"IT TAKES A THIEF..."

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WHEN will the charm and joy of Rabelais ever die? This gaily colored and mirrored carousel set turning in the sixteenth century will spin forever, it seems, flashing its colors, showing its quaint ornaments as it passes by us. We watch until our eyes forget they stare as again and again the great wheel goes around, and the same decorations fascinate us anew as they loom and flash by. Like children at a carnival, we can only gaze in wonderment at a spectacle outside the life we know, fascinated, but not fully comprehending. We realize how impossible it would be for us ever to re-create it. It is all too distant, too untrammeled, too complex, too splendid. Its spirit breathes of another age—freer, gayer—when men could be debonair, chivalrous, cruel, proud, reckless, pedantic, and—obscene. How it stirs us to long for that time of the glorious renaissance of the intellect, when literature was written by men and for men and when learned men were venerated and held one another in esteem.

Never can be recaptured the glow of bringing home the first printed edition in the world of Seneca or Plutarch, still smelling of fresh ink and new paper, chunky and massive tomes whose pages crackled loudly as they were turned. Never the joyful anticipation of a whole winter

of evenings before a clear, bright fire tracing the lines of Latin or Greek with the finger, rereading passages of one great book until it was a part of one.

What an éclat the book of Rabelais made upon the microcosm of Frenchmen! Small wonder that early editions of Rabelais are among the classic rarities—they were literally read to pieces yet were so numerous that the indefatigable Brunet despairs of cataloguing them—or that more copies were sold in six months than of Bibles in six years. The first best seller!

By it the French were endowed with the most spirited book, certainly, that had been written since scriveners first trailed lines of ink on white sheets. Undoubtedly, copies of this book found their way to England, for learned men and courtiers knew French well and made it their business to be *au courant* with French thought. But the English people could not read the book, and Rabelais wrote for the people. From the lack of contemporary references, it is clear that Rabelais had no wide currency in that tight little isle. Shakespeare makes no clear reference to its contents. Bacon and Burton, yes, but they read everything. Perhaps respectability, that hobgoblin of the British genius, excluded it from gentlemen's libraries, as the illustrations in drug-house circulars are excluded from some anatomical laboratories. Its genealogy and its associations were wrong, so it couldn't be good.

Our British forefathers were destined to wait until 1653, one hundred and twenty-two years after the publication of the first two books, before this patient cicada could emerge from the English soil and set itself to whirr ceaselessly in the beeches and yews.

What a pity, five lost generations of Englishmen! Do

not wonder at its tardiness; wonder, rather, that any alembic should ever be blown which could distil this mobile fluid and hold its clarity. Say, rather, that it must wait the transmutation of the elements, the catching of a meteor.

Here was a book that defied translation. No one ever really understood everything in Rabelais. Its author was too shrewd for that. If all its meaning had been known at the time, his head must have fallen. Attempts to find an allegory in Rabelais began with the first publication of the complete translation and reached their absurd climax in the variorum edition of Esmagnart and Johanneau in 1823 and the identification of the personages in the *Songes drolatiques de Pantagruel*. Its language, like that of Edmund Spenser, was not the current literary French. Its highly colloquial style and unfamiliar words have puzzled scholars and brought credit to such as have succeeded in interpreting them. Sainean's *Langue de Rabelais*, containing over a thousand pages, explains 3,700 words or usages in Rabelais, and his comments always are tantalizingly brief. As he tells us, "For fifteen years the work of Rabelais has been the constant preoccupation of my thoughts."

The celebrated bibliographer, Brunet, wrote: "Philology will remain henceforth the principal object in future interpretations of *Pantagruel*, and certainly the frame thus limited is vast enough for him who knows how to fill it properly."

Rabelais borrows freely from Greek, Latin, and Italian or uses roots from these languages to create jawbreakers. He plunders the French dialects, especially Parisian argot, Languedoc, Provençal, Gascon, Limousin, and the

speeches of Poitou, Anjou, and Touraine. The terms and names in architecture, military art, natural history, anatomy, and navigation he throws about would send any translator to his *Cotgrave's Dictionary;* while the extensive and minute knowledge of legends, traditions, songs, games, superstitions, necromancy, proverbs, and customs would require of any translator a long residence in France.

Even when writing the good French of his day, his fine ear demands sacrifice of clarity for a euphonious roll and *bizarrerie* of effect. The quotations from Latin and Greek authors alone would stump most moderns. Yet, even though we succeed in finding an omniscient scholar who has lived in France and has the resources of a selected library, he can still miss the mark, and we shall hear of one such, for animating it all is the Rabelaisian éclat, so often lacking in those who might have the intellectual equipment for the job.

Yet the wonder had happened! The inimitable François had found his match. Just how the somber and rational Scottish nation should yield so impractical, reckless, and fantastic a spirit as Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty will remain a conundrum.

But there he was—as fatuous, vainglorious, talented, and debonair a fellow as ever wrote a book. Certainly no real Scotsman, yet with the longest of pedigrees in that nation of tight clans and long memories, whose ancestors had owned since Macbeth nearly the whole of the shire of Cromarty in the northwestern Highlands, as well as the admiralty of the seas from Caithness to Inverness.

Thomas' father spun the web of his son's life, spun it round and round about him, and poor Thomas was fated

to spend the rest of his life trying to disentangle himself. The father had inherited the ancestral estates without debt or encumbrance of any kind. His bens and glens stretched away tier on tier farther than e'en could see or wit could ken. In the oak-lined great hall of the castle a hundred men had exercised at the pike. But before the father's death his estates were heavily involved in debt. Let Thomas tell us how it happened.

His humor was, rather than to break his word, to lose all he had, and stand to his most undeliberate promises, whatever they might cost, which proved oftentimes dammageable to him in his negotiations with many cunning sharks who knew what profitable odds they could screw themselves in upon the windings of so good a nature. By the unfaithfulness of some of his menial servants in filching from him much of his personal estate, by the falseness of several chamberlains and bayliffs, by the frequency of disadvantageous bargains which the slieness of the subtil merchant did involve him in, his lots came unawares on him. He thought it did derogate from the nobleness of his house and reputation of his person to look to petty things in matter of his own affairs.

Above ten thousand several times I have by those flagitators been interrupted for money which never came to my use, any one time whereof I was busied about speculations of greater consequence then all that they are worth in the world.

This strange kind of flagitators employ themselves in a coin accumulating way towards the multiplying of their trash, and heedful accrescing of the Mammon drosse, wherein their lucre baiting minds and consopiated spirits lie intombed and imburyed.

Do we not recognize in this the nervous, manly, and colorful style of the English Rabelais we know?

Thomas was obviously a studious lad, for he entered the University of Aberdeen at twelve. Once, when reprimanded by his father for not going along with some

gentlemen for a day's shooting, he replied that during that time he was "employed in diversion of another nature, such as optical secrets, mysteries of natural philosophie, reasons for the variety of colors, the finding out of the longitude, the squaring of the circle and ways to accomplish trigonometrical calculations by sines without tangents." A good day's work! In 1642, Thomas' thirty-first year, his foolish father died, bequeathing to him as eldest son, by law of primogeniture, twelve thousand pounds of debt, five brothers, and two daughters almost marriageable.

Thomas devoted himself with fierce energy to the retirement of those creditors, whose voices, he says, were like the hissing of basilisks. In order to decrease expenses, he went abroad to live, intrusting his affairs to his friends. But it fell out far otherwise. "I was so far disappointed of my expectation therein that the debt was only past over and transferred from one in favors of another; my Egyptian bondage remaining still the same." Whether in going abroad he was escaping, whether he had little faith in his own acumen, or whether, like his father, "he thought it did derogate from his nobleness to look to petty things" is not clear, but at any rate he returned to Cromarty after three years' residence abroad. During this time he was acquiring that knowledge of French language and customs that was later to be put to such good use.

Debt, like other handicaps, is a powerful stimulus to industry. Urquhart wrote books to relieve himself of debt. Not like the Trollopes or a modern potboiling author, to realize from the royalties, since, except with plays, these were inconsequential in the 1600's; but in

response to a line of reasoning peculiar to Sir Thomas Urquhart, for so he is now to be styled, having been knighted by King Charles I in 1641. Rather, it was that he wrote books to prove to the king and to the world that he was a genius who might be of great value if only he could be freed of his creditors. This is not a discovery made by the perusal of his correspondence, nor is it gathered from reading between the lines of his writings, but is a claim made again and again in them. In one of the five books from his hand the direct perusal of this end forms the chief subject matter, even the chapter headings.

Now, Urquhart's books had strange and pedantic titles. This one is *Logopandecteison, or an Introduction to the Universal Language*, published 1653. Under the author's name is the by-line: "published for his own utilitie, and that of all pregnant and ingenious spirits."

There are six chapters. Only the first expounds the new language, a sort of forerunner of Esperanto. Actually, this was his last book, and the second on the subject. This first chapter is a rehash of what had been more fully propounded in a book published one year earlier but whose title gives no hint of it. The earlier book also petitioned his release from his Egyptian bondage. Presumably he was tired of talking, and, if the end were to be gained at all, it must be by shouting. So the second chapter is entitled, "The Impious Dealing of Creditors, Wherein the Severity of the Creditors of the Author's Family Is Desired To Be Removed, as a Main Impediment to the Production of This Universal Language, and the Publication of Other No Less Considerable Treatises." The third chapter is called, "The Intricacy of a Distressed Successor or Apparent Heir." The fourth shows

how the rigor of the Scottish kirk has obstructed the author's output, and so on. He must have felt that he who runs may read the chapter headings at least.

What was this brave new language, its scheme, its advantages? In many ways, the plan was a good one and might conceivably be the basis of a universal tongue. Our author explains that "the first inventors of languages, who contrived them for necessity, were not so profoundly versed in philosophical quiddities as those that succeeded after them, whose literature increasing procured their excursion beyond the representatives of the common objects imagined by their forefathers." This growth by accretion and forcing of old word parts to fit new uses is not enough. "When an exuberant spirit would to any high researched conceit adapt a peculiar word of his own coyning, he is branded with incivility." Anyone who has written scientific papers knows how difficult it is to win adoption of a new term.

With this attitude Urquhart found Rabelais a man after his own heart. That he disdained the opprobrium connected with a neologism may be gleaned from any impassioned passage in his writings, particularly when the subject matter is new, as in the following passage from his novel system of trigonometry: "Thus much I have thought fit to premise of the praenoscendum of this mood, before I came to its Cathetothesis; because in my Trissotetrall table, to avoid the confusion of homogeneall terms, the first and prime orthogonospherical work is totally unfolded before I speak of anything of the variety of the perpendicular's demission to which owing to its rectangularity, it thereby obtaineth an infalliable progresse to the quaestium." Such an ingenious soul would be

undaunted by passages in Rabelais as the following: "Upon certain diecules we invisat the Lupanares, and in a venerian extase inculeate our vereties into the penitissime recesses of the pudends of these amicabilissim meretricules: then do we cauponisate in the meritory taberns."

This new language was to have two hundred and fifty prime roots which received varying modulations and suffixes. One word of seven syllables can express what no other language can in "fourscore and fifteen separate words." There are eleven genders, ten tenses, seven moods, and four voices. Each word has ten synonyms. Every specialty of knowledge has a root assigned to it, from which its terminology is derived. For purposes of prosody every word has another of the same length and the same meaning, and every word has five hundred which end like it. Whether poetry with the cards stacked would lose its fascination is an interesting question. *Chants royal* would be as easy as doggerel, that is, if one did not mind his poetry having the recurring precision of a trestle bridge.

But there are several selling points, to which our attention is drawn. "As its interjections are more numerous, so are they more emphatical in their respective expression of passions." We need a system of expletives neatly classified by shades of feeling. What a rusty, thread-stripped little scrap pile of cuss words we have to choose from! Another attraction is that the language is "the most compendious in compliment and consequently fittest for courtiers and ladies." Something else that might stand some diversification.

The contents of the earlier of the two books in which

this language is discussed could never be divined from the title, which is *Ekskubalauron, or Discovery of a Most Exquisite Jewel, More Precious than Diamond Inchased in Gold, the Like Whereof Was Never Seen in Any Age; Found in the Kennel of Worcester Streets the Day after the Fight, and Six before the Autumn Equinox, Anno 1651. Serving in This Place To Frontal a Vindication of the Honour of Scotland from That Infamy Whereinto the Rigid Presbyterian Party of That Nation Out of Their Covetousness and Ambition Most Dissembledly Hath Involved It.* The work is preceded by a preface telling how it came to be published. After the battle on the streets of Worcester some sheets of writing were found scattered in the mire, while some were used for packaging dry confections, kindling tobacco pipes, and other inferior employments and posterior uses. On tracing, it was found they were taken from the home of a friend of Thomas, where they had been placed for safekeeping. They proved to be a preface to the universal language and treated of "metaphysical, moral, mythological, epigrammatical, dialectical and chronological matters, in a way never hitherto trod upon by any." The author having been prevailed upon, by whom it is not said, he agreed to reconstruct a part of the work and prepare it for the press. He cooped himself up daily with the printer and wrote while the printer set the type. They strove who should work the faster; Urquhart often had to tear off parcels of a dozen lines to keep the printer going, so that the type sometimes stood before the ink was dry, and loose papers were scattered about the floor. In the space of fourteen days he composed the whole book "from the first notion of the brain to the last motion of the press."

The precipitate rush and gathering accelerando of the

original reminds one of the last quarter-hour of a student's examination. Reading this account of prompt publication must make any editors of scientific journals blush.

As with the other book, the greater part of the work deals with an entirely different subject. In this case it is the vindication of the Scottish nation. This end is achieved by a citation of the chief exploits of twenty-one Scottish generals and one hundred and six Scottish colonels and by a disquisition on the eminent professors of Scottish origin and education in universities both at home and abroad. But Urquhart must always cap his own climaxes; and his long account of the accomplishments of the admirable Crichtoun ranks with the great cock-and-bull stories of the world.

Now, James Crichtoun was indeed an exceptionally talented young man. He proceeded to his Master's degree at fifteen, knew twelve languages, possessed an eidetic memory, and besides was an accomplished athlete and undefeated duelist. When he was twenty, he toured France and Italy and vanquished all disputants in a variety of subjects and languages. Panegyrics were written of him by Scaliger and Manutius. These are historic facts.

Urquhart's account of the man reads like a lost chapter of Gargantua's exploits. The story of how he won notoriety on the Continent from a series of successful duels for high wagers we must pass over. When he caused to be posted on the gates of the colleges and on the posts before the homes of the most eminent men of learning that he would meet all disputants at the College of Navarre and answer whatever should be propounded to him in any science, liberal art, or any of the four faculties, and in any

of twelve languages, either in prose or verse, the learned men wondered at first if this were some hoax. However, after having made inquiries, "all the choicest and most profound philosophers, mathematicians, alchymists, apothecaries, surgeons, doctors of both civil and canon law, and divines both for controversies and positive doctrine, together with the primest grammarians, rhetoricians, logicians and others, plyed their studies in their private cells for the space of a month exceeding hard and with huge pains and labor set all their braines awork how to contrive the knurriest arguments and most difficult questions, nor did they forget to premonish the ablest of forraign nations to dispute with him in their own maternal dialects." During all this time the admirable Crichtoun passed his time at hawking, hunting, tilting, riding, dancing, playing the lute, and courting handsome ladyes. Needless to say, on the day of the disputation he so well distinguished himself that at the end of the nine-hour day the Rector of the University presented him with a diamond ring and a purse full of gold (from the President's Fund, no doubt). The next day he "went to the Louvre in a buff-suit," which words have a different signification than they would today.

The most Urquhartian episode of all is the account of what transpired on a Shrove Tuesday night, when, after imitating fifteen characters to the life, Crichtoun absconds in a coach with the most beautiful lady of the evening, to her palace, where after enjoying choice dainties and junkets they "barred all ceremonies of Pindarizing their discourse, and of sprucifying it in *a la mode* salutations, and finding themselves alone were in an instant transported with an equal kind of rapture and by the

vertue of the intermutual unlimitedness of their visotactile sensation, that each part and portion of the persons of either was obvious to the sight and touch of the persons of both; the visuriency of either, by ushering the tacturiency of both; made the attrectation of both consequent to the inspection of either. To speak of her hirquitaliency at the elevation of the pole of his microcosme, or of his luxuriousness to erect a gnomon on her horizontal dyal," might be considered improper by some. To make a long story short, they were burst upon by some drunken revelers, and after he had accounted for six of the interlopers, Crichtoun was himself run through, and here he met his death. The moral of all this seems to be that men of distinction should not enter on intimate scenes with ladies on holiday evenings when others are apt to be drunken and at large.

Having begun to consider the original writings of Urquhart in the reverse of the order in which they were published, we must continue. The next book, then, published one year before, in 1652, vies with the preceding for the distinction of being the strangest book ever published. Its title sufficiently describes the contents: *Pantochronoxanon, or a Peculiar Promptuary of Time; Wherein (Not One Instant Being Omitted Since the Beginning of Motion) Is Displayed a Most Exact Directory for All Particular Chronologies in What Family Soever; and That by Deducing the True Pedigree and Lineal Descent of the Most Ancient and Honorable Name of the Urquharts in the House of Cromartie Since the Creation of the World until This Present Year of God, 1652.*

This book, unlike the others, begins straightforwardly enough, and its presentation is the most direct and matter of fact of all. That is, if any of its contents can be re-

garded as facts. Surely if they are not facts, and their author expected them to be credited, the most convincing form of presentation would be the tabular form adopted. The book is nothing more or less than a list of ancestors of Thomas Urquhart, in order, from the time of Adam, one hundred and fifty-three generations being included, together with brief notes on some of them.

The opening paragraph, at least, agrees with our earliest genealogy. "GOD the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, who were from all eternity, did in time of nothing create red earth; of red earth he framed Adam, and of rib out of the side of Adam he fashioned Eve." Then follow in order Seth, who married Shifkah and begat Enos, who married Mahla and begat Cainan, who married Bilhah, who begat Mahaleleel. It early becomes obvious that Mr. Urquhart must have had access to sources not generally known—family records, perhaps—for the names have never been heard of before.

In 1049 B.C. "Mellessen married Nicalia, who before she was married to him, travelled from the remote eastern countries to have experience of the wisdom of Solomon and by many is supposed to have been the Queen of Sheba." Mellessen sent some of his children to Ireland and Britain. One of them founded the city of York. This was in 1019 B.C.—the date of the building of the Castle of Edinburgh. It remained, however, for Nomoaster, the eighty-second in direct line from Adam, to be the one who in 389 B.C. "after many dangerous voyages both by sea and land arrived at last at the harbor of Cromartie." The family motto, "Mean Well, Speak Well, and Do Well," was devised in A.D. 361 by one Astioremon.

From A.D. 1314 the genealogy has a genuine ring, and

in truth the line can be traced historically to that time. Any modern ancestor hunter would be quite content with this, but then Sir Thomas always did have to cap his climaxes. At the end he informs us that he has already begun to write the lives of all these ancestors and will be able to finish the work as soon as the state will acquit him of his private debts.

Eight years before this, in 1645, he published a work, the length of whose title exceeds that of all others previously quoted. A small part of it is the following: *Trissotetras, or a Most Exquisite Table for Resolving All Manner of Triangles, Whether Plain or Spherical, Rectangular or Obliquangular with Greater Facility, than Hitherto Has Been Practised, etc.* The by-line at the end of the title is "published for the benefit of those who are mathematically affected."

The book begins with a long epistle to his mother, containing such passages as: "Thus, Madam, unto you do I totally belong; but so as that those exterior parts of mine, which by birth are from your ladyship derived, cannot be more fortunate in this their subjection, notwithstanding the egregious advantages of blood and consanguinity thereby to them accruing."

The work itself is a kind of trigonometric mnemonic system, much more involved than the subject itself. It could, perhaps, truly be said that no one could possibly read the book through. How he can get so much from a lowly triangle baffles the understanding. The plan of the work is shown in an outline which is in itself complex and contains hardly one word of English or even a recognized mathematical term. At the end of this outline he softens the impact by saying, "The novelty of these

words, I know, will seem strange to some, and to the ears of illiterate hearers will sound like terms of conjuration," which shows that he had a sense of humor.

Concerning its text, the present writer can only pronounce that, while that of respectable mathematical books is broken up by equations and examples, this work is set solid. How this can be he cannot say, not being one of those "mathematically affected."

Then, to add embarrassment to confusion he finds at the end of the book: "but as for such, who, either understanding it not, or vaingloriously being accustomed to criticise on the works of others, will presume to carp therein at what they cannot amend, I pray God to illuminate their judgments and rectifie their wits, that they may know more and censure less."

It is with a sense of relief that we now turn to a book, the contents of which at least make sense, Urquhart's first, a book of epigrams published in 1641. The title states that they are *Epigrams, Divine and Moral*. They are what the title implies, moralizing stanzas urging the reader to regard his mental riches as of greater value than his material wealth; that death is inevitable; that temperance is best; that life is but sin and repentance. The stanzas are of plain construction and show the marks of the saw and the file. It is simply not our Thomas. Something is amiss. This was puzzling, indeed, until the present writer found that on November 15, 1921, Sotheby's offered a manuscript book of epigrams on vellum by Thomas Urquhart, stated to be not as published, but in an entirely different vein, some of which are exceedingly coarse. So the "divine and moral" was in antithesis to the author's earthy and immoral! This fits better with the

spirit of the translator of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. This writer is determined to trace these epigrams and have them printed if it is his sole contribution to literary scholarship.

A few words as to the rarity of Urquhart's works might be of interest to some. They are all rare, some excessively so; but they are also very little known, so their prices are not very high. Searching auction records, both in this country and abroad since 1900, it was found that the *Epigrams* have come up eight times, the trigonometry six times, the *Jewel* nine times, and the *Promptuary* and *Logopandectesion* each only once! The Newberry Library has only the *Jewel*.

Such a survey as this would be difficult were it not for the fact that the Maitland Club reprinted all the original works for its members in 1834. There were seventy-one members, which, incidentally, included some of the primest men of Scotland. Ninety-two copies were printed, one of which reposes on the shelves of the Newberry.

Thus all we know of Urquhart's life we glean from his books. The latter of them are filled with biographical details, though they do rather harp on one moldered string, one which most men prefer not to strum. He must have been thoroughly miserable, and we do know that he was for a time imprisoned as a debtor, by his particular enemy, Leslie of Findrassie. His output shows that he must have found leisure for study. How long he worked on the Rabelais translation is not known, but he published the first two books in 1653, the same year as the last of his own writing, the *Logopandectesion*. Urquhart himself never published any of the other books of Rabelais. He translated the third book, however, and this

was added to the first two after Urquhart's death and published by Peter Anthony Motteux in 1693, together with Urquhart's commentary, a key to the allegory, and an expanded life of Rabelais. The next year Motteux published his own translation of the fourth and fifth books in the form of footnotes. Fourteen years later, in 1708, the five books were republished with the addition of the few extant letters of Rabelais and the *Pantagrueline Prognostication.*

Thus was born the only Rabelais any English-speaking person not skilled in sixteenth-century French would be likely to know until a few years ago.

It is difficult to ascertain what the reaction was to Urquhart's translation, but the demand could not have been very heavy, for a second edition did not appear until 1664. It is certain, though, that when the whole was published, the work was praised by contemporary scholars and critics. The valuable notes were incorporated by Duchat in his critical edition of 1741.

The Urquhart-Motteux translation has been generally regarded by literary men as one of the finest translations of any book. Essays on the art of translation always exhibit it as a supreme example of a successful free translation which preserves the spirit of the original and even intensifies it.

Yet why is the Urquhart-Motteux translation always considered as one unified work? How did it come about that Urquhart's translation, with all his crotchets, his excesses, his highly individualized style, should be wedded with the work of another translator with whose life-span his did not overlap? What did these men have in common, and what manner of man was this Motteux,

whose scholarship would win the praises of contemporaries like Pierre Bayle and Duchat and at the same time had mastery of the racy lingo of post-Restoration London?

His story begins with rectitude enough. Peter Anthony Motteux, *né* Pierre Antoine le Motteux, was born of a Huguenot family of Rouen one Sunday in February, 1663. In Rouen at that time the Huguenots were extorted, imprisoned, and subjected to violence, but the le Motteux endured this bravely. However, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 was too much. The Huguenot churches were demolished, the communicants baptized by force, and their ministers exiled. Risking consignment to the galleys, Pierre, now twenty-two, fled to England, leaving behind him in Rouen several valuable properties.

The little colony of Rouennais established their own church by royal letters-patent, but they were bitterly opposed, of course, by the ministers of the established church. Internal dissensions followed, weakening the hold of the church. As Motteux acquired mastery of the English language, his religious observances were Anglicized, too.

Naturalization with Motteux was extraordinarily rapid and complete, especially for a Frenchman. We shall see that adaptability, versatility, facultativeness, were his dominant traits. Eight years after his hegira the translation of the last two books of Rabelais was a *fait accompli*.

But this is not his first literary venture in English. A year before the translation was published, he founded the *Gentleman's Journal*, the first literary journal in England, at the same time almost the first periodical of any sort,

and an acknowledged forerunner of the *Spectator*. It was preceded in France, however, by the *Mercure Galant*, and Motteux followed his model closely.

He thus took it upon himself single-handedly to produce a miscellaneous monthly journal of thirty quarto pages. Two of the issues he wrote entirely himself, but the others contain contributions, paid and unpaid. The journal is no sooner begun than the volume of the work overwhelms its editor. Such an impressionable and versatile young man must have lacked perseverance, and we know he was fond of society of all sorts. He sends out a general request for news items and requests that the postage on them be prepaid. Many verse contributions were received, but the editor complains that many of them have been finely done before. He threatens that if he does not receive more novellas and essays he will, "like many, borrow from foreign books." Many of the best writers of the day—Dryden, Congreve, Prior—appear and are paid for it.

The contents of the journal are most varied: miscellaneous news, local and foreign, original and contributed verse, novelettes, allegorical skits with classical characters, songs with music, essays on the most varied subjects, book reviews, scientific items, results of recent researches, and the inevitable editorials. The work by Motteux includes specimens of every one of these. His writing is charming, colloquial, clever, shallow, risqué. The tastes of the day were at their nadir, and Motteux had become a man of the day. The stories are primitive in their art, for the modern novel was not yet born. The characters are as artificial as their names: Sir Frolick Wanton, Sir Wilding Freelove, Tom Goodstead. The

plots are of intrigue, debauchery, and vice; the style fresh, impromptu, vernacular, and suggestive.

Poems form a considerable bulk, and it is certain that Motteux wrote a large share of the unsigned ones, for his style is easily identified. His are largely on the theme of love, that is, post-Restoration love-making, which is another thing. Pursuit for carnal ends is their chief theme, as in the following typical specimen:

> I only begged to kiss your hand,
> You said your lips I might command;
> Should I now ask your lips to kiss,
> Would you not grant a greater bliss?

To our modern taste such products seem indelicate and facile, but they were thought clever then, because, though they came to the point, they cleverly avoided saying the naughty word.

This was an age when noble patronage or royal favor might make a writer wealthy and famous or, if lacking, allow him to die in a garret. Nearly all works were inscribed to some great person who was expected to cough up or who had already done so. This was the very decade when the low-born poet Gay wrote his rhymed fables for the young prince but was independent enough to refuse an offer of gentleman usher to the little princess and who so enmeshed the beautiful Duchess of Queensbury that she was dismissed from court. Natural then that the opportunist Motteux should use his journal to spread on to the minutes measures of fulsome flattery for William and Mary. The death of Mary evoked the depths of bathos. After strained heroic metaphors the mourning William is told to forget his woes in fresh military victories. Classi-

cal analogies and far-fetched similes keep the thing going for its proper length. With a private periodical Motteux was in an enviable situation. He could feature anyone or anything he chose (our modern journalizing tycoons have learned of this source of power), and he could always curry favor with laudatory odes.

But, alas, the *Gentleman's Journal* was to run its course in less than two years. The issues appeared later and later, somewhat like Chicago medical journals recently, but in this case the editor took the rap himself. He explains that he has been indisposed, that the weather has been rigorous, that he is incessantly interrupted, and that he has been preoccupied with the translation of Rabelais.

And, sure enough, the Rabelais did appear in the following year. When we are inclined to smile at Peter's foibles and shortcomings, we should pause to reflect that he had a one-man *Harper's* on his hands, while he was translating the sixteenth-century equivalent of James Joyce.

Translations from the French form the bulk of his literary efforts for the next few years. Motteux was also the definitive translator of *Don Quixote*. There were other translations, though. That of Shelton followed the original publication by only a few years, but, like most first translations of old books, it is inexact. Anyone who compares parallel passages of the translations of Cervantes by Shelton, Jarvis, Smollett, and Motteux will see that Motteux's is the most euphonious and the most faithful in spirit to the exuberant Cervantes. Anyone who wants to enjoy *Don Quixote* in English should look for the name of Motteux on the title-page, as he does with Rabelais.

Paradoxical it is when a man's translations make him

famous though his original works are forgotten. His facility in language was greater than his originality of conception and his judgment—those priceless ingredients of all literary efforts.

However, it is as a playwright that Motteux wanted to think of himself, and it was on the theater that he spent the middle years of his life. He found stage people and theatrical life the most suitable of all to his taste. His intimacy with the active dramatists of the day is shown by the number of prologues and epilogues which he wrote for other men's plays. Though their literary value is nil, they reflect the actor-audience relation in a way precious to historians of the theater. Certain it is that the decorum that reigns over the modern audience did not abide in Motteux's day. One of his prologues says:

> Here are people and sports
> Of all sizes and sorts;
> Coached damsel with squire,
> And mob in the mire;
> Tarpawlions
> Trugmullions, lords.
> Ladies, sows, babies,
> And loafers in scores
> Some howling,
> Some bawling,
> Some leering,
> Some fleering,
> Some loving,
> Some shoving,
> With legions of furbelowed whores.

His mastery of the vernacular reveals him as the translator of Rabelais.

His first full-length play, *Love's a Jest* (how well the

title epitomizes the period), was first acted in 1696, four years after the journal folded up. The subject is the usual intrigue, mistaken identity, and cuckoldry, but the style is that of the man who made Rabelais ring for us. A short quotation will illustrate.

"No stay, I'll tell you myself. First he shall read half a score plays, that is, if he can read: then I'll teach him to make rebus's, quibbles, semiquibbles, quarterquibbles, conundrums, carwitchets, longinquopetits, clinches, puns."

"Heigh day! What's all this?"

"Do you know what's cross purposes, or questions and commands?"

"Yes."

"Why puns, carwitchets, etcetera, are not at all like that—but they are wit in fashion and are as easily learned as fornication."

"I'm sure that must needs be easy then: Susan, sister's chambermaid, might teach one that in a quarter of an hour."

In form, the play was dialogue interspersed with songs. That unholy alliance, the musical play, was a novelty then. Critics railed at the absurdity of it, but, being unheeded, the monster has been allowed to survive to our own day.

Other plays followed—*The Novelty*, *Beauty in Distress*, *Farewell Folly*, *The Amorous Miser*, all stamped from the same die.

At the same time the opera was developing. It took two forms, the English, expanded from the Elizabethan masque and characterized by extravagant scenes, costumes, symbolism, and pageantry; and the Italian, with highly wrought arias and recitatives. Motteux composed five works in the English style and then began to experiment with the Italian form. His *Arsinoë*, produced in

1705, was the first of that type in England. Other Italian operas were written or translated by Motteux. All these were played at either the Theatre Royal or the Queen's Theatre, with varying success, but with outbursts from the critics who preferred the good old English opera. These stage productions must have brought him considerable notoriety and financial success, but, with the fifties coming on, Peter began to yearn for the effortless and comfortable life that business could provide him.

A fancier of objects as well as of phrases, he gradually acquired a stock of imported *objets d'art* and established a fashionable emporium for their sale, an "India House." He carried on a fine trade there and was in his element when titled ladies and gentlemen visited. Indeed, an India House was about the only place in London where a genteel lady could with propriety hold a rendezvous. We can imagine our author lending a helping hand to these trysts. Long gossipy advertisements for his establishment appear in the *Spectator* papers. He states that he hardly ever looks into any books but those of accounts. What a change from the scholar who had annotated Rabelais and translated from three languages!

We might draw a slow curtain over the twilight years of our erstwhile author but for his premature death and the circumstances that accompanied it. On February 18, 1718, after an evening in White's Chocolate House, he took a coach to a house of ill-fame in Butcher Row, behind St. Clement Danes, and was found dead there the next morning. The coroner's inquest brought the verdict of murder by throttling; several persons of the house were tried but were mysteriously acquitted. There the subject lay until Cunningham turned up in a book in the British

Museum a contemporary manuscript notation which reads: "Mr. Motteux is supposed to have been strangled by whores, who forgot to cut the cord they had tyed about his neck to provoke venery."

Such was the decline and fall of a man who had abandoned comfort and property to flee his home for his religious convictions! That his moral fiber was weak could scarcely be denied, but before we pass judgment we must recall the corruption of post-Restoration London and how Motteux's hand-to-mouth livelihood demanded that he be *au courant*. In his line of work, to have stood against the public taste would have been suicidal. Where in all Chicago will one find the crowd that gathered in White's Chocolate House, or even the opportunity to get away from our work for an afternoon's escapade? In those days a man couldn't escape temptation, and the pitfalls were many; in these he cannot find a chink in the armor of rectitude. Motteux gave enjoyment to the world of his day and thereafter, and he took a little of it for himself. The Rabelais we enjoy was the distillate of a precious and exuberant soul who prepared himself for his work by his study and his living. Thankful, rather, we must be that no dry-as-dust scholar was destined to be the one to complete that structure and ever mindful of the genuineness of our gift, and its cost, shake the dust from his withered wreath.

Here, then, were two kindred souls—Urquhart and Motteux. The one died before the other was born; but what companions they would have made in life, as they have in print! Motteux would have found a way to save the Urquhart fortunes, and Urquhart would have enlisted the interest and aid of Motteux in his scholarly schemes.

Motteux would have enlivened and brought sanity to the castle of Cromarty, and there he would be safe from the temptations of London. But it can matter little now; separated in life and in time they are forever joined in the literary Valhalla.

Dare we compare the two? Urquhart was certainly the more original and the more fantastic. He conforms more to the Rabelais we have come to know in later years from the newer researches; Motteux more to the debonair buffoon that tradition makes Rabelais out to be. Yet the peculiar features of the translation of the first three books are observed in the last two. Motteux, in comparing the original and translation, must have observed these qualities and imitated them.

Yes, Urquhart was somewhat the better man for the job. It is fortunate that it was the first three books that he translated. We must remember that the five books are not of equal interest in the original. Each, after the first, was a response to popular demand, and the later books are separated by many years from the earlier. It may be fair to state that the importance of the books of Rabelais is in the inverse progression of their order. Thus, if the first book grades five, the fifth book grades one. This gives for Urquhart's contribution the score twelve, for Motteux's the score three.

Until a few years ago there was no published translation into English by another hand. The word "published" is here used advisedly, for in 1893 a complete new translation was printed privately for seven hundred and fifty subscribers only. It was by one William Francis Smith, a Cambridge don. Throughout, the work indicates that it is the work of a cloistered academician and a

product of Victorian England. It is accurate and scholarly, containing the best set of notes in English until a few years ago. The notes are equal to about a quarter of the volume of the text.

Mr. Smith confesses "feelings and pen recoiled" from translating certain of the chapters, so they are left in French. One's French maid, chancing upon the book, would be shocked, indeed. Certain four-letter words have a hyphen between the first and last letters. There are just certain words that a gentleman does not write—that is all there is to it. Smith apologizes: "It is hoped that a repugnance to put into English certain most undesirable matter may not be judged too harshly." But Rabelais is unkillable, and Smith confesses that the translation "has been made with Urquhart lying open and compared paragraph by paragraph. Without hesitation a happy turn or a rare word has been adopted from the old rendering." It is the only Rabelais that contains an index. Most excellent, too, is the book-sized Introduction, "Rabelais in His Writings"—a rich mine. The book of *Gargantua* was revised and reprinted in 1934, but the subsequent books do not seem to be forthcoming.

It was not possible to find any biographical material on W. F. Smith. He was a fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge. Presumably he passed his life in respectable and celibate academic activity, with his books, his boys, and his cronies, in an atmosphere of learning and quiet enjoyment of the scholar's life. He has provided for the first time in English a correct version of Rabelais, useful at least for comparison with the old version. He has contributed to the textual commentary of Rabelais, and his researches were of great usefulness in the preparation of

the definitive edition of Le Franc. So, a great contributor to Rabelaisian study he was, but hardly the sort of fellow to catch the thief.

The third of the four translations is that of Jacques Le Clerc. It was prepared for the Limited Editions Club and published by them in 1936. It has been more recently reprinted by the "Modern Library." The translation is definitely a modern one without any attempt to instil an antiquarian tone. The simplest, most direct expression of the author's meaning is chosen, but the style is uninspired, prosaic. Yet, anyone who wants from a reading of Rabelais primarily understanding, should go to Le Clerc. All classical quotations and Latin phrases are translated, all obsolete words are replaced by current but not slang ones, the rhythm of the litanies is wilfully broken up. Le Clerc incorporated the explanatory notes *into* the text. Some passages, as the games of Gargantua and the library of St. Victor, are thus much longer, but one obtains sense and not sound. Many passages which one is accustomed to read aloud for their lilt, one ends by understanding the meaning. So, going back again to the old translation, one hears the melody again but with it the undercurrent of harmony, which is comprehension. The result is full appreciation, so we can feel grateful for Le Clerc if we will read our Rabelais in this way.

Finally, there is the translation of Samuel Putnam into modern American slang, printed privately in 1929 for subscribers in an edition of thirteen hundred copies. The work is heavily annotated in margin and foot and fills three sumptuous quarto volumes. The beauty of the production is marred by the execrable illustrations of Jean de Bosschère, but they are in the form of plates and can be

torn out. Putnam seems to have held a high opinion of this misguided and would-be sensational artist, since he wrote a book on his work.

This translation is by a living American, Samuel Putnam, now fifty-six years of age, who was brought up in the flatlands of central Illinois, spent a number of years in Chicago, and in all probability was acquainted with several here present. As he tells us in his autobiographical book *Paris Was Our Mistress*, he revolted against "the stuffiness of provincial ideas and provincial mores for which the flatness of the landscape served as a symbol." He longed for great cities, foreign lands, foreign languages, and read Rabelais in the hayloft. At the University of Chicago he acquired liberal ideas and the spirit of free inquiry, which in that institution of real education are not held a stain. After college he became an art and literary reporter with the *Chicago Post*. Living at the old Grant Park Hotel with Reed, he became acquainted with all the Little Theatre group, the *Little Review* group, the newspaper critics, and some of the more well-to-do Pantagruelists of the city. In 1921 Chicago was in the twilight after the western literary heyday. Covici, Hecht, Bodenheim, Carnevali, Turbyfill, were then active, and Schlagel's Restaurant stood for White's Chocolate House. He assumed the editorship of several short-lived literary periodicals. He must be a poor organizer, for nothing he participated in seems to have endured. He found translation more his métier. At that time he had begun his translation of Rabelais. Needing a trip to Paris to complete it properly, and Pascal Covici, needing the services of a translator and literary scout to feed his

presses, they made an agreement, and Putnam, his wife and baby, went off to live on the Left Bank.

Through the period of postwar artistic ferment he participated in the bohemian life of the vanguard of artists and writers. There were in Paris then Ford Madox Ford, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso, André Derain, Luigi Pirandello. Putnam visited them or talked with them at the Dôme or the Deux Magots, but his immediate circle were the lesser folk of the pen, the brush, and the press.

He retained the small-town boy's curiosity for the *outré*. In the course of time in Paris and on the Côte d'Azur he encountered all the notorious "queers": Frank Harris, the pornographist; Willy Seabrook, the sadist; Aleister Crowley, the necromancer; Kiki, the versatile model; Jimmy, the inebriate barkeeper; Gundjieff, the Turkish mystic cultist; Homer Bevans, the cataleptic barfly; Emma Goldman, the revolutionary; Nancy Cunard, the Negrophile. His own family life seems to have been conventional enough.

With the depression the butterflies scattered. The Putnams returned to America but were soon off to Brazil, where they have been living since. Thence has come a steady stream of translations of Brazilian literature.

Putnam's first translation was of that old cesspool of the Renaissance, Pietro Aretino. He has written appreciative biographies of Margaret of Navarre and of Rabelais. Though exact contemporaries, differences in station separated these two kindred spirits; they are now united on the shelves of libraries by common authorship. What séances they must have in the long days and quiet nights in the stacks!

With all this in his makeup, Samuel Putnam, one feels, has earned his place among that little group of true Pantagruelists who have translated the words of the master. If there is a place for a current vernacular Rabelais, Putnam has filled it supremely. The tone struck both in the translation and in the biography are in complete accord with the newer knowledge of the sage of Montpelier. He begins his book thus:

> This is a lean man's Rabelais. Too long the curate of Meudon has had about him men that are sleek and fat, and such as sleep o' nights. It is time he had a scrawny friend or two. This is not the Rabelais of a night club satyr. It is not for bondbroker's apprentices, nor for the Village; nor (above all) for those jolly old Pantagruelizing lads who never step out of the house without their rubbers for fear of catching cold.

It was hoped that there would be time for comparison of passages in the several versions. We will have to be content with a single sentence, but it tells the story nearly as well as pages. In chapter 30 of Book II, when Epistemon returns from Hell, he lists the lowly occupations of those once great. Among them is Pope Calixtus. The original version reads: "Le Pope Calixte estoyt barbier de maujoinct." Now a considerable commentary might be written about the Rabelaisian word *maujoinct*, but it suffices to say here that it literally means a cracked or bad joint and that the translators all got the idea. Urquhart has: "Pope Calixtus was a barber of a woman's *sine quo non*." Here he has abandoned the Rabelaisian metaphor and used a highly original one of his own. This typifies Urquhart. How did Smith meet the situation? By: "Pope Calixtus was a woman's barber." There you are, safe, everything canceling out. Le Clerc? Here: "Pope

Calixtus III, the old dodderer who preached a crusade no one would go to, is a specialist in hairdressing, he is a barber and trimmer of women's *sine qua non.*" Incorporating his notes but taking the punch line from Urquhart—eclectic, anyway; and what does Putnam have; let's find it. Ah! "Pope Calixtus was a gash-barber." Literal and vernacular.

So, there you have them, four different translations, as there are four ways to read Rabelais. If you want as much literal exactness as is consonant with Victorian ideas of propriety, you read Smith; that is, if you can get him. If you want to understand what Rabelais was talking about but don't require the literalness and have no ear for sound, choose Le Clerc. If you want the impact the book made on the general reader of the sixteenth century, then read Putnam. Those quaint-sounding words had real meaning then, and Putnam gives the current equivalent. Perhaps, however, tastes have changed. The general type and status of men who love Rabelais would lead one to believe that they are not seeking obscenity or a good belly laugh. A modern slang version smacks of the crasser associates of our formative years which we try to live away. The scholarly and antiquarian soften the impact. So we turn to the old translation of Urquhart-Motteux. Moreover, the evils Rabelais satirized have departed and others have taken their place. We don't cheer at lucky hits on the Sorbonne; we are not scandalized by outrages of the monastic life. We read him now partly to reconstruct the sixteenth century. It is far away and long ago; there is an antiquarian interest—at most escape, but not bitterness, nor evil. It is a hobby we can prosecute under the eye of our spouse, who smiles indulgently, thinking,

"There he is deep in the sixteenth century again, the dear old scholar." And it is pleasant to compare passages, read a long explanatory note, or be inspired by a reference that sends us away to our shelves for the rest of the evening. It is all fun, and it doesn't really matter, and it makes us feel that even these topsy-turvy days don't matter so much. Here and there is a rollicking or a suggestive passage that recalls more carefree days, that makes us feel once again that all is not winter around us, but that there will always be spring, and that spring slumbers in each of us as it sleeps in nature when wrapped in winter.

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