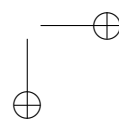
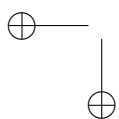
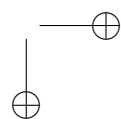
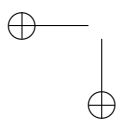
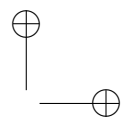
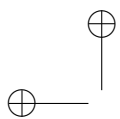
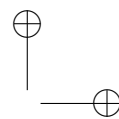
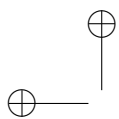


**PENSÉES AND LETTERS  
OF  
JOSEPH JOUBERT**



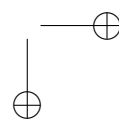
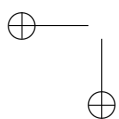


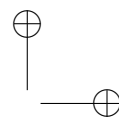
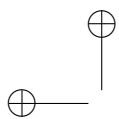


**PENSÉES AND LETTERS  
OF  
JOSEPH JOUBERT**

*Translated with an Introduction by  
H. P. Collins*

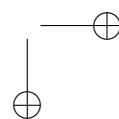
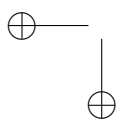
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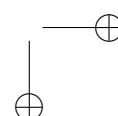
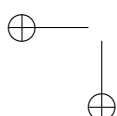


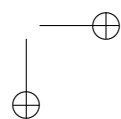
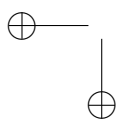
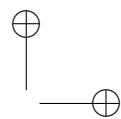
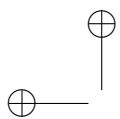


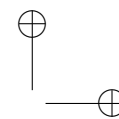
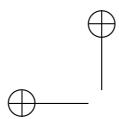
## NOTE

There have been, I understand, two or three fragmentary English versions of the *Pensées*; but I have never seen any of them and they have for a long time been out of print. This book contains, I believe, the first English version of any of the Letters. I have translated Joubert's French quotations, for the convenience of readers who have no French. I am obliged to Mm Perrin et Cie for their ready permission to utilize facts contained in the *Notice* by Paul de Raynal published with their edition of Joubert's works. My acknowledgments are due also to the Editor of *The New Adelphi* for permission to make use of some observations on Joubert that have appeared in his pages. I am indebted to Mr P. L. H. Davis for reading this book in proof. It would be ungracious to close this note without acknowledging a more purely intellectual debt to Professor Saintsbury and Professor Irving Babbitt, whose writings have been a great incentive to my own study of Joubert.

H. P. C.

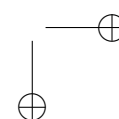
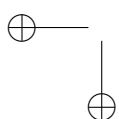


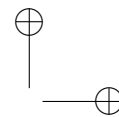
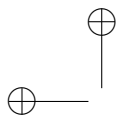




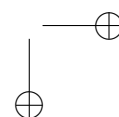
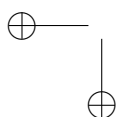
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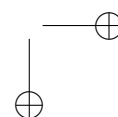




## INTRODUCTION

Joseph Joubert, the eldest of eight children of a medical man, was born at Montignac, a small town in Périgord, on the 6th May, 1754. At the age of fourteen he left his home for Toulouse, with a view to reading for the Bar. But, with his yet unsatisfied hunger for classical learning, he found himself drawn to the company of the clerical tutors of the College of Toulouse; and neglected the law for the more congenial study of Greek and Latin – especially of his idol Plato. He overtaxed, however, his delicate constitution; for he was a lifelong sufferer both from a weak heart and from severe digestive trouble that probably arose from a too sensitive and introspective nervous tendency. In 1776 he was forced to retire to Montignac for two years, where he continued for his own delight the reading in divinity and ancient literature which he had begun at Toulouse. He had already started to keep a kind of diary of his thoughts, though we have no means of dating the *Pensées*, which were composed over a period of fifty years.

Neither the health-giving air of Périgord nor the deep affection Joubert seems to have had for his mother could reconcile him for long to the local libraries and the dearth of enlightening society. Early in 1778 he set out for Paris, with ambitions rather less material than were sending many of his young fellow-townsmen thither. Paris at this time held out unique attractions for a lover of letters; for in Paris was centred an intellectual society which, however far it

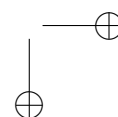




might differ in moral outlook from the theological college at Toulouse, was undoubtedly the most brilliant product of a remarkable age. Joubert was soon admitted to the acquaintance of Marmontel, La Harpe, d'Alembert, and the great Diderot – whose conversation did not quite blind the earnest young listener to a certain sophistry and hollowness beneath. (“Diderot ne vit aucune lumière...” according to a *Pensée*, “Il avait des idées fausses sur le but et les beautés de l’art; mais il les a bien exprimées”; and he is more or less absolved because his foolery could not even pass for wisdom!)

Joubert’s temporary captivation by the charm of this environment is not without its comic side. Deeply religious by nature, a great exponent of *l’ordre* in all things, exceptionally chaste of mind and body, and an inconsolable mourner of the *ancien régime*; he was to make some of the most penetrating – partly because so intensely sincere – strictures that have ever been penned on the Encyclopedists and upon the tendencies of the new *philosophie*. Touched and impressed by Diderot’s kindness to him, he set to work to note down and arrange specimens of the famous talker’s eloquence. But his mind, *impropre au discours continu*, – by reason, no doubt, of physical weakness, – was equally incapable of sticking to any labour, however light, that was not spontaneous.

There is reason to think that Joubert was really less influenced by the philosophical Pléiade than he supposed. He was a man of natural affability and strong social impulses; but these deeper impulses which had so little in common with the spirit of the age have entirely conquered it in all his written words – and they are intimate words. In his biographer’s phrase, he “touched the cup with the edge of his lips.” This phrase is worth remembering because it was in a way the chief “experience” of his life; affording one usually so sheltered a lasting recoil, confirming in him an admirable grasp of the nature of his mind “son étendue et ses limites,”



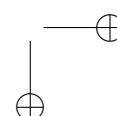
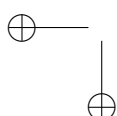


and strengthening his conviction that one must not “separate the mind from the soul.” In this very conviction was to lie the unity and profound reasonableness of his thought; for given as he was to extreme spiritual abstraction he never offers us, as did the Romantics, the outpourings of a soul that has cast off the mind.

Joubert’s very real “genius for friendship” was now to find a more lasting satisfaction through a meeting with a young aristocrat named Fontanes. The friendship, based upon sympathy and a piquant contrast of temperaments, is recorded in many of Joubert’s letters. It was of great value to both. Fontanes shared with Joubert a love of the classics; and, for a time at least, held an admiration for English literature, especially Shakespeare, which Joubert did not share – to the detriment of his critical scope. But he depended upon curious translations.

In the summer of 1778 Joubert was invited by a kinsman to stay at Villeneuve-le-Roi, a small town in Burgundy on the banks of the Yonne, where it is crossed by the main road from Lyons to Paris. As a result of his visit to this retreat – together possibly with some public events of the year 1789 – Joubert, who had mysteriously become fairly affluent, set up there the home in which he was to spend the remainder of his days, and whence most of his letters are written. Plato and the Jesuit college had triumphed.

Before Joubert’s final retirement to Villeneuve there was a short interlude. In 1790 the Assembly reorganized the judicial system of France and introduced the election of local Justices of the Peace. The inhabitants of Montignac chose a long-absent native whom one imagines not a little bewildered by the tribute. Joubert *père* had recently died, and the firstborn bravely returned to the house of the widow, who was left derelict with the daughters of the family; and for two years he performed his judicial offices. He is said to have been both able and zealous: one has no difficulty in believing it.



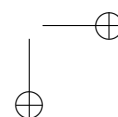


This brings us to the period of the letters; and there is little more outward history that need be recorded. Joubert had skilfully negotiated the betrothal of Fontanes to an extremely eligible young lady; and in a further negotiation at once more interested and more disinterested he did not blunder. Mademoiselle Moreau de Bussy was a neighbour, the only girl of a Villeneuve household which suffered greatly in the Terror. Three of Joubert's letters tell of his sympathy, and of the link it formed between them, which united them in marriage on the 8th June, 1793. Madame Joubert is said to have been a woman of good sense and good character; and we gather that she was a real source of strength to the delicate philosopher.

In their quiet country life they became the centre of an interesting group of friends, to whom the generous disposition and gentle helpfulness and consideration of Joubert seem greatly to have endeared him. Among those of them we meet most frequently in his letters are Chateaubriand (perhaps the least Platonic of the circle), Fontanes, Molé, Chénedollé, de Bonald, Madame de Vintimille, and, dearest of all to Joubert, the appealing and unhappy Madame de Beaumont.

During all the thirty years Joubert lived in retirement at Villeneuve his health remained uniform, but painfully bad. The only record left to us of any external activity is in the letters he wrote to Fontanes, the Grand Master of the University, in the capacity of honorary councillor which Joubert was persuaded to undertake.

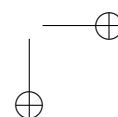
In the winter of his seventieth year Joubert's symptoms became much accentuated, and lung complications set in. He seemed to know that the end was near, for taking up a pencil he added to his diary the words: "*22 March 1824*, Le vrai, le beau, le juste, le saint!" On the 4th May, fortified by the last rites of the Church, he ascended again (in the gracious words of his kinsman-biographer) "vers les célestes demeures d'où il semblait n'être que pour un moment descendu."





Before his death Joubert had left in the keeping of his son some manuscripts, of which the existence was unknown to his friends, though suspected by Molé. Owing to the reluctance of the family nothing was done with these papers until in 1838 Madame Joubert, feeling her own days to be numbered, confided the matter to Chateaubriand. The latter, who fourteen years before had written a brief Obituary of Joubert in the *Journal des Débats*, at once published a small octavo volume of *Pensées* for private circulation, contributing an introduction. Sainte-Beuve reviewed it in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and it attracted notice. Shortly after this Madame Joubert died; and there were discovered among her papers many fragmentary jottings by her husband, all in disorder and in some cases nearly illegible. Paul de Raynal, a military expert, the son-in-law of Arnaud Joubert (a younger brother of the author who had lived during one period of his life in intimacy with him at Villeneuve), took possession of the manuscripts. Fortified in his strong desire to make them public by a retrieved letter of Joubert's containing the words: "Je n'aimai pendant ma vie que la vérité; j'ai lieu de penser que je l'ai vue sur bien de grands objets; peut être un de ces mots que j'aurai jetés à la hâte..." de Raynal devoted the leisure of three years to deciphering, arranging, and editing them. It was no slight task.

The edition of the *Pensées* and correspondence published in 1842 was prefaced by a biography of Joubert by de Raynal; it is an exquisite specimen of modesty, sympathy, and Gallic urbanity. The foregoing sketch of the critic's life is derived mainly from it. There is no substitute for de Raynal's "Notice"; on the other hand, Joubert's chief significance lies in his thought and his place in thought, which are best reflected in his *Pensées* and certain of his letters. Biography and social history are interesting studies; and to-day in England their votaries are more numerous than the votaries of ideas. But



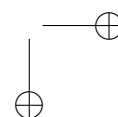


Joubert belongs to the latter; and had he foreseen his fame he would have grieved were interest in his self-effacing life suffered to overweigh any contribution he might make to *la vérité*.

After 1842, however, de Raynal discovered further letters and *Pensées*. These were embodied in a new edition published in 1850, after his death; and Arnaud Joubert, who had survived his brother and his son-inlaw, contributed a brief preface.

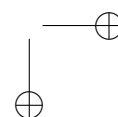
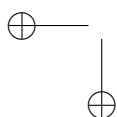
A revised edition in two volumes, one of which is filled entirely by the *Pensées*, was issued in 1862 under the editorship of Louis de Raynal, a younger brother of Paul. A few further letters were included. Louis de Raynal's text and his final arrangement of the *Pensées* according to subject matter still stand in the editions of MM. Perrin (the Paris publishers of Joubert), used for this selective translation.

*Platone platonior*, Joubert boasted himself. It has been customary to derive the essential characteristics of his thought from his early and lifelong devotion to the great philosopher; but this is an assumption in which some caution is needed. If Plato was the dominant intellectual influence upon him, his moral nature was more, and his whole spiritual nature quite as much, conditioned by purely orthodox Christianity, of which the expression was not always tempered by the keenest intellectual stringency. His sayings on local and contemporary matters, in which his recoil from the spirit of the *philosophes* and the horrors of the Revolution (he connected the two) affected his view most strongly, are a rather curious blend of reason and conventional piety; but a blend less curious than it might have been had the time not been one in which piety was itself a form of *la raison*. Joubert valued *la raison*, and he was probably aware that it must be sought upon various planes if it is to be made applicable to all things. In





questions of literature, of high philosophy, in which he passed more or less beyond the sphere of his religious certitude, he is very obviously inspired by ancient and timeless wisdom; mainly embodied, for him, in Plato. But a consideration of his views on social, political, and domestic questions will show that they are deeply tinged with the attitude – at its best, indeed, its most reasonable and most sensitive – bred of the culture of the *ancien régime*; a culture formalized, semi-Augustan, traditional, narrow, and singularly persuasive, from which nobody but the Rousseauists had escaped. With the Rousseauists Joubert, for all his “hospitality” of mind, could have nothing lasting in common. It is a great distinction of Joubert that, finding himself at a parting of the ways, he turned neither to the right nor to the left, but still went forward. Not with any spectacular vigour, but, as he said; “la direction de notre esprit est plus importante que son progrès.” It is not easy to miss this merit in Joubert; but it has proved not difficult to find it in merely a kind of Platonic abstraction or seclusion which in some bearings could hardly fail to seem reactionary: lacking in full intelligence where not applicable. Joubert’s delicate constitution, physical and mental, induced a certain fastidiousness; but “behind his weakness there was strength.” Reactionary he was, though not very often, and never *statically* so. For, it must be remembered, occasional tracts of ignorance that seem strange to us were hardly to be escaped by the rarest French intellects of his age; and Joubert in any case had no pretensions to the intellectual vigour and indiscriminate hunger for knowledge of a Diderot or a Madame de Staël, nor perhaps half the facilities for reading that Sainte-Beuve or even Villemain quite soon after turned to so good account. He had a finer, subtler feeling for the essentials of literature, of the human spirit itself than any of them; but Dante and Shakespeare meant nothing to him. Homer, he said, *is* poetry, as Plato is metaphysics. But this is





not pedantry as the pronouncements of his fellow-countrymen on much of modern literature were pedantry.

It is to this limitation, rather than to his Platonism (which is usually left to mean a transcendentalism and idealism that have been fatal to so many purely critical thinkers), that should be traced the disparity between Joubert's almost supreme quality in æsthetic generalization and the inadequacy or partiality of his judgments on some writers. This disparity has been slightly exaggerated – even by so great an authority as Dr. Saintsbury. For it must be borne in mind that Joubert did not write for publication; that he made no sustained survey even of French literature; and that nearly all his judgments are touched with the overemphasis of the aphorism. On the Greeks and the Romans (confining the question for the moment to pure literature) he is very original considering his time and his nationality: he is no neo-classic. His love of Virgil has something of the idolatry of the Renaissance; his criticisms are wholly on the positive side, but so far they are both sound and stimulating. His view of Plutarch is obviously French (Joubert is in general not very “French”), it is rather curious, and rates the Lives perhaps too highly. It may be painful to some to hear of Catullus that “son instrument est baroque.” Others will not agree that the *Georgics* of Delille's translation are the true *Georgics*. But for the rest, his observations on classical writers are just, incisive, stimulating, and profoundly sensitive. On the subject of Plato himself Joubert's (sometimes unconscious) over-eclecticism, his temperamental preference for and heightening of those aspects which gratify his thirst for perfection, debar a full survey of the philosophy. But there are at least two subtle reservations (one affecting Socrates and the other the digressions); the reply to Plato's expulsion of poetry is or should be a *locus classicus* of criticism; and nothing could be more apt in its way than the phrase in a letter to Molé:

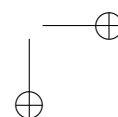






“en le lisant on n’apprend rien, mais on se trouve transporté dans les régions où tout s’apprend.” Joubert’s apprehension of Plato, in short, is *artistic*: from that point of view it is as fine as could well be.

Joubert was to some extent, in a complex and rather negative way, the product of his own century: his comment on the earlier and greater French writers is a little disappointing, though virtually free from the influence either of the La Harpe school or of the Encyclopedists or of the Romantic movement, and free of reaction against any of these, which latter impulse affected him in other questions. A certain fastidious exclusiveness seems to limit his scope. Though he did not echo La Bruyère’s “tout est dit,” he was a *laudator temporis acti*, and it is difficult to deny this want of scope when faced with his lack of enthusiasm for some of the greatest exemplars of the French tradition. What Joubert (and Joubert especially) did not write is of course negative evidence; but he has more than one mention of Molière, and he is wholly insignificant on that great writer. Of Rabelais he does not speak. Rabelais was not very Platonic, and Joubert was openly distrustful of “vigour”; but it is to be feared he had no stomach for this fight. A critic of his quality should have known that the *Tiers Livre* has implications – it would hardly be going too far to call them spiritual – whose influence on French literature cannot be ignored. Perhaps the gold of the mightiest of comic writers found no touchstone in Joubert’s mind. His greatest admirations seem to be for Bossuet, which is explicable enough, and La Fontaine, whom he thinks the most poetical of Frenchmen. He also rates highly Amyot, Corneille, La Bruyère, and Fénelon – though his reservations on the last are both strong and discriminating. Yet he thinks Balzac (he of the *Lettres*) “un de nos plus grands écrivains,” which seems a lapse into the unconscious æstheticism which led to his notorious (though too much preached-on) admiration

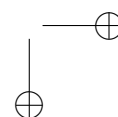




for the Abbé Delille and the “Descriptive” school. What he respects in Corneille is a nobility that transcends his works, which are “less perfect” than Racine’s. Of Racine, as is well known, Joubert had a poor opinion – very much that of the best English criticism till quite recent years, though more neatly expressed. But a Frenchman of perfect sincerity who calls Racine “the Virgil of the ignorant” is giving a very real indication of the uncommonness of his own mind.

It must not be inferred from the foregoing, however, that Joubert’s views on the literature of the *grand siècle* are less than interesting and suggestive, in their way. They are the small cards of a man who holds many of the highest trumps; and here, as often happens, there is some advantage in playing the small cards first. Joubert has little to say on the pure literature of other countries (though more, and better, on their philosophers); but one must not fail to note his *pensée*, which is really a prophetic stricture on “actualism,” about Boccaccio.

Joubert was not an idealist or a transcendentalist in his æsthetic criticism. Being by no means a pure romantic, he had no “absolute” in art. Deeply spiritual by nature, his literary values, at least on their highest plane, are spiritual (it is above all in spirituality of ideas, he says, that poetry consists); but his absolute does not lie solely in the highest manifestations of the human spirit in art. Though he may concede that *la religion* is the metaphysics of the simple, his certainty of a personal God (of Whom “space is the stature”) and the further conviction of a better world to come lead him fundamentally to see human life as a passage, and therefore even the highest concerns of this life as subordinate, *in the individual*, to something beyond. But his Catholicism, which would be dogmatic as an assumption in the evaluation of art, does not generally condition his literary judgments: it is clear that his intelligence has had to temporize. There is

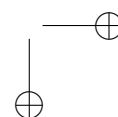




something higher than any spiritual apprehension possible to the individual man (does not God “deceive us and wish us to be deceived”?); but the soul of mankind is itself real, and real only, *sub specie æternitatis*. “Il y a quelque chose d’immuable dans l’homme.” So the literature which is but the expression of a transient phase of society; the literature which merely records *l’affreuse réalité*, and the literature that springs from what is exaggerated in the romanticism of Rousseau must all pass. The Platonic leaven is here clearly at work in the son of the *dixhuitième* and of the college at Toulouse. The sophisticated, the reasonable Joubert, who understands not only the necessity but the nature of compromise, and knows that art, since it involves expression and communication, cannot be a *purely* spiritual and abstract thing, is evident in his two greatest critical dictums, two of the most penetrating observations in all criticism and the greater since they are debatable. In poetry, he says, “il faut ne rien voir tout nu”; and of the good writer “he must have a natural facility and an acquired difficulty.”

In art, and in other issues outside the sphere of practical conduct, Joubert is a kind of perfectionist. Not the kind that believes in perfectibility,\* or that starves inwardly through rejecting the half-loaf. Nor the kind which holds that to be the

\*The expression of an antithetical (and uncritical) view of “perfectibility” may be found contemporaneously in Mme de Staël’s *De la Littérature*. It is something more than a piquant contrast: the work should be looked at by every reader of Joubert who wishes to appreciate his views historically as well as philosophically. Joubert had a temperamental horror of Delphine, which unfortunately, whether or not justifiable, led him rather to overlook many qualities in her which he must have valued. This is perhaps the one respect in which he compares unfavourably as a “transition” pilot with his celebrated friend Fontanes. Joubert has a fuller appreciation of Chateaubriand, whose *Génie du Christianisme*, also rich but often erratic in literary speculation, is another essential document of the time of Joubert’s middle years.



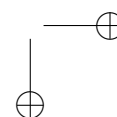


highest which is most faultless. For, as a modern critic says, none of the greatest creations of the human mind has had “that quality of æsthetic perfection.” In sustained works of literature this may seem self-evident; but the balance between creative value and perfection was not a clear or concise issue to many men of Joubert’s time.

Joubert’s perfectionism in art (this is closely related to what has just been said of his religion) concerns the ideal State, not of the creator, but of the critic, the reader. A writer is enduring not because what he gives is perfect, but in so far as he contributes to the process of inward self-perfection by the sensitive reader. At this perfection Joubert aimed; and though the attitude may sound “precious,” it almost never becomes so in him. “Light!” was his cry, as it was to be Matthew Arnold’s after him; and one can best suggest why this also was not precious by pointing out that his demand for the writer to carry us, first and essentially, into the realms of light means very much the same thing as does Longinus’s desideratum of the “sublime.” Coming when it did, from Joubert as from Longinus and from Arnold, it was a necessary protest against a thickening spiritual darkness.

This self-perfecting aim of Joubert’s is, of course, only an ideal formulation of the critical spirit itself, of the motive of all criticism. On profounder examination, indeed, the two things are identical. But unfortunately self-perfection in æsthetic criticism has never been considered as a way of complete morality.

Joubert’s humanism is quite as remote from the naturalism of Rousseau as from the most formalized pseudo-Aristotelianism of the previous age. He respects the dignity of man, but he has no illusions about liberty. “Universal justice will be liberty enough.” It has been very aptly said that he differed from Mme de Staël in seeing morality as a bridle and not as a spur. He concedes to the Romantics that literature





needs passions; but adds that it is restrained passions which avail. He wishes to control instinct by reason, and to subdue reason and unite it with a higher, more spiritual wisdom that is partly Platonic (νοῆσις) and partly religious; deriving as much from the humility of man as from his dignity. Joubert would have man achieve his highest nature not by discarding reason but by subordinating himself to reason and reason to a higher impulse.

The *essence* of things is a kind of order, and it is by orderly contemplation of order that their nature is apprehended and conveyed. Whatever conforms to “universal order” is beautiful. As a natural consequence of this view, Joubert’s conception of education (and particularly his justification of religious teaching as a part thereof) is based mainly upon the idea of order as the only way of life for the average mind. Joubert being comparatively practical, his “order” is not in all things the transcendent harmony of Plato’s *Er*; but his lowering of its plane in political and domestic matters is justifiable both as intelligence and as utilitarian ethic. He does indeed contrast unfavourably the bricks-and-mortar formalism of his own land with the *lucidus ordo* of Horace, in which he finds “something sidereal.” His definition is very flexible, for he says that Boileau’s “beau désordre” (a progenitor of Keats’s “fine excess”) is really a form of order.

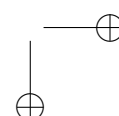
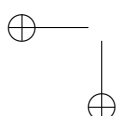
It has often occurred to the present writer, though necessarily in a somewhat vague way, that another clue to Joubert’s critical individualities might be traced in a half-unconscious revolt against the Cartesian influence in European æsthetics. More precisely: the tendency of the Cartesian influence was to substitute an abstract æsthetic for a criticism founded on direct personal contact with the work of art. This manifestation was not chiefly a native one, France was not its region (though it can be definitely seen in Fontenelle, André, and one phase of Diderot); but Joubert was acutely aware of German and English philosophy.





Descartes had, in Hegel's phrase, cut the world in two with an axe. The ramifications of this, in æsthetics, were naturally in opposition to the feeling of religious unity that was essential to Joubert and indeed, on a less philosophical level, a common possession of Catholics. Joubert, to whom "all fine philosophy resembled Plato's" does not seem directly touched at all by the founder of Cartesianism, on whom he has given us two quiet but peculiarly devastating *pensées*. Descartes' system, he says, is so complete that it leaves no room for thought: he wished to wrest from the Divinity His secret; and a probability, a hypothesis which would serve the metaphysician's ends was as satisfying to him as truth. Joubert is very severe with Locke, "un philosophe sournois": no doubt there are causes other than anti-Cartesianism for this; but it is notable that he puts Leibnitz much higher. Joubert was "agin" all modern philosophers, for reasons sufficiently obvious, and it is a pity that his discussion of them is not more extended. But he does suffer Leibnitz as he does not suffer any of Leibnitz's descendants. For his own countryman Malebranche, who tried to modify Cartesianism in the light of Plato, he has little to say; but it is not too venturesome to suggest that this is because Malebranche's Plato is not the Plato of Joubert. The latter's thought on the subject is, almost plainly, "corruptio optimi pessima." The reason, further, of Malebranche's corrupt Platonism being that "on ne peut trouver de poésie nulle part quand on n'en porte pas en soi."

If it be alleged, as bearing slightly against this theory, that Joubert is also "down" on Condillac, the anti-Cartesian, it must be replied that: (1) he is less down on Condillac than on Descartes, Locke, or Malebranche; (2) Condillac is a much smaller man, especially viewed without the justification of his attitude by psychology, which was not to be understood till another century; (3) "Sensationism" was most unconge-





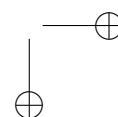
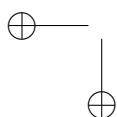
nial to Joubert and inevitably led, so far as he could see, to the narrowed intellectualism which is his chief reproach against Condillac. (To put the issue between Joubert and the philosophers more clearly and fairly, one ought perhaps to recall his remark – in extension of Aristotle's famous dictum – that “metaphysic is, of its nature, more poetical even than poetry.”)

This speculation, having been conceived, must not be suppressed; but it must remain tentative, because the undeniably wide effect of Cartesian dualism upon æsthetics is – except perhaps in Germany – difficult to define at all clearly, and because of the absence of explicit comment by Joubert upon the relevant æsthetic “documents.” Here, again, the limitations of his knowledge come into question.

It is not easy to “place” Joubert, to filiate him, in the history of French critical thought. He has much more obvious points of contact with the Greeks and with his successors. His criticism has an *imaginative* fineness, flowering from deep roots, that is to seek in France\* between Joachim du Bellay and the maturity of the Romantic movement.

Diderot, however, must in some respects be excepted: Diderot is important. More of a purely literary man than the true *philosophes*, he had “escaped” both formalism and Rousseauism, and neither formalism nor Rousseauism is a serious basis for criticism. But it will probably be conceded in the final investigation that Diderot rather widened than advanced the frontiers of criticism. Joubert is a little unjust to him – certainly insufficient on him so far as one can sin

\*The legend of French critical superiority dies hard. The cold fact is that, except in the brief and splendid hour of the Pléiade, France never held the palm of criticism until well into the 19th century; and she does not hold it now. What France *has* usually excelled in is intelligent comment on the contemporary literature from the point of view of the contemporary mind. That is not high criticism: it is very often its obscurant.



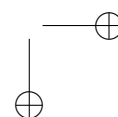


by omission. Diderot's wide and catholic receptiveness, the intimacy of his personal contact with every work of art that came to him, was a more or less new, and a significant thing; though in this case it did not make a great critic. But his limits were very definite; his enquiry was not really deep; and Joubert could not but know this. (We must try to disregard the acquaintance of the two men and Joubert's recoil; or at least to see that Joubert's recoil was inevitable even had there been no personal factor.)

Again, he had a distaste for certain moral aspects of the author of *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (Joubert was dowered with what our contemporary barbarism would probably call a "chastity complex"); but a more subtle diagnosis of the vacuum behind Diderot can be inferred by a study of the *pensées* dealing with conversation. The fact remains that Joubert could not fail, consciously or unconsciously, to feel in a more than negative way the formative influence of Diderot; and there were things he might have learnt, and been the better for learning, from his less eclectic senior.

Yet if Joubert defies precise discussion in the terms of the critical traditions of the *dix-huitième*, his fragmentary Poetic is fortunately lofty enough, and securely enough grounded, to stand erect and impressive in the light of an older and fresher, a more widely-searching and perennial wisdom; the wisdom that draws its experience from the whole achievement of literature itself, that sees the particular as a sign of the universal, and knows how in art the universal is nothing till it is imaged in the particular. Joubert is of the comparatively small band whose best literary judgments, combining the essentially original perception with the essential common heritage of the human spirit, have an unwavering applicability, touch the real nature of that validity (*quod semper, quod ubique*) which is beyond any "scheme of values." He knew the quality of great poetry:

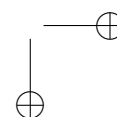
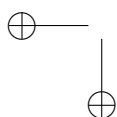
*"Making the heaven of heavens its dwelling-place"*







and his knowledge was a *religious* knowledge. Not that poetry was his religion: that is a consummation which has become fully possible only in later times, since the conscious modification of Christianity by a more intuitive Christian morality, a modification made possible – and in a way inevitable – by the complex developments of modern thought. To a Greek an æsthetic – the word is not really adequate – religion might have been possible; but the moral heritage of the Western world has long been Christian and the great thinkers in pure literature have been within that tradition, whatever the difference – and there must in the nature of things be a “difference” – with which they have worn their Christianity. It is still so to-day, but with the important distinction that since Joubert’s time the specifically religious element in the spiritual being of those alive to art has at once increased and dwindled; it has passed largely from the conscious to the unconscious, and the result is a closer merging of poetry and faith. (The term faith, or belief, must be taken to have altered in meaning *pari passu*; for unfaith in revealed religion is perhaps more common now than faith, and the belief which is one with poetry has shifted its objective from the defined to the indefinable Good.) Thus (ideally if not in fact) our poetic awareness is enriched and our religious feeling is brought more fully into the main stream of consciousness, of the unified diversities of experience that make and respond to art. It is true that our age does not create much poetry and that religion has become less imaginative; but for these things there are other reasons. The point is that a Roman Catholic critic of literature and an “atheist” critic of literature – if such there be – hold unconsciously the same “religion” so far as they are critics at all, and are critics by virtue of that religion; and that now we know enough to know this is true, and true not because art is separable from other spiritual activities in man, but because it embraces them all.





The tendency of Joubert's criticism at its highest was to "platonize" the poetic consciousness – it was Coleridge's too – but they both platonized it unawares; holding the one a not wholly assimilated religious dogma and the other a wholly intractable metaphysical conscience, which both were too scrupulous knowingly to abandon. (Coleridge was in a sense a great literary critic *malgré lui*.) Plato, though in fact not a critic, for he exiled poetry under the compulsion of an incomplete moral judgment, was in *posse* the greatest critic of all. Joubert, though centuries of the Christian tradition came between him and direct acceptance of Greek thought, remains one of the most perfect exemplars of the power of Plato's spirituality to inspire a truly poetic conception of poetry. It must be noted here that Joubert had entertained both the idea that *la métaphysique* could be more poetic than poetry and the idea that the poet could find more truths in his quest of beauty than could the philosopher in quest of truth.

Most readers would perhaps take it as self-evident that Joubert is not of the greatest critics of poetry; but in fact the reasons of this need rather close examination. He inclined always to apply "poetic" standards (standards of "spirituality of ideas") to pure literature of every kind: this could be a strength as well as a weakness, but in the present writer's opinion the observations "De la Poésie" are slightly inferior in ultimate value to those "Du Style," and not better than the best, or of equal worth with the whole, of the larger group classified as "Des Qualités de l'Ecrivain." When he is striving to isolate poetry, to think and write of it apart, Joubert seems involuntarily to limit its scope a little. It is hoped that enough has been said to give some indication why he was liable to this.

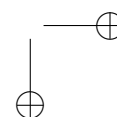
He does not rank with Coleridge and two or three others. The first reason, naturally, that strikes one is his lack of sus-





tained reasoning, the fragmentary form in which we have his opinions, and the never *perfectly* final finality of the aphorism. The second reason, also evident, and hardly separable from the first, is the faint air of over-delicacy which pervades his responses to the stimulus of high literature; it is accentuated by his very metaphorical expression, and the whole effect is capable of irritating, slightly and not unjustly, one who comes to him in a mood of passionate surrender to great poetry – a mood which on the other hand could, or should, find entire satisfaction in Coleridge on the Imagination. One who feels that poetry touches the highest comprehension of life, of the nature of things and the mystery of things, that human vision has englimpsed may feel at difference with Joubert's conscious perfectionism *as expressed*. As expressed, we must say: Joubert's attitude almost certainly sprang from an unconscious impulse deeper than itself.

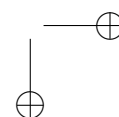
A third limitation of the Joubertian Poetic, if not directly due to the seeming disregard of Dante and Shakespeare that has already been noted, is certainly implicit in his reluctance for intimate experience with work that was, roughly speaking, anti-Platonic. Like many men who combine robust commonsense in practical matters with extremely refined æsthetic taste, he had an aversion to the art that concerns itself mainly with a valiant inclusion of the grosser elements of life. He did not see literature as equally concerned, to borrow a recent critical phrase, with Falstaff's belly and with the lids of Juno's eyes. In short: he apparently did not realize that the wider, the more various, the more uncongenial is the experience that is comprehended and subdued, the greater is the sublimation. His austere judgment and taste consistently rejected bad work: it is another thing to reject any kind of experience prematurely because it has been made the material of bad work. Coleridge in his examination of Wordsworth was not insensible of this.

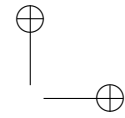
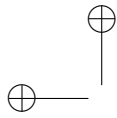




The fourth limitation of Joubert's criticism is of a less obvious kind; and one that compels a glance at deeper questions as to whence, how, and wherefore literature is literature. We have observed that Joubert's knowledge of the nature of great art was a "religious knowledge." That is essential; for a critical comprehension that is religious (the word will not be misunderstood) however imperfect, is nearer to reality than any which wants for one of the greatest impulses of the human soul. Yet Joubert's approach to the poetry that is religion and the religion that is poetry, is incomplete. Let us put it this way: the aspiration (spiritual, intellectual, and emotional) of man to ultimate truth is in the last resort one and indivisible: it is monistic. Joubert, though he would have been pained to recognize it, formulates a dichotomy – which is, of course, remote from and unconnected with the metaphysical dualism he disliked. The reality on which he said so many excellent things, is an incomplete reality. There is *la réalité*; and there is God. (On this ground one must tread delicately, on pain of being told that literary criticism needs a special kind of God!)

To Joubert, God must be unknown: human reality is divine also, but of a second order of divinity. "Order": the "reason which is the rule of rules": these, be they never so entirely spiritualized, "of essence and not of existence," be they even insurpassable as means of critical integration, are imperfect philosophical concepts when not fully derived, as Joubert does not derive them, from their origin. He specifies reality without specifying in comparable terms the nature of God; he does not achieve a moral identity between devotional truth and ultimate æsthetic truth. This does not affect the quality either of his piety or of his æsthetic judgment; but it does impair the value of his philosophic legacy. If we agree (as we must agree) that Joubert's religious acceptance is wholehearted, and if we agree (as we must agree) that his religious



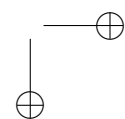
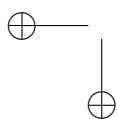


acceptance of Plato and poetry is also whole-hearted, we shall be asked: can man serve two masters? If man cannot, Joubert the critic cannot; and to justify the assumption that there can be a literary comprehension fuller than Joubert's it is necessary to indicate how two masters may be served together, or how the two masters are really identical. Acceptance of a dogmatic theology and acceptance of great art are spiritual states too absolute to co-exist equally in one person unless their moral impulses and moral emanations are, when brought to the touchstone of great problems, identical. Both are forms of belief (there is no more literature without faith than there is religion without faith) and active belief, in anything beyond recognition of mere concrete fact, comes only from moral impulsion.

The real distinction to be made is that between dogmatic and intuitive morality – taking the latter in a rather broad sense. In the instinctive, often subconscious, acceptance of the omnipresent sense of good and evil consists the faith that makes literature. The beauty of literature depends upon the survival of certain impulses in the spirit of man. A great writer like Thomas Hardy, who denies that there is moral order in the universe, in the workings of fate, affirms by the same token that there is moral order in humanity.

With a religion the case is different: for here the machine of dogmatic morality and unquestioning submission to “revealed” truth can go on working when the instinctive moral impulse has long lain dormant. Such a state of religious acceptance could not inspire – could not, indeed, go together with – original thought or artistic creation.\* But the active religious

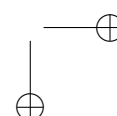
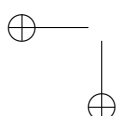
\*It will be clear on reflection that the great pre-Euripidean Greeks form no exception to this. The *ἔθος* of Greek religion was itself actively ethical; and the religious acceptance of, say, Æschylus, lay in the absence of questioning only, not in complete moral satisfaction with Olympia.





sense which we are trying to bring into relation with the active poetic sense combines dogmatic belief with alert, instinctive perception of truth and goodness and love everywhere, a perception heightened by the (non-intellectual) love of God: *accrescit eundo*. If this last sentence should seem to reveal the cloven hoof of one who, seeing that experience added to religion induces a higher ethical sense than was induced by the fundamental dogma, values religion only as a stepping-stone to pure ethics, caring not for religion but simply for ethics, it would be a pity: for such is not its purpose. Rather is its purport to define the moral nature of creative activity, poetic and religious.

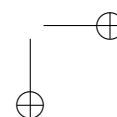
Now to Joubert. It is probable that he came to subject his whole being to extreme theistic dogma because it satisfied his more or less matured moral and æsthetic impulses rather than that, given his nature, those impulses rose inevitably from a strong belief in revelation. We may say this because we know something of Joubert; with others the converse process might hold. Joubert might have been morally creative in the capacity of a priest, he might very naturally have embraced such a rôle; but his spiritual and æsthetic impulses were inseparable, and shorn of his æsthetic perception (which was his manner of moral perception) his goodness would have concentrated on religious dogma (issuing in formalized “good works”) and would not have been spiritually creative. Being as much the artist as the man of piety, his spirit needed to be irrigated and fertilized by beauty. He must, to serve with a serene and living soul, serve two masters; and so serve he did, whence it is fortunate, and surely capable of demonstration, that the two masters are one. Else, certainly, it is impossible to see how he could have served either to very much purpose. The *practical* sagacity which is everywhere so notable in him, is the result rather than the origin, of course, of his restraint and his aversion to *abandon* in others.





The spirit of Rousseau, Joubert once observed, “lives in the moral world, but not in that other world which is above it.” A modern writer would be more likely to say that Rousseau soared to the realms of religion, but had a moral sense too uncertain to sustain him there. The great artist has invariably a religious impulse, but what Joubert did not wholly grasp is that it not only may but *must* be religious in the broader sense; be humane as well as transcendental; be instinctively moral. Great art is an heroic sublimation of the consciousness of good. Religion affords, or perhaps is rather one with, the heroic transcendence of good and evil that attains the serene comprehension of great art. The religious spirit of the artist may be partly passive and conventional, but must in a greater degree be actively moral, questioning all things and affirming its own vision of moral order, thus making the world of the artist’s own creation acceptable *a priori* to all men in despite of their habitual dogmas. How far the sense of moral order conveyed is subjective and how far it proceeds from æsthetic insight into and revelation of that hidden “nature of things” which must be inferred from the fact that so many men respond alike to the apparently personal when it is communicated by perfect expression, is a further question. That art may derive from a “nature of things” which is at once more abstract and more tangible than *l’ordre* with all its manifestations and assumptions, was not apparent to Joubert, to whom none the less all honour for being a more sensitive exponent of *l’ordre* than any of his predecessors, and an almost perfect applicant of it wherever it is applicable.

It is to be hoped that we are a little more clear as to the manner of the religious acceptance and the manner of belief in “art” (imaginative revelation of life) which can apparently reveal an identical reality, how this reality is only capable of revelation by the moral sense, and how Joubert just fell short of apprehending an identity whose formulation – though it





is familiar to us all now – would have set him unshakably among the chief thinkers of his age. He was inferior, indeed, to Goethe, and far inferior to Coleridge, in demonstrating the nature and function of the creative imagination. But he had a fragile solidity which was sadly wanting in Coleridge; countless subtleties of which the German was incapable; and, despite his smaller learning, an inward harmony, a centrality, a “repose in light” and a gentle philosophic security which makes one regret that he is hardly of the company of those greater critics.

It must not be ignored, however, that Joubert’s ultimate limitation indicates directly the manner of his triumph, and is, indeed, a qualified triumph. For it is difficult to remember any considerable critic who has proceeded from so definite a conventionalism in questions of religion and conduct. With Joubert, orthodoxy is the soil; modulation by *la raison* is the stem; the judgment of finely matured intuition the flower.

The passing from a theocratic morality to an inherent morality, from the conscious to the unconscious discernment of the Good, saved this particular critic from all “looking back.” Purification of the moral and æsthetic responses is essential to true criticism, and with Joubert this was achieved *after* the spiritual crisis of contact with revelation and dogma had been passed and was not – as in so many cases – still lying in wait upon the road. This may be the ideal ordering, for among literary critics in the Christian tradition, few are wholly immune from all non-terrestrial spiritual aspiration, and many of them (witness only Coleridge, Arnold, and some leading critics of the present day) have been forced to discount or disrupt a seemingly matured *Weltanschauung* at the overwhelming impulse, tardily come, towards a new personal relation to God, which amounts to a new absolute. (Sometimes even it amounts to mysticism, and all is lost!) An inexpugnable humanism, a complete power to recognize and



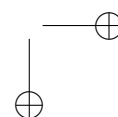




identify beauty, truth, and goodness in human affairs, would be the chief quality of a perfect critic. Joubert shows (though he does not fully exemplify it) that such a quality may be striven for rather better (with more difficulty, that is, but far less subsequent danger) from the starting-point of orthodox Catholicism than from the starting-point of a humanism, however complete, however lofty and inspiring, that is in the slightest degree tinged with scepticism. However, a writer cannot order these things for himself.

Here the attempt to “place” Joseph Joubert by philosophizing must come to an end; perhaps, even if rejected, it may have aided some reader to synthesize, and to set in a wider relation, his achievement. But, as he said, “new books keep us from reading the old,” and his editor is painfully conscious of this. There is little to gain by attempting a *précis* of his thoughts on every aspect of life he contemplated: it is much better, and easier, to turn to his succinct *pensées*, though it is hoped that the general estimate of his position which has been given will be in some harmony with his preponderating attitude to every subject. As an explicit “moralist” he has, as a whole, a less enduring quality than as a pure thinker, though many of his reflections bear the stamp of abiding truth. In politics, especially, many may yearn back or forwards to a world in which his ideas might be practicable, and less vulnerable than they are now. His pensively aphoristic prose is, to misapply a famous expression of his, “un instrument ailé”; yet his phrases have a singular urbanity and precision, touched here and there with the glow of his keen zest for consummating an idea. “Mes idées!” he would exclaim, “c’est la maison pour les loger qui me coûte à bâtir!” But such is his clarity and so welcome his conciseness, that we must not regret this too much.

Of the section “Du Style,” however, it is impossible to resist quoting an estimate which is both a uniquely terse epitome





of Joubert's sanity and genuine worth in literary thought, and an admirably concise statement of a large number of truths that are practical, originally correlated, and subtle, yet challenge no contradiction.

"Here is everything," says Dr. Saintsbury, "the necessity of choice which is the condition of good style, and which works so differently in ancient and modern times; the powers of 'the word' in all their varied bearings; the excellence of archaism rightly understood, and the occasional charms of the *kuria* as a rest and interval for refreshment; the right to reinvest an old word with new meaning; the 'science of names'; the placing of words; the freedom which the reader possesses of improving on his author by keeping his word and adding to his sense; the difference between musical and pictorial style; the impossibility of literature when words are used with an absolutely fixed value; the unpardonable sin of mere purism; the natural and justifiable idiosyncrasy of dictionary and even grammar in good writers, with the due guards against its excess; the variety of degree in which the ancient authors are to be followed; the value and the danger of idioms."

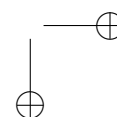
It will inevitably be asked: Is Joubert being put forward as a critical discipline for this generation? For we, as did he, live in an age that "abounds in superfluous ideas and lacks essential ideas." From the standpoint of this very quotation, it is obvious that a rigorous application of the Joubertian Poetic might provide a very stimulating approach to the assessment of the mass of clever contemporary production. He is one, but only one, of those who might recall us to more stable criteria, to older and more durable "values"; and his subtlety of mind and his manner would be of the finest in any age. But the purpose of this book is not didactic: there is no sinister design





of imposing an older philosophy on those who may happen to be wearied awhile of the 19th century and its tumultuous legacy. "The weakness that contributes to order is better than the energy that diverts from it." That seems an odd perception enough to-day; and, true, there was a phase when the great original spirits of the orderly Victorian age seemed to give it the lie. Things change; the ambit of experience becomes enlarged; and it may be permitted to a modern to whom Joubert is the best-loved and the most satisfying of all Frenchmen, to say that he had not the prophetic scope that could enable him to survive quite unimpaired a century of science: a century, moreover, that has produced men so great with an unforeseen greatness, so profound with a newly-discovered profundity, as for example Dostoevski, or Tolstoi, or Thomas Hardy. Joubert did not "include" all; he might *illuminate* all, in some degree, without our straining the real nature of his proclivities too far.

Yet it is doubtful if his country has since produced an intelligence more subtle, more balanced, and more sensitively discriminating, excepting Anatole France and Henri-François Amiel – a compatriot in nature and language, if not in birth. And even these wider-reaching men have surely less poetry in them, and far less "direction de leur esprit." Such a twofold awareness of poetry and philosophy as Joubert had must be sought in greater, but less intense and precise, minds than his own. The uncommon "soundness" of Joubert's attitude depends upon a certain *negativeness* of response; he was as much a "spectator of all time" as some greater thinkers who went more often astray; but he was not willingly a "spectator of all existence," only of the existence which fertilized his spirit or which could be transcendently subjectified. Of his own time and land he was, willy-nilly, a spectator; and the great efforts this cost him in his pursuit of self-control and "perfection" are unconsciously revealed by even the most

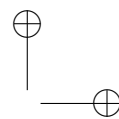
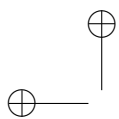




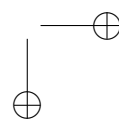
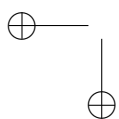
detached and carefully weighted of his words. Every writer, indeed every man of us, must find a way of life; and perhaps the only difference is that some can venture along a broader path than others, can wander farther to the left and right and survive. It is true in a sense that Joubert was the eclectic of his age; but it is a partial truth. For such an attribution implies that to him the past endured, submerged but preserving its essentials, in the present; whereas Joubert was apt to see modernity as a barrier and not as a filter. He called antiquity "an experience of which few are worth worthy" (which was a *fact*, indeed, but a *truth* only with many qualifications); and all that can be said in exoneration of his so often assuming that the Greeks and the Romans had given *completeness* of experience is that some arbitrary ballasting was necessary to save the frail barque of the critical spirit, perilously adrift as it was between the Scylla of La Harpe and the Charybdis of post-Rousseauism. Of his very nature he could never have become a real "Empire" critic; and he disliked above all things the *Journal des Débats* and Geoffroy of the "four iron hoofs." He did not, indeed, echo Bruyère's "Tout est dit," but he counted for little what was said or likely to be said in his own day. His thought was, after the turn of the century, isolated so far as his own countrymen were concerned; yet he remains the outstandingly balanced and sensitive recorder of a transition period: at once the most penetrating and the most urbane critic of Chateaubriand and his influences. Fundamentally candid, he was loyal to himself and to his moderating tradition. Slightly touched with an inevitable *défaitisme*, his attitude was, as we can see clearly at this date, not merely quixotic but the striving of a courageous champion of a real cause; for they were not windmills but hosts against which he tilted.

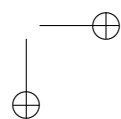
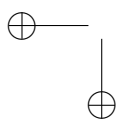
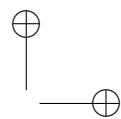
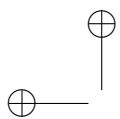
H. P. COLLINS





{ **PENSÉES** }







### THE AUTHOR ON HIMSELF

I love few pictures; few operas; few statues; few poems: yet I am a great lover of the arts.

Madame Victorine de Châtenay said of me that I am like a spirit which has found a body by accident, and manages with it as best it may. I cannot deny the justice of her words.

Like Dædalus, I forge wings for myself. I construct them slowly, adding a feather every day.

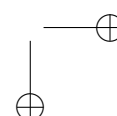
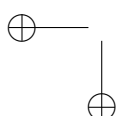
I am like an Æolian harp, which gives forth some fine notes, but plays no air. No continuous breeze has blown upon me.

Like Montaigne, I am incapable of sustained discourse.

Everywhere, intermediate ideas seem to fail me, or to weary me too much.

In many ways I am like the butterfly: I love light as he does, and like him I burn away my life in it: like him I can only unfold my wings when there is beauty around me and my spirit is enveloped and saturated in the mild atmosphere of indulgence: I have by nature a chilly brain and temperament.

I care little for the prudence that is not moral prudence. I have a poor opinion of the lion since I learned that he walks obliquely.





When my friends lack an eye, I look at them in profile.

Verse holds the reader's attention by the pleasure it affords the ear. Prose has not this resource: could the prose-writer achieve it? I try – but I fear it cannot be.

I should like to make exquisite sense pass into commonsense, or make exquisite sense common.

You can attain feeling early and taste very late: that is what happened to me.

I have passed beyond the waters of Lethe.

My soul lives where every passion has passed; I have known them all.

I am familiar with the ways of intimacy but not with those of familiarity.

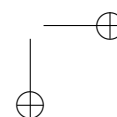
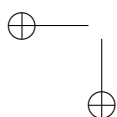
The pain of a dispute far outweighs its uses. Strife always deafens the mind; and when anybody is deaf, I am dumb.

I cannot do anything well except slowly and with extreme fatigue. Behind my weakness there is strength; the weakness is in the instrument. Behind the strength of many men there is weakness. It is in their heart, their reason, their lack of sincere goodwill.

I want neither a mind without vision nor a mind without blinkers. You must be able to blind yourself gallantly for happiness in this life.

Ah! If I could express myself by music, dancing, painting, as I express myself in words, how many ideas I should have that I lack, and how many feelings that will always be unknown to me.

I am told I speak with subtlety. It is sometimes the only means of penetration the spirit can command, either from







the nature of the truth it wishes to attain, or of the opinions or ignorance across which it is reduced to opening a painful outlet for itself.

Whenever I shine. . . I am burning myself away.

If there is a man tormented by the accursed ambition to put a whole book in a page, a whole page in a sentence, and that sentence in one word, I am he.

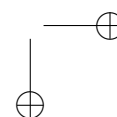
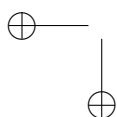
I am able to sow, but not to found or build.

Often have I touched the cup of abundance with my lips' edge, but the water has always receded from me.

I like to see two truths at once. Every good comparison gives the mind that advantage.

I polish not my phrase, but my idea. I linger till the drop of light I need forms and falls from my pen.

It troubles me to leave Paris, for I am separated from my friends: to leave the country, for then I am separated from myself.





## ON GOD, RELIGION, AND KINDRED SUBJECTS

Such is the infinite grandeur of God that, to understand Him, we must conceive of Him in parts.

We know God through piety, that refinement of soul in which alone He reaches our understanding and can reveal Himself to us.

We always conceive of God in our own image; those who are generous cry that He is indulgent; while the vengeful worship Him as the implacable.

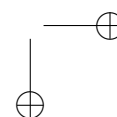
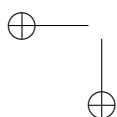
Dare I put it so? It is easy to know God, so long as you do not vex yourself to define Him.

There is no understanding of the earth without understanding of heaven. Without the world of religion, the visible world shows itself as a devastating enigma.

When matter is incessantly put before our eyes, we cannot see it. It is useless to extol the maker by spreading his marvellous works in front of us: their vastness bewilders; the *object* distracts us, and the end, always indicated, is always hidden.

We must offer resistance to man, but yield to heaven.

Religion is the poetry of the heart; it has charms which serve morality; it gives us happiness and virtue.





Religion forbids us to believe anything beyond its own doctrines.

Belief is a stronger link between man and man than knowledge, no doubt because beliefs spring from the heart.

There are two kinds of atheism: one tends to dispense with the idea of God, and the other to deny His intervention in human affairs.

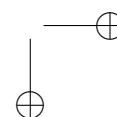
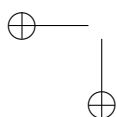
There is a great difference between accepting Mahomet or Luther as an idol, and crawling at the feet of J. J. Rousseau or Voltaire. At least Mahomet's followers thought they were only obeying God, and Luther's hearers that they were only obeying the Scriptures. And perhaps there is no need to deplore the human tendency to give over to the "elect of God" the trouble of ruling our consciences and directing our minds. Considered merely in respect of immediate social utility, the propensity is advantageous and conforms to *order*. It is subjection to irreligious spirits that alone is fatal and really corrupting.

Even if faith did not help knowledge and teaching, it would conduce greatly to general morality by holding inferior minds fast to sentiments of docility and subordination, which are a virtue, a duty in them; their way to a peaceful life; a state indispensable to their welfare and to the kind of accomplishment that can do them credit.

To reach the realms of light, we have to pass through the clouds. Some men stop there; others are able to pass beyond.

One must be religious with simplicity, unreserve, goodwill – not with dignity and high breeding, gravity and mathematical precision.

Without the biblical allusions, our literature would retain nothing familiar, nothing simple and popular.





The Holy Scripture is easy to translate into any language; for common, popular, essential words are enough for the purpose, and they are to be found everywhere.

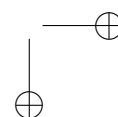
The Jansenists command us to love God: the Jesuits make us love Him. The Jesuits hold a doctrine that is full of inexactitudes, perhaps of errors; but – strange though it be – they are incontestably the better teachers.

Will the Almighty class noble thoughts among noble actions? Will there be recompense for those who have sought them, delighted in and held fast to them? Will the philosopher and the politician be rewarded for their schemes, as the benevolent man is rewarded for his good deeds? And have valuable works, in God's sight, the merit of noble conduct? Perhaps so indeed, but the reward of the first is not assured in the same way, and will not be the same; God has not filled our souls with the hope and certitude of it; other motives determine us. Yet I can well imagine Bossuet, Fénelon, Plato taking their works with them into God's presence, and even Pascal and La Bruyère, even Vauvenargues and La Fontaine, for their works mirror their soul, and could be put to their credit in heaven. But I fancy that Rousseau and Montesquieu would not have dared to present theirs; which only embody the wits, humours, and exertions of the authors. As for Voltaire, his works also portray him, and I fancy they will be charged to him – but to his debit!

The biblical translator must employ a spacious language, with nothing too closely knit or too polished in its construction, and with words and phrases of a venerable air.

The Bible is the Iliad of religion.

Philosophers condone Jansenism because it is a kind of philosophy.





## ON MAN AND HIS FACULTIES

We see everything across the self. We are a medium always interposed between things and ourselves.

Reflection belongs to the head alone; but the whole body has memory. A dancer's feet, a clever musician's fingers, have in an eminent degree the faculty of recollection.

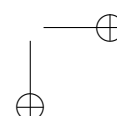
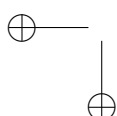
There are men whose spirit not only has no wings, but has no feet for stability and no hands for labour.

The soul has a taste for goodness, just as the body has an appetite for pleasure.

The more I think about it, the more I see that the brain is something outside the soul, as the hands are outside the body, the eyes outside the head, the branches outside the trunk. It helps to be *able* – but not to be *more*.

What we call the “soul” of a man is invariable; but what we call “wit” is not the same at every age, nor in every situation, nor every day. Wit is a mobile sort of thing; its direction changes with all the winds that are for ever blowing.

The habit of thinking gives us facility therein, heightens our insight and sharpens our vision. Our faculties, like our limbs, acquire by exercise more agility, more strength and suppleness.





Imagination is the eye of the soul.

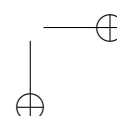
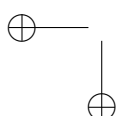
Whether or not there be ideas which can be called *innate* is a question which belongs essentially to the knowledge, understanding, of the soul; not simply a scholastic question. If, when the ear is caught by its proposition, the idea of some thing, some existence which has never been experienced by the senses is born forthwith in our mind, comes to light and develops there, we can say, we are right in thinking, that we have there an innate idea, or one of which the germ was in us – somewhat as one supposes that fire is in the veins of a flint. When one looks upon these notions as germs borne in our mind, which certain flashes will bring to light, one is intelligible and becomes clearer. These innate ideas are certainly not indestructible. On the contrary, they can very easily be disfigured, distorted, degraded, misplaced. Eternal though they be, they are movable and easy to drive away, like everything merely embryonic.

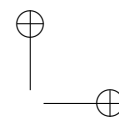
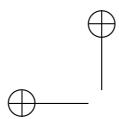
When one is alone, a faculty of the mind will sometimes speak to another and be heard, as the mouth speaks to the ear. That is known full well to those scholars who study aloud what they wish to learn, so that the lesson can enter their memory through two gateways.

Thought must *be* something, and leave some trace of itself, since we have the power, by setting out in pursuit and returning upon its tracks, to catch it again when it has fled us.

Without imagination, sensibility is confined by our present moment; sensations are livelier, more brief, and have no harmony whatever in their succession.

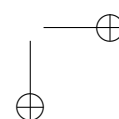
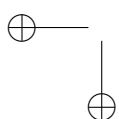
“Fancy,” an animal faculty, is very different from imagination, an intellectual faculty. The first is passive: the second, on the other hand, is active and creative. Children, weak-minded





people, neurotics have plenty of fancies. Men of mind, and strong mind, alone have a wealth of imagination.

Imagination is so essential, in literature and in life, that even those who lack it and decry it are obliged to make up an imagination for themselves.





## ON THE NATURE OF MINDS

It is the nature of a mind, its own luminousness, not its degree of vigour (uncertain as the body's health), which gives it its true value, its quality, its excellence.

Some superior minds are unrecognized because there is no standard by which to weigh them. So it is with a precious metal that has no touchstone.

Every mind has its dregs.

There is a bodily weakness which comes of mental energy, and a feebleness of mind which proceeds from bodily energy.

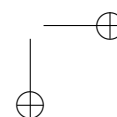
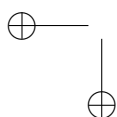
Some airy dispositions yet do not hold light views; they have principles and virtues which at need make them serious. On the other hand, some men of grave and sombre dispositions hold very futile views – and then all is lost.

Nature has created two kinds of rare spirit: one to achieve fine ideas or deeds, the other to admire them.

To have a fine intelligence and a poor brain is a common enough thing with delicate men.

Ample talents, do not despise slender ones!

The happiest men are those who dwell amid fine ideas; but the greatest are those who pass through and beyond them.







Some minds are so fervid that their thoughts go up in smoke and are consumed the moment they are formed.

Enlightenment is a fine word! Some men fancy themselves enlightened because they are decisive, thus taking conviction for truth, and force of conception for intelligence. Others think that because they have every word at their command, they have every truth also. But what man of them is “enlightened” with the eternal light which fastens itself about the brain and makes luminous for ever the mind it has entered and the subjects it has played upon?

Minds can be compared with fields: what is most valuable in some is the top soil; in others the lowest stratum, very deeply bedded.

There is an element of levity in the finest natures; they have pinions to soar, and pinions also to stray.

What is called tenuity of mind is sometimes no more than an appearance produced by ease of motion; an inconsequent advancement of ideas that is a very different thing from superficiality of consideration and judgment.

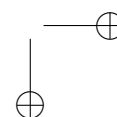
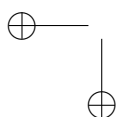
Some wits expand only in an air of geniality; some only in an air of gloom.

Some men find their sole activity in repose; and others their sole repose in movement.

There are adventurous minds which merely wait about to come upon their ideas at hazard.

The intellect which never relaxes is very liable to error.

Some minds have a kernel of error which draws and assimilates everything into itself.





There are some radiant minds well able to receive, to retain, and to transmit light; they shine from every side, they sparkle – and yet that is the end of their activity. That of secondary agents must be added to make it effectual. Thus does the sun bring to life, but never nourish.

The cultured often treat practical affairs like the ignorant treat books: they understand nothing about them.

Propound subtle and delicate views to men of dull, heavy understanding, and you will see how strangely they abuse them. Throw keen rays of light upon a mind naturally cloudy; and you will see how far it can obscure them. Its murkiness will but grow more palpable, chaos will follow night.

Some minds are like those convex and concave mirrors which reflect things just as they receive them, but never receive them as they are.

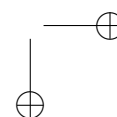
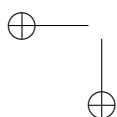
The man of imagination who is unlearned has wings and no feet.

There is a slightly foolish element in ardent temperaments, and a slightly dull element in cold ones.

We can sprain our minds as well as our bodies.

In our elevated moods we delight in generalization; in our graver moods we incline to application.

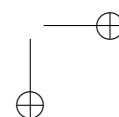
Some thoughtful and fastidious minds are distracted in all their workings by vast, far-away perspectives of τó καλόν, of celestial beauty, always earnest to dispense some image or some ray of it, for it is always in their sight, even when there is nothing before their eyes; they are minds in love with light and when they come upon an idea to use, ponder it long and wait for it to shine, as Buffon ordained when he defined genius as the capacity for taking pains; minds which





have felt that the most barren material, and even the dullest words, bear within them the origin and kindling of some flash of light, like the fairies' hazel-nuts in which you could find diamonds if you broke the shell and if your hands that broke it were blessed; minds convinced that the pure and elemental beauty they adore is in everything which thought can touch, as fire is contained in all bodies; watchful and penetrating minds who can see this fire in the pebbles of all literature, and cannot part with such as fall into their hands without having sought long for the vein which conceals the spark and having made it spurt forth; minds with a *system* of their own as well, claiming for example that to see each object in its beauty and adorn it, is to discern and display it as it really is in the recesses of its being and not as it is to the careless who regard only the surface; minds rarely satisfied because of an insight which shows them too clearly the models they must follow and those they should avoid: active minds, albeit dreamers, who can only rest upon solid truths, and only be happy in the beautiful – or at least in the various pleasures which are the tiny particles and slight sparks of beauty; minds far less enamoured of glory than of perfection, seeming to be idle, yet the busiest of all: but, because their art is long and life is always short, unless happy chance endow them with a subject which abounds in the element they need, and the scope which their ideas demand, they live almost unknown upon earth, and pass from it without a monument, having only gained as their lot among the rarer spirits an internal fertility in which there are few to share.\*

\*This is the celebrated “one sentence” *pensée*.





## ON THE SOUL

We need to *purify* our passions; they can all be made innocent if they are guided and restrained. Hatred itself can be a laudable emotion, when it arises only from a keen love of goodness. Everything that refines the passions makes them stronger, more durable, more noble.

Passion is simply nature; it is impenitence that is corrupt.

Remorse is the punishment of sin; penitence is its expiation. One goes with a tortured conscience; the other with a soul that is changed for the better.

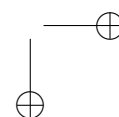
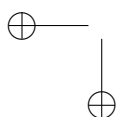
Every emotion seeks its own nourishment; fear likes the idea of danger.

There is an element of callousness in every kind of dissipation; it is a deliberate, wilful abuse of pleasure.

Nothing shrivels up man so much as trivial pleasures.

Blind folk are cheerful, because their minds are not distracted from the appearance of things which can give them pleasure; and they have more ideas than we have sights. It is a recompense which heaven affords them.

Concern for others always cheers us; while self-concern is always depressing. That is why melancholy is the frame of mind habitual to a man who lives shut up in himself.





Misery is almost always the result of thinking.

Gaiety, especially literary gaiety, clears the mind. Boredom confuses it; extreme tension strains it; sublimity revives it.

Grace is in dress, in movements or manners: beauty in nudity and in form. That is true of bodies; but when it is a matter of sentiments, their beauty is in spirituality and their grace in restraint.

Sorrow has its equilibrium: the tranquillity of life can sometimes balance, like a counterpoise, the grief of the moment.

God has ordained that Time bring solace to the miserable.

It is always our inabilities that vex us.

It is an element of all happiness to fancy that we deserve it.

One must cultivate not only friends, but the friendly impulses, preserve them carefully, look after them – irrigate them, so to speak.

Regard must be served up to friends like an ample meal, with no weighing up or trimming down of the portions.

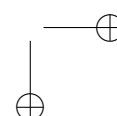
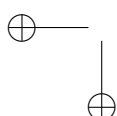
In love, the heart is the judge.

The man who has not the weaknesses of friendship has not its strength either.

You are in a cruel predicament when you cannot make up your mind to hate and despise a man whom you neither like nor esteem.

Our good qualities are rarely loved or admired except when they are toned down by our faults. It often happens that we are more liked for our defects than for our merits.

The faults which make a man absurd rarely make him hateful; so one escapes odium by ridicule.





Hatred between man and woman is very rarely quenched.

If we spend our lives in loving, we have no leisure to complain, or to feel unhappiness.

The man who has no sense of beauty is a bad painter, a bad friend, a bad lover; he cannot lift his mind and heart to goodness.

We must make others love us, for man is only just to those he loves.

Goodness only comes through compassion. So there must be some element of compassion in all our feelings, even when they are of indignation, of loathing for the wicked. But must there be some pity even in our love of God? Yes, pity for ourselves; such as is always mingled with gratitude. So our every sentiment is marked by some compassion, for ourselves or for others. The love that the angels bear us is itself no more than eternal pity, endless compassion. We are all compassionate to the evils we ourselves fear.

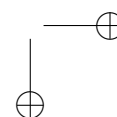
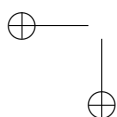
The vanity which consists in the wish to please others and make ourselves pleasant to them is half a virtue; for, obviously, it is a degree of humility and goodwill.

Men who have loved women too much are often punished by being unable to leave off.

Tenderness is the backwaters of passion.

There is less indifference in abuse than in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness, what a sweet word it is!

A man who has seen something often, instinctively takes in his company another man who has not seen it to make the revisitation pleasurable.





Feelings should be held near to the heart. When you accustom your heart to love things which have only an intellectual existence, you become attached to mere abstractions, and easily sacrifice realities to them. When you have a great love for mankind in the mass, there is no affection left to distribute among individuals: all your benevolence has been spent on the universal, and the individual comes in too late. These philosophical passions, which are only brought on by effort, overthrow and destroy our capacity to love.

Perhaps it may be a part of goodness to esteem and like men beyond their merits; but then it is a point of prudence to divine that men are not always what they seem to us.

Unless we take care, we are led away into blaming the unhappy.

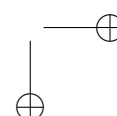
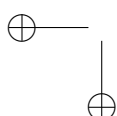
The good deeds we have never done are a discovery, a progress, for the will.

Goodwill links together with our own powers and possessions the powers and possessions of every being it embraces. Man is an immense being in some sort, who can exist partially, but whose existence grows more delectable as it grows fuller, more entire.

To receive benefits from somebody is a surer way to attach yourself to him than to confer obligations on him. Often the sight of a benefactor importunes; that of a beneficiary is always pleasant – we love our own deed in him!

Every man should be the author of good deeds, if not of good works. It is not enough to have one's talent in manuscript and one's nobility in parchments.

We must do good whenever possible, and give pleasure always, for that is always possible.





Let us bear a high heart and a modest mind.

Our good repute is one of our benefits, and we should use it to help the unfortunate.

When you give, give with a smile of pleasure!

Self-satisfaction is allowable from conscience, but not from reflection.

On the soul's heights, there is a region to which can rise the incense given off from praise, but which pride can never attain.

An innocent vanity which spends itself in light vapourings may be a defect slight, and good for one's disposition, especially for a poet's; but pride is the enemy of goodness.

Vanity has to be satisfied ere it will listen to reason.

It is a good thing to open the veins of vanity; lest a man keep it too entirely within himself, and become overridden by it. It needs to be drained, so to speak, every day.

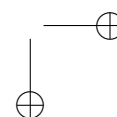
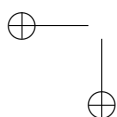
Servants often lie solely from respect and fear.

There is a need of admiration common among certain women in cultured epochs; it is a debasement of the need of love.

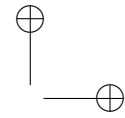
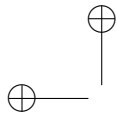
It would be difficult to live despised yet virtuous; we need support.

Through chastity the soul breathes pure air in the most corrupt places; through continence the soul is strong, in whatever state the body may be; it is royal in its dominion over the senses and lovely in its light and its peace.

Heavens, what glorious loves are born of chastity, and what raptures are lost by intemperance!





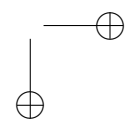
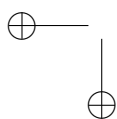


Reason can make us temperate; but piety alone can make us chaste.

Deckings had their origin in modesty.

There is a certain modesty to be preserved in ill-fortune. It has its reason in that laudable and natural repugnance of all honourable people to expose to others' sight unpleasant and repulsive things. One has to take great care not to outrage this very decent feeling, in others or in oneself. There are men whose kindnesses insult misfortune; there are others whose lamentations or demeanour prostitute their misery, in a sense, to the passers-by. The unhappy man should have the modesty of young virgins, who never speak of their sex or their infirmities save with restraint, in secret, and under necessity.

A woman ought to have modesty, not only for herself, but for all her sex; that is to say, she should be jealous for every woman to keep the laws of her sex, for what harms the modesty of one harms the modesty of them all. One who reveals her nakedness to the eyes of men does in some degree disrobe all decent women; in showing herself unveiled, she exposes the others as well.





## **ON THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF OUR LIFE, AND ON DEATH**

Nothing is so trying to children as reflection. That is because the final, essential destiny of the soul is to see, to understand, and not to reflect. Reflection is one of the labours of our life, a road to the goal, a trail, a crossing, not a goal in itself. To understand and to be understood are the two resting-places; and there spiritual happiness will be found.

Esteem only the youth whom age finds courteous.

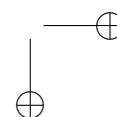
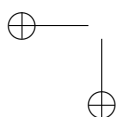
At a certain age bodily vigour changes its place and withdraws into the mind.

The passions of youth are vices in age.

All the good of man lies in his youthful feeling and his mature thought.

The four loves corresponding to the four ages of a well-ordered life are: the love of everything, the love of woman, the love of order, and the love of God. However, there are privileged souls which surrender themselves from youth, almost from infancy, to the love of order and of God, deny themselves the love of woman, and pass a long life in adoring only what is innocent.

The evening of life brings with it its lamp.





The religious virtues do but increase with age; they grow richer with the decay of passion and the loss of pleasure. The purely human virtues, on the contrary, shrink and grow poor from the same causes.

Every year we grow a knot, like a bough of a tree; some branch of our intelligence expands, or else it withers and hardens.

The sedentary student knows that he is growing old, but he feels little of it: he keeps the same aptitude for study.

Age takes away from a man only qualities that avail wisdom nothing.

There comes with age a kind of exfoliation in the moral and intellectual portion of the brain; the mind sheds its rough-cast; notions and opinions detach themselves as by layers from the medullary substance; and the first impressions, which are more intimately bound up with it, revive and reappear according as the others break away and leave them to be seen.

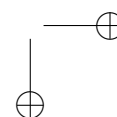
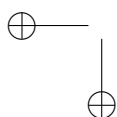
The residue of human wisdom, refined by old age, is perhaps the best thing we have.

Our life is woven wind.

A little vanity and a little pleasure make up the lives of most men and women.

How many men there are who eat, drink and marry; buy, sell, and build; make their agreements and look after their affairs; get themselves friends and enemies, pleasures and pains; are born, grow up, live and die – yet asleep.

The whole of life is occupied with other people; we spend half our days in loving them, and the other half in disparaging them.





We are priests of Vesta: our life is the sacred flame, and our mission is to feed it until God himself quenches it in us.

We must treat our life like our writings, put in order, harmonize the beginning, the middle, and the end. To do that, we have to make many erasures.

Debts shorten life.

To love only beautiful women, and to tolerate worthless books: these are signs of decadence.

The best way of saving oneself a lot of trouble in life is to pay very little heed to one's own interests.

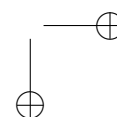
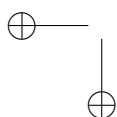
Invalids do not, like other men, experience an old age which overwhelms their mind by the sudden decay of their powers. They retain the same weaknesses until the last: but they retain the same animation and liveliness too. Grown used to disregarding the body, they conserve, for the most part, a healthy mind in a sick frame. Time changes them but little; it merely strikes at their span of life.

Patience and ill-fortune, courage and death, resignation and necessity usually come at the same time. Indifference to life arises from the impossibility of keeping it.

When death is approaching, thought still plays about the brain, like a light vapour ready to dissolve. All that it does is to turn round and round, after the fashion of a soap-bubble which is about to resolve itself into a drop of water.

The poetry to which Socrates said the gods had exhorted him to apply himself ere he died is Plato's poetry, not Homer's – abstract and celestial poetry, which enraptures the soul and lulls the senses in forgetfulness. It should be cultivated in captivity, in infirmity, in old age. Such poetry indeed is the solace of the dying.

When our quest is ended, there is no time to tell the tale: we must die.





## ON THINGS DOMESTIC AND SOCIAL

Few men are worthy to be heads of a family; and few families are fit to be so controlled.

In one class of society good children do not know that their parents are mortal. They have never dared to entertain such a thought.

Only choose in marriage a woman whom you would choose as a friend if she were a man.

A woman can only be wife and widow once with dignity.

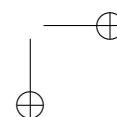
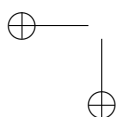
Temperance is not estimable unless virtue be a factor in it.

Take care that your home is always without something whose absence is not too painful to you, yet which can afford you a pleasant ambition. A man should live in such a manner that he can never be either surfeited or insatiable.

To survey the world is to be the judge of judges.

When a man is a model to the community, he may be exempted from active service to it.

It is nearly always difficulties born of his own ideas, not those born of the nature of things, with which man is struggling in the discussions that torment the mind of himself and his fellows.





One of the advantages of the good company and the lettered society of Paris is that it refines your taste by skimming your wit. Commonplace ideas are worked off in conversation; while the more rare ones are reserved for pen and paper.

How often we say things, quite sincerely, in conversation about a subject which we should never have thought of had we confined ourselves to giving it silent consideration. The mind gets warmed up; and its heat gives off something its light would never yield. Speech is a source of error, but sometimes, it may be, of truth as well. The voice has wings that carry us where we should not go of our own accord.

A book should have no more than the requisite tincture of wit; but a superabundance is quite allowable in conversation.

A sportive abuse of wit gives pleasure; but the serious abuse of wit is very distasteful.

In conversation we are content to signify, to label things by their name, without stopping to form a notion of them.

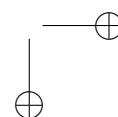
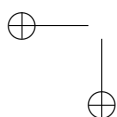
It is a great handicap, in a discussion, to be always aware of the weakness of one's own arguments and of the strength of other people's; but there is nobility in such a defeat.

The end of argument or discussion should be, not victory, but enlightenment.

It is not the opinions of others which annoy us; but the frequent desire to subdue us to them against our will.

Contradiction is only irritating because it troubles our peaceful possession of some opinion or some pre-eminence. That is why it vexes the weak more than the strong, and the invalid more than the robust.

You can convince others by your arguments; you can only persuade them by using their own.





It often happens that an *inconclusive* reason is good *dramatically* because it is characteristic of him who advances it, is his true mental offshoot; for there are arguments *ex homine* as well as arguments *ad hominem*.

We can only explain ourselves frankly when we have some hope of being understood; and we can have no such hope except from people who are half of our own mind.

Intractable characters are exposed to flattery. We naturally seek to disarm those we cannot conquer and do not want to fight.

Of all forms of monotony, the monotony of affirmation is the worst.

We should always keep a spare corner in our head to give passing hospitality to our friends' opinions.

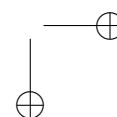
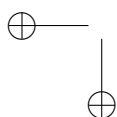
Conversation becomes intolerable when you are with men whose brain is full of boxes where everything is stowed away in order and nothing external can enter. Let us bear hospitable hearts and minds.

Genuine good sayings surprise the author as much as the listeners. They come to birth spontaneously, or at least without our participation, like everything that is inspired.

It is better to stir up a question without deciding it, than to decide it without stirring it up.

In conversation emotion, which is vehement, should be but the handmaid of intelligence, which is calm. It is allowable, nay, praiseworthy to speak according to one's mood; but one must meditate and judge by reason alone.

If your acquaintance have more than one name, address him by the fairest, the smoothest, and best sounding of them!





He who laughs at evil, in any form, has an imperfect moral sense. To make merriment out of evil is to enjoy it.

Do not point out the reverse side and the blemishes to those who have not seen the medal. Do not speak of the faults of deserving people to those who know neither their face, their manner of life, nor their merits.

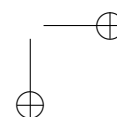
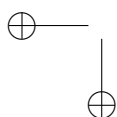
Though it be pardonable to judge the living capriciously, the dead must only be judged in the light of reason. Since they have become immortal, they can only be measured by an immortal rule, that of justice.

To accord an honest man the merit he lacks is to misconstrue his true worth.

Courtesy is to good will what thoughts are to words. Courtesy affects not only manners, but the mind and the heart; it tempers and sweetens every one of our feelings, opinions, and words.

Credulity is the mark of good nature.

Manners are an art. They can be perfect, admirable, or defective; but they cannot be indifferent. Why have we not precepts by which to learn them, or at least a tradition which teaches us to judge them, as we do sculpture and music? A science of manners would be of greater service to happiness and virtue than anyone supposes. If virtue leads to good manners; good manners lead to virtue. Now, manners are an essential part of morality. So we must, at every juncture, impose on ourselves fair manners, simple and agreeable manners, if we would attain the heights of wisdom.







## ON WISDOM, MORALITY, AND DUTY

Wisdom is a science by which we discriminate between things spiritually good and evil. It is the science of sciences, for alone it can understand the value, the true price, the real uses, the dangers, and the potentialities of the soul.

Wisdom is repose in light. Happy the minds that are exalted enough to rejoice in its radiance.

Study the men of old and listen to old men! He is a poor sage who has no wisdom but his own; and a poor scholar who has nothing but his learning.

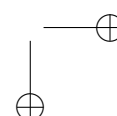
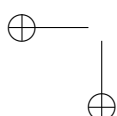
Wisdom is the strength of the weak.

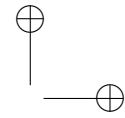
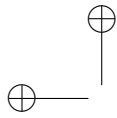
The union of illusion and wisdom makes all the charm of life and art.

Commonsense adapts itself to the world; wisdom seeks to attune itself to the heavens.

The wisdom of man drives away life's ills. But divine wisdom alone shows us true blessings. Animation is needed in the quest of human wisdom, but the way to divine wisdom is meditation, repose.

Virtue has an impulse to spread itself; and its possessors like to bestow it on others.





Necessity can render a doubtful action innocent; but it could never make it praiseworthy.

Perfect innocence is perfect ignorance. It is not prudent, nor mistrustful, and one can put no reliance on it; but it is an amiable characteristic, almost as much respected as virtue, and better liked.

No virtue looks small when it is prominently staged.

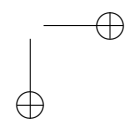
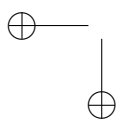
Perhaps we need, for worldly success, virtues which make us loved and vices which make us feared.

In accord with his way of looking at morality, J. J. Rousseau could have defined it as “the art of heightening our passions to advantage.” He would have made two capital errors. First, as to the advantage, for there can be none in heightening the passions if that means giving men more feeling than Nature has given them, or feeling greater than themselves. Secondly, the attributes are wrong, for though it may be advantageous to shape the passions to maintain some rightness, some order, some propriety, some beauty through all their operations, their words and their slightest movements; to attribute a similar care to morality is to let loose confusion. Morality is formed only to repress and constrain; it is a criterion, a criterion immovable and unchangeable, and for that very reason is a barrier: morality is a bridle and not a spur.

A conscience, a morality, a religion of our own are things which by their nature cannot be taken from us!

A man can only see by his own lamp; but he can walk in the light of other men’s.

We must provide ourselves with anchors and ballast, that is, with fixed and constant opinions; we must retain our ballast and lie at anchor, without drifting. Let your streamers float





aloft as well, and let the wind fill your sails; the mast alone should remain unshakable.

Maxims are to the intelligence what laws are to action: they do not illuminate, but they guide, they control, they rescue blindly. They are the clue in the labyrinth, the ship's compass in the night.

We make use of clear ideas in speech; but we nearly always act from confused ideas, they govern our lives.

Reason in man is the universal supplement of Nature's impotence.

When we think what we do not *feel*, we lie to ourselves. We must always think with our whole being, soul and body.

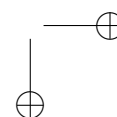
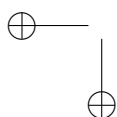
To do the slightest things from the biggest motives, and to see the smallest objects in their widest bearings, is the great way for a man to advance his feeling and intelligence.

The ideal is not always put there to be attained, but to serve as an aim. Such is the precept about loving our enemies.

Taste determines our wishes, and judgment decides their expediency; these are their respective functions to which each should be confined. There must be the same distinction between them as between inclination and reason.

When once a rigid idea of duty has made its way into a narrow mind it can never get out again.

Happy are those who have a lyre in their heart and a music in their disposition which their actions set in play. Their whole life will have been a harmony in tune with the pæans of eternity.





## ON ORDER, GOOD, AND EVIL

Order is the relation of the means to the end, of the parts to the whole, of the whole to its proper purpose, of act to duty, of works to their standard of excellence, of reward to merit.

Welfare is the law for active, living bodies; but order is the law of minds.

Order is to adjustment what the soul is to the body, what mind is to matter. Adjustment without order is a body without a soul.

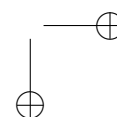
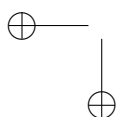
Conceive universal order! Everything that conforms to it in ideas, in imagery, in opinions, in institutions is beautiful; everything which conforms to it in action, in scheme, in enterprise is good. There you have the criterion.

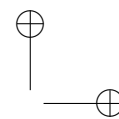
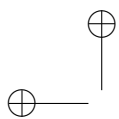
All men are born to observe order; few to establish it.

The weakness that contributes to order is better than the energy that diverts from it.

We must be pleased with our state, that is, the meanness or superiority of our condition. The king should enjoy his sceptre; the flunkey his livery.

Chance is the hand that Providence has kept for herself in the affairs of this world – something which she has not cared for man to believe he can influence.

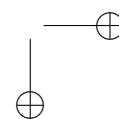
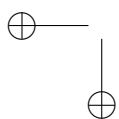




Chance usually favours the prudent man.

If you would live happily, do not exaggerate life's evils, nor slight her blessings.

Whatever corrupts the ideal of perfection which man should form for himself, in any sphere, diverts good at its very source.





## ON TRUTH, ILLUSION, AND ERROR

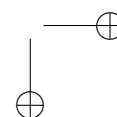
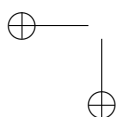
Truth is reality in the things of the mind. It is of several kinds: universal truth, and particular truth; the truth of fact or simple existence, and the truth of nature, of necessity. “Man is a religious animal”: that is a truth born of necessity. “Men are greedy and self-centred”: that is a truth of simple fact, of fact true or otherwise, and can be ignored without intellectual loss. Knowledge of universal truth, the truth of nature, is indeed a great essential of spiritual *ordonnance* and light; but knowledge of particular truths is unessential, is even useless save for practical ends.

Historical truth, except when it bears upon practical matters, only concerns the scholar; physical truth only concerns us bodily; but moral truth concerns our whole being, our life and death. Then what does historic truth matter, where there is a moral truth? If the first compromises the second, we must disregard it and wait for the solution.

We are so enamoured of mental tranquillity that we stop short at any semblance of a truth, and go to sleep in the clouds!

There are two degrees of light; it can illuminate – and it can dazzle. The first is enough!

What is true by lamplight is not always true in the sunshine.





Our opinions are clouds between us and the clear skies of truth.

Ingenuity\* is very near to truth.

The accessories of truth need not always be true; enough that they can grace the truth and make it better able to touch our hearts.

When one has knocked in vain at the door of certain truths, one must try to get in through the window.

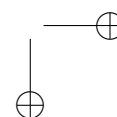
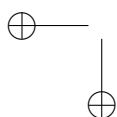
Mistakes are our own; illusions come from heaven.

Some minds are led into error through truths; some, happier, pass through every error and come upon great truth.

Not every truth is better told. A truth, put forward in single isolation, may lead to error and false consequences; but all truths would be better told, if they were told together, and could be propounded with equal facility at the same time. Do you really know how it is that there are pernicious truths? It is because they are not proffered to the mind together with those which should be an antidote to them. So it is not wise to tell men a truth except when you can tell them two. If we can only light on a single truth, we must keep it in reserve, and wait for the other truth that is its companion to appear, join it, and so be able to perform its service. We must emulate kindly Providence, which (as the fable runs) conceived of wine yet would not divulge it to mankind till water was also conceived, to temper it. If we make a discovery we should not tell it to others till we are able to offer them the water and the wine of truth together.

Beware of treating as contestable things which should be regarded as above argument. Do not make answerable to

\**Ingénieux*, here, may be a misprint or misreading of *ingénu*.



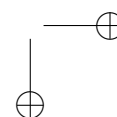


reason things that are of the province of intimate feeling. Set forth the truths of sentiment; do not *prove* them. There is a danger in proofs, for, in argument one has to suppose the matter in question problematic; now anything habitually assumed to be problematic will in the end appear doubtful. In dealing with visible and palpable things, never prove what is taken for granted; with certainties hidden by their majestic nature, compel belief without resort to proof; in dealing with conduct and duty, ordain and offer no explanations! “Fear God” has made men pious; proofs of His existence have made many atheists. Challenge gives rise to attack; an advocate always evokes a quibbler, and the desire to contradict the teacher usually passes into desire to contradict the teaching. Bold defence of the truth provokes boldness on the other side. The bravado of her champions has made many enemies to the truth. Defend truth – but do not arm her: then she will be spared much warfare.

Men who never take back their words love themselves more than truth.

“When you doubt,” says M. de Servan, “you leave an error behind.” He should have added that you often leave a truth behind in the same way.

To make a thing tangible is the next thing to making it clear; and to make it imaginable the next thing to making it tangible. So you render a great service to the truth when you present it to the imagination.







## ON PHILOSOPHY

Myself, whence, where, why, how? is the whole of philosophy: the existence, origin, place, the end and the means.

Do not confuse what is spiritual with what is abstract, and remember that philosophy has its Muse and should not be a mere laboratory of arguments.

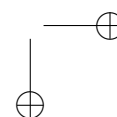
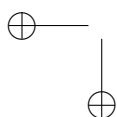
Metaphysics is valuable to those men whose minds wander about in the higher regions: but those who never leave the earth do not need it; morality takes its place with them.

Religion is the only philosophy which the common mind is able to understand and adopt.

Anybody who does not feel the distinction which should be made between the terms “beauty” and “the beautiful,” “truth” and “the true,” *ideal* and *abstract* is a bad metaphysician.

What leads us astray in morality is excessive love of pleasure. What pulls us up and delays us in metaphysics is the love of certainty.

In the realms of ontology, a void is needed for the mind and its evolutions, especially if that mind be wingéd. This diffuse light, without displaying any object, without giving knowledge, perfects the sight; aids perspicacity; and increases





understanding. It is a luminous region, where even error is transparent and does not cloud the mind.

Often a philosophical system is only a new error which nobody knows how to confute because it had never existed before, and there has not been time to prepare to make war on it.

Be on your guard, when you are reading philosophical books, against words which have failed to pass into general usage and are only fit to form a language apart.

It is vain to say that metaphors are not as necessary to philosophy as are abstractions. So have recourse to abstraction when metaphor fails you, and to metaphor when the abstraction is wanting. Grasp the evidence, and demonstrate it as well as you are able: that is the whole art and principle of metaphysics.

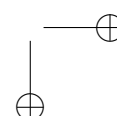
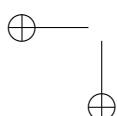
How many people become abstract in order to appear profound! Most abstract terms are shadows that conceal a void.

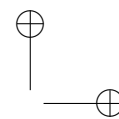
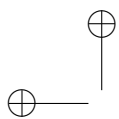
Logic operates, metaphysic contemplates.

Try to reason broadly! Truth need not be found precisely in every word, so long as it is in the thought and the phrasing. As a matter of fact, it is a very good thing for reasoning to be touched with grace: now, grace will not go with too rigid a precision. Dry reasoning is a skeleton which we set playing at “knuckle-bones” in order to bring off the projected coup.

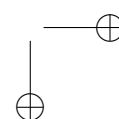
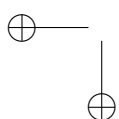
A “system” is a doctrine absolutely personal to him who originates it. If it contravenes all other doctrines it is a bad system; if it sheds light on them it is good, at least, as a system.

The mind delights in metaphysics because it meets space instead of the fullness it meets elsewhere. The mind requires a world of phantasy in which to move about and exercise





itself; and its pleasure is less in the objects than in the space it meets there. So do children like sand, and water, and everything fluid and plastic – because they can do just what they like with it.





## ON SPACE, TIME, AND THE VISIBLE WORLD

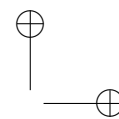
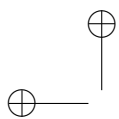
Space is the stature of God.

Storms naturally inspire religious awe in all men: remove this awe and you rob them of a service.

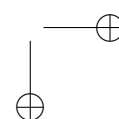
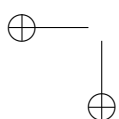
Places die like men; though they seem to live on.

When it is raining, a kind of obscurity lengthens out everything. Further, the bodily state forced on us induces a sort of meditateness which renders the soul more sensitive. The sound, continuously filling our ears, enlivens our attention and holds it under a spell. The kind of brown tint which is given to walls and trees and rocks adds yet more to the impression that these objects produce. Lastly, the solitude and silence which are spread round the traveller, since man and beast are forced to quiet and shelter, have the effect of sharpening his sensations. Wrapped in his cloak, with covered head, and making his way along deserted paths, he is impressed by everything, magnified as it is to imagination or sight. Flooded are the streams, weighed down the grasses, and the minerals shown up more clearly; the sky is nearer to the earth, and every object, bound within a narrowed horizon, seems to have greater position and importance.





There is something divine about the ideas of space and eternity which is wanting in those of pure duration and simple extension.





## ON GOVERNMENT AND THE CONSTITUTION

Politics is the art of understanding and leading the multitude, the greater number: its glory is in leading them not where they wish, but where they ought, to go.

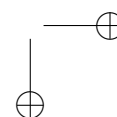
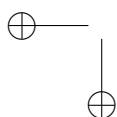
The chief need of a people is to be governed; its greatest happiness in being well-governed.

Those who want to govern favour a republic, those who want to be well governed always favour monarchy.

It is the punishment of bad princes to be thought worse than they are.

The nature of man is supple and adjusts itself to everything; this should be regarded in laws or layings-down of public morality: but in the constitution of a government attention should be given to past and present circumstances. Constitutions have been, are, and can only be, children of their age.

To bestow power where force is not, and give it counterpoise, is the secret of the political world. The more opposition there is, in a state, between power – moral strength – and actual physical strength, the better is that state constituted. There is no art, no equilibrium, nor “beauty politic” whatever in a nation where force and dominion are in the same hands, which are those of the multitude. So there is nothing splendid and absorbing in the history of democracies except when force



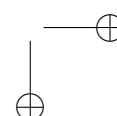
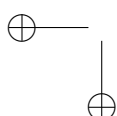


really yields place by the ascendancy of some virtuous man over the movements of the mob, which alone has force in itself unless we use the term as a fable, a fiction. Fiction! It is needed everywhere. Even politics is a kind of poetry.

The multitude does not require to hold from laws and conventions a power which it holds by its own strength. It is the power which comes from agreement only which requires to be proclaimed. In political mechanism the multitude must forget its rights, and the ruler forget his weakness.

In the execution of governance, justice must always be done for the future, but not always in retrospect. We can find consolation and resign ourselves to this by considering a melancholy truth, one which must be known but rarely called to mind. This it is: in all places and all ages, every political establishment has started by some injustice; and good laws, among all peoples, have arisen from the consolidation of what already existed.

Men are born unequal. The great benefit of society is to diminish this inequality as much as possible by procuring for everybody security, the necessary property, education, and succour.





## ON LAWS AND LIBERTY

Might and right rule everything in the world, might waiting upon right.

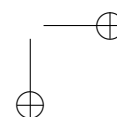
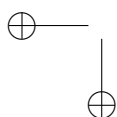
There is a right of greater wisdom; but no right of greater strength.

Insist on freedom of soul far before freedom of person. Moral liberty alone is important and necessary; the only good, the only use in other liberty is to aid that.

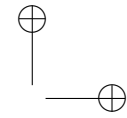
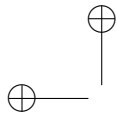
There must be no *unmeasured* liberty; no more in a well-ordered state than in conduct or life. Boundless freedom is a boundless evil.

There is no freedom unless there is a firm and powerful will to maintain acknowledged order.

There are laws and there are decrees. That only should be called law which approximates most nearly to justice, wisdom, moral obligation, the will of God. Since they are designed to hold eternal sway, laws should bear the stamp of a reason that is lifted above all particular cases. Decrees, on the other hand, are only formed to meet circumstances; the legislator frames them less as a legislator than as governor of the city. Designed for the passing hour, they need not be, as law must be, the expression of timeless reason: it is enough that prudence ordain them. In the midst of turmoil laws are silent;







then it is that decrees have voice. Laws shine forth in fine weather, and decrees in the dark days. They veil the law, just as on those occasions when worship is suspended we veil the subjects of reverence in our temples to spare them profanation.

When Providence delivers the world over to human liberty she is letting fall her most terrible scourge upon the earth.

Liberty is a tyrant governed by caprice.

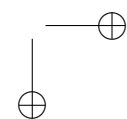
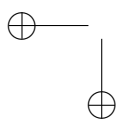
What have wise or worthy men to gain from liberty – men who live under the domain of reason and are slaves to duty? And perhaps nobody ought to be allowed what these men do not allow themselves?

Public freedom can only be attained by the sacrifice of private freedom. In that admirable state, the strong must resign something of their strength, and the weak something of their hopes. The despot alone has sovereign freedom. You cannot share liberty with anybody without yielding and losing a part of it. A moderated, shared liberty, spread abroad, is more valuable than liberty entire and concentrated. Let us remember Hesiod's words: "the half is better than the whole": intensity is not so good as expansion.

Subordination is a finer thing than independence. The first is order and adjustment; the second, mere sufficiency to oneself. The first affords a disciplined whole; the second affords only a unity in its power and plenitude. It is the contrast between a chord and a single note, between a part and the whole.

Liberty! Liberty! Universal justice will be liberty enough.

There are some crimes that fortune never forgives.





Generally, innocence is less than its protest, the fault smaller than the accusation, and misfortune lighter than the victim's plaint.

Indulgence is a factor of justice.

Indulgence must not speak too loudly, lest justice be awakened.

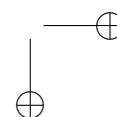
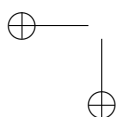
It was the old notion that justice should not arise from laws, but laws from justice.

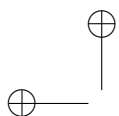
The earliest laws were but the earliest customs stabilized by the injunction of public authority. Everything which grows into law had been in the first place *custom*; and the history of our "unwritten laws" was that of the common rights of all people. The Constitution of Solon was formed just as the *Coutume de Sens*. Laws made in that way are not the worst; and the faculty of selection, adjustment, improvement, and perfect formulation is not the most inconsiderable.

The compulsion of things subdues us; human compulsion rouses us. So bind up the compulsion that you must impose on others or yourself with insensible, impassive, inflexible things like law and order!

Causes may be pleaded; but laws must not. To justify laws in public is to expose their root. The sources of law should be sacred, and for that reason veiled; and you would uncover them to the open air, to daylight! What a frightful sacrilege! When laws arise out of discussion, they no longer come from above or from the impulses of conscience; they are born answerable to bickerings.

Ever since the setting-up of Parliaments all men have, in the generality of causes, been judged by the same judges. Outside his judicial functions the judge, properly speaking,

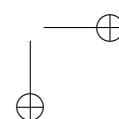
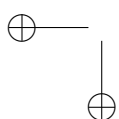




was nobody's superior. That is trial by one's peers, but by peers better qualified than oneself.

To preside successfully over a commonplace and unstable body of men, you have to share those qualities.

Men whose opinion is of great authority must take their place in the temple of wisdom, not on the seats of debate. They should be employed in decision, not in deliberation. Their voice should make laws, not majorities. Being above their fellows, they must be kept out of the ranks.





### ON MORALITY AND CUSTOMS: PERSONAL AND NATIONAL

Morality is made up of customs and habits. Custom makes public morality, and habit individual morality. If the public morality is good the morals of the individual count for little, because the offenders are held back by the bad reputation which will punish them. But when public morality is in a low state, individual morals acquire an extreme significance. They come to reproach the general state of things, and sometimes to amend it. They save *principle* by a sort of protest against the times; they preserve the sacred fire and pass it on, as a trust, to the next generation.

Poetical morality is fitting for an isolated individual, patriarchal morality for domestic life, austere morality for the public man, and a saintly morality for the priest, the aged, the sick, and the ardent Christian. Poetic morals are of the Golden Age, patriarchal morals of the Bible, grave or austere morals those of history, holy or devout morals those of legend. So if we wish to know all things that are worthy of imitation, we must give the legendary a place in our studies and our observations. What is marvellous in the lives of the saints is not their miracles but their morals. Disbelieve in their miracles, if you will; but do at least credit the morality of their lives, for there is nothing better attested.





Human nature is, in the mass, an unsteady thing trying to find its level.

In history our business is to evaluate men; in politics, to see to the needs of soul and body; in morals, to improve ourselves; in literature, to delight and adorn our minds by the clarity, form, and colour in words; in religion, to give our hearts to heaven: everywhere, to better all things within ourselves. Look then in human history for what is true and what is not; in politics, for what is useful and what is not; in morality, what just and what unjust; in literature for what is beautiful and what is not; in religious matters, what is pious and what is not: in everything, to sum up, look for what tends to better or worse.

Few men are worthy of experience. The majority let it corrupt them.

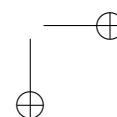
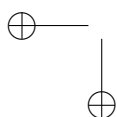
Times affect us just as do places: we live equally in them both; we are surrounded by them, they touch us, fashion us, leave always some impression on us. Unhealthy places and decadent times infect us by their contagion.

All of us are more or less echoes; and, despite ourselves, we repeat the good and bad qualities, the actions and the character of those among whom we live.

We have received the world as a legacy which none of us is allowed to impair, but which, on the contrary, every generation is bound to bequeath in a better state to its posterity.

To ask that human nature be infallible and incorruptible is to ask the winds to be motionless.

Some opinions come from the heart, and if a man has no fixed opinion he has no fixed sentiments.





The true opinions of men are formed slowly, by something habitual and not by anything sudden. The constraint or, more properly, retention is exactly suitable to making them more sincere, more living, more thorough, and more lasting.

To have entertained a number of opinions gives the mind a great deal of flexibility, and strengthens it in its preferences.

The populace is capable of virtue, but incapable of wisdom. Being more sound in its judgments than in its preferences, it can recognize but cannot choose. There is more sense than is supposed in that epigram against a butcher who, being in need of counsel, made his appearance at the courts, in the great hall, and there made his choice – of the fattest.

In the uneducated classes the women are better than the men: in the refined classes, on the contrary, we find that the men are superior to the women. The reason is that man is more likely to be rich in acquired virtues; and woman in native ones.

Men, even in spite of immense favours, never have a steadfast regard for those who debase them.

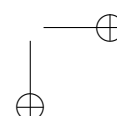
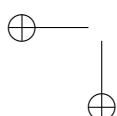
Every age is pleased with the opposite of its faults; even when that be faulty too.

Extravagance among poor people ruins the state.

Every form of extravagance corrupts either one's morals or one's taste.

The idea of peace, as well as of intelligence, is bound up with that of study, and makes it respected and almost envied as a means of happiness by even rough people.

A people, eager for literary distinction yet not over well endowed with wit, is naturally forced to plunge into scholarship,





its resource. Nature gives more patience to those minds which she has made less perspicacious.

Rank is a dignity due to the presumption that we shall act worthily, because our forefathers did so.

In every period, even the most enlightened, there is something we could most aptly call a “spirit of the age,” a sort of atmosphere which will pass away, but which, so long as it endures, misleads everybody as to the significance and even the truth of most of the views that hold sway.

There is something quarrelsome in the composition of man and nation alike. Why should we lament, when this spirit of disagreement and contest exercises itself on trifles? Such times are fortunate. The evil to be feared is that which attacks and disturbs the fundamentals of social order.

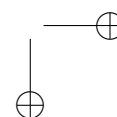
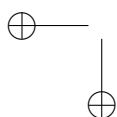
It seems to me that nations love dangers, and when there are none to be found create them to fill the want.

In times of revolution the poor man is uncertain of his probity, the rich of his possessions, and the guiltless of his life.

To flatter the populace amid political storms is like telling the waves to guide the boat, and the pilot to give way to the waves.

What makes civil war more bloody than any other is that we can more easily reconcile ourselves to have our foe as a contemporary than as a neighbour: nobody wants to risk having vengeance so close at hand.

The French are born to levity; but they are born to moderation as well. Their disposition is lively, pleasant, and not very *impressive*. Even their sages seem, in their writings, like young men.





Apart from their domestic affections, no lasting feeling is possible to the French.

Newspapers and books are more dangerous in France than in other countries; for in France every man would be something of a wit: and if he be dull he always attributes wisdom to the author he is reading, and is anxious to think or speak in the same way.

Our devotion to the arts in France seems to be more a matter of connoisseurship than of enjoyment.

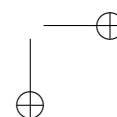
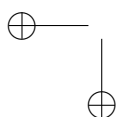
The French used to be a *moral* people, even in their vices, which did little to make them attached to material things; while the Dutch, for instance, were a materialistic race, even in their virtues – love of work and love of thrift. We have to this day in France a homely expression which is a relic and an indication of the high-minded and disinterested nature of our former morality. In our provincial towns they say of a man who loves to hoard: He sticks to the material – a very philosophical phrase which assuredly does honour to a nation that employs it.

From England there have come over, like fogs, metaphysical and political ideas that have obscured everything.

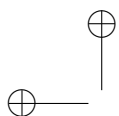
Englishmen are honest in their own affairs; but faithless in the affairs of their nation.

The English are brought up to reverence serious things; the French, to make fun of them.

Politeness of manners and barbarism of morals; the weakness of ignorance and the presumption of success; native crudity with yet an assumed finish; vices which are a thousand years old and will last for ever, springing as they do from race, custom, and climate; virtues a day old which cannot last, since they are not inherent but the gloss of culture: a people,

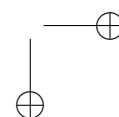
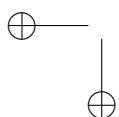






in sum, of which something impossible has been made, and which is condemned to return to its early state – that is the measure of the Russians.

Are the Chinese in so imperfect a condition as we pretend? Is there in the whole world a single nation where authority, its representatives and its subjects, are more strongly and distinctly united, yet differentiated and firmly established? “They have been conquered many times,” you say; but need the institutions of a nation be held responsible for the chances and occurrences of war? Many times conquered! Yes, their emperors; but never their morale. And is not duration a sign of excellence in laws, as applicability and clearness are an indication of truth in a system of thought? Well, what people has ever had more ancient laws, laws less altered and more consistently honoured, cherished, and studied?





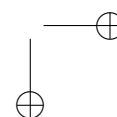
## ON OLDEN TIMES

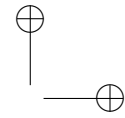
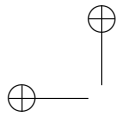
The men of old were attached to their native soil by three things: their temples, their tombs, and their ancestors. The two great chains that bound them to their government were custom and antiquity. In the modern world, aspiration and the love of novelty have changed everything. We speak not of “our fathers” but of “posterity”; we love, not our native land – that is, the country and rule of our forbears – but rather the home and dominion of our children. It is the magic of the future, not of the past, that holds us.

The word *patria* meant to a man of old “the land of my fathers,” and the sound of it went to his heart. Our “patrie,” deriving from no familiar word, is only understood on reflection, it has a mute sound, a vague sense, and cannot waken the same love in our souls. Idiom has made the adjective into a substantive with a purely moral purport; consequently it is frigid.

Ancient institutions made men materialistic; their poetry spiritualized them. They used to say that a Muse presided over the science of government.

The courtesy of the Athenians was finer than our own. It had something of the language of gallantry. Socrates, in Plato’s *Symposium*, would say to Alcibiades: “The eyes of the mind grow more penetrating when the bodily eyes grow dimmed,





and you are yet far from that age.” What a graciousness there is in the contradiction!

Euripides was reproached with having made Menelaus wicked without any necessity. The censure did honour to the critics; they looked upon gratuitous wickedness as an absurdity.

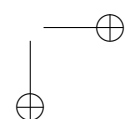
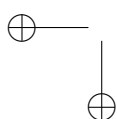
The Greeks loved truth; but they could not resist the desire to adorn it, and the opportunity of embellishing it: they liked to put the most solid truth in pleasant words.

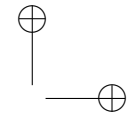
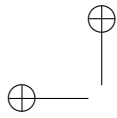
It seems to me much more difficult to be a modern than to be an ancient.

When I speak of antiquity I mean sound antiquity: for there was a sick and delirious antiquity such as that of Porphyry and Iamblichus.

God, unwilling to bestow Truth on the Greeks, gave them poetry.

Those haughty Romans had a harsh ear, which needed to be caressed long ere it was inclined to beauty. Thence the rhetorical style that is found even in their most sage historians. The Greeks, on the other hand, were endowed with perfect organs, easy to bring into play. So they were men to be moved by a touch: a graceful thought would suffice them in the plainest setting; and bare truth in description was enough for them. Above all they gave heed to the maxim: μηδὲν ἄγαν. Great discrimination and clarity of thought; words well-matched and beautiful in their own harmony, lastly, that moderation which alone carries through the impression untrammelled, gives to their fine literature its character. The prodigality of speech inimical to purity is only found in Greeks corrupted by Roman life. In the best Greek historians no rhetorical expression ever occurs: and the eloquence of their





great speakers is nearer to history than is the history of their accomplished narrators to eloquence.

The books of antiquity are an encyclopedia of style, in which we can find how everything may be expressed with subtlety, good taste, and beauty; for they speak on everything with a smooth accent and a fine choice of words. Even their mediocre works bear the impress of a good *type*. They had no more genius than we, but their art is more valuable; their native taste was better, and so were the traditions they inherited.

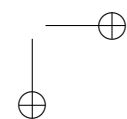
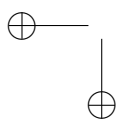
The very dregs of Greek literature affords, in its old age, a delicate residue.

Antiquity! I love your ruins better than your restorations.

Many words have changed in meaning. In olden times the word liberty had the same fundamental meaning as *dominium*. When they said “I wish to be a free man,” they meant “I want to have my part in administering the city”; while we simply mean that we wish to be independent. “Liberty” has a moral sense with us; but to them its signification was purely political.

Contempt for personal affronts was a characteristic of ancient manners.

Strength comes from practice, which is acquired in its turn by surmounting obstacles. That is why in an ancient state, where all labour was given over to slaves, the citizens would introduce athletics – wrestling, boxing, the *cestus*, to avert softness and enervation. Thus it was that the Greeks, to whom the past was a *tabula rasa*, devised their versification, their dialectic, their rhetoric as shackles for reason, mind, and language: thus acquiring nimbleness of wit, incisiveness of thought, and finish of style.



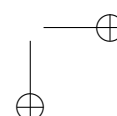
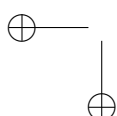


In the style of the best writers of antiquity each word is clear, it is elevated or serious and serves to reinforce a meaning complete in itself. The phrase has few limbs and few joints; it can be read at a single glance and understood by a single effort of the mind. Everything is comprehensible in itself and by itself. One is reminded of a drop of light, which the eye can penetrate with a mere look.

Generally, the men of old had no great clarity of thought; they were little given to profound enquiry. Preoccupied with *expression*, they found satisfaction enough in their own words, and only buried themselves in reflection for the sake of what beauty they could find there. We talk of their imagination, but it is their taste of which we ought to speak. For taste alone was the ruling motive of their activities, in which they applied their discrimination of what was beautiful and what was fitting. Even their philosophers were only fine writers with more austere taste.

The Greeks took pleasure in speaking their language, and in feeling it flow from their pen or their lips: it fascinated them. The reason is that their language was *easy*; and it was easy because polished turns of speech were commonplaces; the author and the man in the street spoke it with the same purity. So allusions to popular sayings are frequent in their most finished writers: Plato is full of them. Now allusion is the chief enchantment of style. It does more than anything else to refresh the mind, to enliven, relax, and revive it. We said in France of the maxim that it was the proverb of the cultured. At Athens, the maxims of the educated classes and the proverbs of the marketplace were one and the same.

The Romans heard themselves talk, and the Greeks saw themselves speak, for they desired their words to resemble their thoughts. The former aspired to harmony, majesty, impressiveness, eloquence; the latter, to clarity and grace.



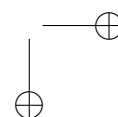


The men of old wrote their works with their minds more at ease than can we. They were not embarrassed, as we are, in a thousand ways by regard for a multitude of books which readers know and which we are thus forced perpetually to be citing or combating. Being thus obliged, either to maintain a harmony, or else to set ourselves in discord, with every book in existence, we play our part in the midst of cacophony: they sang their solo in peace.

It is rhetorical to use classical authority for purposes of declamation; but to respect that authority is a moral duty. The philosophy which gives heed to it is more suave in argument: more persuasive and better fitted to enlighten. Ancient writings breathe forth a spirit of wisdom which enraptures the soul and penetrates to its depths.

The men of old had far more stability and dignity of mind than we. Thence the temperateness of their language and the excellence of their taste.

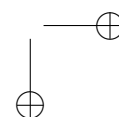
A pathetic, elevated, harmonious style, fitted to the eloquence of a tribune, came as easily to a Greek or a Roman as the witty and polished, neat and lively, playful and flattering style does to a Frenchman. The spirit of intimate and social life dominates us, as the spirit of public life dominated the men of old. They were taught from childhood, and trained in youth, to address the multitude; we, to talk to individuals. Their language was full of similes and impressive phrases; ours abounds in two-faced words and ingenious turns of speech. It was easy for them to sustain earnest and moving discourse, as it is for us to keep on saying pleasant things. Cicero's letters are extremely short; and there is little charm in them. His speeches, on the other hand, are an inexhaustible fund of charm; in them his wit is varied, fertile, and never seems to tire. Cicero would have found it as hard to write a letter like Voltaire as Voltaire to speak like Cicero. It would have





cost a Roman wit great pains to write such a letter as that which Caraccioli attributes to Clement XIV. A Roman lady, Volumnia, the mother of Coriolanus, for instance, would never have succeeded in forging a letter worthy of Mme de Sévigné. However, an Athenian flower-seller might perhaps have achieved it. It is well said that every language has its own character; but, like every other form of national wealth, the wealth of a language arises from the commerce in which men have employed it.

We can say nothing without jumbling and rumpling it up. The ancients, on the contrary, smoothed down everything and spread it out.





## ON THE AGE

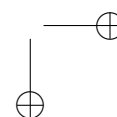
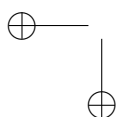
We live in an age that abounds in superfluous ideas and lacks essential ideas.

Since tradition and authority are destroyed, every man indulges in the habits and deportment that his own nature prompts: when he is naturally gross, they are gross. What lamentable ages these are, in which each of us measures everything by his own standards, and goes, in the Biblical phrase, by the light of his own lamp!

Few thoughts and infinite apprehensions; much sensibility and little feeling – if you prefer to put it so, few fixed ideas and many floating ideas; emotions acute but never constant; disbelief in moral obligation and faith in novelty; positive minds and wavering opinions; the assertiveness of doubt; self-assurance and contempt for others; attention to every fanatical doctrine and indifference to cultured thought: these are the faults of our age.

There are no irreconcilable enmities to-day; for disinterested feeling has gone. The good is born of evil.

Why are we all so sensitive to impressions of pleasure and pain? Not thus did our fathers go through life. We are more unstable; our minds are less filled; we have lost gravity of feeling and strength of purpose. The man who has a moral







goal in view and makes straight towards it troubles less about what is on the road.

Our reformers call experience a dotard, and the past a child.

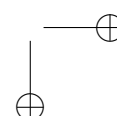
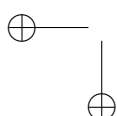
Civilization – grand, much-abused word! Its proper meaning is, that which makes us “civil.” So civilization can come through religion, modesty, benevolence, and justice; for all these are things which bring men together. “Incivilization,” or the return to barbarity, comes from the spirit of squabbling, irreligion, shamelessness, effrontery, general striving, insistent self-love, lust for gain; of all those things which sever men from each other, and attach us only to ourselves.

We live in the midst of conjunctures so strange that the old are as inexperienced as the young. We are all novices, where all is new.

Among the Greeks a philosopher was a metaphysician; in France, as we use the term now, he is a reformer. He is a man who strives to make his way by the light of his own reason, never by that of other men’s: who summons everything that humanity respects before the tribunal of his own mind; and prefers his private views and standards of conduct to the established morality, law, and custom.

The philosophical spirit of the last century was but a spirit of contradiction in morality and law. The spirit of contradiction detracts from profound enquiry; it is serviceable, for it requires no pains; but at the same time it is fatal, destructive. The spirit of assent demands much more intelligence, consideration and knowledge; it is laborious, yet it is beneficial, conservative, and refreshing.

All our plans for betterment or advance have a persistent hyperbole of intention which carries our aims above and beyond the end in view.





In politics, most of us are possessed by a flame which can only torment us; and light that can only bewilder.

Let us have a philosophy that is friendly to antiquity and not to novelty: a philosophy whose aim is to be serviceable rather than brilliant, preferring wisdom to audacity. Presumption is always in favour of what has been: for if it has been, and subsisted, there was a reason for its existence and its duration, and that reason could only be its suitability to what was already in existence – or else, a need of the time or of nature, some necessity, at all events, which will bring it back if it is destroyed, or will make its absence sorely felt.

Nothing makes the literary mind so imprudent and rash as does ignorance of the past and disregard of old books.

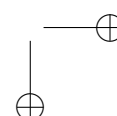
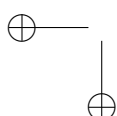
Let us have the virtues of our age as well as its faults; as victims of the evil, we must cherish its compensations.

If nations must come to old age, let it be at least grave and venerable, not frivolous and dissolute.

There is a perpetual demand for new books; and in those which are old possessions there are priceless treasures of learning and culture unknown to us because we are careless of them. That is the great drawback of new books: they keep us from reading the old.

The men of old were eloquent because they were used to addressing multitudes who were ignorant and athirst for knowledge. But what hope is there of persuading or teaching men who think they know everything? We speak to armed critics rather than to friendly readers.

Our fathers judged books by taste, conscience, and reason: we judge them by the emotions they arouse in us. “Is this book harmful or helpful?”: “Is it one that will improve our minds or corrupt them?”: “Will it do good or harm?” These





were the weighty questions our fathers put to themselves. We simply ask: Will it give pleasure?

French authors think, write, speak, judge, and create too quickly. It is the result of our fundamental vice of conduct: we are too anxious to live and enjoy ourselves; we snatch the pleasures of life too hastily.

I can see vigour everywhere in the books around me: but I look in vain for intelligence. Ideas! Who has any ideas? There are approvals and disapprovals; the mind works by its agreements or its rejections; there is judgment, but there is no vision.

Nearly everybody nowadays has surpassing subtleties of style; the art has grown common. Exquisiteness is universal; but there is nothing satisfying to be found. As a witty woman said: "I should like to smell the dung."

Contemporary literature is admirable in its masonry; but weak in architecture.

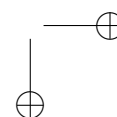
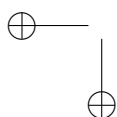
It is because we can do without poets that we have none. Our taste can dispense with them since they have no part in our conduct, nor in our governance, nor in our political displays, nor in our domestic pleasures.

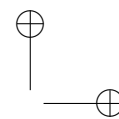
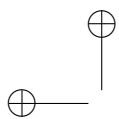
The first poets or authors made foolish men wise. Modern writers seek to make wise men foolish.

One of the bad things about our literature is that our scholars have little wit, and our men of wit are not scholars.

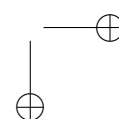
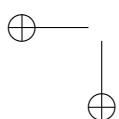
It is very rarely that one finds any but clear words, or any but confused thoughts.

Some discoveries can only be attained by making a détour. Our moderns persist in taking their direct courses; but the Platonic circuits were a surer way.





How many scholars there are who hammer out knowledge;  
hard-working, enthusiastic, indefatigable Cyclops – with only  
one eye!





## ON EDUCATION

The idea of order in everything – literary, moral, political, and religious order – is the basis of all education.

Children stand more in need of example than criticism.

Education should be gentle and stern; not cold and lax.

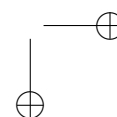
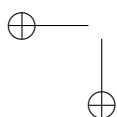
Too much severity congeals our faults and makes them set; while indulgence will often cause them to pass away. A good praiser is as essential as a good corrector.

Teach children virtue, but do not try to teach them feeling. Good sense can come from the judgment of others, and kindness by precepts, for virtue is acquired; but assumed sensibility is an odious form of hypocrisy: it offers a mask as a face.

We must always bear in mind that education does not consist merely in decking the memory and clarifying the understanding; it must above everything be concerned with *directing the will*.

It would be possible so to order the training of man that all his predilections should be truths, and all his sentiments virtues.

When you are bringing up a child, picture him as an old man!





The *direction* of our mind is more important than its progress.

We must allow everyone his degree of wit, his own character and temperament, and be content to improve *those* in him. Nothing save its natural course befits a mind; thence are derived its ease, its grace, and all real or apparent accomplishments. Anything which strains the mind does it harm: to overtax its resources is to ruin it. We all bear within us some indications of our destiny. We must not obliterate them, but follow them; otherwise our ways of life will be discordant and miserable. Those who are born delicate should live delicate, yet sane; those who are born robust should live robust, yet temperate; those who have a soaring mind should keep their wings, and the others keep their feet.

It is a great advantage for superior minds to have received only the education common to other men; for it makes them more fellow-like.

Some admirable sciences, necessary to society, have yet no cultural value. Mathematics is such an one.

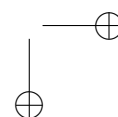
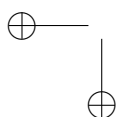
So much knowledge of painting and music as can be gleaned from books suffices a liberal and lettered education.

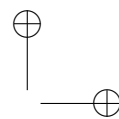
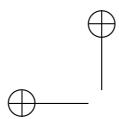
It is easier to find beauty in regularity than in disorder; for the latter repulses beauty, and only by a singular power, a rare endowment of nature, can we unite them. So regularity should be given to beginners as their model. It is the privilege of the masters alone to set themselves another.

In a professional teacher it is mere foppery to fear the name of pedant.

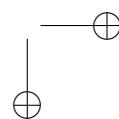
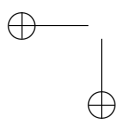
To teach is to learn twice.

A professor's works should be the fruit of long experience, and the occupation of his leisure.





“Inspire, but do not write,” says Lebrun. This should be enjoined on professors: but their wish is to write, not to follow the Muses.





## ON THE ARTS

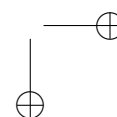
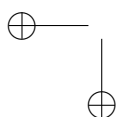
The object of art is to unite matter to forms, which are the truest, fairest, and purest things that Nature has.

Far from relegating the arts to the class of beneficial superfluities, we must number them among the most precious and important blessing of human society. Were there no arts, it would be impossible for exalted minds to make understood the greater part of their ideas. The most perfect and just of men could only experience a part of the joys to which his goodness makes him susceptible and of the happiness that nature designed for him. There are emotions so subtle and things so exquisite that they could never be expressed save by colours and sounds. We should regard the arts as a sort of language apart, as a unique medium of communication between ourselves and the denizens of a higher sphere.

The abstract “beautiful” is beauty seen with the eyes of the soul.

The loveliest expressions, in all the arts, are those which appear born of lofty contemplation.

A *μίμησις* should be made up of images alone. If the poet is giving speech to a man in a passion, he should put in his mouth phrases which are but the *image* of the words a man really so would use. If a painter is colouring some object, his







colours, in the same way, must be no more than images of the actual colours. The same principle should be observed by the comedian in choosing his tones and gestures. It is the great rule, the first rule, the only rule. All first-rate artists have recognized and observed it, although no man may have yet propounded it. I do so now with the more confidence since it is proved by its own evidence, like all principles which are born of the nature of things.

Ordinary actuality, stark realism, can never be the objective of art. Illusion upon a sound basis is the secret of the fine arts.

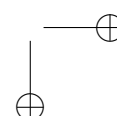
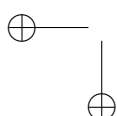
Many of the beauties of art are only made natural by force of art.

Good *lines* are the foundation of all beauty. In some arts they must be visible, as in architecture, which confines itself to displaying them. In others, like sculpture, they should be carefully disguised. In painting they are sufficiently veiled by the colours. Nature conceals, transcends, and recovers them as living beings. The latter, to be beautiful, should reveal lines little; for the skeleton is in the lines, and life in the contours.

Grace is the natural vesture of beauty; strength without grace, in art, is like a flayed body.

The adolescence of art is elegant, its manhood pompous, and its old age rich but overloaded with ornaments that conceal decay. We should aim persistently to recall art to its virility, or, better still, to its youth.

Among the relics of classical art there is a Venus holding out a drapery, a kind of floating veil, which she is about to gather round her. This is the statue we might call "Venus Pudica," for the accessory is so contrived that her nakedness inevitably turns one's thoughts to her modesty.

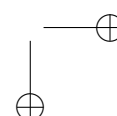
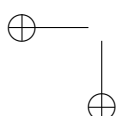




There is a type of man so obsessed by passion for the arts that he no longer looks upon art as a thing made for the world, but upon the world – morals, mankind, and society – as things made for art. Subordinating everything, even morality, to statuary, men of this type mourn nakedness, gymnastics and athletes through their devotion to sculptors! The reason is that they care for art more than morality, and for figures in marble more than for their own children.

Some day, good taste, religion and policy will combine to proscribe the meaningless allegory with which we are given to decorating our sepulchral monuments; exhuming, so to speak, the bones of our dead, to represent them upon the very marble that covers them. The men of old sealed up in an urn the ashes of their loved ones, nothing more – we, to whom everything should recall at every hour the final home of our beloved dead, set it about with bogies fit to make our thoughts recoil from it. When we give to these skeletons decked in sable flummery a mien of authority and power, an air of anger and menace, what do we do but make the dead man odious or absurd to the eyes of the living?

That much-vaunted purity of outline in the works of Raphael and of the Greeks is wholly dependent upon the fine type of nature they selected. Even they would have found it impracticable if they had only commonplace natures to portray. So pure outline must not be confused with exact outline. Rubens is a supreme draughtsman; but the quality of the subjects he had to paint, their ragged and uneven forms, their rough contours, forced him to make the final lines of his design *protuberant*, so to speak, rather than clear, finished with elegance and precision. It is the same with Pigalle's works, if you compare them with those of Bouchardon. Only a pure, light, elemental, ideal nature is susceptible enough to admit and entertain purity of outline and perfection of colouring.





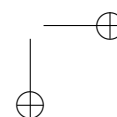
When a painter is depicting an event he cannot put too many figures on his canvas; but he cannot put too few if his only aim is to portray an emotion.

Our sculptors and painters show us little more than uninhabited frames. The most able, such as Gérard, make life their ultimate aim; and create none but living bodies. Yet it is not enough, even to attain the purpose of art, that a figure appear animated by an emotion: it must be an emotion in which the soul has place. No painter or sculptor will achieve anything truly beautiful unless he can express, in all his creations, the human soul in its spirituality and its immortality.

David, lift up your genius and your seated Andromache!

Our dancers ennoble what is vulgar; but they degrade what is heroic.

It is not always essential, in music, to express a marked impulse or a distinct emotion. Song itself may be the objet of song. If it show a soul in harmony, a talent which rises and falls again by a lovely scale of sound, an existence that, freed from care and given over to a thousand passing, swift impressions, livens up and disports itself between earth and heaven; in fine an untrammelled mind which flies about at hazard, like the bee, stops to touch a thousand objects, fixing itself upon none; caresses every flower and hums forth its joy, then that showing is as goodly as another.



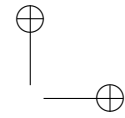
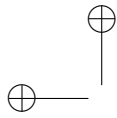


## ON POETRY

What, you ask, is poetry? At the moment I have no idea, but this I will say: every word used by a true poet holds a kind of phosphorescence for the eyes, a kind of nectar for the taste, an ambrosia for the mind which is in no other words.

Plato taught that all created things are but the expression of a concept in the mind of God, which he called the *idea*. The idea is to the image what cause is to effect. Therefore, maintained the philosopher, as everything is but a copy of the idea, the image but a copy of the thing, and words, in their turn, but a copy of the image, the poets who boast of their art are yet creating but copies of a copy of a copy, and consequently only something infinitely faulty, because it is infinitely remote and different from the true model. Plato desired to make out a case against poetry; and his accusations were worthy of poetry and of himself. But I would defend the Muse; and, adopting his assumptions, turn them all in favour of her whom he banished, and make them a crown for her head. I would say, with deference to Plato; all terrene things are flawed and perishable, save only the forms which are the embodiment of the idea. Now, what does the poet do? With a certain ray, he purifies and empties the forms of matter, and shows us the universe as it is in the mind of God. He extracts from all things only their celestial element. His portrayal is not a copy of a copy, but an impression of





the archetype, a hollow plaster, if I may put it so, light to carry, which enters the memory easily, and sinks into the soul's depths, there to yield us delight in our moments of leisure.

Nothing is poetry unless it carries us away. The lyre is, in a manner, a wingéd instrument.

Lovely verses are breathed forth like sounds and scents.

Poetry consists above all in spirituality of ideas.

A poem needs not only poetry of images; but poetry of ideas.

Poets are children with grandeur of soul and a celestial understanding.

Poets have a hundred times more good sense than philosophers. In their quest of beauty, they come upon more truths than philosophers in their quest of truth.

The inarticulate voice of passion is not more natural to man than is poetry.

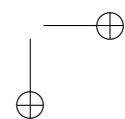
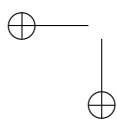
Poetic talent is born in alert minds from the impotence of reason.

To be a good man and a poet, it is necessary first to drape the objects of one's contemplation, and to look upon nothing in its nakedness. At least, to interpose goodwill and a certain amenity.

Beautiful poems, epic, dramatic, lyrical, are nothing other than the dreams of a wise man awake.

One of the principal causes of the corruption and degradation of poetry is that verses are no longer made to be sung.

There is no poetry at all to be found when none is brought.





Mere intellect has no part in true poetry: with which we are endowed as a gift of heaven, which comes from the soul alone, comes to us in a waking dream. But whatever it be, it is never attained by meditation. Yet the mind does prepare the way for poetry, in some measure, setting before the soul things discovered by reflection. Emotion and knowledge, these are the impulse and the material of poetry. The material, unimpelled, is of no avail; the impulse, without substance, would be of more: a poetical temperament which remains passive does at least make itself felt by its owner, and yields him happiness.

Poetry has no utility save for the soul's delight.

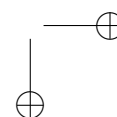
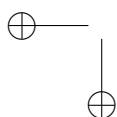
The base, the foundation, the essence of poetic beauty is the contemplation of an ordered scheme of things by an ordered mind.

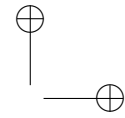
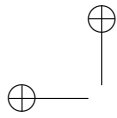
The poet must be not only the Phidias and the Dædalus of his verses, but their Prometheus too; as well as form and movement he must breathe into them soul and animation.

High poetry is chaste and reverent of its essence, let us say, even, of its situation; for it is naturally placed above the earth, near neighbour of heaven. From that height poetry, like the souls of the immortals, sees the spiritual, the intellectual, but very little of the corporeal aspect of things.

He who has never known reverence will never become a poet. The example of Voltaire himself does not belie the statement. He was once a child, and it is proof that he had been under the sway of religious impressions that he spent his life in recalling them, disparaging them, and doing battle against them.

Even when the poet is speaking of things he wishes to show as hateful, he must maintain a calm style, a temperateness





of language; he must spare the foe, preserving the dignity of a soul that is above circumstance. Let him bear in mind Lucan's beautiful phrase: "Pacem summa tenent."

You wish to understand the mechanism of thought, and its intents? Read the poets! You wish to understand morality, politics? Read the poets! When something delights you in their works, search it to its depths: it is truth. Poetry should be the chief study of a philosopher who wishes to understand mankind.

The philosopher meditates upon himself; but the poet asks himself questions.

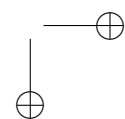
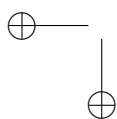
The epic poets who represent a communication, open everlastingly, between earth and heaven, maintained by beings half-human, half-divine, have only called up before our imagination a confused picture of the true state of the world, in which there is much more that is worthy to be known yet hidden from our eyes.

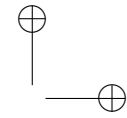
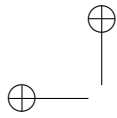
The true poet has words to reflect his thought, thoughts which display his soul; and a soul in which everything is distinctly imaged. His mind is full of the clearest images; while ours are only filled up with confused impressions.

Poets are more inspired by the image than by the actual sight of their subject.

Other writers put forward their ideas for our consideration; poets grave theirs upon our recollection. Their language, less by its mechanism than by its spiritual nature, is the sovereign ally of the memory. It proceeds from the forms of their words, and from the images of the things they have touched upon.

Poets need ideas that are volatile, pure, clear, and rounded off; and words to match the ideas.





A fine piece of poetry is always like an impromptu conceived at leisure. Of those that have not a spontaneous birth, that do not issue at once from the womb of peaceful reverie, one may say “proles sine matre creata.” They have all something imperfect and unfinished about them.

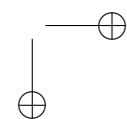
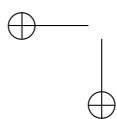
Every word used by the poet sounds so clear a note and offers a sense so distinct that our attention, delighted to be thus caught up, can also release itself with ease and pass on to the succeeding words. Then there is another pleasure in store: the surprise of beholding common words grown noble, outworn words restored to their first freshness, and obscure words bathed in light.

The eloquence of oratory rolls on like the flood of a river. But in poetry there is more art: jets, cascades, sheets of water – every kind of verbal play is carefully indulged, to heighten the charm of the verse by variety.

A poet should not walk across a space which he can clear at a bound.

Sometimes the creative mind will take leave of one emotion and leap clean away to reach another of which it feels the call. The stanzas of an ode frequently show examples of this. There is, none the less for that, an indissoluble link between them; they are united by the bonds of necessity, bonds that are eternal, heaven-sent, and irresistible.

Some poetry seems to be nimble, where it is only restless; it shows movement yet no progress: it has no wings, but paws, feet, joints in which the jerkiness is perceptible. High poetry must go with giant strides, not tread slowly along. When it has to present rapid movement, it must assume the mobility of a Homeric god: “he takes a step, and he is there.”







The poet needs a theme which affords him a kind of unreal setting that he can expand or contract at will. A locality too authentic, a population too “historical,” imprison the mind and hamper its movements.

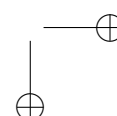
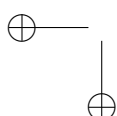
A lengthy work can be composed only by a sustained evenness of energy, movement, and attention. Thence it is that the writing of an epic naturally demands one kind of verse throughout; that kind in which accomplishment calls for the highest serenity and wisdom.

It is necessary for the success of an epic poem that half of the general idea and the mythology be already in the readers’ heads. The poet must address a public also interested in what he himself wishes to tell. Thus will both author and reader be in an epical state of mind, a conjunction or conjuncture which is really indispensable.

Poetry builds with slight material, with leaves, grains of sand, with airy – nothings. But, whether it be transparent or solid, sombre or radiant, deadened or sonorous the material of poetry must always be artistically wrought. So the poet may construct with air or with metal, with light or with sound, with iron or with marble, even with brick or clay: he will always achieve a good work if he knows how to be a decorator in details and an architect of the whole.

Like the bee’s nectar that changes flower-dust into honey, or the liquor that changes lead to gold, the breath of a poet inflates words, giving them lightness and colour. He knows wherein lies the charm of words, and the art of rearing them into an enchanted palace.

In everyday language, words serve to recall objects; but in the true language of poetry objects always have the effect of evoking the words.





## ON STYLE

Man loves to move what is movable, and to vary what is variable: thus it is that each century stamps some change upon languages; and the same spirit of invention which created them lives on to make them degenerate.

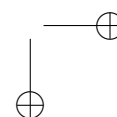
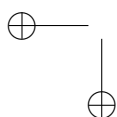
To restore to words their physical and primitive meaning is to furbish them, to purify them, to give them back their original precision. It is recoinng money and putting it into circulation again brightened up; renewing the worn-out printing by fresh type.

It is not pleasant to find in a book words that one would not allow in speech, and which distract attention, not by their beauty, but by their strangeness. Yet they are tolerable, even agreeable, in old authors, for there they are a fact of literary history; they illustrate the birth of the language, while in modern writers they only show its degeneracy.

Words, like glasses, obscure everything which they do not make more clear.

There is a great art in introducing pleasant ambiguities into one's style.

There are times when the vague word is preferable to the precise term. As Boileau puts it: there are graceful obscurities; there are noble ones; there are even a few that are necessary.





These force on the imagination something that the mind could never see in its clarity.

The finest ages of literature have always been those when writers have weighed and counted their words.

With some authors, thoughts beget style: with others, style begets thoughts.

In many cases you can recognize an exceptional writer, whatever he may say, by the rhythm of his phrase and the fascination of his style – as a well-bred man, wherever he may go, can be distinguished by his bearing.

Within a great language there is a special type of language which I would call “historical,” because it only expresses matters in relation to our present customs, our own governments, that condition of things which changes from day to day, and must pass. Anybody who wishes to develop a durable style of writing should be exceedingly temperate in using it.

Before using a fine word, make a place for it!

Ideas never lack words; it is the words that lack ideas. As soon as an idea is brought to its last degree of perfection, the word comes to light and presents itself as the garment.

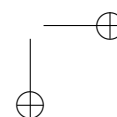
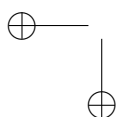
The tempered manner alone is classic.

It is with some literary expressions as with colours: time must soften them before they please everybody.

Those who have no thought beyond their words, and no vision beyond their thoughts, have a very *decisive* style.

If something very subtle is to be made evident, it must be coloured.

The logic of style exacts a more sound judgment and a higher intuition than are needed to connect perfectly all the parts





of the most spacious philosophic system; for words and their combinations are infinite in number, and no system, suppose it as vast as you will, could embrace such a multitude of details. Moreover, speculations afford a certain compass, and so a multitude of points; and it is enough for them to touch each other at one point. In literary style, on the contrary, each component is so volatile and subtle that in some manner it eludes contact. And yet the contact must be achieved; for it can only be perfect – or nothing. There is but a single point of correspondence, and that adventitious, between one word and another. A great writer needs more perspicacity of mind, more delicacy of touch, than a great philosopher.

To write well, mingle over-lively metaphors with constrained metaphors, and pronounced symmetries with blurred symmetries.

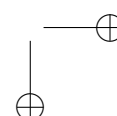
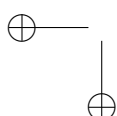
Conciseness of style goes with reflection. Much thinking over an idea casts it into form. When one's ideas are given little or no consideration, the expression of them is fluent and formless; so, in artless writing there is charm but no precision.

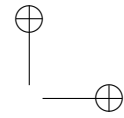
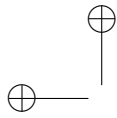
One's words must be not only audible, but visible; memory, imagination, and intelligence have alike to comply with them.

Some thoughts have no need of body, of form, of expression. It is enough to hint at them vaguely and set them in vibration: instantaneously they can be seen and heard.

Liquid, flowing words are the loveliest and the best if you consider language as music: but if you consider language as painting, certain strong words are very desirable, for they form the "strokes."

There is a kind of curt, frank style which belongs to a temperament and a vein of feeling, as does frankness of character.

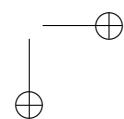
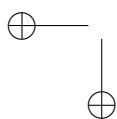




We may like it, but we have no right to exact it. Voltaire had it; the men of old had not. The inimitable Greeks always had a genuine, agreeable, likeable manner; but it was never frank. Besides, that element will not go together with others which are essential to beauty. It can be allied with greatness, but not with dignity. There is something bold and impetuous in it; but also something a little abrupt and wilful. In Virgil, Drances\* alone has a blunt manner, and in this he is modern – a Frenchman.

Sincerity of style is an indispensable quality and is itself enough to commend a writer. If we tried to write, on all kinds of subjects, like the authors of the Louis XIV period, our style would lack reality, for our moods, our opinions, our customs, are different. A writer would be justified in trying to write verse after the manner of Boileau, although he is not Boileau, because he would be merely assuming a disguise: he would be playing a part rather than aping a personality. But a woman who should aim to be Madame de Sévigné would be absurd; for she is not Madame de Sévigné. The more closely is one's literary medium dependent on the character of a man and the manner of his age, the further should one depart in style from writers who were models because they excelled in showing the manners of their period, and their own personality, in their works. In such a case good taste itself allows one to differ from the most elevated taste; for taste, even good taste, changes with the times. With regard to things which can only be mentioned and depicted by bad taste, they are better abstained from altogether. None the less, there are ways and things that are unchanging. The customs and views of the Church, for instance, should remain always the same, for mood and caprice have no place with them; and I fancy a religious orator would do well to think and write just as Bossuet thought and wrote.

\* *Æneid*, XI, l. 122 onwards.





In music every sound should have its echo, in painting every figure should have its background of sky; and we, who sing with our thoughts and paint with our words, ought also in our writings to give each word and each phrase its horizon and its echo.

The reader's mind is fascinated when the contexture of a phrase is such that one word indicates the cause of which another has denoted the effect.

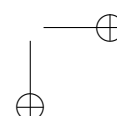
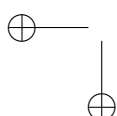
Literary style consists in giving body and shape to the thought by the phrase.

Serious urbanity is the mark of the academic style; it is the only fitting manner for a man-of-letters addressing other men-of-letters.

Notice how, in a discussion, every man gives his opinion a sententious turn. It is the most solid form of argument. It corresponds to the square in architecture. And as, in a dispute, each man seeks to fortify his position, he sets out his opinion in the manner which instinct suggests as the most able to resist attack. As for matters of acknowledged truth, which have no contradiction to fear – which can evoke no animus, if I may put it so – one generally gives them a certain rotundity, an expressive outline, a form which unites grace with substantiality and simplicity with richness. Now in literary style, truths must be laid down as if they were universally recognized.

Idioms appear by their very familiarity to bear witness of a greater sincerity. They give pleasure because they seem to come from the man still more than from the author. But they should stand in literary construction much as do folds in a drapery; they need wide spaces about them to set them off.

An inflated style leaves *pockets* everywhere; the ideas are not closely attached to the subject, nor the words to the





ideas. There are gaps in between; there is too much space, too much airiness about the whole. The word inflated, as applied to style, is one of the boldest, yet one of the most just, metaphors that has ever been ventured on. Everybody has heard it, and nobody has been surprised. The rhetorical style is another matter. It has more consistency than the other, it is fuller; but its plenitude is misshapen, or at all events excessive. It is too spacious, or too blatant, or, even, too splendid.

Images and comparisons are needed so that ideas may make a twofold impression on the mind by acquiring at the same time a physical and an intellectual force.

When the image masks the subject and the shadow is taken for the substance; when the expression is so absorbing that we are disinclined to pass beyond and penetrate the meaning; when, in fine, the form takes up our whole consideration, we are stopping in mid-journey and taking the road for the goal, and it is because we have a treacherous guide.

Since a good number of our poets have been writing prose, ordinary style has acquired a vividness and a temerity which otherwise it would have never had. It may be too that some writers of prose, who were born poets yet without the faculty of verse, have done something to adorn our speech, even in its familiar phrases, with a richness and dignity that used to belong to poetic idiom alone. There is no doubt that Greece and Rome had equally their born poets of prose: Plato, Tacitus, and one or two besides. But these men were poets through exaltation, while our moderns are so merely in the animation and swiftness of their perceptions. That is not the finest element in poetic genius. Contemplation is a more exalted quality of vision than penetration.





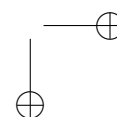
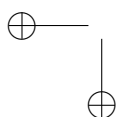
A style which “smells of the lamp,” that which a man only takes up with his pen, is composed of words which would have a strange air if taken out of their own particular surroundings. Having no existence in the world and being found only in books, they are purposeless except when they are linked together. These words have no natural ingress to the memory, for it likes brevity; they, being half-clear and half-obscure, would be only a cloud, an amorphous form in the recollection. Born citizens of the writing-desk, their sole territory is a sheet of paper. Our written language needs voice, soul, spaciousness, open air, words which can stand by themselves and find their place by their own authority.

To preserve for one’s ideas and phrases, when they are linked together in a discourse, their freedom, their air of ease and variety, they must be given each its orbit and its disk, its scope and its limits. The phrase must correspond to the thought, that is to say, not exceed its scope, not alter its form: in fine, must not lag behind nor go beyond its limits at all. It is the rotundity of meaning, in the words and the parentheses, that makes a thought rhythmic. This rotundity comes of ideas and words being turned over in the memory.

To consummate an idea! Very rarely, and after much toil, does one have that crowning satisfaction. Such it is: for thoughts so complete enter the mind without effort; they need not even be beautiful to give their pleasure, it is enough that they are final. The state of the soul that has known them communicates itself to other souls, and conveys to them its serenity.

Correctness comes only through correction.

It is possible to make conceptions clear by the use of imagery; but that is no way to sum up opinions.





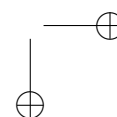


## ON THE QUALITIES OF THE WRITER AND ON LITERARY COMPOSITION

Some literary faculties are organic, others spiritual; some cultural and others natural. Gusto, for instance, is given to us; good taste is acquired. Understanding comes from the soul, and aptitude by practice. But what comes from the soul is loveliest, and what comes by nature is most divine.

Fine works are the product of spiritual delight, not of honest intentions. He who always called a spade a spade would be a sincere man and might be an admirable man, but never a good writer; for the proper and adequate word is not really sufficient in good writing. It is not enough to be clear and make yourself understood; you must please, fascinate, and spread illusions before all your readers – I mean such as illumine, not those which deceive by misrepresenting things. Now, to please and charm, truth is not enough; personality is needed, the author's own thought and emotion must make themselves felt. It is the warmth, the substance almost, of humanity which lends to everything its delightful amenity.

Enthusiasm is always calm, always unhurried, and remains an intimate possession. Explosion is not enthusiasm, nor is it the result of enthusiasm: it arises from a more agitated state of mind. Nor, indeed, must enthusiasm be confounded with warmth, which stirs us, while the former moves us: which is, after enthusiasm, the best element in inspiration. Boileau,





Horace, Aristophanes, had warmth; La Fontaine, Menander, and Virgil had an enthusiasm as fine and rarefied as could be. J. B. Rousseau had more warmth than Chaulieu, and Chaulieu more enthusiasm than Rousseau. Racine, however, was not distinguished in any such way; he was eminent for reason and taste. Everything in his work is selective, and nothing inevitable. It is in this that *his* excellence lies.

You need enthusiasm in your voice to be a great singer, in colour to be a great painter, in sound to be a great musician, and in language to be a great writer; but the enthusiasm must be concealed and almost unconscious: that is the condition of what is called charm.

There are two sorts of genius: one penetrates by a glance the quality of human life; the other, the quality of things divine and spiritual. One can hardly possess the first in its full perfection without having something of the latter: but the latter can subsist alone. The reason is, that everything human depends upon its celestial counterpart, and is related to it at every point, without there being any reciprocity. Heaven could exist without the earth; but not the earth without heaven.

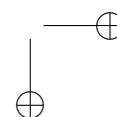
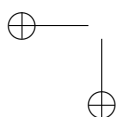
Without passion, or rather without rapture of spirit, there is assuredly no genius!

Mind dominating matter, reason subduing the passions, and taste disciplining enthusiasm, are the characteristics of beauty.

The beginning of beauty is wisdom.

True profundity comes of *concentrated* ideas.

Be profound in clear terms, not in obscure terms. Difficult things will grow easy in their turn; but your deep speculations must be made attractive; and the sombre caverns you have but lately penetrated, flooded with the pure and ancient light of ages less informed but more luminous than ours.





Ignorance, which mitigates the crime in morals, is itself a capital crime in literature.

The mind conceives in pain; but brings forth with joy.

There has never been a single literary epoch in which the prevailing taste was not unhealthy. The best writers triumph by making wholesome works agreeable to sick appetites.

Criticism is the methodical exercise of discrimination.

Taste is the literary conscience of the soul.

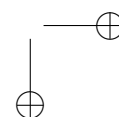
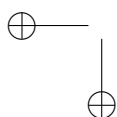
Writers who sway us are those who give perfect expression to the thoughts of other men; who awaken in the mind ideas or feelings that were struggling for birth. Literatures exist at the bottom of minds.

Those of simple life and character care little for simplicity in art; it comes as no surprise to them. Hence princes, kings, and those of high station have a better instinct in literature.

Some minds produce not from their soil, but from the manure which has been put over it.

All men of wit are worth more than their books; men of genius and perhaps scholars are worth less; as the nightingale is less than its song, the silkworm less than its industry, and the instinct greater than the animal.

Some writers are reproved for “research.” I for my part am always searching in books for the right expression, the simple expression, that best suited to the theme, to one’s thought and the feelings that animate one, to what proceeds and follows, to the situation that awaits the word. They talk of the “natural,” but naturalness can be vulgar or exquisite. The natural expression is not always that most commonly used; it is that which conforms to the *essence*. Custom is not nature; and the best is not what offers itself first, but what is durable.





There is no need to throw off a thought in its entirety, except that which it is a good thing to get rid of. Give full vent to anger, but not to friendship; to oburgation, but not to applause. Do not snuff out the mind; nor drain it either. Always keep back a part of its product, leave the bee a little of its honey for nourishment.

The fluent author always seems to have more talent than he has. To write well, you require a natural facility and an acquired difficulty.

Ease is opposed to sublimity. Look at Cicero: he wants nothing but the obstacle and the leap.

In a moment of insight you can perceive everything; but it takes years for exactitude to give it expression.

Perhaps this is not the least important advice to give a writer: only write what gives you great pleasure; for the sensation of pleasure passes naturally from the author to the reader.

Thought, like a painting, is made up of brightness and shade, obscurity and lucency.

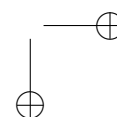
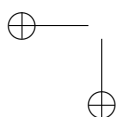
We do not really know anything at all until a long time after we have learned it.

You cannot become well-informed if you read only for your pleasure.

Young writers give their minds plenty of exercise and very little nourishment.

In every form of literary activity we have to avoid anything that can sever the mind from the soul. That is the great drawback to abstract reasonings.

There are writers who steep their creations in an artificial night, to give a semblance of depth to their shallowness, and add brilliancy to their feeble glimmerings.





It is right – it is beautiful – that our thoughts be radiant; but there is no need for them to sparkle, except at the rare instant. It is best for them to shine.

Violence is not power; some authors have more muscle than talent!

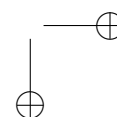
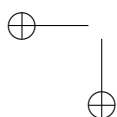
Where there is no subtlety, there is no literature. The work which only unites strength and a kind of fire without brightness simply displays a temperament. Such work can be produced by anybody with sinews, choler, blood, and egotism.

A work of art must have the appearance not of actuality, but of an idea. As a matter of fact our ideas are always nobler and finer and nearer to the soul than the things they stand for – when they correspond in other respects.

The inherent worth or worthlessness of our thoughts is the sure reason of their honour or their oblivion.

By the nature of our taste, by the qualities necessary for a subject, true or feigned, to delight the imagination and to appeal to the heart: in fine, by the admitted nature and the unchangeability of humanity, there are few themes of epic, tragedy or comedy; and, in our blending of them to make new ones, we often attempt the impossible.

One must find space to unfold one's wings. Incoherence is monstrous; but too rigid a cohesion takes away all the majesty of fine works. What I should wish is for thoughts to follow each other, in a book, like stars in the heavens, in order, harmoniously, yet at leisurely intervals, without jostling, without confusion, yet not without proper sequence, harmony, and arrangement. I should wish them, lastly, to wheel about, without holding together, so as to be able to subsist independently, like unthreaded pearls.





Humour is born of the serious side of a personality; pathos from the patience or serenity of a sufferer. So there is no humour without gravity, nor pathos without moderation. The maker of laughter should forget that he is laughable, and the mourner should disregard or keep back his tears.

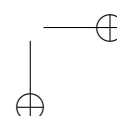
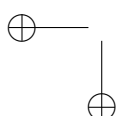
Men are only persuaded by their own wishes. So in order to dissuade them, the thing is to make them believe that what they want is not what they fancy they want.

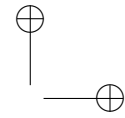
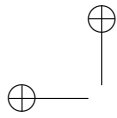
Far from copying the actual – one should always present shadows by light and defects with beauties.

The cause of long searching in composition or creation is looking in the wrong place and failing to look in the right one. Fortunately, by this roaming about you make more than one discovery; you come by happy encounters; and often a spontaneous discovery makes amends for your fruitless searchings.

Not everything in the history of nations is grave and important, and often we meet little incidents which are pleasant to contemplate and certainly not useless, either because they unbend and divert our studious reading or because the mind takes them in easily and they cling to the memory and fix there the main facts, on which they depend. A few details, following the broader statements, introduce variety. Little facts are excellent for *descriptive* purposes. They owe their existence to the manners of the times, to the temper of some personage, his tastes, habits, passions. He is a soil that has produced them, the setting in which they were seen. Great events are born of things or a combination of causes; but trivial things are born of man, spontaneous products whose seed is in the ground and which betrays its quality.

One need only mingle with a historical narrative such reflections as the intelligence of a judicious reader would not suffice to suggest to him.





The comic and the tragic author must be always thoughtful: the latter, to be equal to his work; the former, to be superior to his.

Theatres should entertain in an elevated way; but they should do no more than entertain. To endeavour to make them a school of morality is to pervert morality and art together. A “heroic,” poetic morality has no doubt its value there; but everyday morals, when they are expounded as a lesson on the boards, shrink to something indescribably farcical or tragic; no more than a comedian’s patter.

For dramatic beauty a man crushed by affliction should be crushed by long affliction: so it is with Œdipus. We must be enabled to see in his features the destiny that waits upon him, as we foresee the sacrifice as far as the arrangement of flowers for the victim’s chaplet. Niobe should preserve the traces and the beauty, so to speak, of her past prosperity.

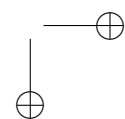
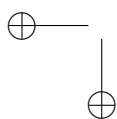
From the fever of the senses, the frenzies of the heart and the afflictions of the mind; from the disasters of the times and the great scourges of life – hunger, thirst, shame, sickness, and death – they can make many tales to draw many tears; but the soul whispers: “You are hurting me.”

“I’m hungry, I’m cold, help me!” There is material for a good deed, but not for a good work.

Does talent, then, need passion? Yes, plenty of repressed passion.

*Lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba* is no excuse. *Pagina lasciva matters, vita proba* matters less.

To attract us, there need not be love in a book, but there must be much *tenderness*.





Taste is more often employed in measuring our enjoyment than in discerning what is good.

How many people there are who, in literature, have a true ear yet sing out of tune.

Good judgment in literature is a very tardy faculty, and does not reach the last stage of its development till late.

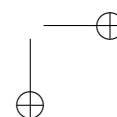
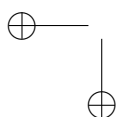
Alas! To please a corrupt people one has to depict passions as inordinate as they. Their souls, whose chaos has made violent emotions necessary, are avid of excess – so implacable is their hunger. In the same way, men accustomed to fear storms, to long for calms, to all the mighty tossings entailed by long and dangerous voyages, never appreciate the restfulness of *terra firma*, and persist in calling for the sea, with all its perils, and for the awesome tempests.

Literary matters are of the domain of the mind, to speak about them with passion is against all amenity, sense of proportion, fine thinking, and good sense. The bitter zeal for good taste which some critics display, their indignations, vehemences, and fiery outbreaks are absurd; they write about words in a manner only permissible when pleading in a moral cause. Things of the mind should be dealt with by the mind, not by violence, gall, temper.

When amenity and a measure of serenity are absent, there is no more true literature. Even criticism should have an element of politeness. If criticism dispenses entirely with the amenities, it ceases to be literature.

A criticism devoid of good nature spoils our literary taste and poisons its savours.

It is the first savours which form or corrupt literary taste.







The surprising astonishes once; but the admirable is admired more and more.

Perfection leaves nothing to be wished, from the first glance; yet it keeps always some beauty, some harmony, some virtue to be found out.

Fine works do not intoxicate; they enchant.

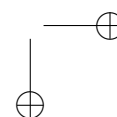
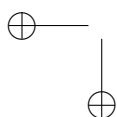
Let the last word be the last; it is like the final touch which gives colour its nuance: there is nothing to add. But what precautions we have to take not to say the last word first!

We find a book eloquent not only when it forms our emotions, but also when it fortifies our opinions.

Midway between reputation and obscurity in literature there is a path bordered wholly by an inglorious success, which, moreover, can be achieved without merit.

The vogue of a book is dependent on the taste of the age. Even a classic is exposed to variations of fashion. Corneille and Racine, Virgil and Lucan, Seneca and Cicero, Tacitus and Livy, Aristotle and Plato, only held the palm in turn. But what am I saying? In the same lifetime, according to our age, in the same year, according to the season, and sometimes at different hours of the same day, we prefer one book, one style, one mind to another.

Even to have an ephemeral success, it is not enough for a book to be written with the amenities proper to its subject; there is needed also an amenity proper to the reader. A book has to bring a man back to re-read it, in the same way as a good wine is said to attract a man to drink it again. Now, the reader can only be called back to a book by this allurements, of which there should be some element in even the most austere writings.





Take a first-rate poem to pieces; scatter apart all its expressions and make a mass, a chaos of it. Give this chaos to a commonplace writer to disentangle, and ask him to create from his fancy an existence, a work of art, out of these scattered particles. If he add nothing, yet he cannot but achieve something that will give pleasure. In the same way, change the order of every idea in a fine speech; put the deductions before the premisses, put what follows in front of what should precede: destroy and ruin to your heart's content: there will always be something in these *disjecta membra* to repay the attention of anyone who may examine them.

Mediocrity is excellence to the mediocre.

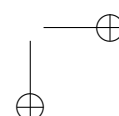
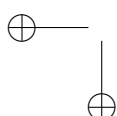
There are phantom authors and phantom books

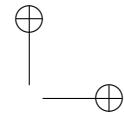
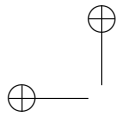
Alas! It is books that give us our greatest pleasures, and men who cause us our greatest miseries. Sometimes it even happens that ideas atone for facts, and books atone for men.

It is not enough for a work to be good; it must have a good author, and we must discern in it not only its own proper beauty, but the excellence of the hand that wrought it. It is always the artist's conception which evokes admiration. The traces of toil, the impression of artistry are an added charm if all the rest is carried through. Therefore talent should so treat all subjects, and so arrange all its works, as to be able to reveal its presence in them naturally: *Simul denique eluceant opus et artifex*.

There is little to be found in a book beyond what you bring to it. But in fine books the mind finds place to put many things.

The compass of a palace is measured from East to West, from North to South; but that of a book, of any work of art, is measured from earth to heaven; so that as much scope and





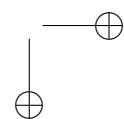
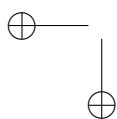
spiritual power can be found in a few pages, or stanzas of an ode, for instance, as in a complete epic poem.

The man of wisdom never composes. Of all his ideas, he admits but a few: he chooses the most important, releases them just as they are, and never wastes his time in exposition. When Triptolemus gave corn to mankind, he was satisfied with sowing it; he left to others the trouble of grinding, sifting, and kneading it.

Exquisiteness is better than bulk. Shopkeepers revere fat books: but readers like small ones; they are more durable and go further. Virgil and Horace are in one volume. Homer, Aschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Terence are no more copious. Menander, a charming writer, is cut down to a few pages. Who would know of Fénelon but for his *Telemachus*? Who would know Bossuet were it not for his *Oraisons Funèbres* and his *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*? Pascal, La Bruyère, Vauvenargues, and La Rochefoucauld; Boileau, Racine, and La Fontaine, take up but little space, and they are the joy of the subtly-minded. Excellent authors write little, because they need so much time to make their abundance or their richness beautiful.

Remember the saying quoted from St. François de Sales on the *Imitatio*: "I have sought peace everywhere, and could only find it in a little corner, with a little book." Happy is the writer who can achieve a little book of value!\*

\*We include these remarks because of their general interest. The "examples" seem curiously inapposite.





**LITERARY CRITICISM OF ANCIENT WRITERS,  
THEOLOGIANs, METAPHYSICIANS,  
PROSE-WRITERS, PUBLICISTS,  
POETS, AND NOVELISTS**

**ANCIENT WRITERS**

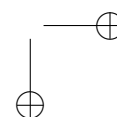
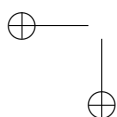
Plato is the first of speculative theologians. Never had natural revelation a more illustrious medium.

Plato found a philosophy of brick, and turned it to gold.

By nature a spirit of flame, and not merely enlightened but luminous, Plato gleams with his own inward radiance. It is the splendour of his thought which gives colour to his language. The spark within him is born of sublimity.

There rises from Plato's pages an indescribable intellectual vapour.

No translation of Homer will ever be tolerable unless every word be chosen with patient art to maintain variety, freshness, and harmony. The presentation, too, must have the primitive, stark austerity of the actions and characters that are its theme. Our modern style makes Homer grotesque; and his heroes seem like buffoons aping gravity and hauteur.





I admire in Plato the eloquence which is above all passion, and has no need to triumph over it. That, indeed, is the characteristic of the great philosopher.

Plato *displays* nothing; but he illuminates, gives penetration to our eyes, and fills us with a brightness which thenceforth lights up every subject. He does not teach; but he forms and fashions us, and makes us fit to receive all knowledge. To read him does, in some mysterious way, heighten in us the sensitiveness to perceive and admit every aspect of philosophic beauty. Like mountain air, his work sharpens the senses and brings a healthy appetite.

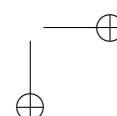
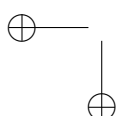
Unnecessary divagations and the exposition of the obvious, are Plato's faults. As does a child, he stirs up the limpid waters just for the pleasure of seeing them settle down again into transparency. In truth, his motive is the better to assert the traits of his character; but in this way he sacrifices the play to the actor, the fable to the masker.

The Socrates of Plato too often shows himself a philosopher by profession, instead of a philosopher simply by force of nature and goodness.

Plato should be translated in a pure style, but a style rather easy and languorous. His thoughts are detached, they have little body, and to clothe them you need only a drapery, a veil, a film of some indefinable floating quality. If you dress his ideas in a tight garb, you cramp and distort them all.

Plato was addressing a very subtle race of men, and had to speak in the way he did.

From Plato, seek only forms and ideas; they were his own quest. There is in him more light than there is subject to irradiate, more form than matter to be shaped. Plato's thought is for us to breathe, not to feed upon.





Longinus reproves Plato for some audacities which were justified by the rhetorical nature of the dialogue, the theme, and the occasion. Like high poetry, high philosophy has its licence. It has the same privilege by the same title.

Though he has admirable judgment, Plutarch often displays a singular frivolity of mind. Anything that intrigues him will distract and hold his attention. He is a master who goes to work like a pupil. I say nothing of his credulity. There is no need to blame, in that respect, the men who record those facts of which philosophy must avail itself in the composition of history.

Aristotle has exactness; ease; depth and clarity. Yet his thought sometimes goes a step further than it need; impelled by the force that will often carry a spring beyond its mark, however cautiously it has been released.

Aristotle's style seems to me to contain more formulas than phrases.

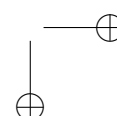
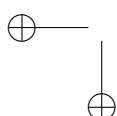
Xenophon wrote with a swan's feather, Plato with a pen of gold, and Thucydides with a bronze stiletto.

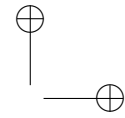
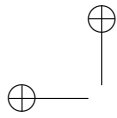
Herodotus flows on in silence.

Homer wrote to be sung, Sophocles to be declaimed, Herodotus to be recited, and Xenophon to be read. The different aims of their work would naturally give rise to very many differences of style between them.

Terence was a native of Africa; yet he has the appearance of one who has been nourished on the amenities of Athens. There is Attic honey on his lips; you could easily believe he was born upon Hymettus.

Cicero is a kind of moon in philosophy. His teaching has a very mellow radiance; but it is borrowed: a wholly Greek light which the Roman has tempered and subdued.





Cicero exhibits in his scholarship more taste and discernment than true criticism.

No writer had more audacity of expression than Cicero. He is looked upon as having been circumspect and almost timid; yet assuredly no tongue could be less so than his. His eloquence is clear; but it can flow along in mighty bursts and waterfalls at need.

We find in Catullus two things that make the worst blend in the world: sentimentality and grossness. But generally the main idea of each little poem is of a felicitous and simple turn; his airs are pretty, but his instrument is barbarous.

Horace satisfies the mind; but he does not give pleasure to the taste. Virgil is satisfying to the taste as to the intellect. It is as delightful to remember his poems as to read them.

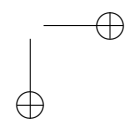
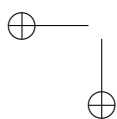
There is not in Horace a single turn of phrase, not a word so to speak of which Virgil would have cared to make use: so different are their styles.

Pliny the younger took great care over his words, but none over his thoughts.

Take away from Juvenal his spleen and from Virgil his wisdom – and you will have two bad authors.

Plutarch, in his *Moralia*, is the Herodotus of philosophy.

I consider the *Parallel Lives* one of the most precious monuments that antiquity has bequeathed to us. There are put before our eyes the noblest aspects of the human story, and there are the greatest deeds of man to be an example to us. The whole wisdom of antiquity is there. I have not the regard for the writer that I have for his work. Admirable for a thousand virtues – he would not allow his old slaves to be sold, nor even the beasts which long toil or accident had





made useless in his service – he is by no means admirable in that pusillanimity which left him floating about between the opinions of philosophers, without the courage to contradict or support them, and burdens him with a respect for all his illustrious men which is only due to those who were virtuous or just. He floods even crimes with a benign light.

Tacitus' style, although less beautiful, less rich in pleasant colours and varied windings, is yet more perfect, maybe, than even Cicero's; for Tacitus ponders all his words and makes them exact in weight, measure, number: now, the highest perfection consists in a whole with every element perfected.

#### THEOLOGIANS

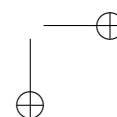
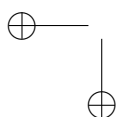
Pascal's language is suited to Christian misanthropy, a misanthropy strong and tender. As few have shared his sentiments, few have had a similar style. He was a writer of powerful conceptions; but he created nothing: that is to say, he broke no new ground in metaphysic.

Behind Pascal's thought you see the attitude of a mind austere and free from all passion. It is that chiefly which makes him so impressive.

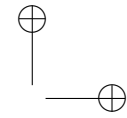
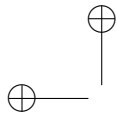
The candour and goodfellowship of the Gaul impress themselves on us magnificently in Bossuet's style. He is pompous and sublime, popular and almost ingenuous.

Voltaire is clear as water: Bossuet clear like wine. But it is enough: he nourishes and strengthens.

Bossuet makes use of every idiom; just as Homer makes use of every dialect. The language of kings, of politicians, and of warriors; of the people and of the scholar, of the village and of the schools, of the shrine and of the scaffold; the old







and the new; the trivial and the pompous; the dull and the sonorous: all serve his ends, and out of them all he creates a style simple, grave and majestic. His ideas are like his words, various, commonplace, and sublime. Every age and tradition was familiar to him; as were all subjects and languages. He was not so much a man as an embodiment of human nature, with the temperance of a saint, the justice of a bishop, the prudence of a sage, and the power of a great intelligence.

St. Thomas and St. Augustine are the Aristotle and the Plato of theology. But Thomas is more Aristotelian than Augustine is Platonic.

St. Jerome's style shines like ebony.

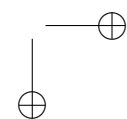
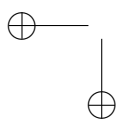
The ground-work of Massillon's sermons is poor; but their bas-reliefs are admirable.

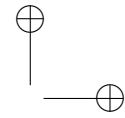
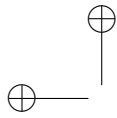
Fénelon inhabits the valleys and the hillside; Bossuet the heights and the utmost summits. One has the voice of wisdom, the other its authority; Fénelon inspires us with a taste for wisdom, but Bossuet forces us to love it with ardour and strength, forces on us its necessity.

Fénelon can pray; but he cannot teach. In philosophy he is almost divine: in theology almost ignorant.

M. de Beausset says that Fénelon "loved mankind better than he knew it." It is a charming phrase: one could not pay a wittier tribute in a reproach; or better commend the man one is reproving.

Fénelon swims, floats, works his way about in a fluid; but he is weak; he has rather feathers than wings. His virtue is that he lives in a pure element. In his precepts he talks of nothing but violence; yet he was incapable of it. Ah, how much better it would have been had he talked of spirituality and delicacy, qualities by which he excels! I attribute to him loftiness of





mind, not because he sustains himself at any great height, but because he hardly ever touches the earth. He is subtle, ethereal, but the subtlety is natural, not acquired. His dim, half-veiled mind

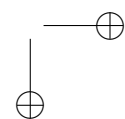
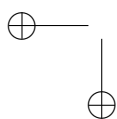
*“... qualem primo qui surgere mense  
Aut videt, aut vidisse putat per nubila lunam”*

fascinates at once by its mystery and its clearness. What makes one impatient is the indiscriminate praise he has hitherto received; exaggerated encomiums that accord little with his own tastes and methods, his own standards of poetics and criticism. The perfection of style which somehow fuses the word and the idea, so that you cannot recall one without the other, is not his; but he has a perfect one of his own; his quiet method shows the nature of his soul, the gentleness of its affections. If his manner does rather obscure his thought, it exhibits the better his feelings.

#### METAPHYSICIANS

Bacon brought his imagination to physics, as Plato had brought his to metaphysics; he was as bold and venturesome in establishing conjectures by evoking experience as Plato was magnificent in displaying appearances. Plato did at least give his ideas as ideas; but Bacon gives his as facts. So he is more misleading in physics than is Plato in metaphysics. Look at his *Historia Vitæ et Mortis*. Both, for all that, were great and luminous minds. Both made an important advance in the realm of literature; Bacon by light, firm paces; Plato by long flights.

They say that Hobbes was a “humorist” and I am not surprised at that. Ill-humour, more than anything else, gives a decisive mind and tone; it is what draws us irresistibly to





concentrate our ideas. Ill-humour is fertile of lively expressions, but, to become philosophical, it must be inspired by the unreasonableness of other people, not of ourselves: by the evil spirit of the age we live in, not by our own.

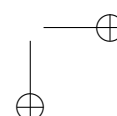
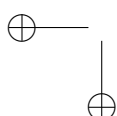
Descartes seems as if he wished to wrest from the Deity His secret, as legend says Prometheus stole from the gods their heavenly fire in order to introduce and multiply the arts upon earth. So true is this that by his own confession he thinks a hypothesis which helps him to his end is as useful, as true, as precious, as truth itself. Never was there a man more content to base his opinions on mere probability, so long as the probability was founded on his own lines of reasoning.

In Descartes' system everything is so complete that even thought cannot find light and breathing space. You are always tempted to cry out as if you were in the pit of a theatre: "Air! More air! It's stifling; we're exhausted!"

Locke argued with a kind of rigour that was more adroit than sincere or straightforward. He abused the simplicity and good faith of the scholastics. He is a cunning philosopher. Leibnitz is more frank, more sincere and enlightened. Among men who have some greatness in them, he is head and shoulders above Locke.

Locke's work is incomplete. It does not embody his subject wholly, because the author did not have it all in his mind beforehand. He pounces on particles and divides and subdivides them endlessly. He leaves the trunk for the boughs; and his work is too "branchy."

Locke nearly always reveals the original logician, but the bad metaphysician, the anti-metaphysician. In fact, he was not only devoid of metaphysic: his attitude to it was incompetent and quite hostile. His enquiries, his tentatives, were skilful but uninspired – the blind man made good use of his stick.





Malebranche evolved a method of avoiding error, and he falls into error perpetually. You could say, in his own phraseology, that his understanding had injured his imagination. Wholly occupied with the truths of his beloved physics, he uncompromisingly made them yield a morality. All his expositions are materialistic, although his every sentiment and precept was against materialism.

Our Malebranche is very rash when he scoffs at rashnesses! His own are more excessive than any he reproves. Yet the man has admirable qualities; though they are not those he has been credited with. It seems, too, that his mind never achieved the good things in his work except by induction, by means of inference from the Cartesian principles. His independence of Descartes' opinions was purely Cartesian. He was a rebel by loyalty.

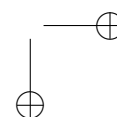
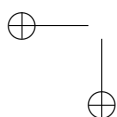
Malebranche, it seems to me, understood the brain better than the mind of man.

Misplaced scorn comes from littleness of mind, and Malebranche does exhibit it.

The word "beautiful," taken as a noun, is not to be found once in all Malebranche's writings. It seems to be a notion that never crossed his mind. The beautiful being really the welfare of the imagination, and this faculty appearing to him essentially harmful, he could only look upon its welfare as a positive evil.

Leibnitz did not stop long enough when he reached some truth; he would pass beyond it in his overhasty search for further truths. He had the nimbleness of mind which enables one to see from afar, but to see nothing fixedly.

Condillac abounds in half-truths; and the result is that we can neither give all our mind to him, nor disregard him. That is what makes him wearisome. One has a sort of uneasiness





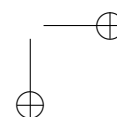
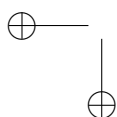
and drawn feeling in reading him. His thought is always in a false position.

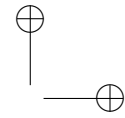
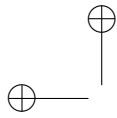
Condillac often talks of thought, and he knows enough about it; but he has never encountered the soul. He is the Saunderson of metaphysics.

Kant appears to have constructed a painful language of his own, and as it was painful to its author, so it is painful to understand. Hence it is, no doubt, that he often mistook its workings for its material. He thought he was forming ideas when he was only forming words. There is something so opaque in his phrases and in his apprehensions that he can hardly have failed to believe that they contained something solid. Our transparencies and our levities do not mislead us so far. There is a thesis to be written: call it "On the Ways in which the Mind can deceive itself, by the kind of phraseology it makes use of."

Saint-Martin's head is in the skies, but they are dark and nebulous skies, whence stray beams of light escape only to reveal clouds. He soars to heavenly themes on the wings of a bat.

Kant always has some glimmer before his eyes, but never any clear light. "I pride myself," he remarks somewhere, "on being ignorant of what everybody knows." He is endowed, moreover, with the faculty of picturing to himself his own abstractions; in his eyes they take on consistency and an almost absolute duration. He has great strength and patience in concentration. His tenacity of mind qualifies him to establish, very ably, certain general principles in morality. He apparently thinks that our ideas are more unchangeable, less easily to be destroyed, than our feelings or even our natural propensities. That is why he regards *duty* as such a powerful and weighty word. Goodness seems to him a soft and almost





bodiless thing; every feeling of *right* he sees as inflexible, and from that he deduces his principle.

#### PROSE-WRITERS

All our old French prose was modified by Amyot's style and by the character of the work he had translated. Beyond that, there were only scholiasts. Plutarch himself is nothing else: a scholiast not of words but of ideas.

The Abbé Arnaud, with all the justice and scholarship of his reflections – which, too, are often both subtle and substantial – conveys an utterly false notion of the Greek genius and its literature.

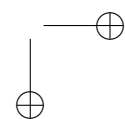
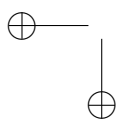
Balzac\* knows not how to laugh; but he is fine when he is earnest.

What Balzac wanted was the ability to mingle little words with the big ones. His style is built up of blocks – yet marble blocks, all firm and polished and gleaming.

A simplicity can be lent to richness; and to every species of richness alike it must be lent. It is also possible – as La Fontaine does – to touch simplicity with richness: but it is only allowable by way of a joke. That, Balzac could not bring off.

Montesquieu has political ideas but no political sentiments. All his works are of the intellect, they are purely reflective. Yet political *feeling* is the life and soul of a state. Without it, nations can only move forward with no impetus of their own.

\*J. L. Guez de Balzac (1594–1654).





Montesquieu had the formula for expressing himself in a few words; he knew how to compress a big meaning in a little phrase.

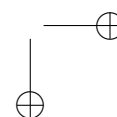
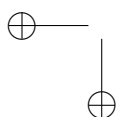
#### **PUBLICISTS**

Voltaire's mind matured twenty years earlier than other men's; and retained its vigour thirty years longer. His style lends all his ideas the harmony which our ideas sometimes lend to our style.

Voltaire is the most debauched of minds; and, what is worse, he debauches others. Wisdom would have restrained his moods, and so would incontestably have robbed him of half his wit. His vivacity needed licence in order to move freely. Yet never did any man have less independence of soul. What a sad qualification, what a deplorable dilemma, to be only an elegant and serviceable writer when you respect the decencies; or to be an author of deadly fascination when you respect nothing! Those who are always reading him compel themselves, in some inevitable fashion, to like him. But those who give up reading him and observe from aloft the influence his character has shed make it an act of justice, a rigorous obligation and a duty to hate him.

Voltaire often steps into the realm of poetry; but he comes out again at once: his impatient and restless mind could never settle there, even for a moment. His verses pass swiftly before the mind; they cannot stay in it because of the rapid propulsion the poet gave them as he dashed them down on paper.

Voltaire introduced and made fashionable such luxury of intellectual works that one can no longer offer ordinary viands unless they are served up in gold or silver dishes. So much





attention to pleasing one's reader shows more vanity than virtue, more wish to seduce than to serve, more ambition than authority, more art than nature; and all these charms call for a great master rather than a great man.

By his influence and the lapse of time, Voltaire has robbed mankind of the austerity of reason. He polluted the air of his age, imposed his manner upon his very enemies, and his opinions upon his critics.

J. J. Rousseau had a voluptuous temperament. In his writings, the soul is always mixed up with the body, and never gets free. No man has conveyed to us better than he the impression of flesh in contact with spirit, and of the joys of their marriage.

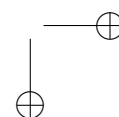
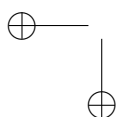
Rousseau gave bowels, if I may express myself so, to all his words. He filled them with such charm, a grace so penetrating, and a vigour so potent, that his writings afford the soul an experience very like those forbidden indulgences which destroy our taste and intoxicate our reason.

Bestow gall on Fénelon and coolness on Rousseau, and you will make a pair of bad authors of them. One man's talent lay in his reason, the other's in his folly. So long as nothing stirred up Rousseau's caprices, he was mediocre: anything that made him sagacious made him commonplace at the same time. Fénelon's genius, on the other hand, lay in his wisdom.

I can see that a Rousseau, I mean a reformed Rousseau, might be very useful, may even be needed, to-day: but in no age could a Voltaire be good for anything.

When you have read M. de Buffon you fancy yourself learned. You fancy yourself virtuous when you have read Rousseau. But for all that you are neither one nor the other.

The spirit of Jean Jacques lives in the moral world – but not in that other world which is above it.







I speak to those whose souls are touched with the gentleness, the ardour, or the exaltation which is the mark of innate piety, and I say to them, “Rousseau alone has the power to detach you from religion, and only religion can cure you of Rousseau.”

Buffon has genius for the whole; and a sense for details. But there is a concealed bombast in him, a compass always too wide open.

Marmontel had only the mind he had made for himself. A singular talent and a very singular ability is that – to give yourself mind when you have none!

Diderot and the philosophers of his school kept their erudition in their heads, and their arguments for their passions or caprices.

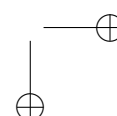
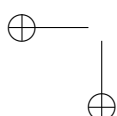
Diderot is less deadly than Rousseau. Folly is most pernicious when it looks like wisdom.

Beautiful words have a form, a sound, a colour, a transparency which make them the proper medium for putting beautiful thoughts before men’s eyes. So they are a great blessing, and their multitude a rich treasury; now, Balzac is full of them: so read Balzac.

D’Aguesseau proceeds too *uniformly* with his arguments.

Montesquieu’s head is an instrument where all the chords are harmonious, but which is keyed too high and is too shrill in tone. It never transgresses the laws, but there is something about its persistently forced vibration which is beyond all the keys of a sweet and tempered music.

Montesquieu’s mind continually gives off flashes which dazzle, delight, even kindle warmth – but hardly ever shine. It is a mind full of spells, by which he blinds his readers. You can





learn better how to be a king from a page of the *Prince* than from the four volumes of his *Esprit des Lois*.

Voltaire has spread over language an elegance which robs it of good feeling. Rousseau filched from the soul its wisdom by talking of virtue. Buffon fills the mind with bombast. Montesquieu is wiser; but he appears to teach the art of founding empires; when you listen to him you think you are learning, and every time you read him you are tempted to build one.

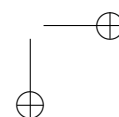
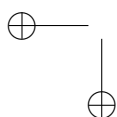
Voltaire, that clever, adroit mind, doing whatever he wanted and doing it well and quickly, was incapable of sustained excellence. He had the talent of a jester, but not the science; knew not when to jeer and when to refrain. His extreme elegance of writing should be avoided, if one is going ever to be a serious thinker. Agile and sparkling, he dwelt in the regions midway between sense and folly, and he flitted constantly between them. He was rich in the good sense that makes satire, that is, he had a keen eye for the evils and shortcomings of society, but he never looked for their remedy. They might have existed only for his bile or his good humour; for he would laugh or fret at them without ever stopping to pity them.

Voltaire would have read patiently through thirty or forty folios to find one little profane joke. It was his passion, his ambition, his mania.

Voltaire is sometimes sad; he is touched; but he is never in earnest. Even his graces are brazen. There is something of the “be damned to you”<sup>\*</sup> about his attitude.

Voltaire is never alone with himself in his writings. An inveterate gazetteer, he would entertain his public every day

<sup>\*</sup> *Cadédís*.





with last night's happenings. His temper did him better service as a writer than his judgment or his knowledge. Some hate or contempt drove him to write every one of his works. Even his tragedies merely satirize some opinion.

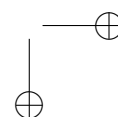
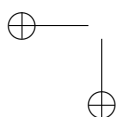
Voltaire cannot satisfy, and he cannot fail to please.

Fontenelle was the shadow of a man with but the shadow of a voice. You could hear no more, however carefully you listened. He was like the old Titan\* who had been turned into a grasshopper.

Life without action, but wholly spent in fancies and semi-sensual thoughts; aggressive idleness; voluptuous cowardice; useless and sluggish activity which fattens the soul without giving it health, which sinks the conscience in bestial sloth and reduces the mind to the antics of a Neuchâtel shop-keeper fancying himself king; Gessner's Swiss bailiff in his old tower of ruins; the arrogance of futility; the assertiveness of a thoroughly debauched rascal who has made himself out a philosophy and expounds it with eloquence; in short a beggar warming his bones in the sun, and deliciously abusing humanity: such is Jean Jacques Rousseau.

There is a prism in Bernardin St. Pierre's style which tires the eyes. When we have been reading him for a long time, we are delighted to find the verdure and the trees in the country less highly coloured than in his writings. His harmonies put us in love with the dissonances he banished from the world, and which one meets at every step. Nature has indeed her music, but it is happily rare. If reality afforded the melodies which these gentlemen find wherever they go, we should live in an ecstatic langour and die of drowsiness.

\* *Tithonus*.





Until the days of the Neckers and their followers one had sometimes told the truth with a laugh; they always tell the truth in tears, or at any rate with sighs and groans. To hear them, all truths are melancholy. So M. de Pange once wrote to me: "As sad as truth." No beam of light cheers them up; no flash of beauty makes them expand: all things do but "intensify" them. Their artistic ideal is Heraclitan.

M. de Bonald needs *terra firma*. His spirit has feet, but no pinions; or at least only very narrow wings which just help him to walk better and more quickly.

Laws have a reason which is the law of laws, and determines at once their scope and their limits. It is the reason behind rules which makes the exception. The professional knows the laws; but the artist knows their reason, feels it and gives it obedience. Thence the criterion. La Harpe knows the craft; but he knows nothing of art. His facility and fluency in the language of criticism give him an air of competence, but he is not very competent. His fashionable, slight mind is only used to judging words. You can see that he is out of his element when he has to deal with things; he wavers and, face it out as he may, you feel he is no longer at home. His aim, then, is to take his stand again on some passage from a book as quickly as possible.

It is quite true that Condorcet only makes ordinary observations; but he has the air of pondering them well before he makes them, and that is his distinguishing feature.

In Cerutti's writings there is more vibration than emotion; you are aware of nerves rather than of heart. His locution contains more figures than images, and more fire than warmth. His thoughts are remarkable for light rather than for clarity; and his opinions seem usually to emanate from a man who has been dazzled, not from one who has found enlightenment.



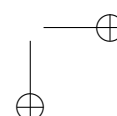
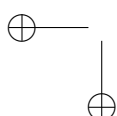


In short: he has an intelligence which moves on without achieving progress. Nowhere does his writing communicate much to us; for we only care to receive vibration for the sake of emotion, a figure by virtue of its being an image, fire for its heat, and animation in writing when it carries us somewhere.

M. de Beausset has recovered the lost thread of sustained narrative; the ductile thread which can coil and uncoil itself in a thousand ways without getting involved or snapped. Simple grace, cautious ease, true moderation, nothing far-fetched – all these are very rare qualities to-day, or rather are never to be seen; and they do distinguish this writer eminently. In Fénelon, he had pearls to mount, and he has set them off with an added richness. In Bossuet he had to exhibit masses, and he has separated them, cultivating an “austere Muse.” His quotations stand out in the stream of his narrative like islands loaded with monuments. When you are reading him you feel as if you are drifting down a river, in fair weather and through a lovely countryside. The period through which he takes his course is exhibited to right and left. He has given back its character to the tempered order of literature, the only order which is classical and able to recall us to the wholesome beauty which enthralls the soul without clouding its light, and without harassing it by passions. But, alas! it would be said that the present age must have weak virtues in which a hurt or two can be suspected; sick virtues, which can be pitied.

Corneille is reproached for his big words and his grand sentiments; but to lift ourselves up and avoid being soiled by earthly meanness we need all the stilts we can find.

The soul can be touched by such a loftiness as can play no part in the artist’s craft or in the beauty of his creation, yet which assuredly is part of that quality, discernible in the





work, which makes us honour the man. Far more perfect than Corneille, and less great, Racine must be the less revered.

Racine's genius, like that of the men of old, lay in his discrimination. His elegance is consummate; but not supreme like Virgil's.

#### POETS AND NOVELISTS

Petrarch was in love for thirty years, not with Laura herself, but with her image – so much easier it is to preserve sentiments and ideas than feelings! Hence came the fidelity of the knights of old.

There is no *dic mihi, musa* about Boccaccio's stories. He adds nothing to what he has been told, and his invention never strays beyond the field of his memory. His tale ends where the common legend ends; he respects it as he would the truth.

Regnard is jocose like a servant; and Molière humorous like the master.

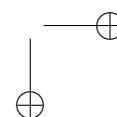
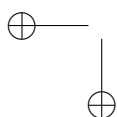
Neither Racine nor Boileau is "water from the springs." Their strength lies in a rare imitative sense. Their works reflect other works, not the souls of men. Racine is the Virgil of the ignorant.

La Fontaine has a fullness of poetry that is nowhere to be found in other French writers.

Racine's talent is his works, but Racine himself is not there. So he grew tired of them.

Boileau is a great poet; but in a semi-poetry.

Molière is comic with composure; he makes you laugh and does not laugh himself; that is his excellence.





The Abbé Delille has nothing in his head but sounds and colours, yet what use he makes of them!

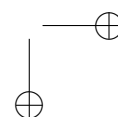
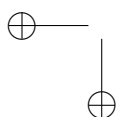
Our world holds a woman with a spacious soul and an exceptional understanding. . . . Madame de Staël was born to be a supreme moralist; but her imagination has been seduced by something more dazzling than true worth; the splendours of flame and passion have led her astray. She has taken the fevers of the soul for its power, intoxication for strength, and our steppings aside for progress. In her eyes, the passions have become a way of dignity and glory. She has aimed to depict them as the supreme beauty; and taking their enormity for grandeur, she has produced a deformed romance.

In Madame de Staël's *Corinne* there is a want of philosophy that spoils everything.

Cervantes has in his book a homely, familiar good-fellowship to which Florian's elegance is in antipathy. In his translation of *Don Quixote* Florian has changed the movement of his author's piece, altered the key of the music. He has given the outpourings of a rich and abundant vein the leapings and murmurings of a little stream: light sounds, light movements, very pleasant no doubt when the theme is a slow trickle of water over the pebbles, but a false and intolerable process when applied to great waters in full flood over the smoothest sands.

Lesage's stories seem to have been written by a domino-player in a café after the theatre.

Saint-Pierre's work is like a statue in white marble: Chateaubriand's is like a statue cast in bronze by Lysippus. One is more polished in style; the other more coloured. One deals luminously with earth: the other takes for his province heaven and hell besides. Chateaubriand has a young, fresh style: Saint-Pierre a style older and, as it were, perennial. One





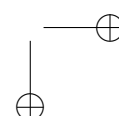
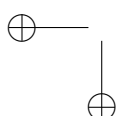
seems to make his choice of what is purest and richest in the language; the other gathers from every field of literature, even the depraved; but he can transfigure indeed, and what he gives us is like that famous metal blended of all other metals when Corinth burned. One is various in his unity; the other rich in his variety.

Both deserve a reproof. Saint-Pierre has endowed matter with a beauty not its own; Chateaubriand has found in passion a purity which it can only know once, if at all. In *Atala* the passions are draped in long, white veils.

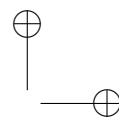
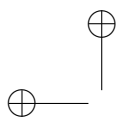
Saint-Pierre has but one line of beauty, which turns and returns indefinitely upon itself, losing itself in the most graceful contours. Chateaubriand makes use of all lines, and where they are flawed he presses the flaws into his service, giving truth to detail and impressiveness to the whole.

Chateaubriand creates in fire, melts all his phrases in the glow of heaven.

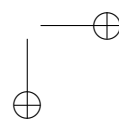
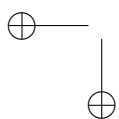
Bernardin writes by moonlight, Chateaubriand in the sunshine.

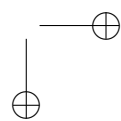
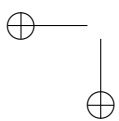
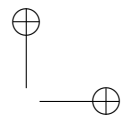
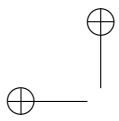






{ **LETTERS** }







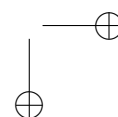
TO THE GUARDIAN OF THE FUTURE MME DE FONTANES,  
RECOMMENDING THE SUITOR

I want to speak to you, Sir, about M. de Fontanes.

He is a man of uncommon talents, of high character and honourable birth; a man who might well make a claim to anything. His father, who came of a very old Protestant family, beggared through their religion, died in the fullness of his powers a chief Inspector of commerce; and he was worthy to be the Minister. The mother was a Fourquevaux, a considerable Languedoc family which still retains its prestige. M. de Fontanes has now only sisters left, daughters of his mother, who retain a good station in life at Niort in Poitou. There M. de Fontanes was born.

His fortune is modest, not that he is without patrimony, only he is too high-spirited a man not to feel straitened by it. He is thirty-one years old; he has strong and righteous impulses, and his principles are sound. His only fault is a certain mobility in his views: it sits on him very well and his friends would be sorry to see it corrected. However, he will lose it when he sees his path of life before him.

M. de la Harpe and M. Ducis will tell you what they think of his talents as they know them. I have an even better knowledge, for while he has only shown them his works he has displayed his whole genius to me more than once. He will certainly be one of the greatest poets of our age; and may be regarded as a man destined some day to bring very high honour to his country. Although *The Orchard* is a very pleasant work, he must not be judged by it; just as your goddaughter's voice must not be judged by an *arietta*, though she does sing an *arietta* to perfection. He is made for greater subjects, just as is her voice for fuller music. He writes poetry like she sings. He is the husband suited to her. If indeed I have not judged her ill, she needs to be married to a man of eminence; and if I may know the eminent men of the hour,





none is more worthy of her than M. de Fontanes and none more likely to fulfil your own ideas.

He is young; he is on the threshold of the Academy; he has already won his laurels and his merits are of the green and vigorous type that the years will but bring to fuller growth. By promoting this marriage, by establishing him in life together with a charming girl who could so well hold him in a lasting attraction, you would be rendering a true service to art in France; you would be hastening on the achievement of a great man. Talents such as his, to reach maturity, need to have known and passed through adversity, and to enjoy present prosperity: the winds and the sunshine that fruition demands.

Neither M. Fontanes' tastes nor his work would separate you from the ward whom you love. He could live for six months of the year at Lyons. A few journeys to Paris would enable him to visit his friends. His companionship would enhance all your pleasures, and yours is a delight to him. He would not be spoiled either by your unpretentiousness or by your generosity. He is a suggestive and stimulating talker; living with ease as he does, he has always lived nobly. Lastly he is, like yourself, a lover of the arts; of artists; and of merit in every form. He is the one man remaining whom you might need as a friend.

It is I who make this proposal: he knows nothing about it. I have given mature consideration to the project, and it comes from me alone: I am fully assured, none the less, that he would not say me nay. It would be the simplest thing in the world for you to gain, in Paris, exact information on all these points which it is my privilege to certify to you. Do not neglect this counsel. I take the liberty of impressing on you that it is a matter worthy of your full attention.

You entertain a feeling towards your charming god-daughter that does you honour; and her frankness, her engaging man-





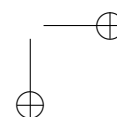
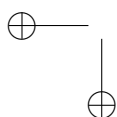
ner, her modesty seem indeed to show that she is worthy of it. Very likely what I am proposing will be her happiness. It comes before you spontaneously, or at least as an offering from the hand of fortune. If my surety is enough for you, you will not let the opportunity pass. What advantage or comfort worth their consideration would these happy young people lack? Even the inequality of their circumstances is a great advantage. If you wish to gain happiness in marriage through your fortune, it must be either given or received. To lose here is to gain, provided one chooses well, which is never very difficult.

That is all I have to say. You have a fine sense of things; the young lady's mother has an observant and penetrating mind: what you both decide on will certainly be the better part. As for myself, I shall have told you the truth. For ten years now M. de Fontanes has been my intimate friend. I owe him a great debt of feeling; but I have paid him only the due of his merits. His price is above gold, but mademoiselle is worthy of him.

I am, etc.

**TO M<sup>LE</sup> MOREAU DE BUSSY,  
WHO HAS SUFFERED BEREAVEMENT IN THE TERROR**

No sorrow could be great enough to be a condolence for you, mademoiselle. It is to Reason and to Time that I must deliver up your affliction: they alone can console you. In the name of Heaven, do not abandon the future or let the present slip away from you. You have suffered an irreparable loss; but you are not yet half-way through your life; and life, in its long span, can offer you compensations unguessed at. Do not lay the indignity on Providence of thinking your meed in her all spent; of thinking that there are no amends to you among her treasures.

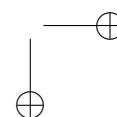




Great blessings may still be awaiting you. Nature, full of sorrows, is full of consolations too. You would be unwise to repulse them. Until they come, do accept at least the small distractions your surroundings offer you. In that moral faculty we call sensibility there is a disposition to excess, a kind of irritability which needs to be tempered by the pure and peaceful indulgence of the senses. When we keep our senses in inaction, in constraint and denial, the soul becomes arid like a plant without the dew. Mingle, I implore you, some physical sensations with your emotions; acquire a fondness for some odours and colours, some sounds and savours. You will be imprudent if you do not. The gifts of Heaven are various. Some are designed for the soul, some for the body. Would you be so bold as to take the half of what is offered and to scorn and reject the rest? Assuredly you would be punished for that.

For my part – if I may use myself as an example – I fulfil as best I can the duty of being happy, whatever may befall. I always am happy to the best of my ability; and when it is little, I say to God: “Behold, O Lord, I can do no more! Forgive my weakness amid all these happenings.”

Indeed I do not claim to be insensible to any of the accidents of life; and I should be sorry if I were. But among the innumerable affections that can touch us, there is no one, joyous or sad, but can awaken some elevated or beautiful feeling. Such a sentiment I seek; I rapidly put aside all others and do not pause till I have gained it. When my spirit has at length achieved this, she holds fast to it, for ever. My sorrows, like my joys, are abiding. Every day I feel sorrows that have been with me from my cradle. Yet these innocent griefs are as fine a thing as joy, and I know from my own experience that even affliction is not inimical to happiness – by which I mean the state where the soul feels a constant delight in itself. It does not matter greatly that the spirit be



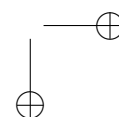


made happy by events so long as they are felt in a way which brings spiritual solace. That way lies in the refinement of a sensibility, well-nourished and controlled, that can extract the honey from everything. There is sweetness even in our troubles.

But you fear, you say, that by accepting any consolation you may affront and wound the “loved shades,” the *manes sacræ*, of your dear ones. There is an exaggeration of sentiment and language about that which I am at a loss to restrain.

No honest affection can ever be hurtful to any worthy being. If, in our earthly imperfection, we have suffered jealousies, they cease and fall from us with the dross that clung about our nature. Beyond this life all is light, all is goodness. Why, even in this world a kindly feeling could hurt no generous soul if – in the fleshly wrapping that hides our hearts, and the blindness in which our vanity confines us – we did not suppose that the affection given to another humiliates us by shutting out the affection given to ourselves; that what is bestowed on another is taken from us, that we are driven out for him to be admitted, that we are despoiled if there is a sharing. We want to be loved alone for fear of not being loved at all.

But to the minds of those in heaven these things are very different. Susceptible only to the pure and spiritual element in our feelings, they leave us to do what we will with what remains. Our affections have a something gross and oily, if I may put it so, which can be compared with the fumes of a torch: that is for the living. But there is also something fine, rare, celestial, which is like the light and the flame; which we conserve by passing it on: this is for the friends we have lost. For this alone could they care, for this alone is fit for them. The dwellers down here who share in it take nothing of it away. The idea of sharing, which to our blindness is inseparable from that of diminution, because one always means the other





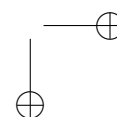
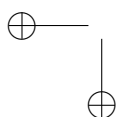
in those material things with which we are for ever fumbling, conveys to these clairvoyant souls simply an idea of extension that pleases and delights them.

If we become angels (and what else, in a better life, can we become?) surely we wish those who were dear to us to be enough like ourselves to love, with a love entire and perfect, all who are sensitive and good. That, alas, is not possible to the living: their hearts are too narrow.

#### AGAIN TO M<sup>LE</sup> MOREAU DE BUSSY

None of your letters distressed me so much as the last. It shows me how deep, and in some measure irremediable, is your wound. Your desolation has become the sole standpoint of your mind and holds your reasonings at its mercy. Everything turns to sorrow with you, and your meditations lead only to finding a cause for dejection in whatever occupies them. I have taken a wrong course. In trying to lighten your unhappiness I have drawn your thoughts the more upon it. Your whole soul is sick; but since my imprudence has provoked it to reason about its malady I am anxious not to leave certain of your remarks unanswered, nor certain of my half-developed views unexplained.

No, those we have lost are not honoured by such unrestrained grief. It honours nobody, for it shows the weakness and obstinacy of the spirit rather than the greatness of its loss. I have known a woman grieve more for the death of a child four days old, shed more tears and work herself into a more protracted mourning than one would accord to the loss of a most valuable life. It is a restrained grief which honours those who are gone, for by its moderation it can last as long as the mourner's life, since it does not exhaust body or soul: a lofty sorrow which allows the business, even the diversions of life to pass – in a measure – beneath it; a calm sorrow which does not set us at war with fate, or the world,







or ourselves; which permeates a soul at peace, in moments of rest, without breaking intercourse with the living or the dead.

Indulge me a moment while I tell you how I myself should like to be lamented; for thus I shall make clearer what seems to me the true way.

I should wish my memory never to come before my friends without bringing a tear to their eyes and a smile to their lips. I should like them to be able to think of me, in the midst of their keenest pleasures, and remain untroubled. Even at table, at a banquet when they are making merry with strangers, I should like them to mention me, counting it among their pleasures to have loved me and been loved in return. I should like to have had enough happiness and enough good qualities about me to make it a pleasure to them often to quote me to their newer friends – some trait of geniality, or good sense, or kind-heartedness, or goodwill; and that by doing so they could make everybody more cheerful, amiable, and happy. I should like them to recall me thus, to the very end; to be happy; and to live long and keep me the longer in memory. I should wish to have a tomb where they could come together on a fine day, at some cheerful season of the year, to talk of me among themselves, a little sorrowfully if they willed, but with a sorrow gentle and touched with joy. Above all I should wish and – if I could – would so ordain it, that all through this tender ceremony, on the way out and on the way home, they should not feel doleful or look depressed: so their pilgrimage might be a pleasant thing to have beheld. In a word, I should like to be the subject of mourning which the onlookers would not be afraid to experience or to inspire for themselves. It is the image of the terrible sorrowings we must leave behind us which makes death's parting so bitter. It is the horror with which death has been set about, again, which makes the grief of the survivors so poignant. The two impulses work





perpetually on each other and harass our souls amid our highest feelings, feelings that come to all of us. Our passions have made our last hour a subject of despair and terror, a hated thing from which anticipation and memory alike recoil. Our formalities and customs, in their turn, have made death an occurrence we hasten to forget, put its ghastly trappings behind us. Instead of using ourselves from childhood to think and feel about the separation merely that it is the moment of departure on a journey from which there is no returning, on which we ourselves shall one day set out, to find a sure reunion in the land invisible, we have omitted nothing that could make the separation horrible. We have been brought to look on it as a punishment, as the stroke of an Almighty executioner, in fine, as a torment; and our near and dear ones, when we are no longer, take leave of our couch of rest as they would of the scaffold where we had been put to death.

Rise, I implore you, above these vulgar notions. You are able to, and you must: it is easier for you than you imagine, for at present your grief is calumniating your reason. While it has yet to gain the upper hand – rest assured of the regard of a man who can never forget you, and who feels all your worth the more keenly since there are now left fewer hearts in which you have a place.

**TO M<sup>LE</sup> MOREAU DE BUSSY:  
A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE**

I am, alas! and am sorry to be, your oldest friend, now that so many of them are no more. It moves me deeply to call myself so. Think by how many titles you are dear to me: in my feeling for yourself are combined all the emotions that were awakened by the company of which you were a member. I love in you yourself, and your brother, and your comrade, and the country in which I have delighted so much, and memories which will always be a tender possession.



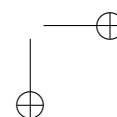


You are a trust which your distress has handed over to me; a trust which I must, at any cost, watch over and preserve; and which I want to take into my own hands so that I can keep watch over it always. Yes, I want you near me, and I want to be near you. What use is all I am saying to you, or could say? I am spilling good liquor into a vase filled with tears; but the first need is to dry the tears, and this no hand can accomplish, unless, perhaps, my own. So I am devoting myself to the task. It rests with you whether I must waste my time and my health, and wear myself out body and soul by worry, effort, and entreaties; or whether I am to be spared all this and left free to do what is needed, by your consenting recklessly to what must happen if we both live. So agree straightway, and then I will do all you can wish; agree with confidence: I will justify it; agree with repugnance and in spite of yourself, for now I can smile at all that: you will be willing enough in time. Were I only twenty-five, I would give you ten years to reflect on your answer. I am just thirty-eight and I will not allow you a day, an hour, a minute. I shall be obstinate, too. Spare me all the trouble and close the matter in a line: "O well, I consent – till the day when I am willing."

#### TO FONTANES IN PARIS

No doubt you have already seen my younger brother, who will have handed you what you ask me for. Also he will have been able to tell you how much we have felt the loss of your poor child. We were entertaining ourselves by making some small preparations, suitable to his age, for receiving him. We have been cruelly cheated in our little solitudes, for they set up a kind of link, a feeling of companionship, which has added to our sorrow.

Your wife and you have youth and health. Time the consoler will not fail you. Leave to him now the healing of the gap this frightful smallpox has so early made in your





family. We should not bewail these little lives so long as we do grown-men; but the tears they bring us are bitter tears. I feel this when I reflect that your sorrow may at any moment become my own, and I am thankful to you for having thought of that too. I do not doubt that in like case you would be ready to share my feelings as I do yours. Consolation is a manner of help we afford one another, and sooner or later every man requires it. I shall turn to you with confidence when the day of need comes.

I write to you very rarely. The reason is that your infernal letters always set me to the discussion of things which stir my mind to such great activity that I am tired and used up with the fatigue of thinking by the time I should answer you. I resolve to hold my peace and put you clean out of mind so that I can recover a little energy.

My health gives me none at all. My heart, lungs, liver, and all my vital organs are sound; I live with regularity and a wisdom of which the inutility wearies me excessively; I lose no ground and make no headway. My mind gets the better of me often enough, 'tis true, and my bodily weakness makes him wholly intractable. But often, again, when I have unhorsed him, I go into my stable, lay me down on my litter, and let the brute in me live for months together, without being any the more refreshed. You see my existence is not quite that beatific rapture in which you picture me immersed. Yet I do experience it at times, and if my thoughts wrote themselves up on the trees, just as they came, you would find on your advent to this countryside to decipher them after my death that I had lived (here and there) more Platonically than Plato himself: *Platone Platonior*. I find even that a sign of my cutting myself off from the world and turning into mind alone. At all events, if I keep too little hold on life through the gross and solid bonds of health and appetite (on which, though strict enough morally, I put a boundless value)

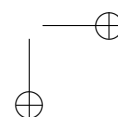




I shall keep my hold on my friends to my last hour through my care for their happiness. This will only leave me with breath and consciousness itself. For yourself you can rely on it. But remember all this is private, do not mention it in your letters. I want to spare those who are about me and care for me anxieties which would be a bad thing for them. One must tell the whole truth about one's maladies to other men only.

I have sent on to you four dozen rolls, which, to my great regret, are all I can manage. My further intention is, so far as my power can achieve it, to prevent your making bad use of them; and I forbid you yourself, with all the authority your indulgence can confer on me, to put more than one or two (just by way of experiment) to your personal use. With the stomach-capacity which my brother assures me you have always enjoyed – I congratulate you on it with all my heart – you would soon absorb the whole stock if you were allowed to vent your hunger on them with the warming beverage at breakfast – for then, I am told, they are delicious. Leave the ladies at least forty-six for their chocolate. It was for their benefit that I persuaded a German baker: the one man in the land who understands rolls. Moreover, he can only be induced to set his oven going once or twice a year, on great occasions. With your ladies I associate M. l'abbé de Vitry, their estimable friend and my venerable correspondent, for whom I like to procure all the little pleasures I can. As for you and your likes, I bar you absolutely from all participation in these pastries.

Before I close I must say something to you, that I have always forgotten, about books and literary style. Buy, and read, books written by old men who have had the gift of expressing the originality of their character and their age. I know four or five that are very noteworthy in that respect. First: old Homer, but of him I need not speak. Nor need I say anything about Æschylus: both these you know very well





for the poets they are. But acquire a little Varro; *Marculphi formulæ* (this Marculphus was an old monk, as he tells us in his preface, with which you will find yourself satisfied); Cornaro's *The Temperate Life*.<sup>\*</sup> I think I know one or two more, but I cannot wait to recall them. Read through those I mention, and you can tell me if you do not see plainly, in their language and thought, minds vigorous though wrinkled, sonorous – and broken – voices, the authority of white hairs: in short, the head of an old man. Your picture-lover always puts them in his collection. The connoisseur of books must add them to his library.

I feel cold and am going to warm myself. Keep well.

It is a great pleasure to me to know you are where you are. The times at last permit the righteous to live wherever they wish. Heaven and earth are changed. Happy those unchanging ones who have emerged pure from so many crimes, and safe from so many awful perils!

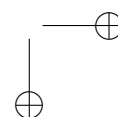
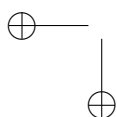
#### TO FONTANES:

##### AN ANALYSIS OF THE WRITER'S OWN MIND

I have been occupying myself, these last few days, with a brief analysis of the make-up of my brain. This is how I see it. It is, assuredly, composed of the purest substance, and it has lofty recesses; but they are by no means all equal. It is not suited to every kind of idea. It is unfitted for sustained works.

If the pith is fine, the covering is not strong; it is small in size, and its ligaments have joined it with the worst muscles in the world. That makes me fastidious in taste, and unable to bear fatigue; at the same time it makes me stubborn in

<sup>\*</sup>Luigi Cornaro (1467–1566); his *Discorsi della Vita sobria* was published in 1558. He was the founder of the famous semi-starvation system, by which, apparently, he restored his health, after deadly excesses.





working, for I cannot rest till I catch what is eluding me. My spirit hunts butterflies, and the chase will be the death of me. I can neither remain idle nor satisfy my activity. The result is, to judge myself handsomely, that I am only fit for perfection; at least, this does recompense me, when I can attain it, and give me some peace by checking me in a host of enterprises. Few works, indeed, and few subjects are susceptible to perfection. It is analogous to myself, for it exacts slowness as well as quickness. It allows a second beginning, and makes pauses necessary. My wish, I tell you, is to be perfect. That alone suits me and can give me satisfaction. So I am going to make for myself a region more or less heavenly and very peaceful, where everything will please me and call me again. In extent and in temperature it will conform exactly with the scope and nature of my poor little brain. I claim that now whatever I write will be purely in the idiom of this land. Here, I hope that my thoughts will take on more purity than glitter, yet not lose all colour, for colours appeal to my mind. As for what they call strength, vigour, nerve, energy, "life," I hope I have no more use for it than just to climb up to my star. There I shall abide when I want to take wings, and when I come down again to converse with mankind, step by step and amicably, I shall never take the trouble to know what I am saying; as I do just now in sending you good wishes.

**TO MADAME DE BEAUMONT, JOUBERT'S "MUSE"**

I owe you many thanks for your news and that from Mme de Sérilly. It has been in my mind a long time, as has also my failure to write to you, the reason being that in the state of temper to which physic has reduced me I could do nothing graciously.

I will satisfy myself to-day with having *rung* for your cousin's letter. If in your beneficence you care to add to my





pleasure and gratitude, sound forth from every belfry the story of its detention.

Riouffe has expanded *his* story overmuch. I certainly do not like his Ibrascha, nor his comparison between Robespierre and Jesus Christ. He had put his reason and his merit alone into his first edition. Into his second – it seems to me – a little too much of his youth and his faults. Besides, like Werther, I am devoted whenever possible to the first edition alone of any work that has given me pleasure. One should add nothing to what has sufficed.

Yet I will admit there are admirable traits in the parts Riouffe has added. Do you recall what he says about human nature: “Its sorrow escapes it just as does its joy”? A saying like that is worth a whole book.

Mme de Staël has written a book, I am told, on the need for peace. If I am not lucky enough to read it before your return, I shall probably owe the pleasure to your indulgence. Of all the women who have ever taken to print, I care only for her and Mme de Sévigné.

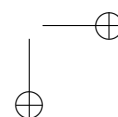
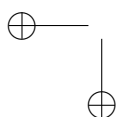
I often see Mme de Sérilly, and as often wish you too were in her park; not that I am so blind to her merits as not to like her. But you have a birthright which will not let me be supremely happy at Passy except when you are there.

I meet M. de Pange there, to my great profit. He has a strong, austere mind: his very laughter is profound. When I come away I gladly dwell on all he has said; but when I set out, I feel a greater desire to listen to him than to talk.

Were you here, my lady, I should be egged on and fortified in my clamber up the steep hill by a twofold impatience.

In his company my imagination is a little constrained and dare not give rein to all its whims. With you, it is more at ease. Our friend wants to walk, and I like to fly – or at least to flutter. My little insect wings give me a twitch directly I think of you.

I am, lady, always with the deepest regard —







TO MME DE BEAUMONT, WHO IS STAYING AT THEIL

Your letters have been a great pleasure to me. A freedom of mind and imagination pervades them: it delights me and reassures me of your well-being. To be happy and make others happy, you have but to let nature have her way, and to be yourself.

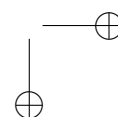
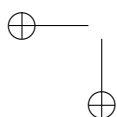
We have nothing to complain about here. Alexandra is cured, and to-morrow she comes downstairs; my wife goes her accustomed way; the abbé set out yesterday to have dinner to-day ten miles off with a colleague, where he anticipates a meat-pie; Victor's\* only embarrassment in life is the doubt which has possessed him for the last hour whether a certain animal he has shown me in *The Country Family*, and which I told him was a fox, is in fact a fox or should not be a marten; for you told him it was a marten and he confessed this to me just too late for his peace of mind. You see he remembers you and your remarks. As for myself, I am buried in Aristotle. After finishing his *Ethics*, here I am plunged hopelessly in his *Metaphysics*; I shall have to read him right through. He will be the death of me; but now I cannot help myself.

Do not sell your Voltaire at Sens; you will get nothing for him. I will make a better bargain for you in Paris. For my part I am grateful to you. God preserve me from ever being the possessor of a complete Voltaire!

If you would rather see Mme de Staël here than at Sens, your green-room is at your disposal. I think I shall be strong enough not to yield to the desire to see her, and to flee the peril of hearing her; so consult your convenience.

Look after yourself, keep well, take care of my books, and write to me. My wife adjures you to make a pleasure of the last few days in your Theil. If it were Spring she would gladly go, she says, with the family, to look after you for

\*Joubert's son; born April 9th, 1794. He turned out the one great disappointment of his father's life.





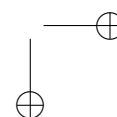
a fortnight. Spend two weeks away from her household! I thought it very gallant of her. But you are doing miracles about here. Good-bye.

**TO MME DE BEAUMONT: A COUNSEL OF CALM**

...There is nothing in the world, I think, more fatal to happiness, and to any kind of wisdom, than passions of the mind when one gives way to them all the time. Those of the blood are more reasonable; for the former, do please reflect, cannot be satisfied every day, nor every month, nor every year – sometimes not once in twenty years. Now is there anything more unfortunate, more fitted to torment us, than constantly to bear and nourish in our hearts unutterable desires and insatiable lusts?

Even the passion for public service would be folly just now. The world is given over to hazard. The men who purpose to stem its flood by throwing into the ocean gravel and fine sand – their little schemes – are wholly ignorant. I far prefer the man who unpretentiously occupies his leisure hours with dropping stones into his well. He at any rate does not think he is being useful. The others fancy they are important, and Heaven knows how much time, reason and merit they waste in trying to make themselves really so! All I can see in them is a need for bustling activity, like children's; a puerile activity which eggs them on to displace, not chairs, but crowns; and to shape broken sceptres with their hands, out of the ruins. They vaunt their solicitude; while they are merely restless. Such anxiety rushes about, to and fro, up and down; a careful solicitude is on the watch and lies low: that should be our course.

Find repose in love, esteem, veneration: with clasped hands I entreat you. It is, believe me, the only way just now to escape many faults, many errors, and many ills. So convinced am I of this that I have just written to Paris that they are to





send me no more papers of which the contributors can read and write. I do not want to be ignorant of what is going on; but I do not want to be absorbed in it.

**TO MME DE BEAUMONT: ON BOOKS AND BOOKS**

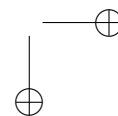
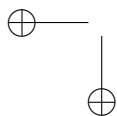
...I am sending you something further to read: the *Review of Reviews*, to which I mean you to be sooner or later a life-subscriber, as I am. This journal has the advantage of saving one from reading the others: no small achievement. It is enough to show the good and bad spirit of the age, which is something – indeed, a great deal.

Yes, I did advise you to read Voltaire's letters. In that I was meritorious enough to divine your taste. It is a talent I am proud of, and it torments me: for I am sure your mind is not yet on the things most likely to entrance; and I am impatient to see you possess the works best qualified to revive your interest. That keeps me very busy.

If God gives me life and holds out to me the chances I ask of Him, I shall yet need only three weeks to amass all the books I think worth putting – not in your library – but by your bedside. If I manage to procure them, I shall feel I have nothing left to do in the world.

I did not know La Bruyère was so firm a friend of yours. I only sent you the little book to familiarize you with him. You do very well to like him. There are books as beautiful as his, and more beautiful; but there is none so absolutely perfect. The review you enjoyed is not by the writer you suggest; but he is drawn on.

I am in one of my low periods of health and cannot write more fully. Beauchêne boasted to my face that he had given you a description of my habits that was wholly inaccurate save in the time he asserts I spend praising you. If I said all I think, the days would not be long enough. Be assured that,





the more I think about it, the more I find you insurpassable, taken all in all.

Keep well; it is all there remains for you to do, and it is what I chiefly enjoin. I have said.

**TO MME DE BEAUMONT;  
WHO IS IN PARIS AT THE INCEPTION OF THE CONSULATE**

I should very much like to see your demeanour to Napoleon's associates. I do not myself think we shall ever be able to call them "Troops Alexander led, And kings when he was dead."

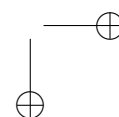
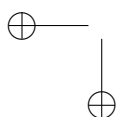
Nature had made these men to be props of some obscure academy, and they are become pillars of state! It is a sorry thing to emerge from the horrible dominion of lawyers to pass under the rule of a library.

There are two classes of man; one of which is above society and the other below it: the professed intellectuals and the professional rogues. Some one said to me once "the latter should be sent to Bicêtre\* and the former to the Academy, and never brought away again." He was right, so right that if I were made Consul and ruler, in my turn, I should be glad to make him my adviser; but, in consistency, I should not make him minister.

Men who have spent their lives in seaports giving lessons in pilotage would make very bad pilots, and we are in worse case. Our poor fleet is entrusted to lieutenants who have always argued about the craft without understanding it and could not so much as sail a yacht in a calm.

Wrong knowledge will replace ignorance; and false wisdom, folly. Evil will be wrought methodically; serenely and with an unshakable self-satisfaction. Every man of them, complacent in his principles and good intentions, will leave us, artistically and by definite rules, to rot in a decline. They have modified

\*The French Colney-Hatch.





a bad system, but they will be cautious of renouncing it. Well, how can they? Our clever ones are only clever through the system, and have no other cleverness. If they rid themselves of their doctrines they would have to rid themselves of all their merit as well – and all the merit they get credit for. It would be asking what cannot be:

*“Convert a doctor! ’Tis a task impossible.”*

**TO MME DE BEAUMONT: SOME SARDONIC REFLECTIONS**

I laughed, but in no scoffing way, at your saying “La Harpe’s devotion is a trick the devil played on the Lord.”

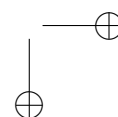
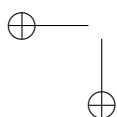
But what will you say to that of M. de la Vauguyon, which I have just learned of in the papers. I myself look on it as the most violent persecution ever stirred up against the Church in your mind and mine. . . .

I want to tell you of a feat. An Englishman, blind from birth and all through his life (he was called Saunderson, Diderot has talked of him to you), taught optics for over thirty years at Oxford University; and he was admittedly one of the most learned Newtonians and ablest professors in Europe. Say what you like this proves that, thanks to our admirable modern philosophy, you can be an authority in many matters without having the least idea of them.

Why do you speak to me of Mani\*? I abhor his wretched name, and I do not think I have ever, even in jest, allowed myself to write or pronounce it.

I like well enough the errors of the simple and the follies of nature; but as for learned errors that are built up by art, I hate them as much as the errors of falseness and bad faith that our Benjamin Constant first led me to discern. I think even that I do not care for truths that are true only by reflexion:

\*The originator of Manichæism, the Persian dualistic system of religion. Born in Babylon circa A.D. 216.





another grievance against this age, when we have hardly any but calculated ideas and feelings.

**TO MME DE BEAUMONT:  
A WORD ABOUT CHATEAUBRIAND**

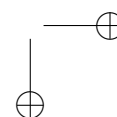
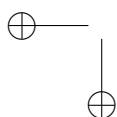
I am sending M. de Chateaubriand the Italian translation of *Atala*. I entreat you to read it; it is a word-for-word which will afford you great enjoyment. Counsel the author to be more original than ever, and to persist in revealing himself as God has made him. Foreigners, who make up three parts – and a half – of Europe, will only find arresting what our native idiom automatically makes us think bizarre from the first moment. The essential is to be true to oneself, one will soon seem it to others. So each man must guard his own idiosyncrasies, if he have any. All respect is due to reason; we owe a complaisance to custom, but also to our own particular habits, whose indulgence touches our writings with a charm of caprice which soon charms our readers too. The personal note always pleases. It is only the note of imitation which displeases; unless it is everybody's imitation. You will see how indisputable a favour Chateaubriand enjoys in Italy.

**TO MME DE BEAUMONT:  
A COUNTERBLAST TO KÖNIGSBERG**

Kant, this terrible Kant who must alter the world, this Kant who is turning so many heads, who used wholly to occupy mine and has set yours a-dreaming, Kant, in short, the great Kant:

*“... the Kant whose frown  
Makes each professor tremble on his throne,”*

Kant is translated, and translated almost in his entirety; but only into Latin! I have the critiques, all the critiques





except the ethical ones,\* which I have held in my hands and shall possess from to-night, if I choose. Four heavy and huge octavo volumes which are costing me, if you please, thirty-six pounds gross, in French money! It is the dearest paper on the market. Picture to yourself a German Latin, hard as pebbles; a man who brings his ideas to birth on his paper, and never sets down on it anything concise, anything quite cleaned and ready; ostrich-eggs that you have to break with your head, usually to find nothing inside.

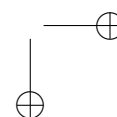
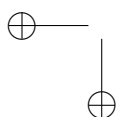
There needs must be the same difference between the German mind and the French mind in their intellectual operations, as we found, all through the war, between the movements of the soldieries. We are told that the Frenchman would change his ground a score of times while the German was doing so once: there is our man.

A French mind could express in a line – in a word – what Kant has hardly expressed in a tome; Kant, a creator of opaque shadows who, seduced and seducing others by their very opacity, believes and makes them believe his cloudy abstractions have a solidity which assuredly is not there. Yet there are moments of perception, glades here and there in the thicket; judgment, sometimes insight; logical chimeras which displace and replace in a fashion the nothings which the older school was so proud of having established, and gave us for full measure with so cool an intrepidity and so blithe a self-satisfaction.

I will break my head once more, and more than once, on these pebbles, this iron, these stone eggs and granites, to try to extract some light from them; but I fear all I shall acquire is a bumpy forehead.

How would you have me put it? I beat about the subject when I talk of this man, because he does it too when he

\* *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Ethics* and *Critique of the Practical Reason*.





talks to his readers. Neither he nor his words allow of a swift judgment; he is not clear. He is a phantom, a Mount Athos turned into a philosopher. In fact I am weary of thinking about him. We will talk of the matter in the winter.

P.S. Kant is, into the bargain, a great adherent of *perfectibility*, and I am sure he looks upon the French Revolution as the happiest event that “the human species” can boast of. His ethic has struck me as fresher and finer than his metaphysics; but I shall see. Diderot’s Salon is detestable.

**TO M. DE CHÉNEDOLLÉ AT VIRE, FROM PARIS**

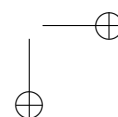
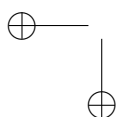
We must forgive Michaud.\* He confessed to me that his head was full of Mme de Krudener. He had an appointment with her on Sunday; so well did he remember it that he forgot you, and me, and the whole world. His excuse is in the first line of the old song:

*“For a dame of high degree.”*

For poetry’s sake, we must accept an excuse that sings itself.

He has just left me. We decided, at his wish, that you should remain in charge of his notes. You have six months to finish them; but you would need to have nearly half of them ready for the printers in three months. They will be put at the end of each volume. He will write to you continually to explain his wishes as to their character and scope. I think it would have been better to give you entire control; but the work the Abbé Delille has already done on the first three cantos exacts a certain conformity which can hardly be dispensed with. You can judge of all that by Michaud’s explanations, and by the Abbé’s work, which will be sent to you. His verses, Michaud says, are useless to you because

\*Evidently Joseph-François, the elder of the brothers Michaud.



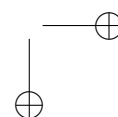




“the Abbé Delille having made notes on Virgil and not on himself, his continuator must follow the same course.” This reason is Michaud’s own. He sets great store by these notes, and the more so that he looks upon them as a work that could be printed separately, and perhaps intends to put them to this additional service. In that case, the price would have to be raised.

Michaud is convinced, or rather has let himself be convinced, that you can do this work anywhere; but, reasonably enough, he thinks it necessary (1) that in a month or a little more you should come and receive from Fontanes the observations he means to put at your service; (2) that in two or three months you should come and read the proofs of your work. I think you ought to accept the first condition, because you will certainly extract nothing from Fontanes except *vivâ-voce*: and the second because it is important that the printer should not mar your style or your ideas. I feel that, to carry out this plan, it is necessary to invest you with what I call “the faculty of coming and going” in good time, and for that there must be a few supplementary conditions, about which I will speak to Fontanes, and perhaps even to Michaud, according to circumstances and the plans which I shall form when I have thought over the matter. I am in a hurry to let you know these first preliminaries, mainly so that you can compose your mind at once for what is asked of it, and for which we persist in thinking it singularly qualified.

Our Michaud never says *everything*. To me, he is rather like a cold broth: wholesome enough, appetizing enough, perhaps even substantial enough (in affairs), but lacking the *appearance* of a solid. Further, it is certain he will have the *reality* of one. So prepare yourself, and go to work in entire peace. As for money, as it is almost an honourable possession, there is no need for shame in making it, and when one is able one should make as much as possible. So neglect nothing



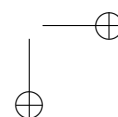


that can accomplish a good piece of business in this. We are all convinced you will accomplish a good piece of work.

**TO M. MOLÉ:\* AN OFFER OF CENSURE**

Do please send me your manuscripts to Villeneuve. There I shall be at your disposal; I will read you with all my attention, and shall be able to judge you with severity; my blows will not be abated by any distractions. You want to be maltreated; you shall be, with the rigour that a much considered examination generally provokes in a mind isolated from things and having no basis of comparison before it but models. You will be pleased with my excessive severity. But do not ask me to indulge you by being worse than the truth requires. Unjust censure can do more harm than misplaced praise, for it is, perhaps, more important not to eschew what is good than to eschew what is bad. And in this regard I warn you that if I praise with delight, I blame with a violence that sometimes leads me to go beyond the bounds of severity. Having to overcome, in fact, two obstacles that hard truth always meets on its way, in the heart of the speaker and in the heart of the listener, I strain onwards, and my expressions often run beyond my thought. When my reproof is verbal, a word or two of explanation soon corrects this excess; but when I write, the trouble is lasting. Further, my opinion of the nature and qualities of your mind is from now on fixed and unchangeable. Your pen can teach me nothing in that way. Do you well or badly, be right or wrong, it does not affect my judgment at all: I shall know your value just as well. It may be – it is even possible – you have not yet brought all your resources into action: perhaps you have used too little skill in exploiting them. I am prepared for that; for

\*Joubert's protégé and "twenty-year old Cato." The early manuscript in question is that of *Moral & Political Essays*.

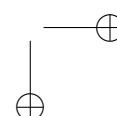
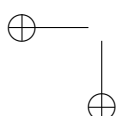




still worse things, if need arise. But when they happened, I should not think the instrument on which you played less than admirably was any the less admirable in itself; the mind Heaven has given you is made of gold and what else is rarest among its eternal fabrics.

**TO MME DE BEAUMONT,  
WHO IS RECUPERATING AT MONT DORE**

When you receive no letters from us, it is at most one little pleasure less in your world; but when we receive none from you, we undergo an intolerable torment. If only by its belief of ill and opposition to hope, fear is always, to me, a sentiment against nature. Judge, then, to what an intemperate state I had been reduced by fears of every kind, for a week, fears of which you were the subject. I had been slow to alarm; but when the time had expired which I had set for my wait, when the postmen, who pass thrice a week, followed one another bearing nothing from your spa, when at length the terrible No which always answered my “Are there any letters from Mme de Beaumont?” had grown a torment to my ears with its obstinate monotony, a kind of trembling laid grip on my spirit, and I desolated the whole household with my lamentations. At last, at last a letter I received yesterday from Mme de Vintimille told me you had written to her from Mt Dore; that you were mortally bored – which is always a sign of life – and that the waters were soothing you, which puts you thus far at rest. I shall never see her hand again without a keen pleasure, not only for her own sake, but for yours too, and for the great solace she has brought me on this occasion. Now your letters may arrive at the pleasure of the post: I am inured. The only loss will be a loss of pleasure, and to me, after these agitations, everything seems peace and happiness.





#### TO M. MOLÉ: A METAPHYSICAL COMMENTARY

It has often crossed my mind that if I had chanced to find your manuscript on our highways, when I was out walking, I should have unrolled it, cast an eye over it and said: Good! Here, I suppose, I have some of our commonplace metaphysics!

With that suspicion in me I should read the first lines. Humph! I should say, at the second page, there is good stuff here. Then, when I was home again, with the paper in my pocket, I should have waited, in some impatience, for the hour when I can allow my eyes and my mind continuous application. When the hour drew nigh, after looking twenty times at my watch, I should go to my room, read it all through and say to myself: Who the deuce wrote this? I should like to know. There is excellent matter in it.

I should probably enquire at the post-house and the inns, who had been travelling through; and, finding out nothing, decide to write to the unknown author by way of the newspapers, to tell him of my discovery, and exhort him to let me know what he was going to add to these beginnings, if he wished to make a return for my information, and gratify a mind which was very pleased by the use he had made of his own.

This will enable you to understand perfectly that my criticism is not a reproof, but simply an observation. Impossible that I could disapprove the passages you quote. Far from it – I make definite use of them to establish this point. Just as purely harmonious words or sounds are a good thing, a “thing in place” which has its meaning and its reason in music or verse; so there are in metaphysics certain vague ideas which, like the sounds, it is good, is useful and essential to employ. They serve to prepare or to refresh the mind; they maintain it in its elevation and sphere; helpful both to author and reader, they afford him a memory or a glimpse of what he has seen or has to see. In what is solid, even physically solid,



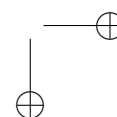


not everything is solid; and that which is not solid is often of great use, as in a schooner, for example, the sails, the rigging, the curve of the bows, the flat span of the stern, etc. I applied, in this case, ideas which have three years growth in me with the more enjoyment that I was able to confirm another idea which occurred to me five or six years ago and caused me to say: Metaphysics is a kind of poetry for the intellect; devotion is its ode.

It will be clear to you, from these items in the history of my ideas, that I explained myself badly and you have misunderstood me. By lending my words an ironic tone that was not theirs (never in my life have I employed irony save in pure fun), you have taken championship as disapproval. I myself, when I read the passages in my letter you quote with that key, felt for a moment I had been metamorphosed into a contributor\* to *The Year in Literature*; I seemed to have taken on four legs and four feet. I was wrong, since an inflexion of the voice could poison my words; but I hold you have seen my mistake in caricature, and disfigured it for me. I will also say, since the occasion offers, that your reply is a happy one, and that every time you develop your remarks you are, it seems to me, right.

Before I close, I have a weighty word for you; one that I have very often spoken to myself. Without thinking of it, without knowing it, without meaning it, you have *Platonized*. There is clear proof of it all over the last page of quotations I sent you; and I could demonstrate it by many other passages if I wished. It has proved to me, to my great satisfaction, what I have often said: naturally, without being a disciple or even a reader of Plato, you become like him when you touch the heights of high argument. The power of the subject will have it so, for Plato is metaphysics, as Homer is poetry.

\*Probably aimed at Geoffroy of "the four iron hoofs."





If one had to give their due to his admirers, such as myself, and to his non-partisans, who are legion, I would say that when you read him you learn nothing, but you are transported to the regions where everything is to be learned. In his writings you see light but never a subject clearly-lighted. Do not read him at any length; my citations will be enough. Some day he will delight you, for the eyes of the mind grow used insensibly to finding in him what cannot be discerned unless one is prepared and, as it were, initiated.

I had several small things to mention to you besides; but I have not the leisure I had counted on this morning. In time I will have my say out.

I am off to get into my bath, whither they are calling me.

#### TO M. MOLÉ: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE WILL

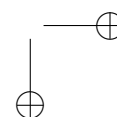
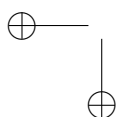
I want to make some remarks upon “Means of Conserving the Will” for the little treatise is a new thing, piquant, ingenious, useful, and attractive. I am asking you to think over the following points:

(1) The will acts upon the will and can achieve much in that way; but it has no other direct power over anything, except the muscles.

(2) Fools and knaves have more will than wise and good men, for they “will” obstinately and overpoweringly, even in the face of all right and reason.

(3) To tell men that “what they will, they can” – is not this encouraging them in what they have done so much in these late years, that is, to wish the impossible?

The will has complete power over us, and so is assuredly of supreme importance; but it has no such power over the world. Things have been said on this subject that are as likely to make men headstrong as to make them firm; things more





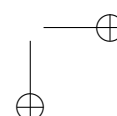
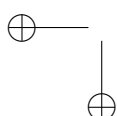
conducive to inflexible ambition than to incorruptible virtue. To listen to some people, you would be tempted to hold your head in both hands, to fix it in unwavering obstinacy. That reminds me of a friend of Fontanes', who used to maintain very earnestly, in the days of our youth, that will was mistress of all things; we could cure a sickness by strong will to cure it, and we should never die if we were resolved not to die. No, we do not live, do not become witty or healthy or wealthy, gain honour or lands, precisely because we will it so, but because our will leads us on the road where these things are to be found. Will creates nothing; it only brings us to avail ourselves of what is created.

I should like men to be offered through the strength of will, a way of virtue, not a way of success; should like them to be told "by a strong and disciplined will you can establish order in yourselves, in your homes, around you," but not "if you have will enough you can be masters of the world." It is time they grasped that – for happiness and *true* success – the important thing is not to will strongly but to will justly.

That will seem clear and true enough to you in the commonly accepted meaning of the word Will; but it is not perhaps just as right in the strict meaning which scholastic rigour has occasionally given the word. The only thing then is to know which is better – more serviceable and easily understood: to take words according to the world, or according to the schools.

I maintain it is better to use them in the popular than in the philosophic sense; and still better to use them in the natural than in the popular sense. By the natural sense I mean the popular and universal acceptance, reduced to its essential and invariable elements.

Proof by definition proves nothing if the definition is purely philosophic; for such, I hold, bind only their authors. Proof by a definition which expresses the one, inevitable, clear idea





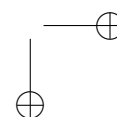
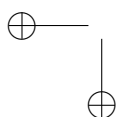
that we derive in general from the subject as soon as it is named does, on the other hand, prove everything; because then we are only showing others what they are themselves thinking, in their despite and without their knowledge.

The rule that one is empowered to give words whatever meaning one wishes, and that all which is needed is to settle how one is naming them, is all very well for pure argumentation, and may be allowed in those particular fencing-schools. But in simple and high philosophy and in the real world of letters it is of no avail.

We must never lose sight of realities, and must make use of expressions only as a medium, as glasses fitted to give a better view of our thoughts. I know from my own experience how difficult it is to observe this rule; but I judge of its importance by the ill-fortune of all metaphysics. No system has prospered; for the one reason that in nearly every case ciphers have been used instead of values, fabricated ideas in place of natural ideas, jargon in lieu of idiom. The finest metaphysic, the only one which merits attention, is that which has at least given images in place of reasons; for images are enjoyable, they stir us up and move us to finer spiritual inclinations.

Moreover, in all the good parts of your writing you have avoided the drawback of which I complain. In them you have displayed a humane and intelligible metaphysic, full of good taste and composed wholly of notions common to all men. Do not go astray by substituting an esoteric sense of words for their common acceptance.

In this chapter on "The Importance and the Means of Conserving the Will" there are simple, true, fresh, and admirable things. I will talk to you about them some day, perhaps not too unworthily, for I am very enthusiastic about them. In the meantime, go round about your subject; expand it by suitable additions, yet without exceeding the just measure. Do not turn this human being into a pure extension. Any-







thing beyond the feet, the hands, the trunk, the head, and the space needed to lodge all that with its contours, would be too much. When the mind gives birth, it bears within itself all that is wanted to feed and bring to growth its offspring; if we have carried it for its full term and take care over hatching it. Search yourself, but make no digressions; take care to isolate your actual subject as much as you can. Many thoughts only hold together because they are united in ourselves. Disentangle, divide up, separate what is in your mind, so as to put into your book only what is inseparably bound up with its substance. In a word, cut the cord.

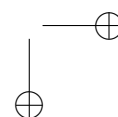
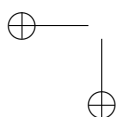
But I must add to all this fine advice, that if it is a good thing for you to circumscribe your plan as far as possible; it is an even greater thing for you to let your mind work at liberty. I am fond of little books, but – especially when one is beginning – it may be profitable to extract a short book from a long manuscript. If you were inclined to diffuseness, I should recommend you to be sparing of paper; but, thank goodness, you have a natural liking for a clear and elegant conciseness. So let your mind and your pen have their will; the surplus will be easily cut away.

I will finish my say another time.

#### TO M. MOLÉ: ON CHATEAUBRIAND

I should like to say a few words to you about poor Chateaubriand.

It is certain that in his work he has affronted essential proprieties and, what is more, troubles very little about them; for he thinks his talent is displayed better than ever in these aberrations.





It is certain that he likes the errors better than the truths of which his book\* is full, because the errors are more his own; he is entirely the author of them.

In this respect he lacks that sincerity which a man only has, and only can have, when he lives much with himself, consults and listens to himself; and when his conscience has been made acute by being kept awake and exercised. Chateaubriand has, so to speak, all his faculties outside, and does not turn them inwards.

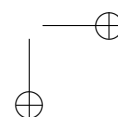
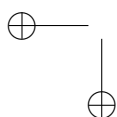
He does not talk to himself, he hardly listens to himself, he never questions himself, unless it be to find out if the external elements of his spirit, I mean his taste and his imagination, are satisfied, if his thought is rounded off, if his phrases are sonorous, if his images are well depicted and so on; he little notices whether the whole is good: that is the least of his cares.

He addresses others, he writes only for them and not for himself; so it is their approval he aims at. Hence his talent will never make him happy, for the ground for satisfaction he might find in it is far from him, changing, unstable, and uncomprehended.

His life is another matter. He conducts it – or, more accurately, leaves it to conduct itself – in quite a different manner. He writes only for others; he lives only for himself. He never gives a thought to his reputation; but only to his self-content. He is even ignorant, profoundly ignorant, of what is approved by the world and what is disapproved.

Not once in his life has he given it a thought, and he has no wish to learn. More: as he never troubles to judge anybody, he supposes that likewise nobody troubles to judge him. In this persuasion he does whatever comes into his head with full and entire confidence, without the slightest self-approval or self-reproach.

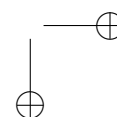
\*Apparently the *Génie du Christianisme*, published in 1802.





A fund of tedium, which seems to draw on the immense vacancy between himself and his thoughts, drives him incessantly to distractions with which no occupation and no variety will ever be able to provide him, and which no society could ever meet unless, sooner or later, he should grow wise and disciplined. Such is what one might call the natural man in him. Here is the educated man. It would appear that early in his life he proposed to himself, or somebody else proposed to him, as the ultimate end of ambition, the honour of being a courtier. If you observe it, the only acquired characteristic which has been forcibly impressed on him, and which he has always retained, is the one which would qualify him for that calling; great circumspection. Quite transparent by nature, he is close on system. He never contradicts; he is very willing to make a mystery of everything. With an open disposition, he keeps not only other men's secrets (which is everybody's duty), but his own. I believe that he has never in his life really told them to anyone. Everything goes in and nothing comes out. He presses the consideration and practice of discretion so far that he will let truth and even virtue be immolated before his eyes and never move to their defence. He would gladly lend his pen, but not his tongue; were it to the noblest cause on earth. Lastly: even in the outpourings and unrestraint of intimate friendship, he only contradicts with a repugnance which betrays that he is resisting a habit. Such is the social Chateaubriand.

Add to this certain lordly passions, a love of the expensive, disdain of thrift, indifference to his spendings and to the trouble they may bring about, even to poor people; his powerlessness to resist his caprices, backed up by carelessness of the results that may come of them – in short, the misconduct of ardent young folk at an age when it is no longer pardonable, and in a character which can hardly excuse it, for he, born prodigal, was by no means born generous. That virtue





requires a spirit of practical reflection, of attention to others, of concern for another man's affairs, and of self-effacement, which it seems to me he has not received as his birthright and has still less thought of acquiring.

There, I think, is the whole man, portrayed, and criticized on his worst side, with austerity; I do not think his conduct or his character can deserve any further reproof.

Well, with the same frankness and the same severity of judgment, I must say, in the face of circumstances, that if it seems to me inevitable that such a man must commit a few blunders, it seems to me impossible for him to give way to grave misconduct such as would bring disgrace upon him; there is and always will be a fund of childlike simplicity in him which makes him as incapable of serious wrong as of sustained well doing.

#### TO M. MOLÉ: ON TRUTH AND ERROR

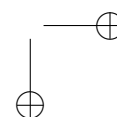
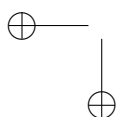
All your new remarks on Error are well put, and not only very well put but very sound, *historic*.

Still, I have a few objections ready for you.

To tell men that every error is fatal – is not that leading them, in their own interests and for their highest ends, to examine all things and consequently make all things problematical, at least at times? The human race could be in no more fatal plight. Besides, it is not exactly the fact, that every form of error is fatal. My meaning is: there are many errors which do not lead us away from truth, for they conduce to it. Such, nearly always, are religious fables. By telling about God, they cherish belief in Him and inculcate His laws:

*“The story bears the moral safely on its back.”*

Many errors are less opinions than virtues, less aberrations of the mind than fine feelings of the heart. Those, for instance,





which are embraced only out of respect, out of sympathy, out of submissiveness to our ancestors or to olden times.

We should be careful to distinguish between new errors and old ones, between dogmatic errors and docile ones, between unheard of systems which strike at all previous thought and systems that are a temporization, affecting forms rather than fundamentals.

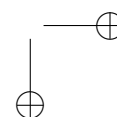
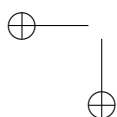
It is a condition of order that all ideas essential to order and the share of happiness this world can give us should be the ideas of all time, and be found wherever mankind is found. By the same token, everything which tends to destroy former ideas is fatal and produces on individuals and nations the sad effects you have depicted.

An error grown hoary has lost its venom – or perhaps, to speak more precisely, every error which has undergone the testing of time and survived it is of its nature harmless and will go with all righteous things. Thence its tenacity.

God is always deceiving us, and He wishes us to be deceived; I mean to say, He is always letting us have opinions in place of a knowledge for which we are unfitted. When I speak of Him as deceiving us I mean by illusions, not by deceptions. His motive is to guide and redeem, not to undo us. He is the Eternal Poet, if I may be allowed the term as one speaks of the Eternal Geometer.

Indeed, we misunderstand and misapply every day the great name of truth. Once upon a time I put it to myself that truth is of nature, not of the individual; of essence, not of existence; of law, not of fact; of the eternal and not of the transitory. As an example, recall this parable of Saint Lambert's.

“A courtier who had been degraded was cursing the king. ‘What does he say?’ asked the latter. ‘That God is merciful to merciful princes,’ answered a wise man. ‘You are being deceived,’ a mischievous fellow put in, ‘the man is cursing





you.' 'Hush!' said the king; and turning to the sage, he added, 'Ah! my friend, you always tell the truth.'"

For really, "God is merciful to the merciful" is a truth, a fact of order, of nature; an essential, an eternal thing. The wise man, by a kind of apologue or substitution of fact, was truly pronouncing a truth; the other man was tending to obscure it by quoting an immediate fact.

**TO FONTANES: SOME NOTES ON  
THE DUTCH SYSTEM OF EDUCATION\***

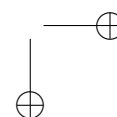
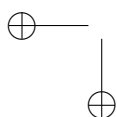
Since you are unwilling to wait, here are my notes. You must blame yourself alone for their dryness and lack of arrangement.

The authors of the Memorial on Public Education in Holland divide the subject into three orders of knowledge: the essential, the cultural, and the vocational. Thence the three degrees of education: the elementary or *Primary*; the literary or *Secondary*; and lastly the professional or *Definitive*.

They make the sphere of Primary education, "the knowledge of which man cannot be deprived without real degradation, apart from any question of the class in which he is born, his rank, his condition, or his fortune."

Of Secondary education, "the acquirement of knowledge of a higher order, knowledge with which the humbler classes of society can dispense, but which are very necessary to the

\*These letters from Paris arise from Joubert's second venturing into public life. On the foundation of the new University in 1809 Napoleon created Fontanes Grand Master. The first three names submitted by the latter as Inspectors-General and members of the Senate were those of de Bonald, de Beausset, and Joubert. As Paul de Raynal demurely puts it, Fontanes had to deal with a master "dont la politique ne s'accommodait pas toujours à la philosophie de M. Joubert"; but the Marquis seems to have kept a nice balance between the two influences.





rest, and become more and more indispensable the higher the class, the greater fortune one enjoys, or the more one aspires to attain a loftier rank by genuine merit.”

Lastly, the sphere of Definitive education is “the kind of teaching which provides the knowledge requisite to exercise one’s vocation, either in scholarship strictly so-called, or in other of the higher professions.”

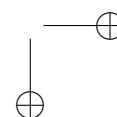
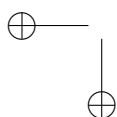
The King does not like this word Definitive. Yet it expresses the professors’ meaning well enough; it is reasonable, for education would seem to be most finished when, having instructed a man in his own interest, it instructs him for the sake of others also. It might be better called Political. It gives in effect, to him who has received it, a rank in the world and in his district; a status, a sort of dignity and authority in society. It is an honour which, among all peoples and even in barbarous ages, has been paid to theology, law, medicine, high science, and literature.

Elementary education, which, by an arrangement they regard as fundamental, embraces both sexes, seems to me to be supervised admirably in Holland and, except for the *innovations* which some would like to impose, it is perhaps outstanding, when you consider the virtues of a land in which the revolutions the government has suffered have changed nothing and interrupted nothing.

Fifty inspectors, for the ten departments, keep an active and ceaseless vigil to maintain or restore order in the schools. These small establishments are tended like the native dykes. The inspectors are reinforced in the larger towns by groups, called local commissions, of persons to each of whom is assigned the schools in his own district.

There is something worth imitation in this arrangement, *et erat quod tollere velles*.

The local commissions meet, three times a year, together with the inspectors, to discuss the requirements of the dis-





tricts; and submit annually to the Minister a report of their activities and of the general condition of all their schools. The inspectors' meeting has the especial object of setting "the examination prescribed by law for those students who wish to become schoolmasters."

Nothing has been left untried, or unsuggested, to the end of getting first-class ones.

"A selection to be made by the inspectors from such scholars as shall acquit themselves well and shall wish to follow a scholastic career;

"Encouragement and pecuniary help to young people of the least well-to-do classes, so that they may devote themselves to so useful a life;

"A prospect of finding a post as soon as a vacancy arises;

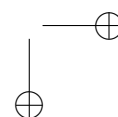
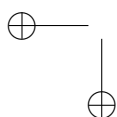
"*Gradations* that may act as a spur, that is to say, promotion from a less to a more important school, from a borough school to a city school, and so on;

"Remuneration so adapted to their needs that they may no more be under the painful necessity of giving up their time to other occupations, which often interfere with the duties of their profession and lessen their enthusiasm," etc.

The authors of the scheme wisely desire to confine elementary education in Holland (as in France) to "reading, writing, and the first rules of arithmetic, in addition to reverence for the Supreme Being and the worship due to Him."

The Minister does not mean to allow, in primary schools, any teaching of religious dogma: an opinion which the King shares owing to his respect for liberty of conscience. Only what is, in the King,\* deep respect, tender scrupulousness, and delicate consideration, shows itself here and there as

\*It will be remembered that Louis Bonaparte occupied the throne of Holland at this time. Owing mainly to his officious zeal for the welfare of his subjects, he was removed by his brother Napoleon in 1810.







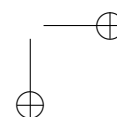
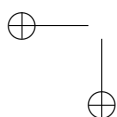
an antipathy in the Minister. But by way of compensation the latter wishes to have taught, in the smallest schools, or at least in some of them “beyond the arts of reading, writing and figures, the Dutch and French languages, singing, the elements of mathematics, physics, reasoning, geography, history and other subjects besides.”

He does not tell us if little girls, who also have intellectual faculties, “will learn the elements of logic”; it is quite probable in an age which believes that reasoning is reason.

Heaven preserve the other children – children of the people, for with them we are now concerned – from being able to learn all the Minister wants to teach them! They would be fit for work no longer. If a man’s strength goes to his brain, it leaves his hands. Anybody who is qualified to concentrate wholly on the abstract becomes unfitted for the mechanical. Nature has provided for the necessary work of life by giving most men only inactive brains.

The inspectors are authorized, in this scheme, to introduce and perfect new methods. It is unwise. Anything that can in practice be introduced in that regard will always tend to make learning less *mechanical*; and that is precisely the characteristic, arising in the first place from instinct and necessity, which makes learning more *popular*, that is to say more welcome to the multitude, which is incapable of calculation, especially when composed of children.

The inspectors’ mission, again, opens a thousand doors, which should be left closed, to the mania of innovation. It brings into education a crowd of experiments arising from caprice; these experiments are deplorable since, when they are not of really great service, they have the grave drawback of severing respect for the old traditions. Such a task inflames ambition and cools genuine zeal; it strips mediocrity of its modesty, for there never was a commonplace man but could conceive an improvement in the alphabet, and the greater his





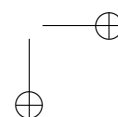
dullness the more he will cling to the honour and glory of the attempt: there are all too many instances. The sum of it is, that to gain merit and distinction in a duty so imprudently thrust upon him, every inspector must have his mind always on the alert for some *Novum Organum* which will bring him into repute; vanity is at work and judgment idle.

The professors suggest, and the King approves it, that without interfering with study manual labour be introduced into the elementary schools, because the children are not capable of mental concentration through all the working-hours. No doubt the measure would have its advantages; but it is not certain that one can find many forms of sedentary labour suitable for men, and so for young boys. Would it not be absurd, for instance, to have them knitting or spinning? And if idle habits are a menace, is there no merit in accustoming a man from childhood to being orderly the while he is resting?

Here I break off.

No, I must have yet another word. You have seen that our good professors were bolder than the King, and better intentioned than the Minister, in the concern of religion. They wish it to be talked about or at least publicly practised in the schools, and they say very sensibly on the theme: "The children must be made to feel that, if the government has wisely left it to the ministers of the Faiths to give a detailed religious training, it attaches none the less a great importance to religion; that it considers religion to be the basis of morality, of individual and general welfare, of the respect due to the sovereign and of all social teaching."

"Sometimes," they add, "too much latitude is given to the principle, very true in itself, that religion is a matter between each individual and the Supreme Being. So doubtless it is; but at the same time it is a matter so important to society, that the welfare, the stability, the progress of society depend





on it; and one could not too early turn the minds and hearts of young people towards it.”

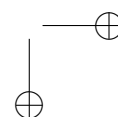
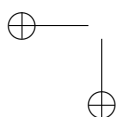
“We are also aware, beyond any possibility of doubt, how much, in a country where religious feeling has retained so great a dominion” (happy land!) “the idea that devoted reading of the Scriptures will no longer form a part of national education alienates some cultured men and women who are as zealous for religion as for the welfare of their country, and makes them less favourable to an educational system which might otherwise call forth their keenest approbation.”

The King has made a note on this paragraph, a note which we will discuss together with the rest. He is not wholly wrong in his scruples, and yet the professors are almost entirely in the right. They are very enlightened, moderate, and sagacious men. Their French is bizarre, but its meaning is sound; and their corrupt language is always used to express very judicious ideas and sentiments. While we await our first meeting you will be able, without compromising the prestige of your discernment, to say a number of kind things to His Majesty about this work and its authors.

#### TO FONTANES: ON LITERARY EDUCATION

The whole of the second part of the Memorial is given up to literary education, or Secondary and Intermediate education as the professors call it. You would gather from it that their zeal for the public welfare has exhausted itself in the affairs of the elementary schools, and has been able to give only a relaxed and wearied attention to the rest. This section, in fact, is curtailed and deplorable – deplorable in its account of things as they are; in its proposals, even in its ambitions; and in its grasp of what is possible.

I need not discuss the present state of things; the Minister of the Interior deals fairly with the subject in his letter to the King.





As for the proposals, the Minister, so splendid, so fertile and so inexhaustible in plans for all that concerns the elementary schools, has nothing to offer here.

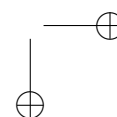
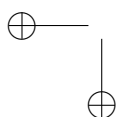
After deploring, with distilled bitterness, the time wasted in Secondary schools over the study of Greek and Latin – which he seems secretly to hate – he can find no better remedy for all these ills than to combine “with grammar, right from the beginning, short readings from the best authors; and to explain them not only as to the meaning and to the construction of the words, but also with relation to realities and to the spirit of the writer.”

There is no doubt this would form an excellent education, for it embraces everything: grammar, rhetoric, history, geography, poetry, eloquence, and erudition. But we are not told how one must set about to attain such a goal: the problem is not solved.

The professors themselves are embarrassed about it. They propose gymnasiums, and, in these gymnasiums, “a great variety of teaching, the study of the French, English, and German languages, education in natural philosophy, political geography, and so on, all this mingled with the Greek and Latin tongues, etc.”

They have two plans and put them forward with a perfect impartiality, although three of the authors hold with the first and one only with the second. The arguments and objections on behalf of both plans are faithfully discussed; the good fellows are true comrades together and impeccable enemies. The most notable difference that there is to show between the two projects – which at bottom are not worthy of serious attention or even of being remembered – is that in the first hypothesis the lessons would be given in the same place, and in different places according to the second.

It is alleged in favour of the latter way that by changing from place to place the children would recruit their energies;





and in favour of the former, that they would be induced to learn everything by coming to a place where everything was taught. The element of novelty, the opportunity, the surroundings would determine a great number of them to learn Latin in *superabundance*. Such is the expressed desire and hope of three of the professors, who display throughout more simple-heartedness than elevation or vigour of mind.

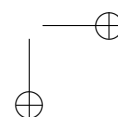
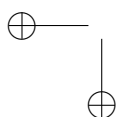
Their opinion on this subject puts me in mind of an opinion of my own which I am unwilling to keep to myself since I have recalled it, and which, a little inferior to theirs in simplicity, is not so in utility. "One could not," I said to you one day in a statement which I had projected as necessary and have since suppressed as superfluous, "one could not encourage by too many privileges that kind of school in which the children of the people, seeing all the time a higher education than is given to them, receive some tincture of it, and thus find improvement." That is my passage. Please see that it is not lost. I come back to our professors.

They are united in asking that, either in the same place or in different places, there shall be a separate *literary education* for two kinds of pupils: those who study the learned tongues and those who do not.

It is dividing what should be united, it is pouring an exquisite liquor into unworthy vessels which would surely taint it. Literature must only be poured into minds and spirits that are literary. Now a modern cannot have such a mind and spirit except by the study of antiquity, nor really understand the men of old without knowing their language.

So the professors are petty in their methods. They are petty too in their aim, or in their inclination – and this brings me to my third point.

These worthy folk think that the aim of a literary education is and should be, not to render the mind more fine, the taste more pure, the instincts more right, the speech more polished,



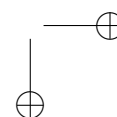


the soul more refined and the memory a greater source of pleasure; but merely to give the intellect “a wider aptitude for all kinds of knowledge.” They bewail the state of their country in that respect: “The study of mathematics, of physics, of natural history, is far too much neglected. The lecture-rooms where these sciences are expounded are little frequented, in some places they are almost deserted.” They blush for it, “and this,” they say, “is not what the present state of enlightenment and of society requires.” So to rise to the level of the present state of enlightenment and of society (the great warhorse of those who, never finding their reasons below the surface, because their minds have little penetration, look for them on the surface, since they still *have* eyes), our friends wish to have everything taught to youth, even to childhood, to make it fit to know everything.

In this they have a singular principle. They recognize that children have little power of concentration; but they claim that by perpetually changing one study for another the young minds can be occupied continually without fatigue. That is to say: a bow that is always drawn will be relaxed if the archer shifts his aim. The comparison is scholastic; but we are talking of pupils.

The professors are mistaken. The master’s brain, which is robust and well-exercised, can indeed relax by a change of attention and occupation; but the brain of a child, being slight and delicate, can only find rest and recreation by bodily movement, games, distractions, frivolity.

It might, however, come about that by dint of exercise a child’s mind could be brought to greater scope and “aptitude” than its nature allows of. But this stroke of art would only achieve a vain appearance and a deceptive extension; you would gain merely an intelligence unreliable and of poor stability.





One of the cares of a good teacher should be to leave each mind in its proper sphere and teach it to fill that sphere. *Meo sum pauper in aere* was Horace's motto; and in some ways it would be a good thing if every child leaving school could apply it. Nobody must learn to have a mind bigger than his own.

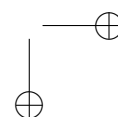
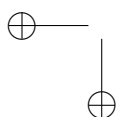
I should myself be going beyond the bounds my natural powers enforce, if I were to continue developing my text without a break. So I will postpone till to-morrow my fourth point, which consists of proving that this part of the Memorial, deplorable as to things as they are at present, deplorable in its proposals and even its aims, is just as deplorable in the question of possibilities. I shall only need to copy, for I have dictated the paragraph, which will thus not be very good – a pity, for it deserved to be dealt with well, but I have disposed of it *invitâ Minervâ* – in spite of my health. Your imagination will supply my deficiencies.

However, you are in a hurry for a review of the plan in general, and will have me give voice to-day: so here are my conclusions.

The first part sins by excess; too much has been done for primary education; there is a luxurious prodigality about it all. We see that they have wished to plant, cultivate, and irrigate at a heavy cost novelties that are dear, and too “dear” to their authors. If it was all necessary for creation, a good half of it at least will be useless for preservation. You will be able to have this mentioned to the King.

The second part sins by default, and above all by an irremediable default; the essential idea of a good literary education is lacking. We will examine the why.

The third is consummate. There is nothing to analyse: everything is there, everything is excellent, save one point about which I will warn you. We absolutely must have this





third section copied; most of the arrangements in it deserve to be pondered and imitated.

If they have not and never have had in Holland the idea of a good literary education; we have not and never have had that of a good university education in France.

When the students arrived at the schools of law, medicine, etc. they were their own masters; they had no protection against themselves. In Holland they are watched over, watched over paternally. Good conduct is required for them to graduate. Gentle and discreet rebukes from the professors, wise legal precautions, a very capable scholastic police, make peccadilloes difficult. The whole scheme is mild and reasonable; it is absolutely necessary that you have it in your hands.

I said there was a point open to revision: it is this.

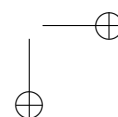
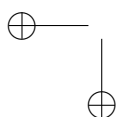
During the six years which the authors of the Memorial call Academic years, so many "courses" of every kind are imposed that the very names of them are terrifying. There is nothing to be said to the King on this matter, except that it is doubtful if the human brain is equal to all these studies in *every* European country, while admitting all the time that they may be very proper in Holland and remarking discreetly that a people avid of literary distinction yet not too richly endowed with wit is naturally forced to plunge into scholarship, its resource; Nature having given more patience to those she has made less perspicacious.

A mere look at the placard would send us Frenchmen fleeing from the very schools whither the enumeration of so many sweet sciences attracts the young Dutchmen in crowds.

I am tired... again to-morrow.

**TO MADAME DE VINTIMILLE,  
FROM PARIS, WITH A SOUVENIR**

Here is a little present which I think worthy of you and the place where you live. It is a letter of Boileau's to M. de







Lamoignon,\* the Solicitor-General, a bearer of the name of that Basville country which your neighbourhood adorns. I feel sure you will be glad to read and to possess this perfect specimen of the poet's writing. It was given me, and I am giving it to you. This is my infallible way of adding to the pleasure I have got from it.

Boileau complains in his letter because that year, on the day he wrote, there was no sunshine worthy of the month, June. To-day we are having weather equally unworthy of the month of July, and July 22nd to boot. But I have my resources, and if to-morrow does not turn out a fine St. Magdalene's day, memory shall warm me with another.

Do you remember hearing Chateaubriand quote two lines by an elderly Justice of the Peace from Sceaux, who was rendering *Atala* in his own way, and made the barbarian say:

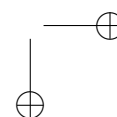
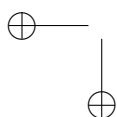
*"cruel memory  
Will never let my sufferings ended be."*

I say to myself, in parody of this barbarian:

*"so sweet a memory  
Will never let my blessings ended be."*

Do please send me more or less detailed news of yourself, and of Madame de Labriche – whose accident has, I hope, left no traces. Is Mme de Pastoret in your neighbourhood, and is her affliction softened? I dare not go to see her for fear of stirring up her grief; but she is much in my thoughts. I give you no message for M. Molé: I want to break off with all but two or three *men*. Politics have bereft the others of half their wits, half their sense of things, three-quarters and a half of their kindness and all their sleep, for a certainty,

\*Guillaume Lamoignon, the elder of the famous officials of that family.





and all their peace of mind. I await them in the next world; there only will I renew my friendships.

On the subject of friendship – poor Frisell,\* who used to serve sometimes as an intermediary of our own, had set out for London, but suffered an attack of gout at Dieppe, one of his hands becoming all swollen and red. So there he was, fancying himself free of all his other ills, and writing for us to join him in singing a *Te Deum*: never was man so happy with the gout! But he waits till the next day to seal his letter, and now he wakes up with the same hand, true, yet with the same back and the same nerves, the same muscles and the same sorrows as before. The poor lad has ended by asking us for a modest *De profundis*. We will tell a *Libera* for him, not for the next world but for this, and pray Heaven to deliver him from everything that takes away his gaiety, his content, and his native amiability.

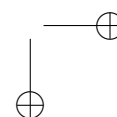
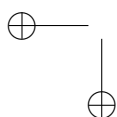
We shall leave for Villeneuve much earlier than usual; let me have your summer arrangements so that I may know if there is any hope of seeing you again before leaving Paris.

Always keep well, and keep always a lot of indulgence and a little affection for me, who have so long loved you and love you so much.

#### TO CHATEAUBRIAND: ON A CHARADÉER

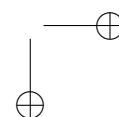
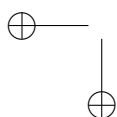
M. Maillet-Lacoste, a very metromaniac in prose, and the man of all men most capable of writing well if he did not want to write too well and could sometimes give his attention to matters outside what he is writing: M. Maillet-Lacoste, who will be young till he is a hundred and is the best, the most sensitive, the most worthy, the most incorruptible, and the simplest of the young people of any age, but who gives his very candour a theatrical air because his bristling head,

\*A scholarly young Englishman, a friend of Joubert's later years.





his gestures, and even the sound of his voice are affected by the habits of the tripod which he always stands on when he is alone and hardly quits when he is not: M. Maillet, who only wants laziness, relaxation, peace of mind, to work admirably and has worked with as much exuberance as courage this last twenty years against the tyranny of the age – as is attested by his tracts, of which I sent you a specimen ten years since, a specimen which had you read it would have made you recognize his merits but you have not read it because, busy as you are, you read nothing, and I believe you are right by a prerogative which is yours alone: M. Maillet, who lost a fair fortune at San Domingo without noticing it or being able to remember it because he was busy with a tale of Phædra and is for ever struggling with some period of Cicero's or his own: M. Maillet who, deported by the Directory, went into a Breton school and made its fortune for his shoes and a coat without observing either the injustice of mankind or his changed situation, because he is always asleep though always dancing about on the pinnacles of his thought: M. Maillet who, with the loftiest and yet the most innocent pretensions, put on as much consequence in his humble rôle of teacher as if he were a mere fool, and fulfilled all his duties with the conscientious devotion of a Rollin; who excels in teaching everything and teaches whatever you like from the “rudiments” to arithmetic, passing through all the intermediate stages – the humanities, rhetoric, and philosophy: M. Maillet, whose destiny is to be appreciated and forgotten, whom the University, in the act of recognizing his academic merit, leaves in the provinces while all these others are in Paris; whom M. de Fontanes himself, so very determined to help him, has neglected; whom M. Dussaut has been known to admire; who can count many partisans but of whom everybody but myself speaks with a smile: M. Maillet, whose ambitions all the laurels of Parnassus could not crown and whose modesty would be content with the





applause of a child; who would give all the blessings of this world (occupied as he is with those of another) for a word of praise, and all the kind words in the world for one from you or for a moment of your benevolent consideration: M. Maillet, then, has arrived in Paris with a letter from the Bishop of Montpellier to M. Trouvé asking the latter to mention him to the Conservator. Now M. Trouvé having replied that he would make the proposal but that the Committee alone would decide, the said Maillet, after going to look for me at Villeneuve, where I had not arrived, came back to look for me at Paris, whence I had set forth, without being clever enough to catch me on the road because he is too busy (that is, too preoccupied) for such cleverness; and he has sent me his cry of distress in a letter calling me to his aid. I fly to it as best I can; that is to say I – who answer nobody – am answering him, and am writing to you, though I write to nobody, not even to you nor to my lady the Duchess de Lévis. I am sending him, quite openly, this commendation, which would make any other man wrathful and will convulse him with joy. Do please pay attention to it. Receive my Maillet, the wisest of fools and the silliest of sages, but one of the best heads in the world if his head were cooler and one of the choicest spirits Heaven has ever created, albeit he is concerned only with his mind; a kind of beakless, talonless, innocuous eagle yet assuredly no unsoaring one; a young man from the other world whom the generous knowing-ones like yourself should appreciate in this, so that justice may be his, for fortune never will be. Make him happy with a word and a smile; you will be doing me good. Farewell.

