

# FRANCOIS RABELAIS

(Born 1483: died, April 9, 1553).

T. A. JACKSON

**F**OUR HUNDRED years ago, almost to the day, died Dr. Francois Rabelais, immortal as the author of the *Lives, Heroic Deeds and Sayings of Gargantua and his son Pantagruel*; a book of which every literate person has heard, and which not a few have in fact read. Two reflections follow from this fact: firstly that it is surprising that so short a time as less than five centuries separates us from a period so seemingly archaic as that reflected by Rabelais. Secondly that Rabelais died peacefully in bed in Paris, happy among friends; and not as so many contemporaries died, burned at the stake amid the howls of a priest-maddened mob.

On an absolute scale, four hundred years—plus the seventy he is supposed to have lived—gives an inconsiderable fraction of the total life-period of Humanity. Yet what a swirling of the seas around Sandy Hook there has been since Pantagruel, and his companion Panurge set out upon their Quest for the Holy Bottle and the Saving Oracle that went therewith?

Rabelais was outstanding among the heralds of a new social order:—the sweeping-away of all the accumulated rottenness and rubbish of the time-and-priest sanctified feudal order, with its exhilarating promise of enormously-magnified social opportunities that sweeping-away held out to all mankind. Yet now, less than five centuries later that 'new' order—revealed as a monstrous caricature of itself, a hideous falsification of its every promise—is visibly threatened at a score of points: demonstrably in process of being swept away in its turn. The official defenders of this 'new' bourgeois order, panic-stricken with hate and fear, go through all the contortions of the 'hobgoblins' and 'furred-cats' against whom Rabelais directed the shafts of his devastating derision.

So far nobody in the U.S.A. seems to have detected Francois Rabelais as a 'fellow-traveller' with the Communists. That somebody will do so before long is certain. The country that cannot bear up under the physical presence of Charlie Chaplin could hardly survive even the ghost of Francois Rabelais. Which brings us to the point that he did in fact contrive to die peacefully among friends.

# RABELAIS — *Illustrations*



GARGANTUA