L. S. B. T. I.

* François Rabelais.

LIFE, WORLD AND THE LIFE OF LEARNING.
Section I.

Environment and Education:

François Rabelais was born probably about the year 1494\(^1\) at Chizé in the province of Touraine, where his father practised as an advocate. Rabelais' childhood was spent in and near Chizé, places to which he refers in affectionate terms.

We possess remarkably little information about his education\(^2\); much is based on inferences from his works which, no doubt, contain many autobiographical details. As his father belonged to the lawyer-magistrate class, one of the most enlightened at the time, there is no doubt that François' education was then considered a good one. It would seem that the Cordeliers of La Baumette in Anjou were his first teachers.

At the time of our author's birth, a new era was being revealed. The discoveries of navigators awakened scientific and geographical curiosity with far reaching consequences. Travellers returned with strange tales of new lands, peoples, animals and plants. Rabelais was conversant with most of these changes which have an important place in his chronicles.

In 1520 Rabelais was in the Franciscan monastery at Fontenay le Comte. Strange to relate the humanists considered the Franciscans as the most ignorant of monks.

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\(^1\) The date of his birth is uncertain; it has been put as 1485, 1490 & 1495. Most authorities of the 17th century give 1485 and this also accords best with the age of the eldest of Du Bellay brothers, with whom Rabelais was perhaps at school. Guy Patin, a witness of merit and not too far removed in point of time favours 1490.

The only contribution which need be made to the controversy is to point out that if Rabelais was born in 1485, he must have been an old man when he died, and that traditions do not speak of him as such.

\(^2\) Three of the four greatest creative geniuses that the whole Christian era has produced, were born in the sixteenth century: Cervantes in Spain, Shakespeare in England, Rabelais in France. Yet relatively little is known of Cervantes' personal life, almost nothing of Rabelais', and nothing significant of Shakespeare's.
yet it was there that Rabelais began his study of Greek which was to open up new fields of knowledge for him. Hellenic studies were then difficult owing to the scarcity of masters and books.

Rabelais was soon on friendly terms with the cultured minds of the district, but his superiors in the Franciscan order regarded with suspicion his Greek studies and his assiduous correspondence with humanists. This culminated in the confiscation of his Greek texts in 1523, when Rabelais fled to the protection of the Bishop of Mâcon and entered the latter’s Benedictine monastery where he spent a happy and profitable time.

Finally, leaving the regular for the secular clergy, he started on his travels to the main intellectual centres, still under the aegis of great lords and scholars including the Du Bellay family. Visiting Poitiers, Bourges, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Avignon and Paris, he then studied medicine at Montpellier and subsequently practised at Lyons hospital from 1532 to 1533.

Situated in the full stream of Italian influences, Lyons was a fitting centre for Rabelais’ activities. The printing presses, notably that of Sébastien Gryphius, were very active; the fairs attracted men of many nations and scholars found their way in large numbers to this intellectual capital. Rabelais himself edited two medical and one legal text as well as writing part of his chronicles, the first book of “Pantagruel” (1532).

The work incurred the displeasure of the Sorbonne theologians but Rabelais had a protector in Bishop Jean du Bellay who, being charged with a diplomatic mission to Rome in the early months of 1534, took Rabelais with him as doctor.

This sojourn in Rome gave Rabelais an opportunity of seeing Rome itself and Florence, and of becoming acquainted with the Italian Renaissance, men, ideas, culture and architecture. His special interests were topography, books, botany and meetings with scholars. Back in Lyons Rabelais soon published his “Gargantua”,
an enlargement of a previous work.

Such are Rabelais' environment, education and main activities during the part of his life with which we are concerned.

When he turns attention to the problem of education we find the influence of the man, the environment and the epoch. His spiritual, aesthetic and social influences have left their mark on his educational system, but not to the exclusion of his personal tastes and ideas.

Our task is to examine his work in the light of the different circumstances which influenced its conception and development; to find out the materials with which the writer has worked either in following certain traditions or rules, or in pursuing his own theories based on his personal experience and tastes.

Rabelais' chapters on education aroused great interest and formed the subject of much written work towards the end of the 19th Century in France, Germany, England and United States. Yet in English language this aspect of his work has been strangely neglected, so much so that many histories of education written in English make little more than a passing mention of his contribution to educational theory.

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**SECTION II.**

Rabelais as Humanist and Man of the Renaissance:

Rabelais led a singularly restless life. His thirst for knowledge, his wandering spirit, perhaps sometimes his fear of persecution, drove him from town to town. He was no revolutionary and was not without the necessary prudence to tone down some of his satirical references when necessary.

We must also reject the entirely erroneous conception of Rabelais as a buffoon and libertine. On the contrary he was a scholar whose keen intellect
embraced all branches of study: he knew several languages; he devoted himself to the study of natural history, medicine, archeology, philosophy and astronomy.

Yet there was nothing austere in Rabelais. His work, revealing such confidence in human nature, reflects the author's convictions and profound aspirations. His exuberant spirit with its inexhaustible fund of good humour, together with his love of liberty, made him bear with difficulty any yoke of rules, and above all the yoke of monasticism.

By his versatility and manifold activities Rabelais is indeed a true son of the Renaissance, Rabelais was not an artist in the Italian sense, no doubt owing to his dull monastic training. We often find beauty of ideas in his work but rarely beauty of form. Yet he is worthy of comparison with the leading spirits of the Renaissance by the great variety of his interests.

He is a humanist, in the narrower sense of the word, by his enthusiasm for the Latin and Greek tongues; and in the broader sense, by the profound study of the classical literatures.

By his varied interests and achievements he is in the forefront of sixteenth century thought in general and of the French Renaissance in particular.

In the revival of Greek studies he was one of the most ardent workers. Being a student of the sciences as well as a humanist, his knowledge of nature strengthened his critical sense as scholar. His vast reading was supplemented by his methodical observation of natural phenomena.

As is essentially of the early Renaissance by his individuality and personality. In law, philosophy, medicine and literature alike he did not conform to the dictates of any particular school, but applied to all theories the acid test of his common sense and his own personal experience. While he drew readily from the common stock of contemporary knowledge, we can discern in all his intellectual activity an independence of
thought, a weighing of evidence in the mental balance.

Rabelais' moral experience does not incline him to introspection and self-analysis. Tired of the seclusion of the cloister, he came forth into the world and turned his attention to criticism of society and church, to the study of mankind.

... Section III.

The social organization of France at the end of the 15th Century.

French Society was divided into three classes or orders - the clergy, the nobility and the third estate. Not only were the two former classes privileged, that is, placed upon a better footing than the last, but there was inequality between sections of the same class. The two privileged orders were favoured in many ways, such as complete or partial exemption from taxes, or the right themselves to tax the clergy through its right to tithes, the nobility through its right to exact feudal dues. Even some of the members of the third estate enjoyed privileges denied the rest.

The Church:

The clergy of the Roman Catholic Church formed the first order in the state. It was rich and powerful. It owned probably a fifth of the land of France. This land yielded a large revenue, and in addition, the clergy exacted tithes on all the agricultural products of the realm. This was in reality a form of national taxation, with this difference from the other forms that the proceeds went, not to the nation, but to the Church. The Church and still another source of income, the dues which it exacted as feudal land lord from those to whom it stood in that relation. Out of this income the Church maintained religious edifices and services and supported many hospitals and schools. It
relieved personal distress by charity, for there was no such thing as organised poor relief by the state. Thus the Church was a state within the state, performing several functions which in most modern societies are performed by the Government. This rich corporation was relieved from taxation. Although from time to time it paid certain lump sums to the national treasury, these were far smaller than they would have been had the Church been taxed on its property and on its income in the same proportion as were the commoners.

An income so large, had it been wisely and justly expended might have aroused no criticism, for many of the services performed by this organization were essential to the well being of the people. But here as elsewhere in the institutions of the country we find gross favouritism and wanton extravagance, which shocked the moral sense of the nation and aroused its indignation. For the organization did not treat its own staff with any sense of fair play. Much the larger part of the income went to the higher clergy, that is, to the archbishops and bishops, and to a small number of abbots, canons, and other dignitaries. These highly lucrative positions were monopolised by the younger sons of the nobility who were eager to accept the salaries but not disposed to perform the duties: many of whom, indeed, resided at court and lived a gay and worldly life, with scarcely any thing, save some slight peculiarity of dress, to indicate their ecclesiastical character. The morals of many were scandalous, and their intellectual ability was frequently mediocre. They did not consider themselves men set apart for a high and noble calling; they did not take their duties seriously — of course there were honourable exceptions, yet they were exceptions — but most of them were very worldly, devoted to all the pleasures, dissipations, and intrigues of the Court. Some held several offices at once, discharging the obligations of none, and enjoying princely revenues.

A few of the bishops received small incomes.
They were in the main absenteeees, residing, not in their
dioceses, but in the Court where further plums were to
be picked up by the lucky, and where at any rate life
was gay.

On the other hand, the lower clergy, the thousands
of parish priests, who did the real work of spiritual
consolation and instruction, who laboured faithfully in
the vineyard, were wretchedly recompensed. They were sons
of the third estate and were treated as plebeians by
their superiors. They had difficulty in keeping bread and
soul together. No wonder they were discontented and
indignant, bitter against their superiors, who neglected
and exploited them with equal indifference.

The Nobles:

Some what similar was the situation of the second
order the nobility. As in the case of the clergy, there
was here also great variety of condition among the
members of this order, although all were privileged.
There were two main classes, the nobility of the sword
and the nobility of the robe, that is, the old military
nobility of feudal origin and the new judicial nobility,
which secured its rank from the judicial offices its
members held. The nobility of the sword consisted of the
nobles of the court and of the nobles of the provinces.
The former were few in number, but they alone with
peculiar brilliancy, for they were the ones who lived
at the court, danced attendance upon the king, vied with
each other in an eager competition for appointments in
the army and navy and diplomatic service, for pensions
and legacies from the royal bounty. These they needed,
as they lived in a luxurious splendor that taxed their
incomes and overtaxed them. Residing at court, they
allowed their estates to be administered by agents who
exacted all that they could get from the peasantry who
cultivated them. Every body was jealous of the nobles
of this class, for they were the favoured few, who
practically monopolized all the pleasant places in the
sun.
The contrast was striking between the nobles who lived at the court and the provincial nobles who for various reasons did not live at court, were not known to the kings, received no favours, and who yet were conscious that in purity of blood, in honourability of descent and tradition, they were the equals or superiors of those who crowded about the monarch’s person. Many of them had small incomes, some pitifully small. They could not figure in the world of society; they had few chances to increase their prosperity, which in fact, tended steadily to decrease. Their sons were trained for the army, the only noble profession, but could never hope to rise very high because all the major appointments went to the assiduous suitors of the clique at court. They resided among the peasants and in some cases were hardly distinguishable from them, except that they insisted upon maintaining the tradition of their class, their badge of superiority, a life of leisure. To work was to lose caste. This obliged many of them to insist rigorously upon the payment of the various feudal dues owed them by the peasantry, some of which were burden some, most of which were irritating.

The nobility as a whole enjoyed one privilege which was a serious and unnecessary injury to the peasants, making harder the conditions of their lives, always hard enough, namely the exclusive right of hunting, considered the chief noble sport. This meant in actual practice that the peasants might not disturb the game, although the game was destroying their crops. This was an unmitigated abuse, universally execrated by them.

The odium that came to be attached in men’s minds to the nobility was chiefly felt only for the selfish and greedy minority. The provincial nobility like the lower clergy, were themselves discontented with the existing system.

The Third Estate:

Such were the two privileged orders. The rest of
the population, comprising the vast majority of the people, was called the third estate. Differing from the others in that it was unprivileged, it resembled them in that it illustrated the principle of inequality, as did they. There were the widest extremes in social and economic conditions. Every one who was not a noble or a clergyman was a member of the third estate, the richest banker, the most illustrious man of letters, the poorest peasant, the beggar in the streets. Not at all homogeneous, the three chief divisions of this immense mass were bourgeoisie, the artisans, and the peasants.

The bourgeoisie, or upper middle class, comprised all those who were not manual labourers. Thus lawyers, physicians, teachers, literary men, were bourgeoisie; also merchants, bankers, manufacturers. Many of them were rich, intelligent, energetic, educated and well-to-do, this class represented most keenly the existing system. For its members were made to feel in numerous ways their social inferiority and conscious that they were quite as well educated, quite as well mannered as the nobles, they returned the disdain of the latter with envy and hatred.

Belonging to this estate but beneath the bourgeoisie were the artisans living in the towns and cities. They were a comparatively small class because the industrial life of France was not yet developed. They were generally organized in guilds, or what we would call today trade unions, which had their rules and privileges that gave rise to bickerings and that were generally condemned as preventing the free and full expansion of industry and as artificially restricting the right to work.

The other large division of the third estate was the peasantry. This was by far the largest section. Indeed it was the nation. France was an agricultural country, more than ninetenths of the population were peasants. The burdens of society fell with crushing weight upon them. They paid tithes to the clergy and
numeorous and vexations feudal dues to the nobles. The
peasant paid tolls to the seigneur for the use of the
roads and bridges. When he sold his land he paid a fee
to the former seigneur. He was compelled to use the
seigneur's wine press in making his wine the seigneur's
mill in grinding his grain, the seigneur's oven in baking
his bread, always paying for the service. Adding that
he paid to the king, the church, and the seigneur, and
the salt and excise duties, the total was often not far
from four-fifths of his earnings. With the remaining
one-fifth he had to support himself and family.

The inevitable consequence was that he lived
on the verge of disaster. Bad weather at a critical
moment supervening, he faced dire want, even starvation.
It need occasion no surprise that owing to such conditions
hundreds of thousands of men became beggars or brigands,
driven to frenzy by hunger.

Restrictions Upon Liberty:

For did they enjoy liberty. Religious liberty
was lacking. Protestant preaching was forbidden and
consequently could occur only in secret or in lonely
place. Jews were considered foreigners and as such were
tolerated, but their position was humiliating. Catholics
were required by law to observe the requirements and
usages of their religion, communion, fast days, lent. The
Church was opposed to toleration.

There was no individual liberty. The authorities
might arrest any one whom they wished and keep him in
prison as long as they chose without assigning reasons
and without giving the victim any chance to prove his
innocence. There was no such thing as a Habeas Corpus Law.

Nor was there political liberty. The French did
not have the right to hold public meetings or to form
association or societies. And of course, they did not
elect any assemblies to control the royal government.
Liberties which had been in vogue in England for
centuries which were the priceless heritage of the English
race on both sides of the Atlantic, were unknown in France.

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emphasis on Philosophy and the classical tradition.

Despite some friction, the kings permitted the church monopoly in education as the church met the cost and indoctrinated their pupils to be submissive to the "divine right of kings".

The curriculum of medieval schools comprised the so-called seven liberal arts, divided into the Trivium - grammar, dialectic, rhetoric and the Quadrivium - music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. Of all these arts the one studied most carefully and generally thought to be the most valuable was grammar. Grammar at this time lacked the dialectical character given it by scholars and thinkers of the later Middle Ages. The grammatical authorities were the honoured and respected and usually the ancient names. The grammar of Donatus and Priscian were the popular elementary works, although perhaps most grammar scholars would admit that Priscian's was the most advanced treatment of the subject. Then the treatises at least those past that dealt with grammar of Martianus Capella, St. Augustine, Boethius, Cassiodorus, Isidore, Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus were used as more advanced texts. Thus grammar formed the foundation, providing the methods of correct writing and speech and the knowledge necessary for interpreting the poetical and historical works studied.

Rhetoric was the art of literary expression and style, including the writing of formal letters. By the end of the 15th century dialectic was, at least in practice, formal logic and this branch of the trivium dominated the rest. Arithmetic was chiefly the rule for finding the date of Easter; geometry, when included in the course of study, was based on Euclid; music included singing and some knowledge of notation, while astronomy, was never quite free from astrology.

Yet in most monastic schools and colleges many of these studies existed only in theory. Dialectic overshadowed the other six "arts" and the quadrivium especially received little attention. We find that it was not a subject that was studied but rather what some
particular writer said on it. The term for study was "legere librum" or "audire librum".

For the exponents of scholasticism all knowledge was mainly theological. Latin was the language spoken and the method exclusively oral, apart from the dictation of certain passages necessitated by the scarcity of books. There are several mentions among the rules of certain contemporary schools of speaking French as a punishable offence, like lying.

We should not expect to find at that time a preference for any method of instruction. Such a method did not appear on the educational scene for some time. The method of study adopted in scholastic education was to subdivide the work in hand into small sections, each of which was then subjected to a minute discussion according to the principles of logic, analysing its various causes and interpreting its several meanings. At its best the method bred alert minds, yet scholasticism had many faults which are not so much positive defects as serious limitations. Its very formalism contained the germ of its own decay. Already in the 12th century John of Salisbury had realised its shortcomings. Returning to Paris to see his former colleagues, who were still detained by dialectic, he found that they had made no progress in their debates.

The same books were kept for centuries while there was no turning to the outside world or to the realities of life, although great efforts were wasted on texts written in bad Latin. The excessive use of memorisation can be partly explained by the scarcity of books. But at the same time there was no appeal to the power of imagination or observation. The content of human knowledge was small and for centuries had received scarcely any addition. Scholasticism arrived at reason by introspective, deductive analysis but, unfortunately, the same method was applied to problems totally
unsuitable for "a priori" reasoning, to questions needing an objective or inductive approach.

From the discussion arising from the texts grew the argumentation which formed such an important part of the course in school and university. Disputation began early, the subjects being taken from the grammatical or moral treatises studied. Originally designed to test and fix knowledge, it finally encouraged argument for argument's sake. Montaigne has left us a typical argument of dialectic logic: "Ham causes thirst; drink quenches thirst; therefore ham quenches thirst".

Students disputed at all times and in every place. The simple words "seme est mihi" gave rise to questions not only of grammar but also of metaphysics. Yet in these discussions there was often no concern for truth but rather for the dogged defense of one's own opinions to the point of fighting.

"The characteristic feature of scholasticism is thus an excessive development of form at the expense of matter. It supplies a typical example of a process that is well marked in the history of the evolution of educational theory. Each new system or variant of a system begins with a rich content and supplies the educand with abundant material which gradually gets thoroughly well arranged and thus forms a capital basis for educational work. The next step is the over-organisation of matter with the consequent predominance of the formal element. By and by formalism develops to such an extent that there is little but form left, and there is room for the negative movement and a new type of education." There were striking exceptions among medieval schools, notably the Cathedral school of Chartres where there was a direct acquaintance with the authors of antiquity.

All writers and scholars of the Renaissance were outspoken about their uninspiring education. They were unacquainted with the great minds of the Middle Ages, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus, Vincent of Beauvais, Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas Aquinas, for they had been introduced to scholastic philosophy through dull commentaries.

Rabelais has also spoken bitterly about the filth of such schools as the notorious College de Montaigu in Paris; Erasmus has written of his life in this "theological gaol" having for his time very modern ideas of hygiene he complained in his letters of the many evils, unhealthy dormitories, cold rooms, bad food and parasites. Corporal punishment was frequent. The tuition displeased him by its formalism. The artist in him was disgusted by such methods though not so profoundly as was Rabelais at a later date with similar methods. Erasmus, finally had to forget much of his Latin but illness gave him an excuse to escape. The day's work, he tells us, was long and crowded. According to the new regulations of monastic austerity drawn up at the end of the 15th century, the poor students were roused at 4 A.M. and "listened" to lessons until 6 O'clock. At 6 A.M. mass. From 8 A.M. to 10 A.M. lessons. From 10 A.M. to 11 A.M. discussion and argumentation. At 11 A.M. dinner. After dinner came a test on the questions discussed and the lessons heard. From 1 to 3 p.m. further lessons. At 5 P.M. vespers. From 5 P.M. to 6 P.M. disputation. Supper at 6 P.M.; then another test on the discussion and lessons of the whole day. The students retired to bed at 8 P.M. in the winter, 9 P.M. in summer.

Thus the seven or eight hours of sleep were inadequate compared with the crowded day of sixteen to seventeen hours with its ceaseless activity of a very one-sided kind. No attention was paid to physical training, no provision made for recreation or relaxation. Although the food was poor, the many fast days reduced even further, nourishment which was already inadequate.
Higher Education

The authority and attitude of the Sorbonne made the task of the French humanists specially difficult. The faculty of theology in the University of Paris was in a dominant position owing to the strength and unity of the medieval church. The Sorbonne, as the faculty of theology was called, held a watchful brief over the "pedagogies". When a spokesman is sent to plead for the return of the bells of Notre Dame removed by Gargantua it is the theologian Jamotus who is entrusted with the task. The faculty of theology took precedence over the others, even over the sector of the university. In Rabelais' life the first instance we have of a clash between the Sorbonne and humanism is the confiscation of his Greek texts in 1523 as a result of a decision of the Sorbonne following the publication of Erasmus' "Commentaries" on St. Luke.

It was only the third book of Rabelais' chronicles which appeared under his own name, while prudence made him effect certain changes in the text of his earlier works. Originally Rabelais wrote that Gargantua was taught by a "theologian" but he altered this and such words as "sorbonagres" and "sorbonicules" to "sophist" in later editions.

The Sorbonne viewed with disfavour the growing humanist spirit of free examination, it persecuted not only heresy but humanism, which was not necessarily opposed to the established religion but, by its admiration for the ancients, was considered to weaken the Christian spirit and upset the traditional interpretation of the Scriptures. Students were warned against Greek.

The year 1530 marks the first flowering of the Renaissance in France. In that year Francis I created the College de France to encourage the study of classical and

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1. In his letter written to Erasmus, December 1530, Rabelais inserts a Greek sentence among the Latin a common practice with humanists when they wanted to hide what they feared would be an indiscretion.
oriental languages, and humanism had definitely won its place. As the languages of antiquity could now be studied for their own sake, apart from the faculty of theology, humanism obtained an immense gain at the expense of the Sorbonne. Such teachers as Mathurin Cordier were devoting their energies to improving teaching methods. Bude, whose influence with Francis I had contributed greatly to the formation of the Collège de France, had also published the valuable "Comentarii linguae Graecae" and, as royal librarian, had collected many rare and beautiful Greek manuscripts. The many printing presses did not confine their efforts to learned publications but many, especially in Lyons and Paris, printed books in French in increasing numbers.

This is the fortunate state of affairs mentioned by Gargantua in his letter to his son:

"Now all the learned languages are restored to their rightful place: Greek, without which a man may be ashamed to account himself a scholar; Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldean and Latin."

Outside the universities and monastic schools a new tradition was alive from the fourteenth century, the education in the castle with its chivalric training for squire and knight. The trivium and quadrivium were intended only for future clerics and scholars. The curriculum for knights was the seven free arts - riding, swimming, shooting with bow and arrow, boxing, hawking, playing chess and writing poetry.\(^1\)

The value of the training varied with the culture of the castle or household. There were three stages for page, squire and knight, careful rules being laid down for each period. Whereas the body was ignored in the monastic school and college, in the castle it was exalted.

\(^1\) In the "Petit Jehan de Saintré" p.1. we find an account of the activities of the page of that name. He had to serve attentively at table at the age of 13, manage a restive steed, sing, dance, run, leap and take part in such manly pursuits.
Devotion to woman war, along with skill in arms, the ideal
of conduct. The Latin of the cloister made way for
Provençal love-poetry accompanied by training in manners
and social accomplishments. This education was as
vocational as that for clerics but more individual.

There was yet a third type of school, intended for
the merchant's son in town, where the vernacular received
special attention and where mathematics and history were
taught better than in either cloister or castle. In these
schools education was in closer contact with the conditions
of actual life.

These three types of education were separate until
their course was greatly modified by the events of the
Renaissance and Reformation.

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