

ANATOLE FRANCE, THE PARISIAN*

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His sympathetic regard, then, urged him to humiliate his fellows in their opinions, their knowledge, their philosophy and institutions. He put his heart into showing them that their weak and silly nature has never constructed or imagined anything worth the trouble of attacking or defending very briskly.

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Abbé Coignard's disquisitions reveal to us a prophetic disdain of the great principles of the Revolution and of the rights of the people, on which we have established these hundred years, with every kind of violence and usurpation, an incoherent succession of insurrectionary governments, themselves, innocent of irony, condemning insurrection.

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The ministers of good man Demos, unceasingly kicked, hustled, humiliated, thrown down and assailed with more rotten apples and eggs than the worst harlequin in a booth at a fair, will have no leisure to prepare carnage politely, in the secrecy and peace of the cabinet, on the board of green cloth, at conferences in regard to what is called the balance of Europe, which is but the happy hunting-ground of the diplomat. There will be no more foreign policy, and that will be a great thing for unhappy humanity.

ANATOLE FRANCE.

LAST November the tribute of a world's admiration was paid with singular unanimity to Anatole France. How far that cynical observer of human estimates would have been pleased with the unanimity, we are free to guess. Some have thought he had an appetite for general applause, but at all events he had no respect for it. One remembers how he wrote in *Coignard*:

Mediocrities are at once raised up and carried along by the surrounding nobodies who are honoured in them. The success of a commonplace person disturbs no one. Rather, it secretly flatters the mob. But there is an insolence of talent which is expiated by dumb hatred, and calumnies not loud but deep.¹

For two generations, Anatole France had been studiously and impartially provocative. He had chosen the most dangerous subjects, and written with Matthew Arnold's purpose of "seasonably disconcerting" his reader,—about government, about religion, about social morals. Yet in that strange tumult of acclaim last November one heard the voices of royalist and republican, radical and reactionary, enthusiast for the Treaty of Versailles and enthusiast for the Third International, prophet of the super-State and sentimentalist of the small nationality. Out of some volume

¹ *Les Opinions de M. Jerome Coignard.*

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in the vast series of his works almost every kind of zealot can borrow a suggestive text or a moving peroration; whilst those to whom all zeal seems ridiculous may draw many an epigram expressive of their very soul's belief, but which they could never themselves have coined. Preachers have delivered memorial sermons on his unconscious Christianity; freethinkers have extolled his fearless atheism. What oft was thought—by men of the most diverse types—but ne'er so well expressed, this is what every kind of seeker can find in Anatole France.

He espoused different causes in turn, making himself the champion of each at the moment when it was especially in disgrace. Perhaps it was just because he thus courted a combination of perils that he so marvellously escaped them all, since he could usually thank his adverse critics for answering one another's criticisms. He may even have planned this from the beginning. Men of various schools forgave him for castigating themselves, just because—with an effectiveness so much more piercing than their own—he castigated also others whom they disliked more than they disliked him. There was at least general agreement that in his death the greatest contemporary man of letters had passed away. And herein lies a problem,—the problem of determining precedence among great contemporary men of letters. It can never be fully discussed until we have escaped alike from the indiscriminate superlatives of the biographer and the kindly restraint of the writer of obituaries.

A few Englishmen have written his *Life*, but they have not written it very well, for their work has been done under a severe visitation of what Macaulay called *lues Boswelliana*. The apparently ceaseless need for panegyric, together with the circumstance that in our dull English language the store of adulatory adjectives—while quite considerable—is by no means inexhaustible, has affected the English biographer's pen almost as a stammer affects one's speech. Anatole France must have lived for some eighty years an actual life in the flesh, whose story we should wish to have presented, besides that life of the spirit which his biographers have described mainly in epithets of profuse compliment. To discover the stages and events of this career we have to disregard those innumerable asides in which the narrator stops his story to re-stimulate admiration and abash once again those who would depreciate. Such pauses and readjustments of interest are both provoking to the reader and injurious to the record.

One can picture the shade of Anatole France contemplating this miscellaneous homage—as Gibbon said clergymen might con-

template a copy of the Articles—with a sigh or a smile. Yet it was in the nature of things that an inconsistent genius should be rewarded with an inconsistent recognition. That he was a man of many and various moods the most dexterous re-interpreter will struggle in vain to disprove. He denounced war in language that would have appealed to Tolstoy, and applauded it in terms that Clausewitz might have thought extreme. In the spirit of an aristocrat and an artist he found the French Revolution too vulgar for sympathy, but the Russian Revolution not too violent for praise. That the author of *Le Lys Rouge* or *La Rotisserie de la Reine Pedauque* should have reproved Zola for the impropriety of his novels, is enough to make one wonder whether Mr. Bernard Shaw may not yet deplore the satiric note that has somehow corrupted the English drama. That the satirist of *L'Ile des Pengouins* or *La Revolte des Anges* should have thrilled French soldiers with a trumpet call to the defence of church, cathedral and village belfry, may well cause an amazement like that of those who once asked "What is this that has come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" Let any passage be produced in which Anatole France has advocated some project as worthy and practicable; it will not be hard to match it with some other passage in which he has mocked a like project as either base or visionary.

He would have regarded it as sheer waste of time to attempt a reconciliation of his different opinions. To an importunate admirer telling him that the English were wondering at the apparent decisiveness of his mind in old age, he replied that such people should open again their *Don Quixote*. One can understand the zest with which he drew the figure of the philosopher in *Thais*, who was by no means a denier of "appearances," just because appearances were the only thing in which he really believed. And appearances at least are contradictory. Here one recognizes a central element in the charm of Anatole France. He appeals to the mood of disillusionment, of intellectual weariness, and in these days—when so many are disillusioned—he strikes the one chord that is still not too exhausted to vibrate.

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Such mood belongs to an old civilization, and Anatole France was first and foremost a child of Paris. If he cultivated "the international mind," he cultivated this as an exotic. Paris, it has been well said, was to him what London was to Charles Lamb, and—we may add—what London was not, for example, to Jeremy Bentham. The unimaginative may pass a lifetime unaffected upon historic ground. Bentham, one remembers, proposed to drive a public

thoroughfare through the site on which Milton's house had stood, and to obliterate the memorial tablet that had been set there by unscientific piety. But Anatole France was of another temperament. His historic sense was ever standing in the way of his own eager radicalism. The same imagination that has placed such unforgettable figures upon the canvas of his creative work would never allow him to forget the past of those winding streets and stately buildings and romantic vistas amid which he moved,—Notre Dame and the Louvre, the Palais Mazarin and the Palais Bourbon, the banks of the Seine and the Garden of the Tuileries, places of which he has told us that the very stones are still eloquent of glorious adventure by the human spirit. In truth, for a mind of such quality there can be few sights better fitted to stir reminiscent reflection than the ancient landmarks of the city of Paris. One can fancy Anatole France passing in turn from the Conciergerie, where the Cordelier Club was roused by the clarion call of Danton, to the dingy structure—now a hospital—which two and a half centuries ago sheltered the persecuted Jansenists, from the gilt statue of the Grand Monarque to the house where Coligny was murdered in the St. Bartholemew, from the cenotaph of Voltaire to the scene of illicit love between Abelard and Heloise, or exploring with pagan joy those remains of Roman baths, aqueducts and cemeteries that carry one back to the Paris of Julian, Clovis, and Hugh Capet.

There was much to move him, too, in the city of his own time, the Paris in which he saw such ceaseless and ineffective turmoil, so pathetic, and yet ever so worthy to be loved. He was born in 1844, when the tempest which surrounded the last years of Louis Philippe was just gathering force. His father, once a guardsman of Charles X, was then keeping a bookstore on one of the quays of the Seine. Anatole France never forgot that little *librairie*. It was a rendezvous, as bookstores have so often been. For example, a hundred years earlier Allan Ramsay's shop in Edinburgh was a haunt of Jacobites awaiting news of Bonnie Prince Charlie in the Forty-Five. At the *librairie* on the Seine, dilettante Parisians seventy years ago used to meet of an afternoon to argue on public affairs as they pretended to be examining the latest books. The old guardsman was still a royalist of the Bourbon school, hating much that he foresaw, but listening respectfully to his republican customers, and occasionally interjecting a word of regret for the good old times that were past. Young Anatole sat in a corner, with his ears alert.

We can imagine a good deal of the desultory conversation in those far away years. Much would be said about current events

in Parisian literature and life,—about Victor Hugo's latest tirade against Napoleon le Petit, about Lamartine's *Restoration of the Monarchy in France*, about the burning eloquence of Lacordaire last Sunday in the pulpit of Notre Dame, about the Socialist escapades of Pierre Proudhon or Louis Blanc, about Renan's tireless campaign for Free Thought in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, or perhaps about the new religion recently invented for mankind, whose canonical scriptures and liturgy were even then in process of composition by the pen of Auguste Comte. Anatole France has related how in his early years he used to delight in questioning the opinions of his royalist and Catholic father, and how his pious mother used to take him regularly to Mass. But he liked his grandmother best, because she was so free from conventions. "Grandmamma," he says, "was frivolous. Yes, grandmamma had no more piety in her composition than a bird. You ought to have seen the little quizzical grimace she would make on Sundays when mother and I were setting out for church." The surroundings were thus rather mixed. But it seems to have been the *librairie* that counted for most. Many a bookshop scene with which Anatole France has enlivened his own merry fiction must have been drawn from the life he so well remembered.

The *coup d'état* happened when he was seven years old. Two years later the child of nine was picking up details about French heroism in the Crimean War, about Russians and Turks, Inkerman and Balaclava. He was in his early twenties when Napoleon III was manoeuvring for power between the rival interests of Pope Pius IX and Garibaldi, oscillating backwards and forwards as the support of Victor Emmanuel or the Vatican seemed to promise most for the stability of the French throne. At twenty-six he was a conscript in the field against Prussia during the war of 1870. He could well recall in old age the horrors of the siege of Paris and the still fiercer horrors of the Commune. He saw the founding of the new French Republic after Sedan, and watched with interest—though with little enthusiasm—those fitful fortunes which attended such men as Thiers, Marshal MacMahon and Gambetta. Since then he was spectator of the successive plottings by Bonapartists, of the craze about Boulanger, of anti-Semite passion in *l'affaire Dreyfus*, of the embittered struggle between Church and State. All these and many more scenes have found a place on his pages. It is from their alternating and combined effects that he has drawn his characteristic moral,—how nothing in human relationship can be made either much better or much worse.

He has been variously described as satirist, humorist, and sceptic. All three names are appropriate. But perhaps Anatole France's work casts more light on the meaning of these epithets than the epithets cast upon the character of his work.

It is a French psychologist who has given us the most penetrating analysis of the meaning of caricature. Professor Bergson has pointed out how the caricaturist does not owe his special power to exaggeration, for not all exaggerations can amuse, and there are many amusing spectacles which are scarcely exaggeration at all. What is brought out, for example, by the political cartoonist in *Punch* or *Le Rire* is some hardly detectable, but quite real, trace of rigidity in the countenance, some leaning toward an habitual bias that is independent of altering environment. There is no face that is perfect, none that is completely mobile, none that has not some lurking mechanical quality. The caricaturist makes this visible to every eye by slightly magnifying it. If there is a hint of austerity, he deepens this into gloom; if there is just a suggestion of fixed meditateness, he makes it an unquestionable stare. Thus, as Professor Bergson says, "he makes his models grimace as they would do themselves, if they went to the end of their tether." Perhaps Dickens has come nearest to interpreting the secret of his own art in a passage which expresses exactly this view of caricature. Writing in *Bleak House* about the likeness of Mr. Guppy that hung in his mother's room, he says: "There was a portrait of her son which, I had almost written here, was more like than life; it insisted upon him with such obstinacy, and was so determined not to let him off."

It is thus that Anatole France caricatures French society. He takes his figures from Church and State in his own time, and reveals by cunning intensification some feature which might otherwise be missed. The ultramontane prelate, compromisers of the Modernist school, some passionate enthusiast for democracy, the chauvinist General of the Franco-Prussian War—these and a dozen other typical men are shown as going to "the end of their tether," for this artist insists upon their features with obstinacy, and is determined not to let them off. His literary instrument is thus at once an insulator and a magnifier. The later historian cannot dispense with the help of such contemporary satirists. We need the *Clouds* of Aristophanes to supplement Xenophon's *Memorabilia*; we need Boccaccio and Rabelais to cast their own light upon the *Lives of the Saints*; we need *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* to illustrate the presentation of eighteenth century Deism in Butler and Berkeley. And it is safe to say that the historian of France for the years between 1875

and the present time will find priceless material in the ludicrous gossip of chateau and salon and city bookstore, distorted and intensified just enough to make it suggestive in the pages of *France Contemporaine*. There the models are indeed made to grimace as they would grimace if they dared to be consistent. There the historian will find a picture of social life as drawn by the keenest observer and most brilliant artist of the period,—the France of royalist manoeuvring, of masonic lodges and army contractors, of apparitions of saints and diplomacy over the Concordat and the war against religious congregations. If coming historical literature would be poorer for want of the caricatures in *Punch*, it is no less true that ages yet to come will turn for light upon that epoch of French affairs to *L'Anneau Amethyste*, *Le Mannequin d'Osier*, and *L'Orme du Mail*.

These books are not for the simple-minded, who want their instruction absolutely direct. Anatole France once described Mr. Bernard Shaw as the Molière of England, and might equally well have called him a caricaturist just after his own pattern. But Mr. Shaw's considered estimate of the medical profession, for example, is not to be found in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, nor has he told us with scrupulous exactness what he thinks of soldiers in *Arms and the Man*. Sharp antithesis and sparkling paradox are the satirist's stock in trade. Thus much of the reproach for bias and onesidedness that is commonly urged against Anatole France is as pointless as a reproach against "Toby M. P." of *Punch* and F. C. Gould of the *Westminster* for failing as exact photographers.

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Yet the satirist does reveal something of his own mind in the selection he makes of subjects for caricature. It is obvious, for example, that Anatole France had little belief in the Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, which the great Revolution was supposed to have brought about. For a certain distinct point of view is constantly adopted by such central figures in his satire as Bonnard, Coignard, Trubbet, Bergeret, and one cannot but feel that in these the author has incarnated himself just as truly as Byron in Conrad, Lara, Harold, Juan. We get over and over again the same features of temperament,—a tone of detached mockery, a welcome half scornful and half sympathetic for all sorts of opinions as partly false and partly true. An apt comparison might be drawn with some literary Voltairean noble under the ancien régime, a man amused at human credulity, moved by human distress, zealous for knowledge though this should lead only to sardonic mirth at the discovery that nothing can be known save "the sequence and continuity of our ignorance,"

one long emancipated from delusions about the prospect of intellectualizing the herd.

For example, Coignard would never have signed the Declaration of the Rights of Man, "because of the excessive and unfair separation it establishes between man and the gorilla." Our novelist's typical hero is one who has seen that reformers are a well-meaning but futile group. He is some roué man of letters, straitened in purse, dividing his time between the cabarets of the Latin Quarter and the bookshops of the Quai Voltaire,—someone like the Marquis Tudesco in *Jean Servien*, who had often breakfasted on a page of Tacitus or supped on a satire of Juvenal, but for whom such artistic substitutes—though they might take the place of food—could in no wise do duty for drink. In many of his books Anatole France makes one think of that sympathetic touch with which Balzac used to depict revived aristocracy in the Legitimist period of fifteen years between the fall of Napoleon I and the rise of Louis Philippe. They suggest the same unmistakable friendliness with which the frail but fair successors of Ninon de L'Enclos were painted, and the far coarser workmanship that Balzac gave us when he tried to present the bourgeois semi-Puritanism prevalent at the court of the Citizen King.

Had he any French models for this literary spirit and method? One at least will occur to every critic,—the acknowledged idol of Anatole France's youth, the venerable *savant* who welcomed all opinions and revered none, he whose characteristic answer to all disputants was "*Vous avez raison, Monsieur*"—while an ironic gleam shone in his eye and the glow of dialectic festivity overspread his features. There is no doubt that among Frenchmen of his time Ernest Renan influenced him most.

But if we are in search less of a teacher he consciously followed than of a temperament to which his own was unconsciously akin, perhaps a different name will occur to us. We may think of that calm, reflective, half-sympathetic and half-cynical *grand seigneur*, who three hundred and fifty years ago retired from the world's bustle, to spend "under the care of the learned maidens" whatever span of life might yet be allotted to him. As we read the Bergeret books, that pensive figure seems to shine through the page; and though the words are the words of Anatole France, it is the spirit of Montaigne that seems to speak. There is the same *amor fati*, the same studied quiet amid mankind's strife, the same gentle irony towards idealists, the same doubt whether anything can be very much altered. We almost see again the placid critic of all human concerns, heedless alike of the bloodshed in a St. Bartholemew

massacre and the cannonading of a Spanish Armada, shut up in the tower of his chateau with the three bay windows which every tourist knows so well, that he might amass more and more illustrations of the "wonderful, vain, diverse and wavering subjects" presented to scrutiny in the life of our race, that he might browse with equal interest among the treasures of literature both sacred and pagan, and that he might amuse his later years by covering beam and rafter with the inscriptions which stirred his fancy,—the aphoristic wit of Martial, the fierce denials of Lucretius, the glowing poetry of the Psalms, the elegant lyrics of Horace, and the doleful vaticination of Ecclesiastes. Anatole France was, in many ways, the Montaigne of our time. We are tempted to say of him, as Andrew Lang said of Montaigne, that he is a man's writer, not a woman's, a tired man's, not a fresh man's. "We all come to him late indeed, but at last, and rest in his panelled library."

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Very characteristic of his country, too, is his extraordinary gift of style. Hardly anywhere else in contemporary prose can we find such a union of those fascinating qualities that are distinctively French. It is like the limpid atmosphere of the Riviera; we look *through* it, never *at* it. Rare indeed in the writings of Anatole France is the "purple patch". For him language was but the clothing of thought. Its perfection was like that of a glove, adapting itself to every movement, while it apparently never calls for either adjustment or attention. The well-dressed thought, like the well-dressed man, attracts no notice to externals. Its aesthetic delight is for the reader to enjoy, for the critic to explain—if he can. Herein Anatole France supplies a pattern that will not readily be surpassed. Though we know that he polished his sentences with more than the patience of a lapidary, choosing his words with the finest sensitiveness to shades of meaning and effect, the art nowhere obtrudes itself, and the elements of an arresting paragraph seem to fall into place with the inevitableness of nature. In him the style was indeed the man. As literary appreciator, essayist, novelist, historian, social pamphleteer, he touched no subject that he did not make to shine with a new interest or enrich with the sparkle of an exquisite fancy. Even his weekly column of literary gossip, written to order for *Le Temps*, has proved fit for collection into volumes that have no rival except the *Causeries de Lundi* by Sainte-Beuve.

Such clarity of expression was matched with clarity of thought. It was indeed the contention of Anatole France himself that these two qualities involve each other. A distinguished Oxford scholar

once told us that no philosophical argument can have real depth if it is capable of translation into French,—surely a remarkable doctrine to those who recall the long line of French *philosophes* from Descartes to Hippolyte Taine. Whatever its truth in the field of metaphysics, it has at least no shadow of application in psychology, as our novelist's success in the analysis of character is enough to show. In novel after novel Anatole France has somehow managed to hold his reader's interest with no more than the most slender fabric of a plot,—a feat possible only on condition that motives or processes of thought are exhibited with an altogether exceptional refinement and delicacy of touch. The four *Bergeret* novels, for example, while they are concerned with very commonplace people, and with occurrences often not only commonplace but drab, owe their strength to that intimate dissection of the ordinary which our "Janists" have so much applauded in the work of Jane Austen. But "the ordinary" in Anatole France is not the life of a rural vicarage in England. It is Paris. Who can point to anything distinctly new in the character of Sylvestre Bonnard? The plot of his adventures, if there is any plot, has long evaded the most ingenious search. Yet somehow the impression of Bonnard has a deathless novelty. And ever since the Abbé Jerome Coignard was drawn, one has felt that a new and much needed name has been added to our literature,—a name for a certain type of eighteenth century ecclesiastic whom we could have described previously only by an awkward circumlocution, but whose qualities are summarized in a word by "Coignard".

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In yet another respect he is very Parisian. Anatole France, says a recent biographer, "deals rather frankly with questions of sex." One is surprised that the same critic should describe the single novel in which such frankness has no place as "a conscious bid for popularity." If this estimate is correct, the Anatole France of 1881 had much to learn about the conditions of popular writing, and he learned his lesson fast. But perhaps it was not the taste of the French public so much as that of the Academy which he sought to conciliate, and for the sake of having his book "crowned" he may have written *Sylvestre Bonnard* with a keen eye to decorum.

When he aimed, as he so often did, to be pornographic, he was successful. The devious windings and complicated disguises of sexual offence are drawn in his books with a skill that might be envied by the tired artists of *Sans Gene* or *Le Sourire*. But is the depicting of this to be called frank treatment of questions of sex? Only in the sense in which we may apply such description to the

work of Herondas, or Apuleius, or Aristophanes. Nowhere else, perhaps, are we made so acutely conscious as in this aspect of his writings that Anatole France belongs to the world of paganism.

There is, in truth, no real treatment of questions of sex which is not at the same time a treatment of human love, and of what is meant by love—except in the sense of physical attraction—he has nowhere shown that he has the least idea. He might have said of it, as Laplace said of God, that he found no need for “that hypothesis.” He approaches acknowledgment of it in Sylvestre Bonnard’s feeling for his ward,—an exception that goes far to prove the rule. Hardly another great artist of our time could be named from whose work this great *motif* is so conspicuously absent. When the Archbishop of Buenos Aires laid his lecturing tour in the Argentine under the ban of the Church, and when in consequence no women were present in halls where Anatole France spoke, the action was dismissed with a raising of the eyelid and a shrug of the shoulders as a case of typical priestly intolerance. But it may well have had a better ground. The essential paganism of a novel like *Thais* lay far less in its disparagement of Christian dogma than in its exaltation of pre-Christian animalism. Seldom indeed until the Alexandrian period do we find in Greek writers any genuine picture of what the modern world calls love; but neither do we find in the same literature what the modern world calls a novel, and the coincidence is significant.

If Anatole France thus stands apart from other artists of his craft, must we suppose that in his rich and varied nature this interest had simply no place? It is a difficult assumption, and the facts may perhaps be explained without it. For what we call the pornographic period in his work coincided in time with his developed anti-clericalism, and grew with its growth. There is precedent for such an association in French letters. The pamphleteering which did so much a hundred and fifty years ago to pave the way for the Revolution was, in one of its aspects, deliberately planned to weaken the Church by pouring scorn on that family virtue for which the Church was supposed to be specially solicitous. Satire in an earlier age had delighted in depicting the hypocritical monk or curé, who affected to be austere beyond others, while he was in truth a secret libertine. But the satire of the Encyclopaedists rested on a frank acknowledgement that the clergy were puritanic, and it appealed rather to the resentment of those who chafed under such restraint. Human vices were thus shamelessly exploited for the injury of the Church which condemned them. Voltaire’s mockery of Jeanne d’Arc was the mockery of one who had become a national

symbol of virgin honour. The unspeakable foulness of Diderot's romances had the calculated design of creating an atmosphere whose mephitic vapours should stifle the voice of the priest. And so definite was the policy of these littérateurs that Condorcet, in an amazing passage, undertook for it a reasoned defence!

The literary tradition to which in this respect Anatole France belongs is thus quite obvious, and he has numerous imitators who follow him to the best of their limited endowment. A like policy has been again and again ascribed to those expert psychologists who of late years in Russia have been breaking the bonds of ancient superstition. It may seem harsh to compare Anatole France with those Moscow anti-clericals who think the spell of the ikon may be counteracted by the lure of Free Love. But the auxiliary invoked against the priesthood is much the same in both cases. And for a time it has an ignoble success. In the long run this is poor strategy, because it implies such deep disgrace to the cause it would advance, and so dangerous a compliment to the cause it would destroy. It is worthy of the caricaturists of Christmas or Easter celebration at Leningrad. But it is not worthy of Anatole France.

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On the moral plane a redeeming feature, never absent from his work, is his intense humanity, coupled with a burning passion for freedom. It was in the Paris of a century and a half ago that the great battle for the franchises of mankind was being fought, and the Anatole France of last generation was ever in the thick of the fight for humane causes that were hard pressed. Side by side with Zola, he was the champion of Dreyfus against ruthless persecution, and against all the forces of fashionable authority. He was lured from the desk he loved, and the literature he could so adorn, to mount the platform of Socialist agitation and appeal for the rights of the poor. Twenty-one years ago, in his story *Crainquebille*, he presented the hardships of a wretched victim of the Paris police, with a power suggestive of Dickens in the past or of Mr. Galsworthy in our own time. And we may say of him what was said of one in almost all other respects singularly dissimilar: like John Knox, he never feared the face of man.

During the Great War, Anatole France was probably the most effective propagandist in Europe on the side of the Entente. When he appeared in this rôle some were old enough to remember how in the year 1870, when the Franco-Prussian conflict was at its height, and the shells from German guns dropped every few minutes hissing into the Marne, Anatole France was doing his prescribed but most

reluctant part on that battlefield as a conscript. He has himself told us how he carried Vergil's *Aeneid* in his knapsack, and read it as often as he could find leisure on sentry duty. The fortunes of Aeneas and Dido then interested him far more than any change in the Europe of his day.

Forty-four years passed. The unknown youth of twenty-six, who had to be dragged into service for Napoleon III, was a famous man of seventy when the German menace appeared again. No one had cared much whether he was apathetic in 1869, but not a few were very anxious indeed to know how his immense influence would be exerted in 1914. Nor did his first letter on the subject, counselling a moderation for which his countrymen could see little place, tend to reassure the public mind. So it caused something like a thrill when we learned that Anatole France had ignored the weight of his years, presented himself at the War Office, and requested to be furnished with a rifle.

He was told to use his pen instead. His next publication, *Sur La Voie Glorieuse*, was unlike anything he had been accustomed to write before, except in that vividness, pathos, overwhelming power which he now turned to a new purpose. Those who love to put a writer's various publications side by side had here much to interest them. For among his many caustic aphorisms, *pour epater les bourgeois*, he had once declared that a man so sure of his opinions as to be ready to die for them must be inordinately conceited! Such gay disparagement of steadfastness in conviction was written in 1893, when he was forty-nine years old. In 1914 he must have congratulated himself at his desk that most people read fiction for its ephemeral entertainment only.

For he was summoning men, by tens of thousands, to offer their lives, presumably because they believed in something, and he could scarcely admit the *rélevance* of the retort that modesty forbids so extreme an insistence upon one's own judgment. He has had at least two more changes of opinion since then, the first when he bade post-war France enter into sympathetic membership of the Third International, and again when he found to his disgust that the Third International was no more likely to redeem mankind than the various redemptive missionaries that had gone before!

But though constantly losing his faith in organizations, he never lost his love for humanity. One is moved to ask whether the events of the war years might not have furnished him with material for yet another satiric piece. If he had lived a little longer, would he not have included in his caustic presentation of men and movements just the case of himself and of that ardent confidence which—

sceptic as he was—he was somehow misled into countenancing? None could burlesque more effectively the enthusiasms of the old French Revolution, with its announcement of the Year One. Yet it was the same futile creed of contempt for the past and faith in an intellectual future that he himself at times used to preach. In the crisis of the Great War, he made no appeal to this. He spoke of the ancient institutions of France, of its culture and its usages, and even its *morals*, handed down as a sacred trust from generation to generation. He spoke as one who believed in something,—not surely for mere purposes of recruiting efficiency, but because for at least the period of that national peril he *did* believe in it. He was falling back, in short, upon that past which he had taught men to deride, but in which he then must needs reawaken a devout enthusiasm. It was supreme art with which this lifelong mocker spoke for the time a language of devotion, and one is forced to think that temporarily at least he had personal faith in what he said. But he had his relapse, his reversion to type,—back to the mood of *nil admirari*, the hopeless and impotent attitude of one to whom this world and its concerns was no more than “the tragedy of a supreme poet,” of which the cast must include all sorts of people, and in which each must just play his rôle.

Parisian in intellectual inheritance and intellectual interests, in mood and in style, in iridescent wit and universal hospitality of mind, in quenchless zeal for freedom and cynical distrust of all who promise to achieve it—Anatole France has introduced us to his countrymen not more through his books than through his personality. Lemaitre has pronounced him “the ultimate flowering of the Latin genius,” and amid the public mourning for his death one heard the beginning of an insistent demand that he be interred in the Pantheon among “les grands hommes de France.” But that the great men who have made France had qualities other than his, one cannot doubt. They had a resoluteness as well as a diffuseness of intellect. They understood “the clash of Yes and No.” When I think of him, the words of Bishop Earle in *Microcosmographie* ever return to my mind:

One that hangs in the balance with all sorts of opinions, whereof not one but stirs him and none sways him; a man guiltier of credulity than he is taken to be, for it is out of his belief of everything that he fully believes nothing.