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# BRITISH AND AMERICAN NATIONALISM

EVERY age has its typical folly, and that of ours is nationalism. This is of course no new phenomenon. It appeared first among the Jews in the time of the Maccabees: then it went underground until it was revived by the English in their resistance to the Armada. Shakespeare gave it such admirable expression that his readers did not notice its absurdity. The French Revolution made it rampant in France; Fichte, and the war of liberation in 1813, caused it to spread to Germany. Now it exists everywhere: in Mongolia and Monaco, in Ecuador and among the descendants of the Aztecs, no less than among the Great Powers. It is a centrifugal force, preventing the governmental and economic unification which is called for by modern technique both in industry and in war. If it cannot be prevented from controlling national governments, there is little hope of preserving civilized populations from suicide.

The two nationalisms that I have experienced most vividly have been those of America and England. From 1938 till May 1944 I lived in various parts of the United States; I returned to England on a British boat, and was still at sea on D-day. The nationalist feeling on both sides was very disquieting, for it is obvious to every sane person in both countries that their co-operation is absolutely necessary if disaster is to be averted. I am the more perturbed since I find in myself a proneness to respond to British nationalism and to condemn that of America, which I can only control by a great effort towards impartiality. Thus, my own emotions help me to know how difficult it is to eradicate this pernicious way of feeling—pernicious because it generates hatred between members of nations that ought to work together.

The highly educated minority in both countries is, on the whole, free from this unfortunate passion. In universities, on both sides of the Atlantic, one finds an attitude of mutual respect, and an ignorance of what is thought and felt by the man in the street. Government officials, and the innumerable unofficial emissaries whom the two governments send to London and Washington

respectively, belong to the same social group as the university professors, and seldom encounter the fiercer forms of national feeling. If they did, perhaps even more would be done by the authorities to promote mutual understanding.

There is a great difference in the nature of the patriotisms of the two countries. British patriotism is quasi-biological, and has an affinity with family feeling; American patriotism is more analogous to party or sectarian loyalty. An Englishman may feel that the socialists are subversive, or, alternatively, that the Tories are ruining the country; he may feel this strongly enough to hate the party to which he is opposed. But this feeling is totally unlike the feeling he has towards his country's enemies, and fades away in a time of national crisis. Our patriotism, like that of other European countries, is made up of love of home, the feeling of cosy safety produced by what is familiar, the comfort of known traditions and prejudices, and the instinct that, in spite of superficial dissensions, we are at one on all really serious issues. A hen, terrified by a motor-car, will rush across the road in imminent danger of death, in order to feel the safety of home. In like manner, during the blitz, I longed to be in England. But all Americans said, 'how glad you must be to be out of it', and were totally unable to understand my contrary feeling.

American patriotism is quite different. The United States is not biologically a nation; a minority of the inhabitants are descended from people who were in America a hundred years ago. When an American feels a glow of warmth about his country, he is not thinking, as an Englishman might, of hedgerows and the song of the cuckoo and wild roses in June, of village churches that keep alive what was best in the middle ages, or even of the traditional pomp of kings and Lord Mayors and judges in their wigs. Shakespeare speaks of the English as 'this happy breed of men'; Lincoln speaks of the Americans as 'dedicated to a *proposition*'. This contrast sums up the difference. English patriotism, like that of other Europeans, belongs to the instinctive and sub-conscious part of human nature, in which we are little different from the brutes; American patriotism belongs to the intellectual, conscious, reasoning part, which is more civilized but less compelling. To us, our country is part of our birthright; to Americans, theirs is part of a sacred Cause.

This fundamental difference, because it is not understood, is a

source of mutual irritation. Every European in America has been worried by the constant question, 'how do you like America?' To us, there is a sort of indecency about the question, as if a man should say, 'how do you like my wife?' We do not think it a mark of virtue to prefer another man's wife to one's own, nor do we think it right to prefer another man's country. I had in America a German friend (a refugee) who had lived many years in England; during that time (so he told me) he had never once been asked, 'how do you like England?' But if a country is 'dedicated to a proposition' the matter is different. If the proposition is true, we all owe allegiance to it; if false, none of us do so. Therefore the man who prefers his own country to America seems, to Americans, to be finding fault with the fundamental articles of their creed. I could not make it clear to Americans (with only two or three exceptions) why I did not wish to become naturalized. I said that an adopted nation was like adopted children, and could not give the profound emotional fulfilment that is to be derived from one's own children and one's own nation. But my words remained unintelligible, and produced no glimmer of response.

What is this 'proposition' to which America is dedicated? I shall venture to paraphrase and enlarge on Lincoln's few words on this subject, since I wish to set forth what the average American sincerely and profoundly believes. It is hardly relevant that the United States does not realize his ideals. Every clergyman will admit that the Christian churches fail to realize Christian ideals, but he is none the less quite genuinely loyal to these ideals and persuaded of their importance. So an American may admit this or that blemish, and still maintain, in all sincerity, that America is striving to go in the right direction, which in his opinion other nations, and especially the British, are not.

England, for most Americans, is still the England of George III. What has happened since may, in part, be known intellectually, but has not been assimilated emotionally. America stands for those things in which Jefferson differed from George III: equality, absence of caste, political and religious freedom, abstinence from foreign conquest—the creed, in fact, of English and American Radicals in 1776. The English are disliked because they have hereditary titles, because they have an empire, and because socially they are felt to be haughty. It is also thought that they are

effete and inefficient, but at the same time astute and always able to outwit the simple and honest Americans. On the highest moral grounds, therefore, it is the duty of Americans to oppose British cunning, arrogance, and lust of dominion.

The attitude of suspicion of England is sometimes carried to extraordinary lengths. I was assured at a dinner table, by a middle-aged lady who was apparently considered sane, that the aeroplanes which attacked at Pearl Harbour were British, the airmen having dyed their skins and painted their eyebrows to slope upwards; this she had from one in the know at Washington, whose name she was not at liberty to divulge. An American pilot, who had been disabled in North Africa, flatly gave me the lie when I mentioned that, at the time of the War of Independence, many Englishmen were on the side of America. From reading the *Chicago Tribune* it is hardly possible to discover that the nominal enemy is Germany, not England. I have often heard Americans, with gleaming eyes, express the wish that they could fight England, instead of the relatively harmless Nazis. When I have made speeches on India, as I have frequently done, everything I said has been discounted as British propaganda, except once, when a Hindu and a Muslim were both on the platform, and displayed their dissension without any need of emphasis on my part.

The nationalism of Americans, owing to the fact that it is not so deeply based on instinct as that of the British, is more vocal, more shrill, and more blatant. There is supposed to be something called 'The American Way of Life', which is so excellent that it ought to be imposed throughout the world. The family, one gathers, was invented by the Pilgrim Fathers; from Adam and Eve to their day it was unknown, and is still unknown on this side of the Atlantic. It is quite useless to point to comparative statistics of divorce or to any other evidence; the belief remains unshakable. Leading articles in newspapers assure readers that the American young man, in contrast to the European, is sexually virtuous and hates violence. Here again, an appeal to the statistics of rape and homicide is useless. The wife of a Chicago professor assured me that there only *seemed* to be more murders in Chicago than in London because the English police were so inefficient. And if labour troubles are worse in America than in England, that is because English employees have no spirit and English employers are cowards.

I do not think Americans can be conciliated by kowtowing to them. If we were to attempt this, we should have to do various things, some good, some bad. First and foremost, we should have to abolish titles. Next, we should have to surrender all the parts of the Empire that are not self-governing. Third, we should have to revert to unregulated capitalism, abandon all attempts at planning, and allow the unemployed to starve. Fourth, we should have to adopt the American attitude to negroes. Last, but not least, we should have to learn to talk American, for nine Americans out of ten believe that our way of speaking is an affectation, only adopted to show our superiority. We found, in America, that strangers in shops or buses at first took us for Germans and tolerated our way of speaking, but when they found that English was our native language they became indignant with us for not speaking as they do. It never occurred to them for a moment that the English have some rights in the English language.

In June 1944 I published in the *Saturday Evening Post* an article called 'Can Americans and British be Friends?' It was intended as my modest contribution towards Anglo-American co-operation, and was the very reverse of provocative. The gist of it was that, while of course America is God's own country, still the English have perhaps *some* humble merits, which could be acknowledged without endangering the purity of American morals and patriotism. The result was a shower of violently abusive letters; hardly a single American letter was friendly though there were friendly ones from Englishmen, Scotsmen, Irishmen, and even Hindus. Here is a typical sample of the American response:

'Sir.—In your "Can Americans and Britons be Friends?" you ignore the most obvious fact that the mutual dislike between Americans and "Britons" exists solely for the English, and not for the Welsh, Scotch and Irish who are well liked by the Americans, and vice versa—you also disregard the fact that the Welsh, Irish, and Scotch residents of the United States make sincere efforts to Americanize themselves and become naturalized citizens as soon as possible. You further overlook the fact the Irish and Welsh dislike the English as heartily as we Americans loathe you; and for the identical reasons! If the English do not consider themselves "the master race" why do they insult the American people by refusing to

become naturalized citizens (save only to procure jobs in war plants at exorbitant rates of pay)? And why has Russell prevented his young son from learning to speak the American language although the lad has spent five of his six years in the haven of the U.S.? The answer is either obtuseness, or snobbery—it certainly is not sense. This old-stock American of remote British ancestry considers the English to be America's No. 1 enemies as twice within twenty-five years they have made suckers out of us by involving us in costly wars in which we have no vital stake; and are now assiduously sowing the seeds for involving us in a third war (with Russia). According to his scale of values the modern-day Englishman is the *next* to lowest form of animal life—the American who toadies to the English being the lowest. No American of personal dignity wants or feels the need of the “friendship” of the English—you are far too expensive “friends”—forty billion dollars 1917–18; 250–300 billion in 1941–45—it would be far cheaper for us to join the Germans (or the Russians) and exterminate your breed.’

This is not an anonymous effusion; the writer gives his full name and address. The name is not Irish, but one familiar and native in England.

Such a letter as this will be dismissed by most educated Americans; and by most English people who have associated with educated Americans, as the mere effusion of a crank, but this is a dangerous error. I have encountered the point of view which it expresses in print, in letters, and in social intercourse too frequently to be any longer able to suppose it rare or politically unimportant. It is the point of view which dominated American policy from the rejection of the Versailles Treaty to the passing of the Neutrality Act. Since 1939, the men who have been in charge of the American Government have succeeded, by the exercise of amazing tact and skill, in preventing the United States from signing its own death-warrant by permitting the defeat of the British; but few people on this side of the Atlantic know how difficult it has been to achieve this success—or how powerful are the anti-British forces which may assert themselves when the war is over. British sailors in American ports experience a popular hostility so great as to involve frequent danger to life; this hostility is, of course, partly Irish, but by no means wholly. There is a vast

hatred of us on the part of a very large section of Americans. This fact is in the highest degree disquieting—so disquieting that many people refuse to acknowledge it. But I do not think any useful purpose is served by blinking facts, for until the facts are admitted nothing effective can be done to diminish the evil.

That there are any valid grounds for hating us is not easy to admit in the face of hostility, nevertheless I fear it is true. We have in the past been arrogant and contemptuous towards Americans; no novelist would have written about a European country as Dickens wrote about the United States in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Something of this attitude still exists. So far as I have been able to judge, medicine is better in America than in England, but I have frequently found English medical men unwilling to consider seriously innovations coming from the other side of the Atlantic. I should not be surprised to find that the same attitude exists towards technical improvements in industrial processes. Nor are stay-at-home English people aware of the misdeeds of our representatives abroad. At the present moment, our actions in Belgium, Italy and Greece are such as to fill every sensible man with deep misgivings. When I lived in China I found that, so long as the British had any influence there, they exerted it almost always in favour of what was decadent and corrupt, and against every movement that gave hope of radical improvement. We have now little power to do harm in China, but we still do harm where we can. Until we undertake a drastic reform of the Foreign Office, friends of mankind abroad will continue to think ill of us, and not without cause.

If we are to be less hated in America, we must admit and amend our shortcomings, without being silent about our virtues. But when we have done everything that is in our power, much will remain to be done by Americans, especially by those who control education in schools.

When one finds oneself or one's country hated, one reacts at first in an instinctive manner which is usually unwise. When the amiable correspondent whom I have quoted, in order to show the freedom of Americans from that arrogance which exclusively characterizes the British, expresses the hope that his country will join with Germany or Russia to exterminate us, my first instinctive reaction is to feel in return an equal animosity, and to explore the possibility of a United States of Europe which shall be strong



enough to meet hate with hate and force with force. But while a United States of Europe would be infinitely desirable if it were possible, it would not advance the welfare of mankind if the motive of its formation were hostility to the United States of America. Hatred between nations is an evil thing; hatred between allies is very dangerous; and hatred between Great Britain and America is suicidal on the part of both. We must therefore avoid feeling hatred ourselves, and try to find ways of diminishing the hatred of which we are the object.

I do not think we can achieve anything by being mousy and humble, or by singing small about what we have done in the war. Americans, almost to a man, consider our loss of Singapore shameful, but their loss of Manila glorious. We do no good by giving in to this belief. They observe that in the battle of Normandy we remained stuck, while they careered over France; here, again, we should insist on explaining the strategical situation. We should shout from the house-tops that our war effort, per head, has been greater than theirs. Only harm is done by being 'tactful' in these respects.

American boastfulness is like that of small boys, and they expect it to be met by boastfulness in return. When we abstain from boasting, it is not from modesty, but from pride; they sense this, and as our pride is what they most dislike, our failure to brag increases their dislike of us. It also causes them to be genuinely ignorant of the facts. Our newspaper publicity in America would be more useful if it were more self-assertive—not as to our virtues, but as to our efficiency. Not that we should ever hint at any shortcomings on their part, but that we should be more blatant about our own exploits.

The source of the trouble lies largely in American schools, which are in some regions exploited as agents for the propagation of nationalism. Education is a matter for each State, not a Federal matter; it is everywhere deeply involved in politics. Public sentiment is such that few politicians would dare to find fault with anti-English teaching in schools; the Federal Government might, as a war measure, express opinions as to what is prudent, but has no power to enforce its views.

The educational effect of 'democracy', as understood in America, is curious. Every taxpayer feels that he has a right to object if, in any State-supported institution, anything is taught of which he



personally disapproves. If, in a State university, a biology teacher ventures to express a belief in evolution, or a teacher of ancient history throws doubt on the complete historicity of the Pentateuch, or a teacher of astronomy mentions that the Inquisition opposed Galileo, the President of the university in question is inundated with indignant letters from uneducated farmers or fanatical Irishmen, saying that their hard-earned money ought not to be spent on the dissemination of such pestiferous falsehoods. If the President of the university is obdurate, the Governor and Legislature of the State are approached, by a powerful lobby if the matter is deemed of sufficient importance. Naturally the practical politicians see no reason why professors should insist on teaching anything unpopular. 'Democracy' is interpreted as meaning that the majority knows best about everything. Are birds descended from fishes? Are there reasons for doubting whether Joshua made the sun stand still? Has the Church ever been hostile to scientific doctrines subsequently accepted? Is Aristotle's doctrine of the syllogism capable of improvement? The prevalent feeling in America, except among the highly educated minority, is that such questions should be decided, not by the opinions of those who have studied them, but by the prejudices of the ignorant majority. This makes the life of a teacher in a State institution somewhat hectic: at every moment he or she has to fear that a pupil will repeat something to his parents, they will repeat it to the priest or the pastor, and there will be the devil to pay.

The pressure of the ignorant multitude is, however, only half of what the teacher has to face. There is also the pressure of the plutocracy, exercised more discreetly, but not less drastically. The condition of immigrant labour in the State of California has long been appalling; it was set forth in a best seller, *The Grapes of Wrath*. A young instructor in the University of California ventured to investigate the question, and to publish his results, among which was the conclusion that trade union organization was necessary if conditions were to be improved. He was in consequence dismissed from his post, on the alleged grounds that he was a bad teacher and did insufficient research. (Investigating the conditions of labour in California is not 'research'.) Although the other teachers sympathized with him, they could do nothing, for fear of sharing his fate. If their children were not to starve, they had to acquiesce in *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*.

The position of a teacher in an American university is utterly different from his position at Oxford or Cambridge. The independence enjoyed by the Fellows of a College at Oxford or Cambridge is a legacy of the middle ages; it is derived from the autonomy of the medieval Church, and owes much to the courage of St. Ambrose and the philosophy of St. Augustine. Even in England, it is only tolerated as a survival; the modern provincial universities have not been allowed to possess the merit which makes Oxford and Cambridge unique. This merit is that the men who teach also control the finance. The Master and Fellows of a College have no one above them except the State; and as they belong to the same social caste as the men who (in effect) compose the State, they have seldom had difficulty in coming to terms with Parliament and the government. The Master is either elected by the Fellows, or is just such a man as they would have elected; moreover, he is a constitutional monarch, possessing only very limited powers. The consequence is that learned men have, in England, an independence and a status which, elsewhere, they have been gradually losing ever since the Reformation. We all know of their subjection in Germany and Russia, but in America there is something similar, though less in degree and less avowed.

An American university is a very different affair from Oxford or Cambridge. Its finances are in the hands of a Board of Trustees, who are business men, usually wholly devoid of academic qualifications. These business men appoint a President, who may or may not have had some academic education, but is selected for his supposed administrative ability, which, of course, includes agreement with the political and theological prejudices of the Trustees. The President, so long as he retains the support of the Trustees, has the powers of an oriental despot rather than those of a constitutional monarch. All the younger members of the faculty (roughly speaking, those under about thirty-eight or forty years of age) hold their posts on a yearly contract; if the President, for no matter what reason, dislikes one of them, his contract is not renewed. And if the cause (avowed or unavowed) of his dismissal is one with which other Presidents of universities sympathize, he will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain another post. Consequently cases in which younger teachers refuse to toe the line are rare. The older men, who have the title of

Professor, have more security of tenure, but even they would find their position very difficult if they were on bad terms with their President. As a rule, by the time a man becomes a professor he has been tamed, and has learnt the advantages of submission.

The result of this system is that, while Presidents of universities are part of the governing class, mere men of learning are nobodies, having something of the position of Greek slaves in the Roman Empire. I found that when the President of a university invited me to dinner, if he wished to do me honour the other guests would be business men; only social inferiors were invited to meet mere professors. The difference of status is at once apparent to any one who has to visit both professors and the President in their respective offices. The President's office is in a palatial building, with carpets even in the passages; his rooms are vast and expensively furnished, with all the evidences of insolent luxury, while the professors' little dens are stowed away in stuffy corners. This expresses the relative estimation in which Americans hold administration and learning.

In regard to some subjects, the harm done by this system is not apparent. It does not affect the teaching of mathematics or physics, and it does no harm to the teaching of medicine or chemistry or crystallography or entomology. But whenever a subject is related, even indirectly, to economics or politics or theology, the harm done is immeasurable. Among young students in America, as I have known them, there is a great deal of first-class ability, combined with a degree of enthusiasm and enterprise which is much less common in England. I cannot speak too highly of the best of the young men whom I have taught in America. But owing to the system, very few of them achieved as much as their abilities would have led one to hope. T. S. Eliot, whose acquaintance I made when he was my pupil at Harvard, turned his back upon America; his somewhat reactionary opinions are, no doubt, all due to revolt against the ideals of his native country. Of the rest of my American pupils, some were Jews, and had to combat the anti-semitic prejudice which makes it very difficult for Jews to obtain university posts; others were Radicals, who either surrendered and lapsed into listless cynicism, or stuck to their convictions and therefore abandoned the teaching profession. Those who somehow managed to fit in were so over-worked, as a result of the exploiting instincts of the ignorant

business men whose employees they were, that they lost their resilience and the fine edge of their abilities was blunted. And so, in one way or another, America's immense heritage of idealistic ability is squandered by a system which divides all power between the prejudices of the ignorant many and the ruthlessness of the plutocratic few.

The situation in schools is much worse than in universities. In New York and Boston the Catholic Church is dominant; New York school teachers are taught to speak of the Reformation as 'the Protestant Revolt'. In the Middle West there is intense local patriotism, and teachers can hardly hope for an appointment except in their own city or its vicinity. They must of course carefully abstain from shocking the prejudices or pruderies of even the most benighted parents, and from saying anything that might conceivably offend the plutocracy. All this is faithfully recorded in *Middletown*, a book which should be studied by all who wish to understand America. The actual instruction, from a technical point of view, is very poor; English young people who were sent to America in 1940 and who are now of an age to go to the university, find that they have to go to school again in England in order to reach the necessary scholastic level. My daughter, then aged fifteen, came to America to visit me in 1939, and had to stay there because of the outbreak of the war; young as she was, I had to send her to the university, because no school taught anything (except lying plutocratic propaganda) that she had not already adequately learnt.

All this is difficult to reform without a radical reform in politics, of a sort which seems very improbable, since it would have to go against the American conception of 'democracy'. According to this conception, not only are one man's political rights as great as those of another, but his judgement is equally to be respected on all points. On bimetallism or egyptology or astronomy, the opinion of an up-country farmer is allowed the same weight as that of a man who has spent his life in studying the question at issue; indeed, if popular passion is roused, the farmer's opinion has the greater weight, because he can find more people to agree with him. Nor is it only in opinion that conformity is demanded; in dress and manners and speech any departure from what is usual is frowned upon. A learned man must not be absent-minded, or display any of those amiable eccentricities

described in Lamb's essay on Oxford in the vacation; he must learn to look and move like a business man, if he is not to be thought to be setting himself up. This protective colouration gradually goes deeper, and in time, even in his dreams, he comes to prefer executive efficiency to thought and meditation. In Europe a man's profession can often be guessed from his demeanour, but not so in America, where the whole middle class apes the successful executive. All must be alike; none must be outstanding unless in income.

The intolerable boredom of such a vast uniformity is alleviated by certain tolerated forms of hero-worship; those who excel in athletics or the movies are allowed to be great, and have some of the privileges of aristocracy. But even for them there are strict limits; no movie star, however great, could avow himself or herself an agnostic and still appear on the screen. And as every one knows, an apparently virtuous life is essential, though a new wife or husband every few months is permissible.

There are in America very many individuals who are intelligent, high-minded, and in every way delightful; I have a large number of friends in that country whose friendship I value very highly. But unfortunately the system is such that almost all the most admirable people are devoid of power, and many of them know very little about how affairs are managed. In the public life of America, the best thing is the Federal Government, which is also what is most conspicuous; the worst things are those that happen under cover and do not become known. The power of the very rich, even under a Government that they abhor, is much greater than the average citizen supposes: they can give or withhold credit and custom and subscriptions, as advertisers they have a hold on the Press, and as trustees they control the majority of universities. A man who is in their bad books can succeed as an author, but in hardly any other career; that is why American literature is so largely radical.

It is to be hoped that the new world-wide responsibilities of the United States will lead to more respect for knowledge, and a greater readiness to accept guidance, in practical affairs, from those who have studied the matter in hand. In particular, to return to our earlier theme, we may not irrationally expect that supremacy will make American patriotism less uneasily self-assertive, and that the broad identity of interests between Great Britain and the

United States will gradually soften the hatred of us which undoubtedly exists. It is of course the duty of every Englishman to do what he can towards this end, but a great part of the work will have to be done by Americans. The American Government is clearly aware of the necessity, and perhaps may find means to promote that friendly feeling without which the outlook for the world must be utterly black.

The problem is part of the larger problem of nationalism throughout the world. Since it has become impossible for even the most powerful nations to hold their own without the help of allies in war, the cruder forms of national self-assertion have everywhere become incompatible with self-preservation. This fact is not at all realized by the general public in America; I have frequently heard it said that, with the largest army, navy, and air force in the world, the United States could easily defeat a coalition of all other Powers. This state of mind is dangerous, and might lead in time to an attempt at world conquest. We in England have learnt (except for a few old men, some of them in high places) that it will not do to offend everybody; but many of us still have towards citizens of other countries the haughty attitude acquired during our period of unquestioned naval supremacy. It is a wholesome exercise to admit your own faults and other people's merits. In private life everyone knows this, but as between nations those who claim a monopoly of patriotism are often blind to it. Human beings of different nations do not differ so much as they think they do; they have the same pains and pleasures, similar loves and hates, and an equal admixture of good and bad. Mutual hatred can only injure both; mutual esteem is enjoined not only by the moral law, but by common prudence.

IAN W. ALEXANDER

# NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS

## II—THE SCEPTICISM OF ANATOLE FRANCE

THE year nineteen forty-four marks the centenary of the birth of Anatole France; it also marks the passage of twenty long years since his death. In that period of twenty years the reputation of France has undergone something of an eclipse, the reasons for which are in the nature of things. On the one hand, his value as a writer and thinker was, in the latter years of his life, grossly exaggerated, not so much in France as in this and other European countries. He became the 'Master', the object of a cult, the blind, uncritical nature of which was the cause of more harm than good. On the other hand, his political activity from the 'Affaire Dreyfus' onwards, his Socialism, anti-militarism and anti-clericalism made him the centre of political controversy in France, hated by the Right and venerated by the Left. Finally, his assumption of the mantle of Renan, his dilettantism and scepticism came into conflict with the idealistic and religious revival of the early years of the new century, and from the day when Victor Giraud, in his *Les Maîtres de l'heure*, described him as 'le plus séduisant et le plus dangereux professeur d'anarchie que nous ayons eu depuis Renan', his philosophy and type of mentality have been in contradiction with the main currents of contemporary French thought and literature.

Now, twenty years after his death, Anatole France is no longer the object of such passionate controversy and his work can be judged more objectively. Perhaps his very irrelevance to modern times (for his influence is non-existent) is an additional help. In attempting a revaluation, we are no longer confronted with a 'Master' or a political and moral 'Anarchist', but with the representative of a certain highly interesting and even complex type of mind in pre-war French literature.

### I

Anatole France was born and passed his youth on the Quai Malaquais, where his father traded as a bookseller. A lover of