

**AT THE SIGN OF THE
REINE PÉDAUQUE**

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At the sign of the Reine Pédauque by Anatole France & Mrs. Wilfrid Jackson

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ANATOLE FRANCE & MRS. WILFRID JACKSON

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REINE PÉDAUQUE
BY ANATOLE FRANCE

A TRANSLATION BY MRS. WILFRID JACKSON



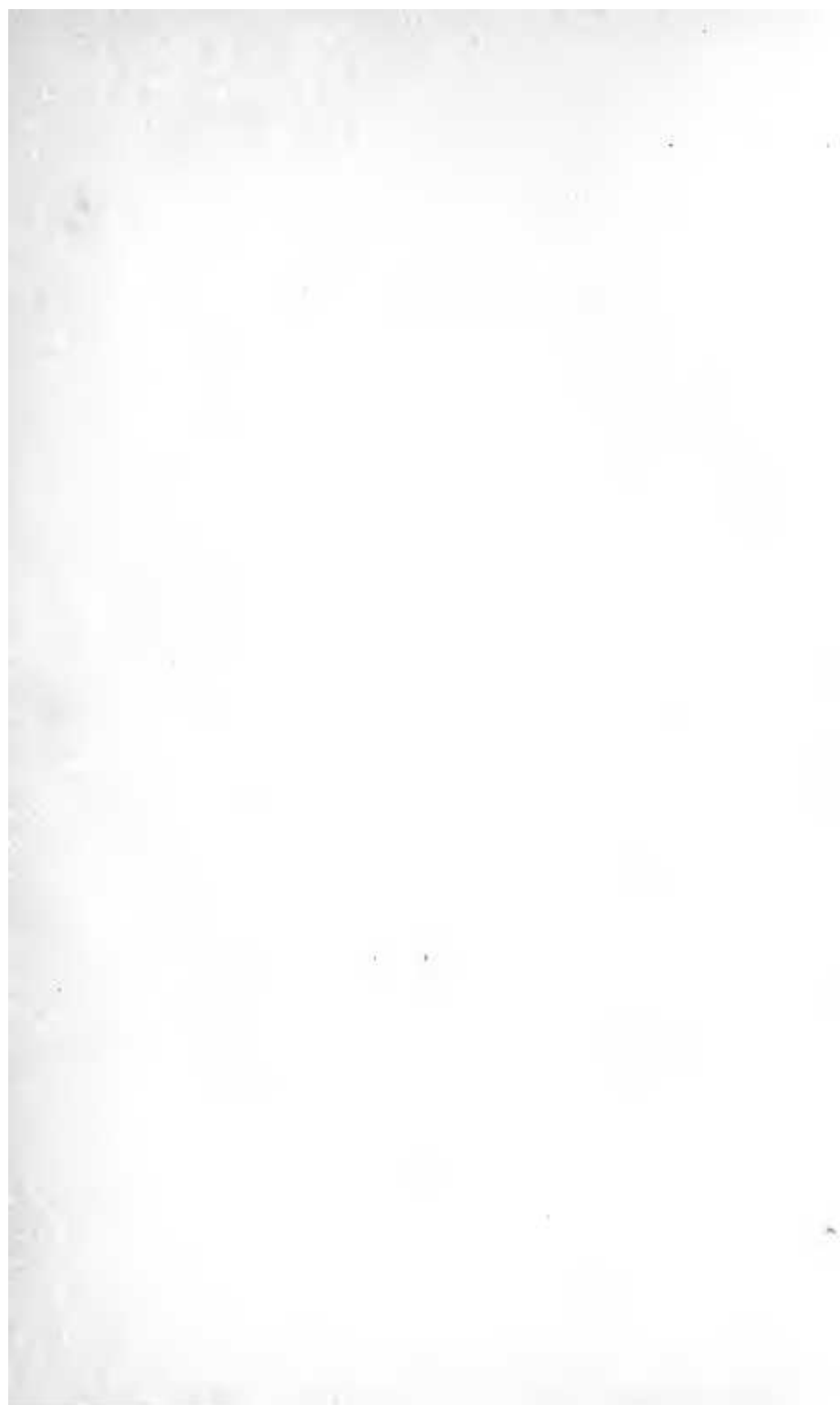
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY WILLIAM J. LOCKE



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INTRODUCTION



THE novel of which the following pages are a translation was published in 1893, the author's forty-ninth year, and comes more or less midway in the chronological list of his works. It thus marks the flood tide of his genius, when his imaginative power at its brightest came into conjunction with the full ripeness of his scholarship. It is, perhaps, the most characteristic example of that elusive point of view which makes for the magic of Anatole France. No writer is more personal. No writer views human affairs from a more impersonal standpoint. He hovers over the world like a disembodied spirit, wise with the learning of all times and with the knowledge of all hearts that have beaten, yet not so serene and unflinchingly as not to have preserved a certain tricksiness, a capacity for puckish laughter which echoes through his pages and haunts the ear when the covers of the book are closed. At the same time he appears unmistakably before you, in human guise, speaking to you face to face, in human tones. He will present tragic happenings consequent on the little follies, meannesses and passions of mankind with an emotionlessness which would be called delicate cruelty were the view point that of one of the sons of earth, but ceases to be so when the presenting

hands are calm and immortal; and yet shining through all is the man himself, loving and merciful, tender and warm.

The secret of this paradox lies in the dual temperament of the artist and the philosopher. One is ever amused by the riddle of life, dallies with it in his study, and seeks solutions scholarwise in the world of the past, knowing full well that all endeavours to pierce the veil are vanity, and that measured by the cosmic scale the frying of a St. Lawrence and the chilblain on a child's foot are equally insignificant occurrences. The other penetrated by the beauty and interest of the world is impelled by psychological law to transmit through the prism of his own individuality his impressions, his rare sense of relative values, his passionate conviction of the reality and importance of things. The result of the dual temperament is entertaining. What the artist, after infinite travail, has created, the easy philosopher laughs at. What the artist has set up as God, the philosopher flouts as Baal. In most men similarly endowed there has been conflict between the twin souls which has generally ended in the strangling of the artist; but in the case of Anatole France they have worked together in bewildering harmony. The philosopher has been mild, the artist unresentful. In amity therefore they have proclaimed their faith and their unfaith, their aspirations and their negations, their earnestness and their mockery. And since they must proclaim them in one single voice, the natural consequence, the resultant as it were of the two forces, has been a style in which beauty and irony are so subtly interfused as to make it perhaps the most alluring mode of expression in contemporary literature.

The personal note in Anatole France's novels is never more surely felt than when he himself, in some disguise, is either the protagonist or the *raisonneur* of the drama. It is the personality of Monsieur Bergeret that sheds its sunset kindness over the sordid phases of French political and social life presented in the famous series. It is the charm of Sylvestre Bonnard that makes an idyll of the story of his crime. It is Doctor Trublet in *Histoire Comique* who gives humanity to the fantastic adventure. It is Maître Jérôme Coignard whom we love unreservedly in *La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque*. And saving the respect due to Anatole France, Monsieur Bergeret, Sylvestre Bonnard, Doctor Trublet and Maître Jérôme Coignard are but protean manifestations of one and the same person. Of them all we cannot but love most Maître Jérôme Coignard. And the reason is plain. He is the only scapegrace of the lot. Even were he a layman we should call him a pretty scoundrel; but, priest that he is, we have no words wherein to summarise the measure of his fall from grace. He drinks, he brawls, he cheats at cards; he cannot pass a pretty girl on the stairs but his arm slips round her waist; to follow in Pandarus's footsteps causes him no compunction; he "borrows" half a dozen bottles of wine from an inn, and runs away with his employer's diamonds. At first sight he appears to be an unconscionable villain. But endow him with the inexhaustible learning, the philosophy, the mansuetude, the wit of Monsieur Bergeret, imagine him a Sylvestre Bonnard qualified for the personal entourage of Pantagruel, and you have a totally different conception of his character. He becomes for you the *bon maître* of Tournebroche, his pupil, a personage cast in heroic mould who, at all

events, drank in life with great lungs and died like a man and a Christian. Now there dwells in the heart of the mildest scholar a little demon of unrest whom academies may imprison but cannot kill. It is he who cries out for redemption from virtue and proclaims the glories of the sinful life. He whispers—of course mendaciously, for demons and truth are known to be sworn enemies—that there is mighty fine living in the world of toss-pots and trulls and rufflers, and having insidiously changed the good man's pen into a rapier, and his ink-pot into a quart measure, leads him forth on strange literary adventures.

On such an adventure has the scholar (at the same time mocking philosopher and exquisite artist) gone in the *Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque*. He has gone in all lustiness, in a spaciousness of enjoyment granted only to the great imaginers, and vested in Maître Coignard's wine-stained cassock he comes to you with all the irresistible charm of his personality.

WILLIAM J. LOCKE.