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XXII. Lucian - Rabelais.

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nation. Your spirit therefore sunk under it; you bore it with meanness. Mine was unbroken, superior to my enemies, superior to fortune; and I died, as I had lived, with undiminished dignity and greatness of mind.

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DIALOGUE XXII.

LUCIAN—RABELAIS.

LUCIAN.

FRIEND Rabelais, well met.—Our souls are very good company for one another. We both were great wits, and most audacious freethinkers. We laughed often at Folly, and sometimes at Wisdom. I was indeed more correct and more elegant in my style: but then, in return, you had a greater fertility of imagination. My *True History* is much inferior, in fancy and invention, in force of wit and keenness of satire, to your *History of the Acts of Garagantua and Pantagruel*.

RABELAIS.

You do me great honour: but I may say, without vanity, that both those compositions entitle the authors of them to a very distinguished place, among memoir-writers, travellers, and even historians ancient and modern.

LUCIAN.

Doubtless they do. But will you pardon me if I ask you one question? Why did you chuse to write such absolute *nonsense*, as you have in some places of your illustrious work?

RABELAIS.

I was forced to compound my physic for the mind with a large dose of nonsense, in order to make it go down. To own the truth to you, if I had not so frequently put on *the fool's cap*, the freedoms I took, in other places, with *cowls*, with *red hats*, and *the triple crown itself*, would have brought me into great danger.

danger. Not only my book, but I myself, should, in all probability, have been condemned to the flames: and martyrdom was an honour to which I never aspired. I therefore counterfeited folly, like Junius Brutus, from the wisest of all principles, that of self-preservation. You, Lucian, had no need to use so much caution. Your heathen priests desired only a sacrifice now and then from an Epicurean, as a mark of *conformity*; and kindly allowed him to make as free as he pleased, in conversation or writings, with the whole tribe of gods and goddesses, from the thundering Jupiter and the scolding Juno, down to the dog *Anubis* and the fragrant dame *Cloacina*.

LUCIAN.

Say rather that our government allowed us that liberty! for I assure you our priests were by no means pleased with it; at least they were not in my time.

RABELAIS.

The wiser men they! for, in spite of the conformity required by the laws, and enforced by the magistrate, that ridicule brought the system of pagan theology into contempt, not only with the philosophical part of mankind, but even with the vulgar.

LUCIAN.

It did so; and the ablest defenders of paganism were forced to give up the poetical fables, and *allegorize the whole*.

RABELAIS.

An excellent way of drawing sense out of absurdity, and grave instructions from lewdness! There is a great modern wit, Sir Francis Bacon, lord Verulam, who, in his treatise entitled *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, has done more for you that way than all your own priests!

LUCIAN.

He has indeed shewn himself an admirable chemist, and made a fine transmutation of folly into wisdom. But all the latter

latter Platonists took the same method of defending our faith, when it was attacked by the Christians: and certainly a more judicious one could not be found. Our fables say, that, in one of their wars with the Titans, the Gods were defeated, and forced to turn themselves into *beasts*, in order to escape from the conquerors. Just the reverse happened here:—for, by this happy art, our *beastly divinities* were turned again into rational beings.

RABELAIS.

Give me a good commentator, with a subtle, refining, philosophical head; and you shall have the edification of seeing him draw *the most sublime allegories*, and the most venerable *mystic truths*, from my history of *the noble Garagantua and Pantagruel*! I don't despair of being proved, to the entire satisfaction of some future age, to have been, without exception, the profoundest *divine* and *metaphysician* that ever yet held a pen.

LUCIAN.

I shall rejoice to see you advanced to that honour. But in the mean time I may take the liberty to consider you as one of our class. There you sit very high.

RABELAIS.

I am afraid there is another, and a modern author too, whom you would bid to sit above me, and but just below yourself: I mean Dr. Swift.

LUCIAN.

It was not necessary for him to throw so much nonsense into his history of Lemuel Gulliver, as you did into that of your two illustrious heroes; and his style is far more correct than your's. His wit never descended (as your's frequently did) into the lowest of taverns, nor ever wore the meanest garb of the vulgar.

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RABELAIS.

If the garb, which it wore, was not as *mean*, I am certain it was sometimes as *dirty* as mine.

LUCIAN.

It was not always nicely clean. Yet in comparison with you he was decent and elegant. But whether there was not in your compositions more *fire*, and a more *comic spirit*, I will not determine.

RABELAIS.

If you will not determine it, e'en let it remain a matter in dispute, as I have left the great question, *Whether Panurge should marry or not?* I would as soon undertake to measure the difference between the height and bulk of the giant Gargantua and his Brobdignanian majesty, as the difference of merit between my writings and Swift's. If any man takes a fancy to like my book, let him freely enjoy the entertainment it gives him, and drink to my memory in a bumper. If another likes Gulliver, let him toast Dr. Swift. Were I upon earth, I would pledge him in a bumper, *supposing the wine to be good*. If a third likes neither of us, let him silently pass the bottle, and be quiet.

LUCIAN.

But what if he will not be quiet? A critic is an unquiet creature.

RABELAIS.

Why then he will disturb himself, not me.

LUCIAN.

You are a greater philosopher than I thought you! I knew you paid no respect to popes, or kings; but to pay none to critics, is, in an author, a magnanimity beyond all example.

RABELAIS.

My life was a farce: my death was a farce: and would you have me make my book a serious affair? As for you, though
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in general you are only a joker, yet sometimes you must be ranked among grave authors. You have written sage and learned dissertations on history, and other weighty matters. The critics have therefore an undoubted right to maul you, if they find you in their province. But if any of them dare to come into mine, I will order Garagantua to swallow them up, as he did the the six pilgrims, in the next fallad he eats.

See Rabelais,
l. i. c. 38.

L U C I A N.

Have I not heard that you wrote a very good serious book on the Aphorisms of Hippocrates?

R A B E L A I S.

Upon my faith, I had forgot it. I am so used to my *fool's coat*, that I don't know myself in my solemn *doctor's gown*. But your information was right: that book was indeed a very respectable work. Yet nobody reads it; and if I had writ nothing else, I should have been reckoned, at best, a *laquey to Hippocrates*: whereas the historian of *Panurge* is an *eminent writer*. Plain good sense, like a dish of solid beef or mutton, is proper only for peasants; but a *ragout of folly*, well dressed with a *sharp sauce of wit*, is fit to be served up at an emperor's table.

L U C I A N.

You are an admirable pleasant fellow! let me embrace you.—How Apollo and the Muses may rank you on Parnassus, I am not very certain: but, if I were master of the ceremonies on Mount Olympus, you should be placed, with a full bowl of nectar before you, at the right hand of Momus.

R A B E L A I S.

I wish you were—but I fear the inhabitants of those sublime regions will like your company no better than mine. Indeed, how Momus himself could get a seat at that table, I can't well comprehend! It has been usual, I confess, in some of our courts upon earth, to have a privileged jester, called the

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king's fool. But in the court of Heaven one should not have supposed such an officer, as *Jupiter's fool.* Your allegorical theology in this point is very abstruse.

LUCIAN.

I think our priests admitted Momus into our heaven, as the Indians are said to worship the devil, through fear. They had a mind to keep fair with him.—For, we may talk of the *giants* as much as we please; but to *our gods* there is no enemy so formidable as he. *Ridicule* is the terror of all *false religion*. Nothing but *truth* can stand its lash.

RABELAIS.

Truth, advantageously set in a good and fair light, can stand any attacks: but those of ridicule are so teasing and so fallacious, that I have seen them put her ladyship very much out of humour.

LUCIAN.

Ay, friend Rabelais: and sometimes out of countenance too. But *truth* and *wit* in confederacy will strike Momus dumb. United they are invincible: and such a union is necessary upon certain occasions. *False reasoning* is most effectually exposed by *plain sense*; but *wit* is the best opponent to *false ridicule*; as *just ridicule* is to all the *absurdities*, which dare to assume the venerable names of *Philosophy*, or *Religion*. Had we made such a proper use of our agreeable talents, had we employed our ridicule to strip the foolish faces of superstition, fanaticism, and dogmatical pride, of the serious and solemn masks with which they are covered; at the same time exerting all the sharpness of our wit, to combat the flippancy and pertness of those, who argue only by jests against reason and evidence, in points of the highest and most serious concern; we should have much better merited the esteem of mankind.

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