

Voltaire

CANDIDE

INTRODUCTION

Ever since 1759, when Voltaire wrote "Candide" in ridicule of the notion that this is the best of all possible worlds, this world has been a gayer place for readers. Voltaire wrote it in three days, and five or six generations have found that its laughter does not grow old.

"Candide" has not aged. Yet how different the book would have looked if Voltaire had written it a hundred and fifty years later than 1759. It would have been, among other things, a book of sights and sounds. A modern writer would have tried to catch and fix in words some of those Atlantic changes which broke the Atlantic monotony of that voyage from Cadiz to Buenos Ayres. When Martin and Candide were sailing the length of the Mediterranean we should have had a contrast between naked scarped Balearic cliffs and headlands of Calabria in their mists. We should have had quarter distances, far horizons, the altering silhouettes of an Ionian island. Colored birds would have filled Paraguay with their silver or acid cries.

Dr. Pangloss, to prove the existence of design in the universe, says that noses were made to carry

spectacles, and so we have spectacles. A modern satirist would not try to paint with Voltaire's quick brush the doctrine that he wanted to expose. And he would choose a more complicated doctrine than Dr. Pangloss's optimism, would study it more closely, feel his destructive way about it with a more learned and caressing malice. His attack, stealthier, more flexible and more patient than Voltaire's, would call upon us, especially when his learning got a little out of control, to be more than patient. Now and then he would bore us. "Candide" never bored anybody except William Wordsworth.

Voltaire's men and women point his case against optimism by starting high and falling low. A modern could not go about it after this fashion. He would not plunge his people into an unfamiliar misery. He would just keep them in the misery they were born to.

But such an account of Voltaire's procedure is as misleading as the plaster cast of a dance. Look at his procedure again. Mademoiselle Cunégonde, the illustrious Westphalian, sprung from a family that could prove seventy-one quarterings, descends and descends until we find her earning her keep by washing dishes in the Propontis. The aged faithful attendant, victim of a hundred acts of rape by negro pirates, remembers that she is the daughter of a pope, and that in honor of her approaching marriage with a Prince of Massa-Carrara all Italy wrote sonnets of which not one was passable.

We do not need to know French literature before Voltaire in order to feel, although the lurking parody may escape us, that he is poking fun at us and at himself. His laughter at his own methods grows more unmistakable at the last, when he caricatures them by casually assembling six fallen monarchs in an inn at Venice.

A modern assailant of optimism would arm himself with social pity. There is no social pity in "Candide." Voltaire, whose light touch on familiar institutions opens them and reveals their absurdity, likes to remind us that the slaughter and pillage and murder which Candide witnessed among the Bulgarians was perfectly regular, having been conducted according to the laws and usages of war. Had Voltaire lived to-day he would have done to poverty what he did to war. Pitying the poor, he would have shown us poverty as a ridiculous anachronism, and both the ridicule and the pity would have expressed his indignation.

Almost any modern, essaying a philosophic tale, would make it long. "Candide" is only a "Hamlet" and a half long. It would hardly have been shorter if Voltaire had spent three months on it, instead of those three days. A conciseness to be matched in English by nobody except Pope, who can say a plagiarizing enemy "steals much, spends little, and has nothing left," a conciseness which Pope toiled and sweated for, came as easy as wit to Voltaire. He can afford to be witty,

parenthetically, by the way, prodigally, without saving, because he knows there is more wit where that came from.

One of Max Beerbohm's cartoons shows us the young Twentieth Century going at top speed, and watched by two of his predecessors. Underneath is this legend: "The Grave Misgivings of the Nineteenth Century, and the Wicked Amusement of the Eighteenth, in Watching the Progress (or whatever it is) of the Twentieth." This Eighteenth Century snuff-taking and malicious, is like Voltaire, who nevertheless must know, if he happens to think of it, that not yet in the Twentieth Century, not for all its speed mania, has any one come near to equalling the speed of a prose tale by Voltaire. "Candide" is a full book. It is filled with mockery, with inventiveness, with things as concrete as things to eat and coins, it has time for the neatest intellectual clickings, it is never hurried, and it moves with the most amazing rapidity. It has the rapidity of high spirits playing a game. The dry high spirits of this destroyer of optimism make most optimists look damp and depressed. Contemplation of the stupidity which deems happiness possible almost made Voltaire happy. His attack on optimism is one of the gayest books in the world. Gaiety has been scattered everywhere up and down its pages by Voltaire's lavish hand, by his thin fingers.

Many propagandist satirical books have been

written with "Candide" in mind, but not too many. To-day, especially, when new faiths are changing the structure of the world, faiths which are still plastic enough to be deformed by every disciple, each disciple for himself, and which have not yet received the final deformation known as universal acceptance, to-day "Candide" is an inspiration to every narrative satirist who hates one of these new faiths, or hates every interpretation of it but his own. Either hatred will serve as a motive to satire.

That is why the present is one of the right moments to republish "Candide." I hope it will inspire younger men and women, the only ones who can be inspired, to have a try at Theodore, or Militarism; Jane, or Pacifism; at So-and-So, the Pragmatist or the Freudian. And I hope, too, that they will without trying hold their pens with an eighteenth century lightness, not inappropriate to a philosophic tale. In Voltaire's fingers, as Anatole France has said, the pen runs and laughs.

Philip Littell.

I

HOW CANDIDE WAS BROUGHT UP IN A MAGNIFICENT CASTLE, AND HOW HE WAS EXPELLED THENCE.

In a castle of Westphalia, belonging to the Baron

of Thunder-ten-Tronckh, lived a youth, whom nature had endowed with the most gentle manners. His countenance was a true picture of his soul. He combined a true judgment with simplicity of spirit, which was the reason, I apprehend, of his being called Candide. The old servants of the family suspected him to have been the son of the Baron's sister, by a good, honest gentleman of the neighborhood, whom that young lady would never marry because he had been able to prove only seventy-one quarterings, the rest of his genealogical tree having been lost through the injuries of time.

The Baron was one of the most powerful lords in Westphalia, for his castle had not only a gate, but windows. His great hall, even, was hung with tapestry. All the dogs of his farm-yards formed a pack of hounds at need; his grooms were his huntsmen; and the curate of the village was his grand almoner. They called him "My Lord," and laughed at all his stories.

The Baron's lady weighed about three hundred and fifty pounds, and was therefore a person of great consideration, and she did the honours of the house with a dignity that commanded still greater respect. Her daughter Cunegonde was seventeen years of age, fresh-coloured, comely, plump, and desirable. The Baron's son seemed to be in every respect worthy of his

father. The Preceptor Pangloss¹ was the oracle of the family, and little Candide heard his lessons with all the good faith of his age and character.

Pangloss was professor of metaphysico-theologico-cosmolo-nigology. He proved admirably that there is no effect without a cause, and that, in this best of all possible worlds, the Baron's castle was the most magnificent of castles, and his lady the best of all possible Baronesses.

"It is demonstrable," said he, "that things cannot be otherwise than as they are; for all being created for an end, all is necessarily for the best end. Observe, that the nose has been formed to bear spectacles-thus we have spectacles. Legs are visibly designed for stockings-and we have stockings. Stones were made to be hewn, and to construct castles-therefore my lord has a magnificent castle; for the greatest baron in the province ought to be the best lodged. Pigs were made to be eaten-therefore we eat pork all the year round. Consequently they who assert that all is well have said a foolish thing, they should have said all is for the best."

Candide listened attentively and believed innocently; for he thought Miss Cunegonde extremely

¹ The name Pangloss is derived from two Greek words signifying "all" and "language."

beautiful, though he never had the courage to tell her so. He concluded that after the happiness of being born of Baron of Thunder-ten-Tronckh, the second degree of happiness was to be Miss Cunegonde, the third that of seeing her every day, and the fourth that of hearing Master Pangloss, the greatest philosopher of the whole province, and consequently of the whole world.

One day Cunegonde, while walking near the castle, in a little wood which they called a park, saw between the bushes, Dr. Pangloss giving a lesson in experimental natural philosophy to her mother's chamber-maid, a little brown wench, very pretty and very docile. As Miss Cunegonde had a great disposition for the sciences, she breathlessly observed the repeated experiments of which she was a witness; she clearly perceived the force of the Doctor's reasons, the effects, and the causes; she turned back greatly flurried, quite pensive, and filled with the desire to be learned; dreaming that she might well be a *sufficient reason* for young Candide, and he for her.

She met Candide on reaching the castle and blushed; Candide blushed also; she wished him good morrow in a faltering tone, and Candide spoke to her without knowing what he said. The next day after dinner, as they went from table, Cunegonde and Candide found themselves behind a screen; Cunegonde let fall her handkerchief, Candide picked it up, she took him innocently by the hand, the youth as innocently

kissed the young lady's hand with particular vivacity, sensibility, and grace; their lips met, their eyes sparkled, their knees trembled, their hands strayed. Baron Thunder-ten-Tronckh passed near the screen and beholding this cause and effect chased Candide from the castle with great kicks on the backside; Cunegonde fainted away; she was boxed on the ears by the Baroness, as soon as she came to herself; and all was consternation in this most magnificent and most agreeable of all possible castles.

II

WHAT BECAME OF CANDIDE AMONG THE BULGARIANS.

Candide, driven from terrestrial paradise, walked a long while without knowing where, weeping, raising his eyes to heaven, turning them often towards the most magnificent of castles which imprisoned the purest of noble young ladies. He lay down to sleep without supper, in the middle of a field between two furrows. The snow fell in large flakes. Next day Candide, all benumbed, dragged himself towards the neighbouring town which was called Waldberghofftrarbkdikdorff, having no money, dying of hunger and fatigue, he stopped sorrowfully at the door of an inn. Two men dressed in blue observed him.

"Comrade," said one, "here is a well-built young fellow, and of proper height."

They went up to Candide and very civilly invited him to dinner.

"Gentlemen," replied Candide, with a most engaging modesty, "you do me great honour, but I have not wherewithal to pay my share."

"Oh, sir," said one of the blues to him, "people of your appearance and of your merit never pay anything: are you not five feet five inches high?"

"Yes, sir, that is my height," answered he, making a low bow.

"Come, sir, seat yourself; not only will we pay your reckoning, but we will never suffer such a man as you to want money; men are only born to assist one another."

"You are right," said Candide; "this is what I was always taught by Mr. Pangloss, and I see plainly that all is for the best."

They begged of him to accept a few crowns. He took them, and wished to give them his note; they refused; they seated themselves at table.

"Love you not deeply?"

"Oh yes," answered he; "I deeply love Miss Cunegonde."

"No," said one of the gentlemen, "we ask you if you do not deeply love the King of the Bulgarians?"

"Not at all," said he; "for I have never seen him."