d'Annunzio is an excellent dramatic author."

Mme. M——. "Agreed, Master. The Theatre is the kingdom of false and often coarse appearances. There is nothing save deception there for delicate minds.

"But is life so different from the stage?

"My profession brings me into contact with the mightiest ones of the earth. I must tell you of my interviews with them.

"At Berlin, at the close of an evening performance at which I had played before the Kaiser, I was presented to him.

"You know that he is acquainted with strategy, painting, politics, architecture, diplomacy, music, theology, dancing, dressmaking and cooking.

"He is also a good judge of French literature.

"'*Ach!*' he exclaimed. 'I have a great affection for France.'—Undoubtedly, but his love was that of the wolf for the lamb.—'*Ach!* I am passionately fond, above all, of your literature. Passionately fond! Passionately fond! You are playing

just now the work of a great genius. I read his works a great deal. I'm passionately fond of them. Passionately fond of them. We have not the equivalent in Germany.'

" ' To whom does Your Majesty refer ? '

" ' To Georges Ohnet. *Ach !* Georges Ohnet ! Nothing more *kolossal* than *Le Maître de Forges* has ever been written.'

" You see what a good judge of French literature the Kaiser is.

" In brief, this monarch, who makes the world tremble by turning up the points of his moustache, is but a perfect imbecile."

Mme. M—— continued :

" At the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg I was conducted to the Czar's box.

" He desired, it appeared, to congratulate me.

" At the very moment they introduced me into his presence, he was seized, I know not for what reason, by an attack of indigestion. A metal basin was being held for him. Nevertheless he received me, turned his colourless eyes in my direction, and Nature, which is no more clement towards potentates than it is towards beggars, made this sorry marionette execute the most unedifying of pantomimes.

" I assure you that I made off without waiting for his compliments.

" Behold under what aspect the most powerful

sovereigns of the world, at the height of their grandeur, appeared to me.[1] Distance lends enchantment to the view!

"Well, now, tell me, after that, whether the stage is more deceptive than reality."

Smiling, M. Bergeret took Mme. M——'s hand and lightly touched it with his lips.

"Thank you for the lesson, dear friend. It was wrong of me to slander the stage. It is much less untrue than I maintained, and it assuredly resembles life, since life so much resembles the stage."

[1] At the time Mme. M—— was speaking of these two crowned puppets she took them to be comic personages. She little thought that soon they would belong to tragedy. But whether comedy or tragedy, is it not still theatrical?

ANATOLE FRANCE AT RODIN'S, OR THE LUNCHEON AT MEUDON

NE day, Anatole France visited Auguste Rodin at Meudon. He was taken there by Mme. de N——.

She is a Polish noblewoman, of middle age, short in stature, dumpy and smiling. Her French is voluble, but spoken with a lisp and a pronounced accent.

She adores men of genius; loves them platonically, but passionately. Their most humble servant does she become. To Rodin and M. Bergeret, at one and the same time, had she given her soul.

She was to be seen at all the gatherings at the Villa Saïd. Roses for our host appeared with her, and, bowing, almost kneeling before him, she rained a shower of little greedy kisses on his aristocratic hands.

She did the same in the case of Rodin on going to see him in the Rue de l'Université, in the Rue de Varenne, or at Meudon.

This idolatry of great men is more frequent than people think, and they sometimes have great

difficulty in preserving themselves from it. They are besieged with love-letters.

Certain women make overt advances to notoriety, just as men offer homage to beauty.

Accompanied by Mme. de N——, France, then, came to the celebrated sculptor's rustic studio.

When M. Bergeret takes a walk he wears on his head a rather low grey felt hat, which, on account of its broad brim, resembles a *galette*—a thick flat cake. His overcoat flaps a little around his lankiness. Tall, round-shouldered and with an air of good-natured simplicity, one would think he was an amiable member of the middle-classes on his way to his country house.

He never wears his decoration.

He is—as you may know—an Officer of the Legion of Honour. Not a very high rank for a man of his reputation. But he himself has taken care, on many occasions, to say that he places no value on decorations.

The rosette disappeared from his buttonhole at the time of the Dreyfus affair, as a protest against Emile Zola being struck off the rolls of the Order.

Sometimes, among friends, it happens that he will discourse on his compatriots' fondness for honorary emblems.

"Where do they catch this mania?" he asks. "Yes, I know that a man with a decoration can wear soft hats without incurring the mortifying

disdain of janitors. That's indeed something. A man has no longer any need to be so careful in his get-up; people no longer notice the stains on his waistcoat. In short, the red ribbon acts as benzine.

"This decoration may also be useful in the case of one caught in the very act of breaking the moral code. How could a police officer hook a gentleman who had the red ribbon at his buttonhole?

"But this hypothesis is unwarranted, is it not? For never does a decorated gentleman fail in honour.

"So I cannot see why Frenchmen are so eager to obtain the Cross.

"Are they vainer than other mortals?

"No, I don't think so. Man is the same everywhere. Only, the manifestations of his vanity differ from nation to nation.

"Italians are proud of high-sounding titles, such as Cavaliere, Commendatore.

"Germans are fond of pedagogic distinctions: Herr Doktor, Herr Professor.

"Yankees admire the figures of a man's fortune: Mr. Such a one is worth so much; Mr. So-and-so is worth double.

"In short, our appetite for ribbons, crosses, orders and such-like trinkets is perhaps the most inoffensive and the least troublesome."

Rodin certainly considered himself very flattered by M. Bergeret's visit.

Yet these two great men did not profess unreserved admiration for each other.

In conversations with intimate friends, Anatole France was accustomed to speak his mind concerning the illustrious artist's inspiration.

"He is a man of genius. I am convinced he is a genius.

"I have seen works of his which are the most lifelike of nudes. But he is not one of those great decorators such as France has known, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

"He seems to me to be ignorant of the science of *ensembles*.

"And, above all, let us confess it, he collaborates too much with catastrophe."

M. Bergeret explained what he meant by these somewhat sibylline words.

"He abuses the right of destroying whatever, in a work, comes out badly.

"One day, when good President Fallières was paying an official visit to the Salon, he stopped before a statue which had neither head nor arms nor legs, and said simply:

"'M. Rodin is certainly a great man; but his carriers are very clumsy.'"

Whereupon M. Bergeret gave rein to his fondness for anecdotes.

"Do you know," he asked, "how that semi-

reclining Victor Hugo in marble, which is in the Palais Royal garden, came to be imagined?

"The story runs that Rodin had just completed, in clay, an imposing statue of the poet. Victor Hugo was standing upright at the end of a rock. All kinds of Muses and sea-nymphs frolicked beneath him.

"One morning, the sculptor led to his studio a number of journalists who wished to see the new work.

"Unfortunately, the night before, he had left a top window open, and, a heavy storm coming on, a torrent of water had reduced the huge group to a shapeless mass. The rock had given way on to the dancing divinities. As to Victor Hugo, he had slid down into an ocean of mud.

"Rodin closed the door and passed his guests before him; and then, suddenly, he beheld the disaster. He nearly pulled all the hairs of his beard out in despair.

"But already a chorus of praise was heard:

"'Wonderful!—Prodigious!—Formidable!—Victor Hugo emerging from a lake of mud, what a symbol!—Master, this is a stroke of genius!—Your idea is to represent the ignominy of a period in which the inspiration of the sublime bard alone remained pure and noble. How beautiful it is!'

"'You think so?' asked Rodin timidly.

"'Why, certainly! It is a masterpiece of masterpieces. Oh, Master, don't do anything more to it!'"

A piquant story, undoubtedly . . . *Si non e vero*. . . .

"In his drawings," continued M. Bergeret, "Rodin depicts hardly anything else but women displaying their. . . . And his monotonous audacity is somewhat wearisome.

"The other day, I met him at a friend's house and he confided to me, with ecstatic delight, that he was making a series of water-colour drawings of a delightful little model.

"'This young woman,' he said, 'is Psyche herself. . . . But, indeed, you who are a scholar, can you tell me what Psyche was like?'

"As I always endeavour to please people, I tried to answer his question.

"'Psyche,' I said, 'was a little woman who readily displayed her . . .'

"'Ma foi!' exclaimed Rodin, 'that's exactly as I see her. You make me most happy.'

"But I cannot reproach him for his eroticism," added M. Bergeret, "because I am well aware that sensuality forms three-quarters of the genius of great men.

"Less willingly do I overlook his too easy habit of appropriating the work of others.

" I was told, recently, that a photographer went to Meudon to make some pictures of the Master's sculpture.

" Rodin being absent, he was received by a *praticien*.

" The photographer caught sight of a huge and barely shaped block of marble, whence appeared only a finely sculptured knee. He went into ecstasies.

" ' Admirable ! ' he exclaimed. ' Tell me, please, the name of this masterpiece ? '

" ' *Thought*,' replied the assistant.

" Delighted, the photographer pointed his camera and was about to operate when the *praticien* said :

" ' But this is not Rodin's work ; it is that of Despiau, his collaborator.'

" The photographer turned towards another massive block whence a nude back emerged.

" ' Splendid ! ' he exclaimed. ' What is this called ? '

" ' Still *Thought*. But that is not Rodin's either. It is by Desbois, his collaborator.'

" Disappointed, the photographer spied a third block with a foot emerging.

" ' Marvellous ! ' he declared. ' And what may this represent ? '

" ' Once more *Thought*, as is fairly apparent, moreover. But this is not by Rodin. It is the work of Bourdelle, his collaborator.'

"The photographer, in despair, then loaded his apparatus on to his back and made off as fast as his legs would carry him."

On the other hand, Rodin sometimes uttered remarks on the subject of M. Bergeret which were wanting in indulgence.

Certainly he was loud in his praise of Anatole France's wit and graceful style. But he had little appreciation for the variable shades of his thought, which he considered specious and lacking in firmness.

"He has the sauce," he boldly declared, "but not the rabbit."

It must be explained that rabbit was a special treat for him; a recollection of the days when, as a *praticien*—a mere assistant to another sculptor—he frequented common eating-houses. Rabbit was to him a food for the gods. Evidently, Anatole France was greatly deficient, since he was lacking in rabbit.

Consequently Rodin would never model M. Bergeret's bust.

He received an order for it from good Dujardin-Beaumetz, superintendent of Fine Arts. But he never set to work upon it. Perhaps the extraordinary mobility of such a face discouraged him?

. . .

Rodin pointed out for M. Bergeret's admiration the pieces of sculpture on which he was working

and showed him his collection of antiques. Then they passed into the dining-room.

Rose, the sculptor's old helpmate, wanted to make good her escape. She felt ill at ease in the presence of an illustrious visitor. Rodin seized her by the arm.

" Rose, sit down there ! " he told her imperiously.

" But, Monsieur Rodin. . . ."

" I tell you to sit down there ! "

It was Rose's custom to call her companion " Monsieur Rodin," in order to mark her respect for him.

She still murmured :

" How funny men are ! They think one can be at table and at the stove at one and the same time ! "

However, she sat down with us to eat the soup.

During the meal she rose many times, carried away the dirty things, and trotted off to the kitchen to fetch clean plates. Then, quickly, she sat down again.

Rodin would never tolerate any other servant near him.

Rose was the sweetest of creatures.

The life of this timid, discreet and humble woman, spent in the shadow of the despotic Colossus, crowned with glory, merits narration by a Balzac.

Formerly she had been a girl of fascinating beauty.

Sometimes Rodin would point out in his studio

an admirable bust of Bellona, her eyes full of anger. And, addressing Rose, he would say :

" You sat for this *Bellona*. Do you remember ? "

" Yes, Monsieur Rodin," she would reply, in a tremulous voice.

The contrast between this good little old woman and the terrible helmeted goddess who formerly had been modelled in her likeness was striking.

She idolized her great man. With him she had shared all the rude trials of a career full of obstacles. He often tormented her. For he was the most whimsical and inconstant of men. She saw beautiful women—her victorious rivals—enter her own home, and had to support their presence without a bitter word.

The slightest attention showed to her by him filled her with joy.

She was passionately fond of growing flowers in her garden at Meudon. One day, we saw Rodin pluck a blossom and offer it to her, saying :

" Here, Rose, this is for you."

A gift that cost him hardly anything.

" Oh, thank you, Monsieur Rodin," she exclaimed, filled with heavenly delight.

May we be allowed to complete, by a few more pencil strokes, so touching a silhouette, and to recall what the last moments of this humble life were ?

When Rose's health declined, Rodin married her.

And it was as though Paradise had suddenly opened above her.

But her malady consumed her. They used to place her in a wicker arm-chair on the *perron*, so that the sun's rays would warm her. Her sockets were hollow, her eyes abnormally bright, her cheeks suffused with a hectic flush. She coughed incessantly.

Rodin suddenly realized that he was going to lose his Rose. He was very old himself. By her side, in a similar arm-chair, he sat, looking at her but speaking not a word. His big paw-like hand was resting on the poor woman's thin bloodless fingers as though to keep her with him by force.

Rose died, and but a short time afterwards the giant followed her into the grave.

. . .

The dining-room where we were assembled was idyllic. The windows looked on to the bluish slopes of Meudon and the valley of the Seine, lazily winding under a silvery sky.

Rose placed before us a big dish of rabbit and Rodin himself picked out the bits of bacon to put them on Anatole France's plate, out of courtesy to the guest he desired to honour.

At a given moment, the sculptor, wishing to dilute his wine, stretched out his hand towards a cubical decanter, the crystal stopper of which was

curiously ornamented with coloured spirals, like those glass marbles schoolboys delight in so much. And immediately he exclaimed :

" Rose, I've already told you I do not wish to see any more on my table. . . ."

Hurriedly snatching the abhorred object from the table, Rose carried it off. She was back in a trice with another decanter, and explained to us that " Monsieur Rodin would have thrown to the ground the one which displeased him so much."

" We are surrounded by ugliness," growled the sculptor. " Everything we have around us in daily use offends the taste. Our glasses, plates and chairs are horrible. They are made by machinery. And machinery kills the mind.

" Formerly, the smallest domestic utensils were beautiful, because they reflected the intention of the artisan who made them.

" The human soul adorned them with its dreams.

" I have read in Anderson, the adorable Danish writer, that, on night coming on, the furniture and other household objects began to converse.

" The candlesticks talked to the clock, the fire-dogs chatted with the tongs.

" Truth to tell, all the relics of the past talk thus, even in full daylight. They murmur to us a hundred touching confidences concerning the honest men who fashioned them.

"But the furniture of to-day is silent. What could it tell us? The wood of an arm-chair might reveal to us that it was cut up wholesale in a saw-mill in the North; the leather that it came from a big leather-dressing factory in the Midi; the brass ornaments that they were moulded by thousands in some manufactory in the East or the West. And if all these things began to talk together, what a terrible cacophony there would be!

"It is sad, indeed, to live at a time when all the little familiar gods of our homes retain death-like silence."

M. Bergeret admitted that our decorative art was at a low level.

Rodin. "If it was only our decorative art! But it is art — art in its entirety — which has descended to nothing. There is no distinction to be made between decorative art and art: to make a very beautiful table or model a female torso is all one.

"Art always consists in translating dreams into forms. People no longer dream. They no longer know that every line, to be harmonious, must interpret joy or human sorrow.

"And in the case of what is called great art—sculpture, for instance—as well as in the making of common things, it is above all mechanism which pursues and kills imagination."

This prophetic sally somewhat disconcerted M. Bergeret, who is not accustomed to fly at so dizzy a height. He brought the conversation to a more modest altitude.

"How can mechanism," he asked, "have an influence on sculpture?"

"How?" exclaimed Rodin, still growling. "Why, because moulding has replaced talent."[1]

FRANCE. "Moulding?"

RODIN. "Yes, this mechanical process is now daily employed by our sculptors. They are content to make mere casts of living models.

"The public is still unaware of this. But it is an open secret in our profession. Modern statues are but casts placed on pedestals. The sculptor has nothing to do but cross his arms. It's the plasterer who does the whole job."

FRANCE. "Allow me to ask one question. I can quite understand what you say when the figures of a monument are exactly life-size. But how do

[1] At the beginning of Auguste Rodin's career he was accused by academic sculptors of having recourse to this very process he here condemns so vigorously.

The State, which proposed to purchase his *Age d'Arain*, even appointed a committee to make sure that this work was not a simple cast from life.

It is piquant to hear the man of genius, who always spiritualized Nature, here return the ball to his adversaries, whose lifeless technique certainly deserved his stern reprimand.

our artists manage when they execute figures which are larger or smaller than life ? "

RODIN. " That is not difficult. There are instruments for enlarging or diminishing casts."

FRANCE. " And in ancient times, you say, sculptors abstained from moulding from life ? "

RODIN. " They used casts merely as documents. In all studios in former days, moulded arms, legs and torsos, perfect in contour, were to be seen suspended on the walls.

" Artists consulted them as a means of control when inserting muscles in their works ; but they took very great care not to copy them, and invariably strove to animate these references, to transform them, to make their inspiration palpitate therein. It was the Italian Canova who, at the end of the eighteenth century, began to incorporate moulded parts into his statues. The great number of works with which he was commissioned obliged him to adopt this expeditious method. Since then his example has been universally followed.

" Sculptors have ceased to set the seal of thought on their works—thought which transfigures things, illuminates them with inner truth. They have sought for nothing more than a vulgar and deceptive representation of still life. And, not content with moulding the nude, they have, by a fatal propensity, reproduced actual clothing with exactitude. In

feminine dress, they have imitated ribbons, lace and passementerie; in masculine wear, frock-coats, breeches, cuffs, collars—the whole department of things in the latest style.

"Thus, our streets and the façades of our national monuments have become branches of the Musée Grévin." [1]

France. "That is only too true, mon cher Maître. And there is further evidence of this base realism in modern sculpture in the quantity of accessories of everyday life: furniture which looks as though it had just come from the cabinet-maker's, scientific apparatus, all sorts of objects which are a dead weight for Art, since, because of their precise stiffness, they escape the fancy of interpretation.

"One could compose a strange curiosity shop of all the attributes which make our official monuments heavy.

"Bernard Palissy's oven would be side by side with Pelletier and Caventou's phial, Lavoisier's balance, Claude Bernard's dissecting table and his dead dog, Diderot's arm-chair, Camille Desmoulin's chair, Renaudot's press, Dr. Tarnier's hospital bed, Gérôme's revolving stand, etc.

"But, side by side with this lumber-room, you would have to open a big branch to house such

[1] The Madame Tussaud's of Paris.—*Translator's note.*

huge objects as Chappe's telegraph and the siege balloon."

Rodin. "The artists of to-day do not know that the rôle of art is to interpret the human soul, that one does not represent science by machines but by a pensive forehead and meditative eyes; that one does not depict courage by means of cannon and aerostats, but by virile faces and bold breasts.

"The accessory is their supreme resource, because they no longer know how to make mind irradiate."

. . .

M. Bergeret, who is most civil, considered that it was good to say that our modern sculpture possessed, however, some splendour.

Whereupon Rodin, as though this praise was not addressed to him, magnanimously mentioned Dalou, whose *République Triomphante*, drawn on a chariot by lions and followed by Justice and Abundance, he praised.

France. "Certain critics have disapproved of this mythology; but I do not share their prejudices. Allegory—so badly in repute—appears to me to be alone capable of interpreting general ideas. Is that not your opinion?"

Rodin. "Yes, indeed! It is merely a matter of rejuvenating old images. Thus, Dalou's Marianne, wearing the Phrygian cap, reproduces

the conventional type of liberty; but her gesture, impressed with familiarity, and her face, at once serious and modest, are those of an honest workwoman of to-day."

FRANCE. "It's the same in literary matters. Consider the allegory of Victory. It is extremely ancient and apparently well worn. But read Napoleon's Proclamation on his return from the Isle of Elba.

"'La Victoire, marchera au pas de charge.'

"Tell me, is that the ancient Nike? No. It's Napoleon's own Victory which he leads with drums beating. 'Au pas de charge!'—'Double quick step!' She no longer has wings, but she treads the roads and fields furiously. She is dusty, dishevelled, plebeian. . . ."

Therefore it was agreed that allegory, like every artistic or literary resource, only became of value through the genius of those employing it. And by chance the name of M. Puech was mentioned.

FRANCE. "Oh, that gentleman makes me terribly frightened. Sometimes, I am obliged to cross the Luxembourg Garden. It bristles with funeral monuments, dedicated to writers, and produces upon me the not very diverting impression of a cemetery of the Muses.

"But especially does Leconte de Lisle, caressed by a big woman with wings, in lard, seem to me

to inspire pity. When I see it, I hurry away as fast as I can, thinking that, some day perhaps, M. Puech will represent a *Dreyfus Affair* in tallow voraciously kissing my bust in margarine."

Rodin burst into Homeric laughter.

. . .

The two great men naturally came to speak of the changes made in Paris.

Both were born there, and M. Bergeret, who was brought up in a shop opposite the Louvre, on the banks of the sluggish Seine, tenderly cherished the smiling perspective of pleasing buildings and trembling foliage which enchanted his childish eyes.

"They will end," he said, "by making our Paris ugly."

Rodin. "Yes, indeed. Everywhere they are destroying the ancient buildings which are the noblest ornament of the city.

"Modern politicians, engineers, architects and financiers have hatched an abominable conspiracy against the grace bequeathed to us by the past. They are rapidly demolishing the most radiant remains of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Have they not recently sacked the delightful Île Saint Louis, where reverie, hunted out from everywhere, seemed to have taken refuge?

"Virgil has related a dramatic legend. To feed a sacrificial fire, Æneas breaks the branches of a

myrtle. Suddenly blood flows from the broken branches and words are moaned :

" ' Stop, wretched man, you are wounding, you are tearing me ! '

" The tree was a man metamorphosed by the will of the gods.

" The poet's fable often returns to my mind when I see Vandals destroying the stately mansions of former times.

" It seems to me, then, that the walls bleed, for, like Virgil's myrtle, they are living and human.

" Do not the French of former days speak to us through the harmonious rhythm of their monuments ?

" To shatter a sixteenth-century mask, a seventeenth-century portico, or a delicate frieze of the eighteenth century is to criminally gash our ancestors' faces and lacerate their eloquent lips. What a heinous crime to stifle their voices !

" If, at least, the residences erected in the place of those destroyed were beautiful ! But the majority are hideous."

France. " They are all too high. The moderate height of dwelling-houses was the chief attraction of old Paris. They did not hide from sight the pleasant sky of the Île de France. Land being cheap, they developed in breadth. That was the secret of their charm. Land has become very dear

and the houses of to-day rise simply because they cannot spread out. That is the reason for their ugliness."

Rodin. "They present neither good proportions nor style, nor pleasing details. People have forgotten that architecture, like painting, sculpture, poetry and music, is a language of the soul. Taste is declining. And taste is the mind of a race expressed in its daily life, it is its character made sensible in its costumes, homes, gardens and public squares. Modern society detests mind. It is killing imagination."

He continued:

"Is there not a question of replacing the light foot-bridge, the Pont des Arts, opposite the Louvre, by an enormous iron bridge?

"It is enough to make one howl with rage! Only stone is permissible in front of the Palace of the Kings.

"This mass of iron with which we are threatened would, it appears, span the river quite near the foreland of the Vert-Galant.

"Thus, the magnificent landscape formed by the two banks of the river, the Louvre, the Palais Mazarin, the Monnaie, the verdant prow of the Île de la Cité and the Pont-Neuf, as majestic as a tragedy by Corneille or a canvas by Poussin, would be spoilt.

"The reason why this ensemble is perfect is that generation after generation of Parisians have bequeathed the duty of embellishing it. Just as the strains of Amphion's lyre raised the docile stones which of their own accord formed divine monuments, a secret melody has grouped in irreproachable order such radiant buildings around the Seine, in which their reflections tremble.

"And suddenly people want to destroy this great masterpiece!"

FRANCE. "Practical utility, they say. But is there anything more useful to a nation than the charm of a city in which is visibly interpreted its social spirit—bold, well-balanced, clear and joyful? That, I think, is a lesson which, in the life of a nation and for its future, is worth more than all the iron bridges!"

. . .

After our coffee we went into the garden and walked to the edge of a slope whence the eye could take in the whole of Paris. As far as the most distant horizon stretched a sea of domes, towers and steeples.

Through light clouds the golden and opalescent rays of the sun streamed on this stony swell.

But often clouds of smoke from humming factories in the valley spread a gigantic dark veil over this fairy scene.

"Was it so difficult," said France, "to keep these loathsome factories at a distance from the city? Is it not an absurdity to allow the air of Paris to be continually poisoned by the tall chimneys which encircle it? Is this not an odious sacrilege against so beautiful a city?"

Rodin. "Our epoch, in which money reigns, tolerates the worst outrages on the right of all to health and also to beauty. It infects and defiles everything. It kills Imagination! It kills Imagination!"

France. "But Imagination is always reanimated. And perhaps it will have its revenge? Perhaps, soon, it will form another society less basely utilitarian and less disdainful of the mind."

Such were the sorrowful observations these two prophets exchanged on the hill of Meudon.

ON WARS

BERGERET has always detested war. In several of his books—*Le Lys Rouge*, *L'Orme du Mail* and *Le Mannequin d'Osier*, for instance—he has expressed his hatred of it by an irony infinitely more effective than anger.

Before the Great War broke out, he used to say that he could not believe such a thing possible, because formidable armaments made it too horrible ; and, again, European Governments, all more or less tinged with democracy, would shrink before the hazards of war. At other times, on the contrary, he was, like every one of us, seized with anguish.

" It would be foolish to pretend," he wrote in the preface to *Jeanne d'Arc*, " that we are certain of a peace which nothing will disturb. On the contrary, the terrible industrial and commercial rivalries which are increasing around us foreshadow future conflicts, and there is nothing to assure us that France will not some day be enveloped in a European or world-wide conflagration."

A tragic prophecy which, alas, was shortly to be fulfilled !

During those dreadful years of the War, when the country he loves so filially was threatened with destruction, he experienced terrible anguish of heart.

Then, when occasion arose, he let one see in his conversations the fears caused him by the revival of the spirit of conquest among the Allies in proportion as their triumph became less doubtful.

Immediately after the Armistice, when attending a ceremony in memory of Jean Jaurès, he made, in the midst of the hot-brained crowd, one of those noble gestures which the democracy has no difficulty in interpreting and which invariably arouses enthusiasm.

Taking a Croix de Guerre from a maimed soldier, he pinned it under the bust of the man who had preached brotherhood and had given his life for it.

He thus attested that the people of France had piously offered their blood in the name of Peace and henceforth would stoutly protect her against every bellicose frenzy.

Since, he has never missed an opportunity of again launching an anathema against war and expressing an earnest desire for a social order from which it will for ever be delivered.

. . .

The following conversation was held at the Villa Saïd a few years before the inexpiable horror.

We were slightly at variance with our awkward Eastern neighbours over Morocco. The storm had already begun to rumble in the distance.

That day, M. Bergeret spoke first of all on the subject of the English Press, which supported us against the Germans a little too loudly.

"Great Britain disquiets me," he murmured. "She is martial beyond measure.

"Certainly she is brave. And perhaps she does not fear war on her own account. But I am certain she fears it still less on France's."

There was laughter.

FRANCE. "Oh, that witticism is not my own. At least, it is but a variant of a farcical threat uttered a long time ago by a certain Bermudez de Castro against Baudelaire."

We begged France to tell us the story of Bermudez, and he was not reluctant to do so.

"Bermudez was a Spanish nobleman," he said. "He had been persecuted in his native country for translating *Les Mystères de Paris*, for the clericals there were so suspicious that our puerile Eugène Sue appeared to them to be infernal.

"So the translator withdrew to France, where literary society gave him a good welcome. Théophile Gautier, Baudelaire and Flaubert received him at their gatherings, for his originality amused them. He was extravagantly proud in his quality

A CORNER OF THE DINING-ROOM IN THE VILLA SAÏD

of hidalgo; also extraordinarily dirty. To become acquainted with the bill of fare at his last meal, one had but to glance at his broad black beard. In addition, a greater fop than Narcissus.

"One day, when dining with his friends, he found a deliciously scented letter under his napkin. It had been slipped there by Baudelaire.

"Bermudez sniffed at the envelope, concluded that a piece of good fortune had come his way, and furtively put the letter in his pocket. Then, as soon as they had risen from table, he went into a corner to read it, which he did with flashing eyes, dilating nostrils, and sighs of hope. Baudelaire and his friends were looking at him out of the corners of their eyes and thoroughly enjoying the varying expressions on his face.

"The bogus letter ran somewhat as follows:

"'Noble Spaniard: you are tall and I am supple; you are dark and I am fair; you are strong and I am beautiful. I love you. Be on the Place Saint Sulpice, near the fountain, to-day, at midnight.'

"At midnight, the practical jokers, who had pretended that they were all going to their respective homes, hid themselves not far from the appointed meeting-place. It was winter and bitterly cold. The hidalgo was already there. More slender-waisted than ever, with his arms akimbo and his moustaches upturned, he walked round and round

the fountain. A bitter wind swept the deserted square and scattered the water which, freezing on the muzzles of the stone lions, furnished them with fantastic white beards.

" Bermudez continued to walk round and round.

" The quarter, then the half-hour struck. Phlegmatic and superb, he ever went round and round.

" Suddenly, from one of the corners of the square, a roar of laughter came, followed by a jeering cry :

" ' Hallo ! Seigneur Don Juan ! '

" Bermudez was beside himself with rage.

" ' Ah ! ' he roared, ' I recognize that voice. It is Bodelairre's.'

" He rolled his *r*'s terribly.

" ' I will kill him ! I will kill him, even if I myself perish. I care little for my own skin, but I care still less for that of Bodelairre ! '

" He then made off majestically. The next day he had forgotten his threats."

Charles Saunier, the art critic, drew a note-book from his pocket and set down this anecdote.

" I belong," he said, " to the Historical Society of the sixth ward in which Visconti's fountain is situated. The smallest incidents which have occurred on that small space interest us deeply. The greatest events which happen in the rest of the universe we wouldn't give a pin's head for. But it

seems to me," he continued, " that you have related a similar scene in *Jocaste et le Chat maigre*."

" Well, yes," said France. " It is precisely Bermudez's adventure which I attributed to another character."

. . .

An old gentleman present cut short these remarks, which he considered frivolous.

" We were talking of a coming war," he growled. " Well, if it breaks out, all the better ! "

The author of this peremptory declaration was an obscure poet who has since died. Judging by his speech, ever overflowing with chauvinism, his Muse must have been very heroic. But no one had ever read his verses.

He was so crippled with gout that he could not wear boots. He dragged his feet about in old shoes laced over thick canvas bandages. And it was in this peculiar footwear that he paid his visits.

He was a coughing, tearful and spluttering old fellow.

He often came to see Anatole France, whom he had known a long time. The Master, who tolerated him, sometimes used to say when he was not there :

" Some old friends make me have doubts about friendship—that celestial boon. They pride themselves on being most attached to one, and so they

are—like the mussels on the keel of a ship. You are aware that these are often poisoned."

Nobody replied to the gouty bard's trenchant remark. So, striking the arms of his arm-chair with his flabby hands, he resumed, between fits of sneezing:

"We have remained, thank the Lord, a nation of soldiers! Atchum! We are fond of war. Atchum! We ask for nothing better than to fight. Atchum! We'll go and get back the clocks the Prussians prigged from us in 1870. Atchum! Atchum!"

France, after looking at him for a moment in silence, said to him gently:

"I admire such fine enthusiasm in a veteran. And I am sure that, if the country is in danger, our courageous young men will not spare their blood. But to contend that Frenchmen love warfare is not correct.

"No nation ever loved war. No nation ever wanted to fight.

"At bottom, the crowd always looks without joy upon fighting.

"It was Titus Livy's rhetoric which, above all, distorted the ideas of historians. But I do not believe that this Paduan was sincere. He knew quite well that nobody is glad to run the risk of death. But he said to himself, that it was necessary to revive

the courage of the Romans, who were becoming enervated, and so he inflated his sonorous periods.

"The bravery he celebrated we generally attribute to victorious armies. We think that they deserve their success because of their contempt of danger, and that, on the other hand, conquered armies are lacking in courage. Gratuitous suppositions! It is chance which, the more often, decides battles. As to armies, I suspect that they are all mediocre and that not a single one faces suffering and death with a light heart.

"Our revolutionary troops have been lyrically extolled. On that topic, I came by chance on a very instructive pamphlet by a person named Rozière, entitled *La Révolution à Meulan*. I've no longer got this little work. I lent it to some one and it was not returned—a proof of its interest.

"When the country was in danger, men were levied at Meulan, as all over France. This was done with great show. The Mayor summoned the population to assemble in the church. There was a beating of drums, the young men swore they would conquer or die, the *Champ du Départ* was sung and they set off towards the army. . . . But, a week later, the majority of them were found in the neighbouring country and even at Meulan itself. When circumstances again became very critical, the Mayor decided that it was necessary to make a fresh appeal

to his fellow-citizens. He assembled them once more. The same conscripts were enrolled . . . and returned after a few days' absence.

" This ceremony, without any change in the stage or actors, took place several times.

" Finally, a single citizen of Meulan remained with the army—only one ! We are assured that he became a general, and well he merited it.

" I imagine that, in the case of many other ' Pont-Neuf ' enlistments, the same thing occurred. For, indeed, you ought to know that, when a man offers his devotion to France on the Pont-Neuf, it is principally in order to show himself off. Once he had displayed himself, it suffices. He is free."

The Old Poet (sounding the horn to call the dogs of war).—" Come now ! Come now ! my dear France . . . I cannot understand your irony. Military virtue, fortunately . . . atchum ! is not rare—atchum !—and you will admit that—atchum ! atchum ! . . ."

France. " I grant you, certainly, that there are heroes. Still, they are not always so. The real hero confesses that, sometimes, he lacks courage. I grant you that certain troops, at certain times of enthusiasm, face terrible risks with intrepidity. But from all we know we are obliged to conclude that the majority of the soldiers composing an army cling eagerly to life and would not expose it unless they were forced to do so.

"That is why the little book I have just mentioned, although it certainly does not indicate the mentality of all Frenchmen during the Revolution, seemed to me to be worthy of credence. And my own experience corroborates it."

THE OLD POET. "Your own ex—atchum!—perience?"

FRANCE. "Yes. . . . Listen. I will relate to you, very faithfully, a few of my impressions as a national guard during the siege of Paris.

"The commander of our battalion was a big grocer of our quarter. He was lacking in authority, one must admit, because he sought to treat his customers with consideration.

"One day, we received an order to take part in a sortie. We were sent to the banks of the Marne. Our commander, in his spick-and-span, brand-new uniform, was splendid. He was mounted on a charming little Arabian horse, which he had obtained I know not where, and of which he was exceedingly proud—a little horse entirely white, adorably graceful and lively. Too lively, for it resulted in the poor grocer's death. Whilst engaged in making his mount execute a series of caracols, it reared to its full height, fell on its back, and killed our commander on the spot by breaking his back.

"We felt little regret at the loss of our leader. We made up our minds to stop, to fall out of rank and stretch ourselves on the grassy bank of the river.

We remained there the whole morning, and the whole of the afternoon. In the distance there was the booming of artillery. . . . But we took good care not to march to the guns.

"Towards evening, we saw a number of sailors running along the road which overlooked the river bank. Many of them were black with powder. Wounded men wore bloody bandages. These brave fellows had fought well, but had been forced to give way to bad fortune.

"What idea came into our heads? We began to shout: 'Long live the fleet!'

"This exclamation, which the sailors thought was ironical, had the effect of making them angry. Some of them went for us with their bayonets! A dangerous game, in our opinion. So we precipitately left those grassy slopes and made away. And as we were well rested, whereas the pursuers were almost dropping with fatigue, we were able to escape from them without difficulty.

"We returned to Paris. But long inaction weighed on us and we were very hungry. Consequently we had no scruples over pillaging a bakery we found *en route*. Fortunately the owners had had time to get away, so we were not guilty of homicide.

"Such was our conduct. Oh, I am not boasting of it; oh, no, I am not boasting of it. But truth is dear to me and I pay it homage."

THE OLD POET. "Those are certainly exceptional events—atchum—and I am sure that . . ."

FRANCE. "My dear friend, I am not trying to shatter your faith. Above all, refrain from thinking that I am seeking to disparage my companions-in-arms. Our enemies differed in no way from ourselves. Few among them were heroes. Many witnesses saw German soldiers, who had been sent to dangerous districts, weeping. Why jeer at their tears? Undoubtedly they were shed at the thought of the young women who would never see again their husbands, the little children who would never again kiss their fathers.

"But let me tell you another anecdote.

"A short time after the war of 1870, I happened to be at X——. Entering an inn, I heard roars of laughter, and found the occupants of the place surrounding a sturdy-looking fellow.

"He was explaining to them how he had succeeded in avoiding every battle.

"'Fust of all,' he said, 'I left 'ome two weeks late. When I comes afore the sergeant, says I to meself: Now, 'e's going to give me what for. So I—not so much of a fool as ye think—pretends to be a hidiot. To every darned thing he says to me, I replies: Moo! Moo!—just like a coo.

"'"What a brute! What a brute!" says 'e. "Moo! Moo!—that's all I can get out of 'im."

" ' In th' end, a horficer, says 'e to me : " Eh ! simpleton. Since yer a farm 'and, ye knows all about osses."

" ' I says yes with me 'ead.

" ' " Well, take these 'ere two nags to Colonel Bouchard of the 28th Regiment, Third Army Corps. 'Ere's yer route and the wherewith'l to feed all three o' yer—two nags and yerself."

" ' I says yes again and off I goes.

" ' But—naturally—I taks the wrong road and brings me two nags to another colonel of another regiment.

" ' This colonel, as soon as 'e'd squinted at me papers, 'e shouts at me : " Bless me soul, what a fool the man is to be sure ! "—and he put me on the right road wi' money to spend on th' way.

" ' You bet, I goes wrong agin.

" ' And like that I goes from colonel to colonel all the time there was 'ot fightin'. But, once peace comes, I brings me two nags to the right colonel, and there I was ! '

" Well now, the cynical confession of this cunning fellow provoked sympathetic hilarity.

" Oh, I don't say that the same auditors would have been insensible to the narration of an act of great devotion. If the most hide-bound of men admire cunningness, they are also capable of venerating nobility.

" But the gallery did not reprove this sham Nicaise.

In the heart of the people there is always a feeling of great indulgence for a Panurge who tucks himself away in the midst of the fight, for a Socia who, under a tent, far from the fray, stuffs himself with ham and wine.

" Really, it appears to me quite impossible that the chauvinism with which our middle-classes are attacked from time to time ever reaches the real people.

" On the contrary, I notice that anti-militarism is bolder than it was. In days of yore, deserters and insubordinates made no excuse for their conduct. ' We are betrayed,' they cried. ' We are sold.'

" That was their only justification.

" Now they have a theory and reasoned motives. They have replaced the *Chant du Départ* by a hymn in praise of *Not setting off*. To refuse, in music, to march ! That becomes glorious."

The Old Poet. " And so you approve of them in this ? "

France. " Do not make me say what has not entered my mind. No, I do not approve of them. For, in the present situation of Europe, they are running the risk of favouring the worst enemies of civilization."

The Old Poet. " You recognize then that the country . . ."

France. " I recognize that our country would

deserve to be desperately defended if it were threatened.

"Even then we must see clearly in what respect it has a right to our love.

"The nation, if by this word we mean the sum-total of the great ideas and deep sentiments which differ from one country to another, and which form French wit, English common sense, or German dialectic, this certainly is a treasure which ought to be dear to every nation. It is a flag of light planted on each territory. The most brilliant men of genius of each race have carried it higher and higher. They have afterwards, and little by little, given a magnificent spiritual meaning to groupings which fortuitous historical circumstances had originally by good luck contracted.

"But, if these touching national doctrines differ, they do not, at least, diverge. The most eminent thinkers stretch their hands across the frontiers. They have neither the same inclinations nor the same brain. Yet they draw near to each other through their humanity and through their compassion towards all their fellow-men.

"Therefore, it is a guilty error to try to set national consciences in opposition. On the contrary, in their most serene expression, they complete each other. One can adore one's native land whilst revering the others.

"But, unfortunately, the nation is not merely an ensemble of radiant ideas. Connected with it is a host of financial enterprises, of which many are not over-recommendable.

"Above all, it is the antagonism of sometimes most illegitimate capitalist appetites which urge nations to come into conflict and thus cause modern wars. Nothing is sadder.

"From the bottom of my soul, I hope that my country will abstain from every covetousness which may bring her the slightest responsibility in a conflict.

"But, if ever she was invaded by a greedy neighbour, the duty of all her sons would be to fly to her aid.

"It would, indeed, be the most dire catastrophe for Humanity if France were diminished. For, all the same, does not our native land symbolize generous aspirations sufficiently?"

THE OLD POET. "Ah! ah! you see quite well—atchum!—that there is some good in chauvinism."

FRANCE (vigorously). "Not in the least! It is criminal madness. When chauvinists say that war is sublime, that it is the school of all the virtues, that it invigorates and strengthens men, that Providence enables the worthiest to triumph, and that the greatness of a nation is to be measured by its victories, that is to say, by massacres in which its children perish with its enemies, they are absurd and odious.

THE OLD POET. "But how would you persuade the people to sacrifice themselves for their native land?"

FRANCE. "By making that native land ever better, ever more just, ever more maternal towards the people,—more loyal, more fraternal towards other nations,—by incessantly repeating that war is abominable, by carefully keeping ourselves out of all those tortuous intrigues which may provoke it,—by proving, through the striking frankness of our conduct, that we do not wish to take up arms and that we shall only use them in defence of our liberty.

"Then the people will love this land, which blends in its heart with the most splendid future of the human race, and if, perchance, it is assaulted, the people will not allow it to succumb." [1]

[1] Such, at that time, were Anatole France's opinions. Since then, by his adhesion to Communism, he has shown that only the international organization of the working-classes seems to him capable of preventing the return of wars.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AT THE VILLA SAÏD

IT was during the cold season. When Joséphine opened the door to us, we found the vestibule full of overcoats, mufflers and furs.

The garments of M. Bergeret's friends were piled on chairs and on consoles. Hats were hung on beautiful rococo candlesticks. Great-coats were suspended at the bottom of the ancient carved oak Gothic banisters.

" Are there many visitors ? " we asked Joséphine.

" Far too many ! " she replied crustily. " Heaps of Russians ! "

Joséphine had little sympathy for the Slav race.

" It's a mystery to me," she continued, " why Monsieur receives such people. Dirty and no mistake. Swarming with fleas. Just look at these old rags ! "

Between thumb and finger, she took hold of a poor threadbare cloak.

She continued to mumble :

" These Russians do nothing but dirty the whole house. And of a certainty they have bombs on

them. If Monsieur would only listen to me, he would make a better choice of his acquaintances. Celebrated as he is, he ought only to frequent the *beau monde*."

We left her to her ill humour.

With the Master, in his library, we found, indeed, several Russian revolutionaries. Among others was the famous sociologist, K——, a giant with long white curly hair, face enframed by a downy beard, large blue, astonished-looking and tender eyes, and a smiling, infantile and devout air—the perfect type of the learned anarchist whose ideas, sincerely expressed, turn society topsy-turvy.

We were in the days when Nicholas II was beginning to struggle against the agitation of his people, tired of the knout and the nagaika.

S——, a correspondent of newspapers in St. Petersburg, who had just returned from a lecturing tour in the French provinces, where he had spoken against Czarism, was giving an account of a speech he had delivered at Valenciennes.

" A very sympathetic public," he said, " and one that appeared to be well acquainted with the question."

France. " On the whole, the provinces, nowadays, are on the same intellectual level as Paris."

S——. " With the exception of a few districts, such as Brittany."

France. "It is true the Bretons are backward. That is partly due to their ignorance of our language. If they understood it, they would, perhaps, be more favourable than others towards certain of our social ideas.

"Thus, I believe that they would easily accept collectivism. They are prepared for it by the custom of parish properties, which, as in all poor districts, are numerous with them. For, at present, it is only the poor land and wretched pasturage which can remain common property, whereas, on the contrary, the smallest patch of fertile ground is immediately snapped up. Unfortunately, we have no speakers who know their dialect.

"Alcoholism, also, is fatal to them.

"There is no doubt about it, that during my last sojourn at Quiberon they appeared to me to be very backward.

"They use none of the new methods of fishing. They go out to find fish haphazard. They never think of telegraphing to each other information concerning the progress of the shoals.

"As to selling their catch, this takes place under heart-breaking conditions.

"A fish-woman—a stout well-to-do female—awaits them on the shore, feverishly on the look-out for their return. As soon as they have landed, she takes them to the wine-shop, where she serves them

with liquor, and when they are drunk she arranges for the price of their catch.

" Note that this fish-wife is a middlewoman they could very well do without. For, often, the dealer who sends the fish to Paris is also waiting, not far away from her, on the shore. But it never occurs to the fishermen to enter into direct relations with him.

" What confirmed my unfavourable judgment regarding their intelligence was a conversation I overheard between two Breton women. As women are generally sharper than men, and these were hardly that, at least so it seemed to me, I drew severe conclusions concerning the mentality of the Bretons.

" By listening to these two Breton women, I committed, I would have you know, no indiscretion. They were, in fact, half a kilometre from each other, and it was at that distance they addressed each other, at the top of their voices, like Homer's heroes.

" One of them shouted—take careful note of this, Monsieur," said France to the old sociologist—" she bellowed, ' You're nothing but a dirty good-for-nothing for going with my man.' Whereupon the other replied, in the same tone : ' If your man goes with me it's because my . . . is finer than yours.'

" Well, sir, I don't know whether you are of my opinion, but this reply seemed to me to denote

the most complete absence of psychological observation.

" It is certain, indeed, that if we love one woman more than another, it is not at all because her . . . appears to us to be finer than another, but for a host of very different and, moreover, very complex reasons."

The old sociologist sought to form an opinion but without succeeding.

A moment later, France said to him :

" Pope Gapon must be pleased. The Russian revolution has come to a standstill."

Addressing other persons, he continued :

" Our friend S—— made me known to this Pope, about whom so much has been said. He even brought him here. He is a sturdy, dark, sunburnt young man. I must timidly confess that he did not produce an excellent impression on me. He is verbose and pompous. As he does not know a word of French, S—— translated his words to me and took care to curtail them. Gapon perceived this and got quite angry.

" ' He is scolding me,' explained S——, ' because I curtailed his last sentence, in which he compared Nicholas II to a tiger. He did, indeed, add that he is a tiger *thirsty for human blood*.'

" Well, really, this dispute on the subject of a metaphor appeared to me to be bad taste. For

are not all royal or imperial tigers thirsty for human blood ? [1]

" Gapon, who directed the first processions of strikers at St. Petersburg, considers that the people must be allowed a little rest before they are asked to make fresh efforts.

" I do not know whether he is right. But the danger is that the halt may become a long stop.

" Perhaps the Russians are still too enslaved and too wretched to desire liberty passionately. For that that can be so is a fact. Almost all revolutions which triumph durably are confined to sanctioning acquired results.

" Look at the revolution of '89. It was the centres already delivered from feudalism which revolted to demand the abolition of the old régime. Asto the provinces on which the traditional yoke still weighed, they were so little inclined to assist

[1] It will, perhaps, be remembered that this man Gapon was an *agent provocateur* in the pay of the Czarist police. He led a big labour demonstration at St. Petersburg and slipped away at the very moment machine-guns were mowing down the people.

He came to France shortly afterwards, and it was then he visited the Villa Saïd. He then went to the Côte d'Azur to lead a gay life with the money he had received for his act of treachery.

He met a well-merited end. The revolutionaries, having obtained proof of his infamy, led him into a trap and executed him.

When he visited Anatole France, nobody yet suspected him. However, as shown by the above dialogue, M. Bergeret was not his dupe.

that they shed their blood fighting against the Revolution. This was the case with the Vendée and Brittany.

" It is the same with socialism. It counts its most staunch supporters in big corporations, such as that of the miners, who, precisely, thanks to their discipline, have already obtained a good part of the advantages promised by socialism. Whilst the most bitter adversaries of this doctrine are the peasants, who suffer the most under the middle-class régime.

" In reality, social changes only take place when they are ripe.

" That is why I wonder whether the Russians are not still too deprived of the fruits the Revolution would bring them to wish to win them."

K—— protested that his fellow-countrymen were more enlightened than people thought.

France. " But is not their devotion to the Czar an obstacle to their emancipation ? "

K——. " Russia's religious respect for her sovereign has quickly disappeared. Our people are mystical, but perspicacious. Having experienced the Czar's bad faith, Russia has broken away from him. Her piety remains intact, but jumps over a step and appeals direct to God."

" More intelligent than the Breton fishermen," some one remarked, " the intermediary is suppressed."

K——. "Moreover, it would be wrong to imagine the Russians as blindly submissive to their priests. On the contrary, although they are devout, they have no great love for the clergy. And when, for example, they kiss a Pope's hand, their intention is to pay homage, not to the man of the Church, but to the God he represents."

France. "You do not astonish me. For contempt of the priest is quite reconcilable with piety. In general, the people revile the cassock. Why? Merely, in all probability, because it is lugubrious and evokes the idea of the last sacrament.

"But tell me, is not Russian mysticism wilfully contemplative and hostile to acts? Does not your prophet Tolstoi, for instance, preach to the moujiks resignation and what he calls 'non-resistance to evil'?"

K——. "Between ourselves, he is not heard. Our workmen and peasants are stout dogs, and it is difficult to put them to sleep again, once they are awake."

France. "Yes, I understand: sheep become wolves more easily than wolves sheep. And listen, that is a truth which was recently experienced by your compatriot, Prince Trubetskoi, in Paris, where he lives. Just as Tolstoi invites men to bleat, this prince undertook to tame wolves. He captured two very young specimens, brought them up, and

took them about in leash like dogs. To break them of their instincts, he fed them principally on vegetables, and the surprising thing is that, for some time, they seemed to be quite satisfied with this regimen.

"But, suddenly, the other day, one of them fixed its fangs in the arm of the fruiterer from whom the prince did not disdain to purchase, in person, his animals' food, and they had great difficulty in making that naughty wolf leave go.

"However, this is not meant as an apologue."

K—— (laughing). "Nevertheless, one is able to draw sociological conclusions from it."

France. "If you like . . ."

K——. "The best way, it seems to me, of assisting in the progress of liberalism in our country, at the present time, is to advise other races, and the French in particular, not to subscribe to any Russian loan before the Czarist Government has brought in a liberal constitution."

France. "I wish success to those tactics with all my heart. For they will save thousands of human lives. It is, unfortunately, certain that, if the Russian Government saw it was supported by our money, it would not hesitate to launch out into the most atrocious reaction."

K——. "It is preparing for it."

France. "It might even happen that it would

succeed in stifling for a long time every inclination for independence."

K——. "No. For, in response to reaction, there would soon be terrorist reprisals. But it is important to facilitate the task of the liberals, and, as you say, spare human lives."

France. "Alas! each step in human progress devours but too many!

"'C'est un ordre des dieux, qui jamais ne se rompt
De nous vendre bien cher les bienfaits qu'ils nous font.
L'exil des Tarquins même ensanglanta nos terres
Et nos premiers consuls nous ont coûté des guerres!'"

A very dark young Slav, with long hair plastered down with grease, a Mongolian complexion, a prognathous face and the drooping moustaches of a Kalmuk, suddenly broke the silence he had retained until then. He spoke French with extreme difficulty.

"For success of Revolution much better that . . ."

France. "Do you not admire the mightiness of our great Corneille?"

The Young Slav. "Yes,—admirable. But better that . . ."

France.

"'L'exil des Tarquins même ensanglanta nos terres
Et nos premiers consuls nous ont coûtée des guerres!'

"It is more than poetry, more than eloquence . . ."

The Young Slav. "The Revolution . . ."

France. "It is rock! . . ."

The Young Slav (obstinately). "Yes, yes! . . . You are wrong in thinking Czarism will abdicate. . . . No confidence. . . . Much better submit to atrocious persecutions. Much better have many martyrs, much blood, much blood, and then government swept away by furious people."

France (addressing his guests). "This young man, as you see, is one of the uncorrupt. If need be, he would throw bombs! . . ."

The dynamiter began to smile.

From his waistcoat pockets he drew two steel tubes. Then, triumphantly, he said:

"Bomb in two pieces. Separated, nothing to be feared. If two parts screwed together, whole house blow up."

France (courteously). "Screw them not together, I beg of you. And believe me, my friend, so long as other means present themselves, we must have recourse to them. Remember this: a murderous Justice, even exercised by a nation which is liberating itself, is never more than a sad Justice. It is not good to regale the thirsty gods with blood."

. . .

He resumed:

"The cause of the Russian revolutionaries concerns us much more than people think.

"If they were conquered, the Liberal spirit would

pass through a crisis in every country in Europe. On the other hand, their victory will give great impetus to socialism in other nations and especially in France."

The conversation now branched off to the subject of the French revolutionary party.

FRANCE. "I believe that the people of our country are very favourably disposed towards collectivism.

"But they have only the instinct of their interests, and, as regards ideas, they remain frightfully indifferent.

"At Bordeaux, recently, I had the opportunity to question two coopers, who, the night before, had been present at a lecture by Jules Guesde. 'Did he speak well?' I asked. '*Sûremintgne!*'—'Did you understand all he said?'—'*Naturellemintgne!* It was fairly clear. He desires the happiness of coopers!'

"That was all they had retained.

"Another anecdote. A few days ago, I was at the Bourse du Travail, in the office of the redoubtable Pataud, secretary of the Electricians' Syndicate,—the man, you know, who has but to make a sign to plunge the whole of Paris into darkness.

"Around him, on the ground, were scattered a large number of pamphlets.

"'Good!' I said to him. 'I see that you are

thinking of instructing our comrades. For here, I suppose, are doctrinal works for their use ? '

" ' Those writings,' he replied, ' are copies of the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.* Our syndicalists cannot bear any other form of literature.' "

France concluded by saying :

" If our party were better led, if it were not cut up into thirty-six sections, it would organize a more assiduous and more methodical propaganda, and our principles would meet with a more thoughtful welcome among the working classes." [1]

[1] Anatole France has shown continued interest in the Russian revolutionaries.

One day, Gustave Hervé brought to him a man of thirty to thirty-five years of age, a pale-faced man with hair cut short like a convict's, and on his emaciated face a perpetual and enigmatic grin.

The Editor of *La Guerre Sociale* introduced him :

" Boris Savinkof, assassin."

" Delighted to meet you," said M. Bergeret, stretching out his hand to this unknown visitor.

" I shall ask my friend Hervé to get me a hundred visiting cards bearing the title he has given me," said Savinkof, joking.

' And whom did he assassinate ? " asked France.

" The Minister de Plevhe and the Grand-Duke Serge," replied Hervé.

" Big game," observed M. Bergeret.

Since then, Savinkof became Minister of War under the Karensky Government. He tried in vain to oppose Bolshevism. He was obliged to leave Russia. Throughout Europe he is incessantly striving to stir up adversaries against Lenin and Trotsky.

This former Terrorist is henceforth labelled a reactionary,—not the least paradoxical change in his career.

o

Addressing a young engraver. "Look at these plates by Hans Burgmair. You will tell me what you think of them! This seigneur and this dame,

---

Another Russian, M. Rappoport, who has become French, and who has manifested a deep and faithful sympathy towards the Bolshevists, maintains a close friendship with Anatole France.

Van Dongen's truculent portrait of him is well known. A face like a tobacco-jar furnished with a reddish beard, which eats away the entire features. In the midst of this beard, shining gold-rimmed spectacles.

He is a Diogenes, or a Menippus, let loose in modern society. He speaks French with a very pronounced accent, and lets fly a continual stream of witty yet ferocious remarks, which hit the mark among socialists and middle-class citizens without distinction.

During the War, he went many times to La Béchellerie, in Touraine, to which France had retired.

He turned his host's library topsy-turvy, stuffed his pockets with venerable sixteenth-century volumes, and, stretched flat on his stomach under the willows in the meadow, took his fill of their delightful contents.

After his departure, M. Bergeret asked his secretary to gather in the tall grass the books that might be missing.

One day, they found a precious Ronsard hanging on the wire used for drying clothes.

During the bombardment of Paris by Gothas, an untoward adventure happened to M. Rappoport. Denounced for having uttered alarmist remarks in a cellar—remarks which over-zealous patriots declared they had heard—he was put in prison.

Anatole France did not fail to send him a letter which, read before the magistrates, saved the accused. In this letter M. Bergeret said that M. Rappoport's ideas were known to him, that they were sound, and that the imprisonment of so excellent a man was a scandal.

It is certainly M. Rappoport's influence which, quite recently, has inclined Anatole France more and more towards Communism.

caressing each other—how touching they are! Do you notice the lady's big stomach? . . . It is not because she is enceinte. . . . It was then the fashion for ladies to have big stomachs, just as it is the mode to-day that they shall have none.

"What decision of line and what a well-balanced composition!

"One must, from time to time, enjoy that which is the whole consolation of life."

THE OMNIPOTENCE OF THE IDEAL

HE election of a deputy for Paris was about to take place.

A delegation of the Socialist party waited on M. Bergeret and proposed that he become a candidate.

That showed little knowledge of him.

For he possesses none of the characteristics of a political speaker. He often speaks in public, but does so very much against the grain. " Comrade Anatole "—as he is sometimes called at meetings—is little versed in the art of oration.

A piquant contrast. He is a sublime conversationalist. In his own home, he is a magician of speech. Sometimes tender, sometimes satirical, he talks like a book—the most exquisite of books.

At a public meeting, he has a difficulty in finding his words. He reads his speeches. He drones them out in a nasal tone which is not without a certain solemnity. If he has to improvise, he stammers, gets confused; and his very emotion is the most refined homage to the crowd, which, proud of intimidating a man of genius, wildly cheers him.

But, in Parliament, his enemies would not, perhaps, be so considerate.

Another drawback. He never replies to letters. Nay, he does not even open them. Formerly, they used to accumulate on a tray until old Joséphine burnt them. That was one of the ritualistic duties of that faithful servant.

Also note, that M. Bergeret forgets appointments, unless he turns up a day too soon, or a day too late. Electors would quickly grow tired of such a representative.

Verily, the tricolour scarf would suit this philosopher about as well as a ring would befit a cat.

On that day, therefore, he declined the dangerous honour they offered him. The delegates insisted. He persisted in his refusal.

"I am flattered and touched by your proposal," he said, "but, really, I'm not made of the stuff for a representative of the people.

"Don't accuse me of looking down on politics. On the contrary, I admire those intrepid men who devote themselves to it, and who, you clearly understand me, uphold sound opinions—that is to say, ours."

Thereupon the name of Jean Jaurès sprang to his lips.

Anatole France professed the deepest affection for him. He liked him for the quickness of his

intelligence, the astonishing extent of his knowledge, and especially for his greatness of character.

"What noble conscientiousness!" he said. "He is sometimes unskilful because of his very uprightness. He does not fear to run counter to the passions of the crowd. It happens, at times, that he irritates his own partisans by his resistance to their excesses and by his loyalty towards his opponents.

"He has chosen the most thankless of parts. He strives to be a mediator between the workers and the middle-classes, and to avoid violence.

"A splendid but hard task.

"Sometimes, on the occasion of a strike, when the Riot Act has been read to the workers, who are brandishing paving-stones, a heroic man, intent on preventing slaughter, will advance to the dangerous space separating the opposing forces. In so doing, he runs the risk of receiving both the bullets of Law and order and the stones of Rebellion.

"Such an image well represents the courageous mission my friend Jaurès has set himself and the threats he faces."

When, later, the illustrious orator met his tragic end, we remembered these words, which seemed to us prophetic.

A moment later France was praising the disinterestedness of Jules Guesde.

"What strength this man draws from his poverty!"

he said. "He always wears the most common clothes. But his very bearing is indigent, and would still be so under less faded garments.

"His part, one must confess, is not so difficult as Jaurès'. For he has less scruple about obstinately refusing to collaborate with the middle-classes than in seeking to reform them.

"The hostility reigning between these two socialist leaders alarms fretful minds. The profound discords in our party are often interpreted as signs of weakness. But, in my opinion, they are rather a proof of vitality."

As astonishment was expressed, he resumed :

"Why, yes ! Let us reflect. Never will there be, between the principal revolutionaries of to-day, such bitter dissensions as those which arose between the early Christians, between St. Peter and St. Paul, for example.

"In the first century, there were certainly pagans nearer to Paul than to Peter, and among others the Syrians.

"Yet Christianity has not miscarried, as far as I know. Really, it has not succeeded so badly. And it's on the same day, together, that Peter and Paul are fêted. Everything, therefore, leads me to believe that the socialists of the future will celebrate Jean Jaurès and Jules Guesde on the same day."

There was laughter.

M. Bergeret next spoke of Briand, who was long his friend.

"It's a long time ago," he said, "since he thought of giving us the slip.

"He grew impatient of the ambitious young men who, in congresses, sought to overthrow him.

"'I'm tired of being used as doormat by them,' he growled.

"Don't you find that a pretty metaphor? It describes fairly well the tactics of those new-comers who, in order to gain the confidence of gatherings, begin by wiping their feet on well-known orators.

"Briand could with difficulty tolerate the refusal of the congresses to allow socialists to participate in middle-class Governments.

"'It's a great pity,' he confided to me. 'A great pity. For, after all, there are four or five of us who would cut very good figures as Ministers.'

"I'm sure that among those four or five he counted himself as five or six.

"He has attained the power he hoped for so ardently and he exercises it skilfully; for he possesses the art of governing men.

"I recollect that, at the time he spoke at public meetings, he knew marvellously well how to animate the public.

"At a meeting, one day, he was near me on the platform.

A BEDROOM IN THE VILLA SAÏD

"Recently, again, Briand gave a great proof of his industrious mind. It was on the day old Cardinal Richard left the house of M. Denys Cochin,[1] whose guest he had been, for his new residence in the Rue Barbet-de-Jouy.

"Briand, then in power, feared there might be demonstrations on the Archbishop's route.

"And this is what he contrived.

"He sent a number of policemen in plain clothes to stand outside M. Denys Cochin's house.

"When the prelate's carriage appeared, they began to shout at the top of their voices: 'Long live the Archbishop! Long live the Archbishop!' Then, unharnessing the horse, they placed themselves between the shafts, as though to give proof of their enthusiastic devotion to the cardinal.

"Pulling, pushing and still shouting, they dragged the vehicle along as fast as they could.

"On meeting young and fervent Catholics who cheered the venerable old man, they hustled them out of the way and continued at full speed.

"They covered the distance in the twinkling of

[1] "A great gentleman known far beyond the limits of France," as a writer in *The Times* aptly describes him, and who died in March 1922. His house was in the Rue de Babylone, where he gave a hearty welcome to many British officers serving in France. "He was the soul of kind and generous hospitality. . . . Many will recall his genial presence and his open house. To hear him recite passages from Dante and also from his own writings on Fra Angelico was a rare treat."—*Translator's note.*

an eye, disappeared with the Archbishop into the courtyard of his residence, and closed the big gates upon him.

"Thus were the rows the Government feared avoided.

"Political wisdom is to be recognized by these subtle artifices.

"It is a quality which I praise in others, and which seems to me to be almost miraculous, for I feel that I am sadly deficient in it. That is why I should make but a sorry deputy. Yes, yes, I assure you it is so.

"Moreover, I prefer my calling as a philosopher. My foolish vanity urges me to believe that it is also of some use."

M. Bergeret then set forth the parallel we were awaiting.

"I am well aware that a dreamer is an insignificant personage, compared to a politician.

"A politician is the idol of the crowd. He is its master and slave. He drags after him an entire host of beggars. He is influential, celebrated, glorious. He holds the destinies of the people in his hands. He leads them to prosperity or ruin. He makes laws. And that, above all, seems to show his power. To frame laws, institute regulations which the herd must observe, set up bounds beyond which no citizen has the right to go—is that not an almost celestial sovereignty?

"There is but one little reservation—namely, that laws never regulate anything. When leaders have formulated a law, it has long since passed into use. All it does is to give validity to manners. If it runs counter to them, it remains a dead letter.

"Above the legislator, therefore, there are reigning manners. Now, by whom are these established? By everybody, but especially by dreamers. Is it not their mission to reflect on behalf of the community?

"In order to meditate, one must receive a training, just as much as if one had to plough, trade, navigate, or build houses. And I cannot say whether the mortals who cut and polish ideas are more meritorious than other men. Nevertheless, when they have played their part well they are worthy of some gratitude.

"They improve the lives of all in several ways.

"The frail spectacled scientist in his laboratory, at the bottom of a sleepy courtyard, once more moulds the world.

"Cannot we see, under our very eyes, the development of the revolution brought about by modern machinery, and especially by the steam-engine? The echo of this invention is far from having ceased to travel. Distances are being shortened. Europe, diminished by the extreme rapidity of communications, certainly no longer exceeds the extent of

France under the First Empire. The entire world is hardly larger at the present time than little Europe was a hundred years ago.

"What imminent transformations in the history of the globe does this truth not presage?

"And does not the prodigious output of books, pamphlets and newspapers, which spread the most daring thoughts broadcast, also accelerate the approaching changes?

"It is not only by means of inventions that dreamers change the existence of their fellow-men, it is by means of the most speculative and apparently most useless ideas.

"Copernic proves that the earth is not a fixed point. He pushed it outside that central point where the proud thing strutted. It is nothing more than a puny vagabond amidst infinity. Consider the protracted repercussions of this shock. Since men no longer inhabit the immobile centre of the world, since they wander about on a little drop of mud swimming in immensity, they are no longer the kings of the universe. They lose their theological assurance. Doubt, criticism and fruitful modern disquietude in its entirety penetrate their skulls. Poor beings—most uncertain and most pitiful—they feel, a little better each day, the holiness of tolerance and mutual compassion.

"Darwin teaches the law of Evolution. Consider

the unbounded effect it will henceforth exercise on minds. Incessantly, they will come to realize, more and more, the profound original sympathy which brings everything that lives and suffers closer together. Incessantly, they will better understand that everything is insensibly in transformation, and that it is idle to try to stop the course of inevitable changes, or to seek to hasten them.

"Thus, the majority of great discoveries end by acting on our daily existence.

"And have not other dreamers—writers and artists—as much power as savants?

"They are the ones, in truth, who, from on high and in advance, direct the people, since they form the mind of each nation.

"How could the moral unity of a country come into being without the intervention of poets? How could a common idea spring from the diversity of races, the extraordinary medley of provinces assembled haphazard through conquests or treaties, if thinkers did not elaborate it, together and in turn, for the benefit of all their compatriots?

"First of all, a few dreamers express the feelings of men surrounding them: they give expression to the aspirations of those who toil and make merry around them. Then, if their language is clear, if their natal province, by its wisdom or strength, imposes its law on neighbouring territories, these

first poetic accents are transmitted, like echoes, to other singers, who take them up and spread them !

"Little by little, throughout the whole extent of a country, an accord is established, a symphony is composed, all the dissonances melt into a unique melody.

"And undoubtedly many dreamers, many poets, many artists take part in this concert. Yet from century to century orchestral leaders are rare.

"Men such as Villon, Rabelais, Montaigne, Molière and Voltaire are few and far between.

"To make use of another image, these great men are the master-workmen who build a nation. In response to their genius, hundreds and thousands of task-workers gather together. Thus, the character of States is consolidated. Thus, our spiritual France was raised,—an edifice of independence and sincerity, of ironical spirit and avenging raillery, —an edifice of reason, sociability and pity,—an edifice of human fraternity.

"Well now, my friends, we must courageously continue this beautiful construction, and this is not the time to fold our arms. We must enlarge it, in order that all men may dwell therein. That is the work in which dreamers, both great and small, ought to be employed.

"In order to see the walls rise up, the stately colonnades and huge pediments stand out in profile

against the sky, the humblest journeyman is glad to climb the ladders, carrying a hod of mortar to the more skilful workmen, who are laying stones at the top of the scaffolding.

"Allow me then, my dear friends, allow me to mix the mortar for the Ideal City. It is my destiny, it pleases me and I ask for no other."

THE END

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ANATOLE FRANCE

"I do not believe that Thorfin Karlsefne was more astonished and delighted when he discovered America than I was when, in my sixtieth year, this great literary luminary sailed into my ken. . . . I have three good reasons for writing about Anatole France. I want to help the British people to enjoy his work; I want them to accord to the great Frenchman the full justice which I feel he has not yet received in this country; and I want to ease my soul by some expression of my own gratitude and admiration. . . . Of all the famous or popular men alive upon this planet Anatole France is to me the greatest. There is no writer to compare to him, and he has few peers amongst the greatest geniuses of past ages and all climes. . . . 'Penguin Island' is a masterpiece and a classic. It is, in my opinion, a greater work than 'Gargantua' or 'Don Quixote' or 'Sartor Resartus' or 'Tristram Shandy.' . . . The laughing, mocking, learned and dissolute Abbé Coignard is one of the greatest creations of human genius. If it will not sound too audacious I will venture to claim that there is no character in Rabelais, Cervantes, Dickens, or Sterne to equal the Abbé Coignard, and, with the exception of the miraculous Hamlet, there is nothing greater in Shakespeare. These be 'brave words.' I am writing of one of the world's greatest artists and humorists: of Anatole France, the Master. . . . Then there is the great scene of the banquet in the house of Monsieur de la Geritande, which I have read fifty times, and hope to read a hundred times again. The whole chapter is one of the most artistic, humorous, human, and exhilarating achievements in literature. It is alive; it is real; it goes like a song. There is nothing finer or stronger in the best comedy work of Shakespeare. . . . Anatole France is a great man, and there is no living celebrity for whom I have so much reverence and regard."—Robert Blatchford in the *Sunday Chronicle.*

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