

GARGANTUA AND PANTAGRUEL

FRANCOIS RABELAIS*

Produced by Sue Asscher

MASTER FRANCIS RABELAIS

FIVE BOOKS OF THE LIVES, HEROIC DEEDS AND SAYINGS OF
GARGANTUA AND HIS SON PANTAGRUEL

Translated into English by

Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty
and

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The text of the first Two Books of Rabelais has been reprinted from the first edition (1653) of Urquhart's translation. Footnotes initialled 'M.'

are drawn from the Maitland Club edition (1838); other footnotes are by the translator. Urquhart's translation of Book III. appeared posthumously in 1693, with a new edition of Books I. and II., under Motteux's editorship.

Motteux's rendering of Books IV. and V. followed in 1708. Occasionally (as the footnotes indicate) passages omitted by Motteux have been restored from the 1738 copy edited by Ozell.

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J. De la Salle, to the Honoured, Noble Translator of Rabelais.

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Introduction.

Had Rabelais never written his strange and marvellous romance, no one would ever have imagined the possibility of its production. It stands outside other things—a mixture of mad mirth and gravity, of folly and reason, of childishness and grandeur, of the commonplace and the out-of-the-way, of popular verve and polished humanism, of mother-wit and learning, of baseness and nobility, of personalities and broad generalization, of the comic and the serious, of the impossible and the familiar. Throughout the whole there is such a force of life and thought, such a power of good sense, a kind of assurance so authoritative, that he takes rank with the greatest; and his peers are not many. You may like him or not, may attack him or sing his praises, but you cannot ignore him. He is of those that die hard. Be as fastidious as you will; make up your mind to recognize only those who are, without any manner of doubt, beyond and above all others; however few the names you keep, Rabelais' will always remain.

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We may know his work, may know it well, and admire it more every time we

read it. After being amused by it, after having enjoyed it, we may return again to study it and to enter more fully into its meaning. Yet there is no possibility of knowing his own life in the same fashion. In spite of all the efforts, often successful, that have been made to throw light on it, to bring forward a fresh document, or some obscure mention in a forgotten book, to add some little fact, to fix a date more precisely, it remains nevertheless full of uncertainty and of gaps. Besides, it has been burdened and sullied by all kinds of wearisome stories and foolish anecdotes, so that really there is more to weed out than to add.

This injustice, at first wilful, had its rise in the sixteenth century, in the furious attacks of a monk of Fontevault, Gabriel de Puy-Herbault, who seems to have drawn his conclusions concerning the author from the book, and, more especially, in the regrettable satirical epitaph of Ronsard, piqued, it is said, that the Guises had given him only a little pavillon in the Forest of Meudon, whereas the presbytery was close to the chateau. From that time legend has fastened on Rabelais, has completely travestied him, till, bit by bit, it has made of him a buffoon, a veritable clown, a vagrant, a glutton, and a drunkard.

The likeness of his person has undergone a similar metamorphosis. He has been credited with a full moon of a face, the rubicund nose of an incorrigible toper, and thick coarse lips always apart because always laughing. The picture would have surprised his friends no less than himself. There have been portraits painted of Rabelais; I have seen many such. They are all of the seventeenth century, and the greater number are conceived in this jovial and popular style.

As a matter of fact there is only one portrait of him that counts, that has more than the merest chance of being authentic, the one in the *Chronologie collee or coupee*. Under this double name is known and cited a large sheet divided by lines and cross lines into little squares, containing about a hundred heads of illustrious Frenchmen. This sheet was stuck on pasteboard for hanging on the wall, and was cut in little pieces, so that the portraits might be sold separately. The majority of the portraits are of

known persons and can therefore be verified. Now it can be seen that these have been selected with care, and taken from the most authentic sources; from statues, busts, medals, even stained glass, for the persons of most distinction, from earlier engravings for the others. Moreover, those of which no other copies exist, and which are therefore the most valuable, have each an individuality very distinct, in the features, the hair, the beard, as well as in the costume. Not one of them is like another. There has been no tampering with them, no forgery. On the contrary, there is in each a difference, a very marked personality. Leonard Gaultier, who published this engraving towards the end of the sixteenth century, reproduced a great many portraits besides from chalk drawings, in the style of his master, Thomas de Leu. It must have been such drawings that were the originals of those portraits which he alone has issued, and which may

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therefore be as authentic and reliable as the others whose correctness we are in a position to verify.

Now Rabelais has here nothing of the Roger Bontemps of low degree about him. His features are strong, vigorously cut, and furrowed with deep wrinkles; his beard is short and scanty; his cheeks are thin and already worn-looking. On his head he wears the square cap of the doctors and the clerks, and his dominant expression, somewhat rigid and severe, is that of a physician and a scholar. And this is the only portrait to which we need attach any importance.

This is not the place for a detailed biography, nor for an exhaustive study. At most this introduction will serve as a framework on which to fix a few certain dates, to hang some general observations. The date of Rabelais' birth is very doubtful. For long it was placed as far back as 1483: now scholars are disposed to put it forward to about 1495. The reason, a good one, is that all those whom he has mentioned as his friends, or in any real sense his contemporaries, were born at the very end of the fifteenth century. And, indeed, it is in the references in his romance to names, persons, and places, that the most certain and valuable evidence is to be found of his intercourse, his patrons, his friendships, his sojournings, and his travels: his own work is the best and richest mine in which to search for the details of his life.

Like Descartes and Balzac, he was a native of Touraine, and Tours and Chinon have only done their duty in each of them erecting in recent years a statue to his honour, a twofold homage reflecting credit both on the province and on the town. But the precise facts about his birth are nevertheless vague. Huet speaks of the village of Benais, near Bourgueil, of whose vineyards Rabelais makes mention. As the little vineyard of La Deviniere, near Chinon, and familiar to all his readers, is supposed to have belonged to his father, Thomas Rabelais, some would have him born there. It is better to hold to the earlier general opinion that Chinon was his native town; Chinon, whose praises he sang with such heartiness and affection. There he might well have been born in the Lamproie house, which belonged to his father, who, to judge from this circumstance, must have been in easy circumstances, with the position of a well-to-do citizen. As La Lamproie in the seventeenth century was a hostelry, the father of Rabelais has been set down as an innkeeper. More probably he was an apothecary, which would fit in with the medical profession adopted by his son in after years. Rabelais had brothers, all older than himself. Perhaps because he was the youngest, his father destined him for the Church.

The time he spent while a child with the Benedictine monks at Seuille is uncertain. There he might have made the acquaintance of the prototype of

his Friar John, a brother of the name of Buinart, afterwards Prior of Sermaize. He was longer at the Abbey of the Cordeliers at La Baumette, half a mile from Angers, where he became a novice. As the brothers Du Bellay, who were later his Maecenases, were then studying at the University

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of Angers, where it is certain he was not a student, it is doubtless from this youthful period that his acquaintance and alliance with them should date. Voluntarily, or induced by his family, Rabelais now embraced the ecclesiastical profession, and entered the monastery of the Franciscan Cordeliers at Fontenay-le-Comte, in Lower Poitou, which was honoured by his long sojourn at the vital period of his life when his powers were ripening. There it was he began to study and to think, and there also began his troubles.

In spite of the wide-spread ignorance among the monks of that age, the encyclopaedic movement of the Renaissance was attracting all the lofty minds. Rabelais threw himself into it with enthusiasm, and Latin antiquity was not enough for him. Greek, a study discountenanced by the Church, which looked on it as dangerous and tending to freethought and heresy, took possession of him. To it he owed the warm friendship of Pierre Amy and of the celebrated Guillaume Bude. In fact, the Greek letters of the latter are the best source of information concerning this period of Rabelais' life. It was at Fontenay-le-Comte also that he became acquainted with the Brissons and the great jurist Andre Tiraqueau, whom he never mentions but with admiration and deep affection. Tiraqueau's treatise, *De legibus connubialibus*, published for the first time in 1513, has an important bearing on the life of Rabelais. There we learn that, dissatisfied with the incomplete translation of Herodotus by Laurent Valla, Rabelais had retranslated into Latin the first book of the History. That translation unfortunately is lost, as so many other of his scattered works. It is probably in this direction that the hazard of fortune has most discoveries and surprises in store for the lucky searcher. Moreover, as in this law treatise Tiraqueau attacked women in a merciless fashion, President Amaury Bouchard published in 1522 a book in their defence, and Rabelais, who was a friend of both the antagonists, took the side of Tiraqueau. It should be observed also in passing, that there are several pages of such audacious plain-speaking, that Rabelais, though he did not copy these in his *Marriage of Panurge*, has there been, in his own fashion, as outspoken as Tiraqueau. If such freedom of language could be permitted in a grave treatise of law, similar liberties were certainly, in the same century, more natural in a book which was meant to amuse.

The great reproach always brought against Rabelais is not the want of reserve of his language merely, but his occasional studied coarseness, which is enough to spoil his whole work, and which lowers its value. La Bruyere, in the chapter *Des ouvrages de l'esprit*, not in the first edition of the *Caracteres*, but in the fifth, that is to say in 1690, at the end of the great century, gives us on this subject his own opinion and that of his age:

'Marot and Rabelais are inexcusable in their habit of scattering filth about their writings. Both of them had genius enough and wit enough to do without any such expedient, even for the amusement of those persons who look more to the laugh to be got out of a book than to what is admirable in it. Rabelais especially is incomprehensible. His book is an enigma,—one

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may say inexplicable. It is a Chimera; it is like the face of a lovely woman with the feet and the tail of a reptile, or of some creature still more loathsome. It is a monstrous confusion of fine and rare morality with

filthy corruption. Where it is bad, it goes beyond the worst; it is the delight of the basest of men. Where it is good, it reaches the exquisite, the very best; it ministers to the most delicate tastes.'

Putting aside the rather slight connection established between two men of whom one is of very little importance compared with the other, this is otherwise very admirably said, and the judgment is a very just one, except with regard to one point—the misunderstanding of the atmosphere in which the book was created, and the ignoring of the examples of a similar tendency furnished by literature as well as by the popular taste. Was it not the Ancients that began it? Aristophanes, Catullus, Petronius, Martial, flew in the face of decency in their ideas as well as in the words they used, and they dragged after them in this direction not a few of the Latin poets of the Renaissance, who believed themselves bound to imitate them. Is Italy without fault in this respect? Her story-tellers in prose lie open to easy accusation. Her Capitoli in verse go to incredible lengths; and the astonishing success of Aretino must not be forgotten, nor the licence of the whole Italian comic theatre of the sixteenth century.

The Calandra of Bibbiena, who was afterwards a Cardinal, and the Mandragola of Machiavelli, are evidence enough, and these were played before Popes, who were not a whit embarrassed. Even in England the drama went very far for a time, and the comic authors of the reign of Charles II., evidently from a reaction, and to shake off the excess and the wearisomeness of Puritan prudery and affectation, which sent them to the opposite extreme, are not exactly noted for their reserve. But we need not go beyond France. Slight indications, very easily verified, are all that may be set down here; a formal and detailed proof would be altogether too dangerous. Thus, for instance, the old Fabliaux—the Farces of the fifteenth century, the story-tellers of the sixteenth—reveal one of the sides, one of the veins, so to speak, of our literature. The art that addresses itself to the eye had likewise its share of this coarseness. Think of the sculptures on the capitals and the modillions of churches, and the crude frankness of certain painted windows of the fifteenth century. Queen Anne was, without any doubt, one of the most virtuous women in the world. Yet she used to go up the staircase of her chateau at Blois, and her eyes were not offended at seeing at the foot of a bracket a not very decent carving of a monk and a nun. Neither did she tear out of her book of Hours the large miniature of the winter month, in which, careless of her neighbours' eyes, the mistress of the house, sitting before her great fireplace, warms herself in a fashion which it is not advisable that dames of our age should imitate. The statue of Cybele by the Tribolo, executed for Francis I., and placed, not against a wall, but in the middle of Queen Claude's chamber at Fontainebleau, has behind it an attribute which would have been more in place on a statue of Priapus, and which was the symbol of generativeness. The tone of the conversations was ordinarily of a surprising coarseness, and the Precieuses, in spite of their absurdities, did a very good work in

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setting themselves in opposition to it. The worthy Chevalier de La-Tour-Landry, in his Instructions to his own daughters, without a thought of harm, gives examples which are singular indeed, and in Caxton's translation these are not omitted. The Adevineaux Amoureux, printed at Bruges by Colard Mansion, are astonishing indeed when one considers that they were the little society diversions of the Duchesses of Burgundy and of the great ladies of a court more luxurious and more refined than the French court, which revelled in the Cent Nouvelles of good King Louis XI. Rabelais' pleasantry about the woman folle a la messe is exactly in the style of the Adevineaux.

A later work than any of his, the *Novelle of Bandello*, should be kept in mind—for the writer was Bishop of Agen, and his work was translated into French—as also the *Dames Galantes of Brantome*. Read the *Journal of Heroard*, that honest doctor, who day by day wrote down the details concerning the health of Louis XIII. from his birth, and you will understand the tone of the conversation of Henry IV. The jokes at a country wedding are trifles compared with this royal coarseness. *Le Moyen de Parvenir* is nothing but a tissue and a mass of filth, and the too celebrated *Cabinet Satyrique* proves what, under Louis XIII., could be written, printed, and read. The collection of songs formed by Clairambault shows that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were no purer than the sixteenth. Some of the most ribald songs are actually the work of Princesses of the royal House.

It is, therefore, altogether unjust to make Rabelais the scapegoat, to charge him alone with the sins of everybody else. He spoke as those of his time used to speak; when amusing them he used their language to make himself understood, and to slip in his asides, which without this sauce would never have been accepted, would have found neither eyes nor ears. Let us blame not him, therefore, but the manners of his time.

Besides, his gaiety, however coarse it may appear to us—and how rare a thing is gaiety!—has, after all, nothing unwholesome about it; and this is too often overlooked. Where does he tempt one to stray from duty? Where, even indirectly, does he give pernicious advice? Whom has he led to evil ways? Does he ever inspire feelings that breed misconduct and vice, or is he ever the apologist of these? Many poets and romance writers, under cover of a fastidious style, without one coarse expression, have been really and actively hurtful; and of that it is impossible to accuse Rabelais. Women in particular quickly revolt from him, and turn away repulsed at once by the archaic form of the language and by the outspokenness of the words. But if he be read aloud to them, omitting the rougher parts and modernizing the pronunciation, it will be seen that they too are impressed by his lively wit as by the loftiness of his thought. It would be possible, too, to extract, for young persons, without modification, admirable passages of incomparable force. But those who have brought out expurgated editions of him, or who have thought to improve him by trying to rewrite him in modern French, have been fools for their pains, and their insulting attempts have had, and always will have, the success

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they deserve.

His dedications prove to what extent his whole work was accepted. Not to speak of his epistolary relations with Bude, with the Cardinal d'Armagnac and with Pellissier, the ambassador of Francis I. and Bishop of Maguelonne, or of his dedication to Tiraqueau of his Lyons edition of the *Epistolae Medicinales* of Giovanni Manardi of Ferrara, of the one addressed to the President Amaury Bouchard of the two legal texts which he believed antique, there is still the evidence of his other and more important dedications. In 1532 he dedicated his *Hippocrates* and his *Galen* to Geoffroy d'Estissac, Bishop of Maillezais, to whom in 1535 and 1536 he addressed from Rome the three news letters, which alone have been preserved; and in 1534 he dedicated from Lyons his edition of the Latin book of Marliani on the topography of Rome to Jean du Bellay (at that time Bishop of Paris) who was raised to the Cardinalate in 1535. Beside these dedications we must set the privilege of Francis I. of September, 1545, and the new privilege granted by Henry II. on August 6th, 1550, Cardinal de Chatillon present, for the third book, which was dedicated, in an eight-lined stanza, to the Spirit of the Queen of Navarre. These privileges, from the praises and

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