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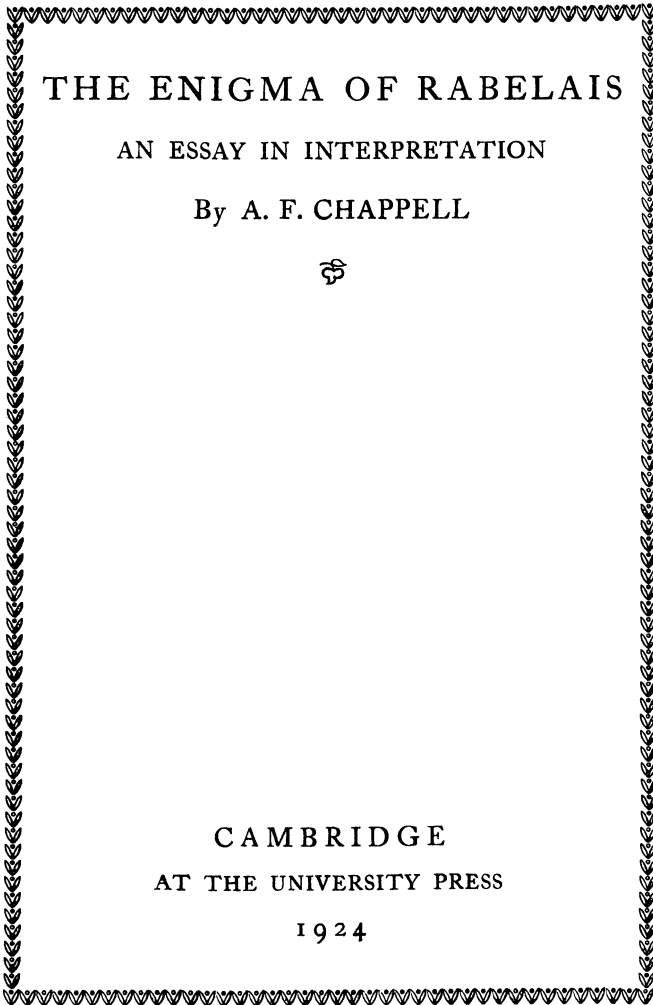
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‘Rabelais surtout est incompréhensible; son livre est une énigme, quoiqu’on veuille dire, inexplicable; c’est une chimère, c’est le visage d’une belle femme avec des pieds et une queue de serpent ou de quelque autre bête plus difforme; c’est un monstrueux assemblage d’une morale fine et ingénieuse et d’une sale corruption. Où il est mauvais, il passe bien au delà du pire, c’est le charme de la canaille; où il est bon, il va jusques à l’exquis et à l’excellent, il peut être le mets des plus délicats.’

LA BRUYÈRE, *Les Caractères*, chap. I.

‘Entre les livres simplement plaisants, je treuve des modernes, le Decameron de Boccace, Rabelais, et les Baisers de Jehan Second, *s’il les fault loger sous ce tiltre*, dignes qu’on s’y amuse.’

MONTAIGNE, *Les Essais*, Livre II, chap. X.

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N O T E

THE author wishes to thank most heartily  
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## ABBREVIATIONS USED

- P.* *Pantagruel*, 1532; finally revised 1542. Edition quoted: reprint of *Pantagruel* (Edition de Lyon, Juste, 1533), edited by P. Babeau, J. Boulenger and H. Patry. Paris: Champion, 1904.
- G.* *Gargantua*, 1534; finally revised 1542.
- T.L.* *Tiers Livre*, 1546.
- Q.L.* *Quart Livre*, 1552. In 1548 a portion of this book appeared.
- A.P.* *Ancien Prologue of Quart Livre*, 1548.
- I.S.* *Isle Sonante*, 1562, posthumous. Edition quoted: reprint. Edited by Lefranc and Boulenger. Paris: Champion, 1905.
- R.E.R.* *Revue des Etudes Rabelaisiennes*, 1903- .
- R.S.S.* *Revue du Seizième Siècle*.

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RABELAIS' purpose has been most variously interpreted. In appealing to men of very divergent views in an age of theological debate his work naturally aroused the bitterest enmity in many powerful minds; indeed it would seem to have brought about a momentary alliance between the Catholics and the Calvinists in consequence of his refusal to be bound by their common principles. Therefore we find both orthodox believers and the new sectaries seeking to minimize this evil influence by denunciations of the teaching and even by vilification of the teacher, and it is only of recent date that refutations of the more extravagant legends thus generated have appeared. Montaigne's hesitating opinion and La Bruyère's still stranger criticism have not thrown sufficient light upon the question, but they have rather intensified the confusion. We must concede that, so long as the work is considered as an organic whole, Rabelais appears to be an enigma, but it is essential that we should study the work as an expression of a mind developing under natural conditions at a time when most men were powerfully affected and disturbed. Rabelais must himself have developed, and, since his work was so personal, that development must be traceable therein. It seems impossible to reach the truth by tracing apparently Protestant

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thought in the earlier portion, and then attempting to track such sympathy down in the later work; still less possible is it, on the authority of one or two passages, to explain the variety of the adventures by supposing that the skilled physician merely sought to amuse his patients, for the subject-matter is hardly conceivable as amusing, and when the above passages were written the author had been forced to adopt or had voluntarily adopted a figurative way of expression<sup>1</sup>. The real critical difficulty appears to arise out of the inadequate recognition of the years that followed the publication of *Gargantua* and preceded that of the *Tiers Livre*. It appears in the highest degree probable that, in those years of which little or nothing is known about his life (1534 or 1535 to 1546), the remarkable change in the author's circumstances altogether altered his views on life, a supposition not out of keeping with observed developments of the human mind even later in an individual's life.

Such a transformation may occur very gradually with the result that the individual himself is least aware of it. This appears to have been the fact in Rabelais, and the author of the *Tiers Livre* seems not at first to have noticed that his thought was not consonant with what his readers had been led to expect. Two years later, 1548, he published a fragment with a prologue, now printed as 'L'ancien

<sup>1</sup> See the use of 'vin' in extract from 'L'ancien prologue,' *Q. L.*, quoted in the next paragraph.

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prologue' of the *Quart Livre*, in which occurs the following curious passage:

*Vous dictes. Quoy? Que en rien ne vous ay fasché par tous mes livres cy devant imprimés. Si à ce propos je vous allègue la sentence d'un ancien Pantagrueliste, encores moins vous fascheray. . . . Plus dictes que le vin du tiers livre a esté à vostre goust, et qu'il est bon. Vray est qu'il y en avoit peu, et ne vous plaist ce que l'on dist communément, un peu et du bon. Plus vous plaist. . . beaucoup et du bon.*

And thereupon he passed on to write a passage in his untroubled joyous style, but the hesitancy and the wording of the italicized phrases are worthy of note. The author opens with the insinuation that he had not really offended his public, then he suggests that they will find the 'wine' to their taste and good, and finally he quotes the common criticism of his latest work. Only then does he concede his reader's demand for much of the good 'wine'; but in so doing he happens to use the word in a figurative sense, a distinct change from his practice of the early period. It cannot possibly be maintained that 'boire d'autant' meant originally anything but actual drinking, nor that the excellent 'Propos des Beuveurs' is at all incongruous in a story wherein one of the giants provokes thirst by his shadow falling upon a companion. In the earlier portion wine and drinking are to be taken literally; in the above passage wine is synonymous with delight. Under the circumstances

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a comparison of the tone and spirit of the 1548 volume with that of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* would appear natural and essential. This hurriedly published volume, later incorporated in the *Quart Livre*, consists of the opening chapter, Panurge's adventure with the sheep dealers (v–viii), the greater part of the storm episode (xviii–xx), Ennasin, Cheli, 'Pourquoi les moines sont volontiers en cuisine' (in part), part of Procuration Island (ix–xii), Friar John's test of the Chiquanous (xvi), the death of Bringuenarilles<sup>1</sup>, the sequel of the storm scene (xxi–xxiv), and part of the episode of the Macreons (xxv)<sup>2</sup>. This outline is perhaps sufficient to indicate a general resemblance in the 1548 volume to the earlier work of 1532–5, rather than to the *Tiers Livre*, action taking the place of discussion; and the manner of setting some of these diverting adventures into the completed *Quart Livre* reveals that peculiar combination of the serious with the amusing which from that date became typical of his writing. The humour of Book iv, says Millet, is that of a big child<sup>3</sup>, and this criticism seems to be near the mark. The pleasant narrative of *Gargantua*, so different from the enquiries of the *Tiers Livre*, is never again a feature of the still later

<sup>1</sup> Introduced from *Le disciple de Pantagruel*, for the authenticity of which book see Tilley, *François Rabelais*, pp. 200–1.

<sup>2</sup> See Tilley, *François Rabelais*, pp. 99–100. References given above are to the *Q. L.*

<sup>3</sup> *François Rabelais* (Grands Ecrivains Français), p. 64.

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work. Instead, there is an earnestness, as of conviction, alternating with the old comic horse-play; and this may have been forced upon him by the demands of his readers for more of their old 'wine.' Again, as we might expect, a wider gap separates the *Gargantua* from the *Tiers Livre* than separates that book from the later books, and these two facts may suggest that the volume of 1548 was published in order to re-establish the somewhat disappointed reader's confidence in an author whose purposes had radically changed<sup>1</sup>. That change took place before the resumption of the romance in 1546, and it brought with it both a loss of the earlier characteristics<sup>2</sup>, and on the whole a considerable gain in more subtle humour.

It therefore appears most probable that we should study Rabelais' work with a threefold division in mind: *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, the work of his immaturity; the *Tiers Livre* and *Quart Livre*, that of his maturity; and the *Quint Livre*, which, composed at various times, appeared posthumously<sup>3</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that the volume was published in order to get a little money.

<sup>2</sup> Plattard, *L'Œuvre de Rabelais*.

<sup>3</sup> The *Isle Sonante*, it seems to me, must have been written while his memories of Rome were still fresh in his mind, and while he was under the protection of the du Bellays, who shared his views. It is much more of a *jeu d'esprit* than the Homenas episode, though more powerfully satirical; yet the debating and combative spirit is lacking. The rest of the book ranges from the very early, if authentic, *Isle des Esclois* to the arrival at the Oracle which probably dates about 1542-6. There are sufficient clearly marked traces of Rabelais' power and thought

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most important epoch of development is that (1535–46) which separates the two sections revised by the author, but the last book must not be neglected. It will confirm our views with all the greater force in that Rabelais did not prepare for his readers' acceptance what was undoubtedly conceived with great earnestness.

to justify our accepting the whole of the *Quint Livre*, with the exception of short interpolations and inappropriate readings which prove lack of skill in the editor of the 1564 edition.