

Classic Poetry Series

Anatole France Thibault
- poems -

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Anatole France Thibault(16 April 1844 – 12 October 1924)

Anatole France, born François-Anatole Thibault, was a French poet, journalist, and novelist. He was born in Paris, and died in Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire. He was a successful novelist, with several best-sellers. Ironic and skeptical, he was considered in his day the ideal French man of letters. He was a member of the Académie française, and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in recognition of his literary achievements.

France is also widely believed to be the model for narrator Marcel's literary idol Bergotte in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*.

Early Life

The son of a bookseller, France spent most of his life around books. His father's bookstore, called the Librairie France, specialized in books and papers on the French Revolution and was frequented by many notable writers and scholars of the day. Anatole France studied at the Collège Stanislas, a private Catholic school, and after graduation he helped his father by working in his bookstore. After several years he secured the position of cataloguer at Bachelin-Deflorenne and at Lemerre. In 1876 he was appointed librarian for the French Senate.

Literary Career

Anatole France began his career as a poet and a journalist. In 1869, *Le Parnasse Contemporain* published one of his poems, *La Part de Madeleine*. In 1875, he sat on the committee which was in charge of the third *Parnasse Contemporain* compilation. As a journalist, from 1867, he wrote a lot of articles and notices. He became famous with the novel *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* (1881). Its protagonist, skeptical old scholar Sylvester Bonnard, embodied France's own personality. The novel was praised for its elegant prose and won him a prize from the French Academy. In *La Rotisserie de la Reine Pedauque* (1893) Anatole France ridiculed belief in the occult; and in *Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard* (1893), France captured the atmosphere of the fin de siècle.

He was elected to the Académie française in 1896.

France took an important part in the Dreyfus Affair. He signed Emile Zola's manifesto supporting Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer who had been falsely

convicted of espionage. France wrote about the affair in his 1901 novel *Monsieur Bergeret*.

France's later works include *L'Île des Pingouins* (1908) which satirizes human nature by depicting the transformation of penguins into humans - after the animals have been baptized in error by the nearsighted Abbot Mael. *La Revolte des Anges* (1914) is often considered France's most profound novel. It tells the story of Arcade, the guardian angel of Maurice d'Esparvieu. Arcade falls in love, joins the revolutionary movement of angels, and towards the end realizes that the overthrow of God is meaningless unless "in ourselves and in ourselves alone we attack and destroy Ialdabaoth."

He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1921. He died in 1924 and is buried in the Neuilly-sur-Seine community cemetery near Paris.

On 31 May 1922, France's entire works were put on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (Prohibited Books Index) of the Roman Catholic Church. He regarded this as a "distinction". This Index was abolished in 1966.

Famous Sayings

"We do not know what to do with this short life, but we want another which will be eternal."

"The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich and the poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread." (*Le Lys Rouge*)

"If the path be beautiful, let us not question where it leads."

"The history books which contain no lies are extremely tedious."

"I prefer the folly of enthusiasm to the indifference of wisdom."

"A person is never happy except at the price of some ignorance."

"To accomplish great things, we must not only act but also dream, not only plan but also believe."

"Irony is the gaiety of reflection and the joy of wisdom."

"Wandering re-establishes the original harmony which once existed between man and the universe."

"For every monarchy overthrown the sky becomes less brilliant, because it loses a star. A republic is ugliness set free."

"She fought him off vigorously, scratched, cried that she will die before she submits, but the chevalier paid no attention to her words and took her.

Afterwards, she smiled coyly and told him: "Do not think, dear chevalier, that you won me against my will. Better thank our good preacher who reminded me that we are mortal, and a pleasure missed today is missed forever. Now we can proceed, for I missed too many pleasures while being too prudent for my own

good." (Fable by Anatole France.)

"If 50 million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing."

"Nine tenths of education is encouragement."

"All religions breed crime." (Thais)

"The people who have no weaknesses are terrible: there is no way of taking advantage of them." (The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard)

"It is human nature to think wisely and act in an absurd fashion."

"The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards."

"Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened."

"Stupidity is far more dangerous than evil, for evil takes a break from time to time, stupidity does not."

"All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another."

"We have never heard the devil's side of the story, God wrote all the book."

"One must learn to think well before learning to think; afterward it proves too difficult."

"An education isn't how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know. It's being able to differentiate between what you do know and what you don't."

"When a thing has been said and well said, have no scruple; take it and copy it."

A Théophile Gautier

Sur sa nouvelle d' ' Arria Marcella '

Le creux d'un sein charmant que la cendre moula
Fut la coupe où tu bus cette ivresse éloquente,
Qui, sous l'étroit portique aux volutes d'acanthé,
Fit surgir dans la pourpre Arria Marcella.

Anatole France Thibault