

real culture in the better sense; and how many people there are in the universities, the large cities, the farmsteads, everywhere from the Great Lakes to the Caribbean, who are not exclusively absorbed in money-making and pleasure-seeking. Of them we hear and see too little.

The Fortnightly Review

ANATOLE FRANCE AGAIN

BY W. L. GEORGE

OF Anatole France, as of Mr. Bernard Shaw, it can be said that to see him once is to store a memory. There is such kindly cruelty in his shrewd eyes, such friendly malice in his short beard. The great Frenchman looks like his books: he is ironic and pitiful. In all his works, some thirty of them, that note is felt. He sees mankind as small, wretched, blinded by its own superstitions, and yet simple, lovable, beautiful. He sees man sanely, and sees him whole; he pities him for falling into illusion, he loves him because he can commit art. And now and then he hates him as inferior to his ideal; then he lashes him with satire.

It is mainly as a satirist that Anatole France will be remembered. His chief works, *Penguin Island*, *Contemporary History*, *The Gods Are Athirst*, *The Revolt of the Angels*, all these are less novels than satires cast in fiction form. He never falsifies his picture by forcing life to conform to it; he contents himself with sketching the adventures of priests attaining bishoprics by the narrow path of comic intrigue, of mock conspirators, of politicians astride on the popular donkey, of capitalists making money for the good of the people. And he is not always kind to the people: A declared Socialist, he loves the people, but is

not taken in by them. Thus, in *The Gods Are Athirst*, he pricks with savage irony the historic figures of the French Revolution; demonstrates that Jacobin, Girondin, Royalist, all well meaning, were theatrical and showed off. For he will not be deceived; that is the centre of Anatole France's mind; he will not even be deceived by women, whom he loves; only in *The Red Lily* has he painted a woman with any nobility; nearly all the others are flighty, frivolous, and charming.

Being a Frenchman, carrying the great tradition of Voltaire and of Renan, Anatole France naturally enlisted under the anti-clerical banner, because in France the Roman Catholic Church is a political force in a sense quite different from the Church of England here. As a Socialist he found the Roman Catholic Church actively inimical; so he took up the torch fallen from Diderot's hand and set out to 'crush the infamous one.' He had much to do with the movement which, after the Dreyfus case, separated the French Church from the state. In nearly all his books appear clerics who plot with nobleman and capitalist to overthrow the Republic. He is just enough, for the years 1898 to 1905, in France, were as full of clerical and political intrigue as any Florentine court. *Coups d'état*, military dictatorships, Bourbons traveling from London in egg boxes—all this was within likelihood. Anatole France poked so much cruel fun at these people that, by becoming ridiculous, they became powerless. He sank forever General Mercier (the chief persecutor of Dreyfus), by causing his prototype to say, 'If you must have evidence against the traitor . . . invent it; manufactured evidence is better than the truth because it is made to order.'

Anatole France does not limit his attacks to the Church. He takes a defi-

nite line against the Christian religion and all religions. He does not need religion; he looks upon the religious man as a confessed coward; he is content to die, content no longer to be. His M. Bergeret (a character in which he makes his own portrait) says, 'I don't want to be immortal, I am content to be eternal.' Thus he looks upon the Christian faith as a hotch-potch of childish superstitions, historical dreams, and fanciful legends told by the camp fires of Assyria even a thousand years before Christ; lullabies for children; opiates for men with childish minds. But, despising it, he also hates Christianity, because he fears its ascetic spirit. Above all, he is an æsthete and a voluptuary; he believes that pleasure is the reason of life, and that the only duties of man are to enjoy, to procure enjoyment, to foster art. In every one of his books runs his delight in color, forms, smiling lips, sweet scents, wine, dances, flower garlands. He is a pagan, incapable of self-sacrifice, even to the fierce gods of old Greece and the civil-service gods of old Rome; he is mainly a Pantheist; his natural impulse is to lay a cake of honey and a wreath of marigolds on a little altar in the forest round which Pan might play while the *napææ* dance.

It is, therefore, natural that he should hate the Christian faith, with its aversion from free physical relations, with its belief in abstemiousness, its respect for self-scourging saints. Being a scholar, his mind filled with the literature of all the world, Roman, Greek, mediæval, being a Socialist, who dreams a world where all men will be free, where labor will leave much time for pleasure, where factories would be beautiful, where learning would be a pastime, it is natural enough that he should have taken up this violent attitude against a faith

which, for a long time, feared all knowledge, notably science, as if it knew that knowledge might challenge its power. This is most notable in *The Revolt of the Angels*, where the angels come to earth to rally round Satan — Satan, father of the old gods, lover of learning and of art, ground down by the tyranny of an obscurantist deity.

It is characteristic that Anatole France should have sent his revolting angels to seek recruits on earth. He sees the earthmen, their faith in science and knowledge, arrayed against the tribal ideas of a savage deity. He believes in man. He does not say that man has a mission, such as to make an ordered world; it may be that Anatole France would secretly dislike an ordered world, for an earth without tyranny, cruelty, folly, would not afford the contrasts necessary to make a colored life. And what is the use of life unless it helps one to make good literature?

He loves life as it is. He says, 'In spite of many disappointments, I have not lost faith in my old friend life. I love life which is earthy life, life as it is, this dog's life. On Sundays I go among the people, I mix with the and crowd that flows in the streets, I plunge into groups of men, women, and children, which form round street singers or before the booths at fairs; I touch dirty coats and greasy bodices; I breathe the strong, warm scents of hair, of breaths. In this well of life I feel further from death.'

That is perhaps the keynote of Anatole France. He loves life for its own sake, as he loves man. He does not think it kindly, but he thinks it infinitely attractive. He expects as little of it as of man. Thus, in one of his short stories, he causes an Eastern king to ask his wise men to write him the history of mankind. In the end

that history is written in a sentence: 'They were born, they suffered, and they died.' Yet he is not a pessimist. He does not think it tragic that man should die. He would agree with Shakespeare that the lark at heaven's gate sings, but that would not make him sentimental. Anatole France would say, 'I like to hear the lark sing but larks greatly improve pies. First let him sing, then let him baste. Thus shall the lark fulfill himself, both in life and in death.' That is the feeling of the Great Serene. He is a man who can laugh and sneer, understand indignation, conjure up hope; but behind this essential humanity always stands a proud, aloof spirit. Anatole France, brooding on a hill and beholding man, can say, 'Little creature, in a blind world, I old man, old God, who have seen so many worlds like this one, let me beg thee not to be so urgent, so hot, so young. For I am old, old as truth, and I know the brevity of thy pains.'

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WEDLOCK PRELIMINARIES

'I'M going to get married,' said Eustace.

'Who is the plucky lass?' I inquired politely.

'Well, as a matter of fact I have n't mentioned it to *her* yet.'

'I should do that,' I said. 'These concealments at the outset only cause unhappiness in after years. Besides, she may want to buy confetti or a second-hand slipper or something.'

'As a matter of fact I've only met her once — at dinner,' he murmured.

'How thoroughly bizarre!' I exclaimed. 'May I ask her name?'

'Dorothy.'

'Dora' for short. That makes it more *outré* still. The other name hardly matters, of course.'

'Well, that's just the trouble, really,' he confessed. 'I've forgotten the other name. I wrote it down on the only piece of paper I had on me, which happened to be a ten-shilling note; and I gave it to the taxi-man who took me home.'

'H'm, she'll get rather talked about with John Bradbury, won't she?' I said. 'You did n't take the number of the note by any chance?'

'No, nor of the cab either,' he admitted.

'You must call on her mother all the same,' I said firmly. 'The procedure to be adopted is this: You walk straight up to the front door, avoiding the gate marked "No Hawkers" (not that they'd be very likely to take you for a transatlantic flier, anyhow), wipe your boots on the *Salve*, ring the bell with a smart forward movement of the right thumb, and ask the servant whether the lady she helps is within. Or it may be a butler. In that case you say, "Is Mrs." — and then make a kind of gurgling noise somewhere between Parkinson and Featherstonehaugh — "at home?" The rest is up to you.'

'Yes, yes,' said Eustace rather testily. 'But how the deuce do I find out her address?'

'I think you lack some of the necessary grasp of detail,' I agreed. 'How about writing to your hostess? Quite a short note would do. "Ref. your Ration Issue of the — inst. Kindly repeat introduction to my right-hand partner and state address in quintuplicate." That will give you a chance of losing a few copies, if she knows what you mean.'

'But I did n't take her in to dinner at all,' said Eustace. 'I just talked to her afterwards about theatres and pictures and things.'

'You must have a complete nominal roll of guests then,' I insisted, 'with several columns for particulars — size