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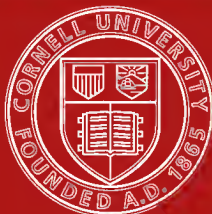
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SELECTIONS FROM THE CHARACTERS,
REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS OF
LA BRUYÈRE AND OF VAUVENARGUES

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Selections from the Characters

Reflexions and Maxims

Translated with Introductory

Notes and Memoirs by

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INTRODUCTION

I

“ There are two kinds of wisdom : in the one, every age in which science flourishes, surpasses, or ought to surpass, its predecessors ; of the other there is nearly an equal amount in all ages. The first is the wisdom which depends on long chains of reasoning, a comprehensive survey of the whole of a great subject at once, or complicated and subtle processes of metaphysical analysis ; this is properly Philosophy. The other is that acquired by experience of life, or a good use of the opportunities possessed by all who have mingled much with the world, or who have a large share of human nature in their own breasts. This unsystematic wisdom, drawn by acute minds in all periods of history from their personal experience, is properly termed the wisdom of ages ; and every lettered age has left a portion upon record.”—J. S. MILL.



T is the unsystematic wisdom, as contained in “Characters” and “Maxims,” that we offer in this volume of selections from La Bruyère and Vauvenargues. Philosophy, properly systematic, is, to the most of men, a sealed book, which they have neither the leisure nor the inclination to open. But as the years pass by and bring with them their varied experiences of mind, heart and action, men form for themselves, in many cases almost insensibly, a kind of rough philosophy of life that becomes their guide. Thus the unsys-

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Introduction thematic philosophy which has found literary expression appeals to and interests all those who, without being students of systems of philosophy, have observed men and manners and given heed to all sorts of human experience. Let that fact then serve as an *apologia* for presenting these samples of two of the greatest unsystematic philosophers the world has known.

II

“ We know nothing, or almost nothing, of the life of La Bruyère. . . . If there is not a single line of his unique book, which since the first moment of publication did not come into the full light and remain there, there is, on the other hand, scarcely a single well-authenticated detail known about the author. All the light of the age fell upon each page of the book, but the countenance of the man who held it open in his hands is hidden.”—SAINTE-BEUVE.

“ I live in the world rather as a spectator of mankind than as one of the species.”—ADDISON.

Any attempt, however modest in aim, to write a biography of La Bruyère bristles with difficulties. His latest editor, M. Servois¹ owns that La Bruyère, the man, is the most unknown of all the great writers of his epoch. His life, it seems, was hidden even from his contemporaries, and the information that they have to give us is vague and scanty. We are thus compelled to construct the man's personality from his work,

¹ Cf. *Œuvres de La Bruyère par M. G. Servois*. 3 vols. Paris 1885.

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aiding ourselves by such facts as we know to be most authentic. Introduction

Jean de la Bruyère was born at Paris in August, 1645, of a good middle-class family. His father, Louis de la Bruyère, was Comptroller-General in the Financial Department of the Hôtel de Ville. Little is known of Jean's childhood and education. He graduated in law at the University of Orleans, and for eight years practised, or attempted to practise at the Bar in Paris. In 1673 he abandoned law for finance, his father purchasing him a post in the Treasury at Caen. After going through certain formalities there he continued to reside in Paris, leading a life in which he had the free use of his time, the free choice of work and recreation, a life in which he was the sole arbiter of what he did or did not do. Notwithstanding, he held his post in the Treasury until 1686. Two years earlier he had been appointed one of the masters entrusted with the education of the young Duke of Bourbon, grandson of the Great Condé. Although in accepting the tutorial office he gave up his liberty, he gained so vastly in knowledge of men, that his entry into the house of Condé may be fitly described as the decisive event of his life. The task of teaching the sixteen-year-old duke was no easy one; he had been spoiled and flattered from

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Introduction babyhood, and was not the pleasantest of pupils. La Bruyère had to instruct him in history, geography, the institutions of France, even in mythology and heraldry, and, despite manifold difficulties, he performed his duties most conscientiously. It is told how, on one occasion, Bossuet being present when a lesson on Descartes's "Principia" was going forward, pronounced himself well satisfied with the teacher. It seems strange that La Bruyère should have sacrificed his liberty for such an office. Perhaps he did so conscientiously in order to gain the wider experience of men necessary to his work; or the obtaining of that experience by a lucky chance, as it were, may have helped to fix the character his work was to take, and have insured it something it must otherwise have lacked. We who are his heirs can only rejoice that the experience should have been his, and we fully concur with Sainte-Beuve when he writes: "What would he have been without the unexpected opening of that window on to the great world, without the corner seat which he occupied in a grand tier box at the great spectacle of the human life and high comedy of his time? He would have been like a hunter who lacks game, big game, and is compelled to content himself with a poor hare whom he encountered on the plain. La Bruyère, with only the middle class, or only the literary class,

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for the range of his observation, would have Introduction
reaped a harvest there ; but with nothing else to observe, he would certainly have lost much, and we should have lost it with him." When the young duke's education was finished, La Bruyère remained in the service of his father, probably as librarian or secretary.

The earliest mention of La Bruyère's great work occurs in a letter from Boileau to Racine, May 19, 1687 :—" Maximilian (i.e., La Bruyère) came to see me at Auteuil, and read me some of his 'Theophrastus.'" The next year, 1688, there appeared at Paris "Les Caractères de Théophraste Traduits du Grec avec les Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce Siècle." The book was published by Estienne Michallet, chief printer to the King. A pleasant little story, that one would like to think true, was told at Berlin by Maupertuis, and incorporated by Formey, Secretary to the Berlin Academy, in one of his speeches. It is to the effect that La Bruyère was in the habit of going every day to Michallet's to look at the new publications, and of playing with Michallet's little girl, for whom he conceived a great affection. One day he drew a manuscript from his pocket and said to Michallet: "Will you print this (i.e., the 'Caractères')? I don't know if it will pay you, but in case of success let the profit be my little friend's dowry." Michallet

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Introduction took the risk, and before long the book was worth two or three thousand francs. It is known that Michallet's daughter made a very good marriage. The book which brought its author such sudden fame was a slim duodecimo of some 360 pages. It went through five editions in less than two years; each successive edition was revised and considerably augmented by the author. This is in accordance with the practice of all character writers from Overbury and Earle onwards.

In his preface to the edition of 1689, La Bruyère wrote: "The orator and the author cannot overcome the delight they have in being applauded." We are not then surprised to find La Bruyère applying, in 1691, for admission to the French Academy. That application was not successful, and it was 1693 before he obtained the much coveted distinction, when he succeeded to the chair of the Abbé de la Chambre. In the speech made by him at his reception he praised those academicians, who, like Bossuet, La Fontaine, Racine, Boileau, and Fénelon, had great reputations; those of lesser distinction who were his friends, he likewise praised; but his enemies, no matter what their standing or attainments, he ignored. And, to add to his sins, he depreciated Corneille at the expense of Racine. That kind of thing was displeasing to the illustrious forty and contrary to all their most

cherished traditions. They tried, therefore, to prevent the publication of La Bruyère's discourse. It appeared, however, separately, in 1693, and was incorporated next year in the eighth edition of the "Caractères," with a preface, being a reply to his detractors.

La Bruyère never married, and there is no certain evidence that he was ever any woman's lover. But it is difficult to believe that the two chapters in his book, entitled respectively "Of the Heart" and "Of Women," are not, in a large measure, the outcome of personal experience. Such a remark as "the sound of the voice of one we love is the sweetest melody in the world," such an exquisite portrait as that of Arthenice,¹ point to something beyond mere imagination. However that may be, there is little doubt that immunity from an absorbing passion for the other sex left him more time for friendships with his own. When we remember that among his friends were such men as Bossuet, Fénelon, Racine, Boileau, besides others less known to fame, it is more than surprising that references to him in the memoirs of the time should be so scanty and unimportant. We gather in a general sort of way that beneath the calm exterior, beneath the contemplative and inactive life, there lay a passionate nature, sen-

¹ Cf. p. 95.

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Introduction sible of wounds to his self-love, and capable of generous indignation. Saint-Simon writes of him as a very agreeable man, pleasant company, simple, with nothing of the pedant about him, and entirely disinterested. La Bruyère died suddenly in May, 1696, at Condé's house in Versailles, of an attack of apoplexy, while occupied, so it is said, on a new work, "Dialogues on Quietism." He was buried at Versailles in the Church of St. Julien.¹

III

"If it is true that Theophrastus, so to speak, created La Bruyère, it must be confessed that therein lies his greatest fame and his greatest work."—(One of La Bruyère's critics.)

"If these characters do not find favour, I shall wonder; if they do, I shall wonder no less."—(The concluding words of La Bruyère's book.)

La Bruyère was occupied with the composition of the "Characters," from about 1670 until their publication in 1688, and thence until 1694 with their development and revision. So that if we except the time devoted to teaching the Duke of Bourbon, and that devoted to the posthumous "Dialogues on Quietism," thought by some to be apocryphal, it is correct to say that the "Characters" formed the unique work of La Bruyère's life.

The first edition of the "Caractères" (1688)

¹ Pulled down in 1797.

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bore the title "The Characters of Theophrastus, translated from the Greek with characters or manners of the Age." Two other editions were called for the same year, and they each contained 420 articles. Other editions which La Bruyère revised, and to which he greatly added, appeared in 1689, 1690, 1691, 1692, and 1694, the last containing 1,120 articles. The ninth edition was the last printed in La Bruyère's life-time, and is usually considered the best text. It was published a few days after his death in 1696. With the translation of Theophrastus we are not here concerned. Suffice it to say that it was approved by La Bruyère's learned contemporaries. Lack of faithfulness to his original, a circumstance greatly blamed by modern scholars, was no bar to the success of a translation in the seventeenth century, when a considerable amount of license was regarded as a translator's right. Those who are interested in La Bruyère's views on that subject can read the "Discourse on Theophrastus" he prefixed to his translation.

La Bruyère took the title and idea of his "Characters or the Manners of the Age" from Theophrastus, but with La Bruyère, the word *character*¹ became a synonym for *portrait*, and

¹ Littré defines *caractère* as that which distinguishes one person from another morally. The best "character" writers may perhaps be said to have aimed at a happy mean between individual and generic portraits.

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Introduction his aim was to describe the manners of his age in a collection of portraits. With such portraits, however, he mingled a great many reflexions or remarks. He sets forth this object and intention of his book in the motto prefixed to it, and in the preface. The motto—"Our purpose is to warn, not to bite; to be useful, not to wound; to do good to manners, not hurt to men"—is taken from the letter of Erasmus to Martin Dorpius, in which he replies to the latter's criticism of his "Praise of Folly." In the preface he writes:—"The subject of the following sheets being borrowed of the public, it is but justice to make restitution to it of the whole work, such as it is, throughout which the utmost regard has been paid to truth. The world may view its picture drawn from life, and if conscious of any of the defects which I have delineated, let it correct them." He then requests his readers to keep the title of the book in view, "and to bear in mind that I describe *the characters or the manners of the age*; for though I frequently take them from the Court of France and men of my own nation, yet they cannot be confined to any one court or country without greatly contracting and impairing the compass and utility of my book, and destroying the design of the work, which is to paint mankind in general. . . . To conclude, what I have written is not designed

for maxims; they are like laws in morality; and I have neither genius nor authority for a legislator. I know that I should have sinned against the law of maxims, which requires short and concise phrases, like unto oracles. Some of my remarks are of this kind, others are more diffuse. I think of things differently, and express them in a turn of phrase equally different—by a sentence, an argument, a metaphor, a simile, or some other figure, by a story at length or a single passage, by a description or a picture, whence proceeds the length or shortness of my reflexions. They who write maxims set up for infallibility; I, on the contrary, allow anybody to say my remarks are not always just, provided he will make better ones himself.”

The book contains sixteen chapters with the following titles: “Of works of genius—Of personal merit—Of women—Of the heart—Of society and conversation—Of the goods of fortune—Of the city—Of the court—Of the great—Of the sovereign—Of the state—Of man—Of judgments—Of fashion,—Of custom—Of the pulpit—Of free-thinkers.” In these chapters portraits, observation of manners, and general maxims follow each other without connection. La Bruyère never had the intention of writing a regular work; what he desired was a large supple frame in which he could include things that a more rigorous plan

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Introduction would have excluded. He well knew wherein lay the novelty of his book. In the prefatory discourse concerning Theophrastus he characterizes the work of Pascal and La Rochefoucauld thus: "The first makes metaphysics subservient to religion, explains the nature of the soul, its passions and vices, discusses the most prevalent motives to virtue, and endeavours to make man Christian. The other is the production of a mind thoroughly acquainted with society who has arrived at the conclusion that self-love in man is the source of all his errors, who attacks it unceasingly wherever he finds it; and with him this one thought is so happily diversified in a thousand ways by the choice of words and the variety of expression that it always has the charm of novelty." La Bruyère desired to do neither of those things. His work was less sublime than the first, less delicate than the second; it was his aim to make men reasonable, the means to that end being to examine and describe them. To define well, to paint well, were, according to La Bruyère, the whole duty of a writer. His "characters" are certainly real and picturesque, and possess the quality of something "seen." Notwithstanding the lack of regularity, when we have read one of his chapters we feel that we have been looking at a complete picture, we have a profound impres-

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sion that everything on the subject treated has been said.¹ Introduction

We shall leave aside the question of the "keys" to the different characters; it is treated fully by M. Servois, and those who are interested may study it in his volumes. We prefer to regard the matter from La Bruyère's own standpoint. He said: "It is true that I have painted from life, but it was not always my purpose to paint this man or that woman. . . . I have taken one feature from one, and another from another, and have formed from these different features probable portraits." There is little doubt that in nearly every case La Bruyère had real persons in his mind, and in describing some of them, Fontenelle (Cydias) and Condé (Æmilius)² he was surely guided by his personal feeling towards them; but while describing his contemporaries, La Bruyère painted mankind, as far as he had the means of observing it, in general, and in that, and not in isolated portraits of this or that individual, lies the value of his work as a moralist.

And what splendid opportunities La Bruyère had for observing all classes of society. Belonging to an old bourgeois family, himself a barrister and a treasurer of France, nephew of

¹ Cf. the chapter "Of the Court."

² Cf. pp. 104 and 106.

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Introduction a financier and of a secretary to a king, almost everybody who at that time formed the town, so to speak—tradesmen, men of independent means, lawyers, magistrates, manipulators of the public funds—came under his view.

As a guest in Condé's house at Chantilly or Versailles, he associated with all those of the court, the army, the church, and the magistracy, reckoned as the most illustrious men of France. Men of letters he knew likewise, and is often justly indignant at the low opinion held of them by the great in his day. An author was mostly regarded as something a little above the jester or buffoon, something to provide distraction and amusement for his betters. It was a period when the pope would ask the king for the loan of his poet, much as we might ask a friend to lend us his horse or his dog. We do not know if La Bruyère knew much of the country gentlemen or of the yeomen of the period, but he laughs at the cockneys who think all begins and ends at the gate of their town; he shows acquaintance with agricultural subjects, and signs of an appreciation of the beauties of external nature. In addition to his great opportunities for observing mankind, he had nothing to distract his attention, no absorbing avocation, no large fortune to administer, no family to bring up, no imperious passions to yield to or with-

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stand. Except during the two years in which Introduction
he was teaching the Duke of Bourbon, La Bruyère enjoyed the leisure of the sage. Observation was the great business, the sole occupation of his life. When his friends accused him of doing nothing, of wasting his time, he replied, "I am opening my eyes and looking, opening my ears and listening." He was of those contemplative spirits whom the rush and hurry of modern life seem to have killed, men who live without ambition, unenvious of their fellows, yet interested in all that concerns their kind.

Some critics refuse La Bruyère a place among the originals. He said nothing new, they argue. If an author is to be judged solely by the new things he says, we should be compelled to eliminate most writers from the ranks of the immortals. To thoughtful persons the great moral truths when expressed in words inevitably present something of the obvious. But, like our own poet, Alexander Pope, La Bruyère possessed, in a supreme degree, the art of rivetting attention, and if he says nothing that is new, when once he has said the things that are old, we never forget them. He has said them, so to speak, for all time. It must also be remembered that La Bruyère made no attempt to trace human feeling to its source, or to discover its cause ; it is rather the outward physiognomy

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Introduction of the passions that held attraction for him. Yet in some few points it seems to us that La Bruyère can claim originality. As a thinker, he was in many ways in advance of his time, and was by no means inaccessible to new ideas. He was not, it is true, agitated or dominated by them to the extent of being inspired with revolutionary passions or utopian dreams. But he was irritated by the vanity, and the insolence, and the cruelty of the nobles, and did not hesitate to express his irritation, and he was pained by the misery and poverty and downtroddenness of the people, and gave them freely of his sympathy. In that way he touches hands with Voltaire, Rousseau, and Beaumarchais, the precursors of the Revolution. He was almost the first among French writers to describe the people, the toilers of the earth¹ who labour without reaping the fruit of their toil. Yet his reason always held sway, and his recognition of the vices of the nobility never prevented him from seeing the faults of the people. We find, too, in La Bruyère, as we shall find presently in Vauvenargues, a feeling for nature and natural scenery that was rare in seventeenth century and early eighteenth century writers. His description of the little town which seems to him as it painted on the slope of a hill,² of the park of

¹ Cf. p. 111.

² Cf. p. 112.

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Chantilly,¹ and the comparison of the king and the shepherd,² are interesting examples. He had, too, a love of places that is entirely modern. He writes—"There are some places which we admire, others which we love, and where we could wish to pass our days," a sentence which contains the germ of what afterwards blossomed into fruit in the work of Rousseau, Bernardin de St. Pierre, and Lamartine.

We have already pointed out that La Bruyère's chapters follow no regular plan. Sometimes he gives us short dialogues, sometimes rhetorical apostrophes to a fictitious auditor, sometimes a fairly well developed narrative which is almost an apologue or a short story; he well understood the art of telling an anecdote to illustrate a character. With these are mingled brief sentences or longer maxims. We have chosen some of all sorts for this volume, and have been guided in our choice by what seems most permanent and most likely to interest the general reader. The student of the history of the age of Louis XIV would, of course, approach La Bruyère's work from another point of view. But he should bear in mind that the historical portraits, like those of Louis XIV, the great Condé, William of Orange, are among the weakest which La Bruyère has drawn. The portraits of

¹ Cf. p. 112.

² Cf. p. 110.

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Introduction the secondary personages of the time, like those of Fontenelle, La Fontaine, or Lauzun, are, on the other hand, of great excellence. The general characters, like those of the ambitious man, the hypocrite, the egoist, the wit, or the miser, are fair of their kind, but as he always seems to have before his eyes some original, his type is of an age rather than for all time, and so, perhaps, misses that stamp of universality which all great and enduring work of the kind should bear. Undoubtedly, La Bruyère's greatest genius lay in the representation of narrow detail. Wide impressions were not possible to a man of his temperament, and as we read him we come to the conclusion that his best work as a character writer is to be sought in his many admirable portraits of the more or less harmless and trifling eccentricities of men. His portraits of the dilettante collector with a mania for books which he never reads, or for medals or prints, or for tulips or plums, of the absent-minded man, the news monger, the man who thinks he knows everything, and similar personages, have probably never been surpassed in any literature.

It is not easy to describe or classify La Bruyère's literary style. His French critics, and they ought to know, find his style too laboured, an example of a too earnest seeking after the right word. "Among all the different expres-

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sions," he wrote, "which can render a single one of our thoughts, there is only one which is the right one. Everything which is not it is feeble, and does not content an intelligent man who desires to make himself understood." He dutifully followed the rules accepted by all the great French prose writers of the seventeenth century, but, in so doing, did not disdain to traverse roads from which they had turned aside, and which it was still possible to traverse again, or to throw open roads to be traversed for the first time. His vocabulary was very rich, richer even than that of La Rochefoucauld, Bossuet, or Madame de Sévigné. He used a number of technical words borrowed from the law, from the military arts, from agriculture, even from heraldry, the merchant's office, or the artisan's workshop. The best characteristics of his style are to be found in its variety, in its conciseness, in his original way of illustrating an abstract idea by some physical detail which at once materializes it, as when he writes: "Thirty years are required to think of one's fortune; it is not made at fifty; a man commences building in his old age and dies when it is time for the painters and glaziers to begin their work." In this feature of his style La Bruyère was curiously modern, not to say curiously English, for some modern English philosophers use the method largely and with

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Introduction admirable effect. But let us not forget that both they and La Bruyère are following no less a precedent than that of Dante. It may justly be said that La Bruyère brought light and colour into French prose. In many ways he belongs to both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for while the strongest bonds attach him to the former, he foreshadows the methods of Voltaire and of Montesquieu, especially in the *Lettres Persanes*. Lesage, Regnard, and Destouches owe him something. Among English writers it is Addison who perhaps owes him most. Both led quiet, contemplative lives, and were spectators of mankind, not themselves men of action; both were silent and retiring, wanting probably in that outward grace of manner that so readily confers an indiscriminate popularity.

Despite the fact that between 1605 and 1700 fifty-six books of *Characters* were published in England, it would not seem that English character writers owe anything to La Bruyère. Casaubon's Latin version of *Theophrastus* published in 1592 gave the impulse to such writing here. The first book of English characters, *The Fraternity of Vacabondes*, by John Awdeley, appeared in, or possibly before, 1565, and was followed by Thomas Harman's *Caveat for Common Cursetors, Vulgarely Called Vagabones*, in 1567. Then came Joseph Hall's *Characterisms of*

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Vertues and Vices, 1608; Sir Thomas Overbury's Introduction *Wife now a Widow, Whereunto are added Many Witty Characters*, 1614; Nicholas Breton's *Characters upon Essays Moral and Divine*, 1615; and *The Good and the Bad*, 1616. The most notable book of the kind in English literature, John Earle's *Microcosmographie, or a Peece of the World Discovered in Essayes and Characters*, was published in 1628. Earle dealt with all types. His portraits are drawn with animation and sympathy; but his method differs considerably from that of La Bruyère. The two manners may be best compared in the portrait of the *Poor Man* as drawn by each. Earle describes the treatment which the poor man receives from his fellows, La Bruyère describes the manner in which the poor man himself behaves. The historians, Clarendon and Burnet, may both be styled writers of Characters, for the value of their works lies chiefly in their admirable portraits of the historical personages of the times with which they deal. Character writing in our literature forms a kind of link between the comedy of manners and the novel. It was handed on fresh to the novelists by periodical essayists such as Steele and Addison, who simply revelled in character writing.

Our character writers can scarcely be placed beside such authors as La Bruyère and Vauvenargues, who use the form as much for conveying

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La Bruyère took his mission as a moralist very seriously. Pascal made metaphysics serve religion, and strove to make men Christians; La Rochefoucauld's observation of men led him to attribute the cause of all their weaknesses to self-love, and so he attacked mankind, and actually slandered it wherever he came in contact with it; Vauvenargues restored to humanity its virtues, and was tolerant towards its sins and vices; while La Bruyère's system, so far as he had one, differed from all these. Less sublime than Pascal, less subtle than La Rochefoucauld, he aimed at making man reasonable, and his means to that end was to examine and describe him at various ages, under various conditions, taking note of his vices, weaknesses, and eccentricities.

IV

“Courage is the light of adversity.”—VAUVENARGUES.

“Vauvenargues was one of the most admirable of men; and certainly of all the great sages the most unfortunate. Whenever his fortune hangs in the balance, he is attacked and prostrated by cruel disease; and notwithstanding the efforts of his genius, his bravery, his moral beauty, day after day he is wantonly betrayed, or falls victim to gratuitous injustice; and at the age of thirty-two he dies, at the very moment when recognition is at last awaiting his work.”—MAETERLINCK.

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Luc de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues, Introduction was born at Aix, in Provence, 6 August, 1715, of an ancient and honourable but poor family. His father, Joseph de Clapiers, Seigneur de Vauvenargues, was created marquis by royal letters patent in 1722, partly in recognition of the devotion which he had shown two years previously, when alone among the magistrates of the city he remained at his post in Aix during the terrible plague of 1720. Of Vauvenargues's early youth and education we know little beyond the fact that his studies were interrupted by the weak health that pursued him as long as he lived. About the age of sixteen he came across Plutarch's *Lives*, and, as with so many boys, the book thoroughly impressed his imagination. Years afterwards he wrote in a letter to a friend :—" I wept for joy when I read Plutarch's *Lives*; there was no evening that I did not converse with Alcibiades, Agesilaus and others. I went down into the Roman forum to discuss with the Gracchi, to defend Cato from the stones thrown at him. Do you remember how Cæsar, wishing to pass a law too greatly in favour of the people, that same Cato, desiring to keep him from proposing it, put his hand on his mouth to prevent him speaking? Such methods, so contrary to ours, made a great impression on me. At the same period a Seneca fell into my hands, by

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Introduction what chance I know not; then the letters of Brutus to Cicero when he was in Greece after the death of Cæsar. Those letters are so full of dignity, elevation of soul, passion and courage that it was impossible to read them and preserve my coolness. I mingled the three books and was so moved by them that I only contained what they put into me." He must have read his classics in translations, for he does not seem to have known either Latin or Greek.

At that period the only professions considered worthy the attention of a young man of good family were the church and the army. From his earliest boyhood Vauvenargues had a passion for military glory, and at the age of eighteen he entered the army as sub-lieutenant in an infantry corps. In 1733 he accompanied Marshal Villars into Lombardy. He returned to France in 1736 to a monotonous garrison life, to much idleness, and some dissipation. Now and again he would isolate himself from his companions for the purposes of study and reflexion. His comrades evidently liked him and recognized his superior parts, for, young as he was, they were in the habit of styling him *père*.

The first, perhaps, to discover Vauvenargues's originality was the Marquis de Mirabeau, father of the famous Mirabeau of the Revolution. The young men were about the same age, and their

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correspondence, which extends from July, 1737, to August, 1740, serves as a history of Vauvenargues's intellectual development. Mirabeau urged Vauvenargues to go to Paris and to take up the profession of letters. As yet, however, the profession of arms seemed to him the most noble and desirable, and he held no high opinion of men of letters. The following passages from the correspondence will best illustrate his attitude of mind at this period :—" You will easily understand that it is not from choice that I spend my youth among persons who do not touch my heart, whom I have no desire to please, who drive me from society by the little taste and interest I find in intercourse with them. You would like me, compelled to live in solitude, to attempt to fill it with literature, to cultivate my reason, being unable to follow my heart, and to steep myself in writing for lack of conversation, so as to keep myself in the world by that road at least, and to communicate my soul. That is a good thought, nothing could be better said; but I know myself, I know how to do myself justice, and to prove that I do not boast, I will not hide from you that I have neither the health, the genius, nor the taste necessary for writing, that the public does not want to know what I think, and that if I told them, it would be without either effect or profit . . . there is neither proportion nor

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Introduction propriety between my strength and my desires, between my reason and my heart, between my heart and my circumstances. . . . But although I am not happy, I stand by my inclinations and cannot renounce them, I make it a point of honour to protect their weakness. I only consult my heart. I do not wish it to be the slave of the philosophers' maxims nor of my circumstances. I do not make vain efforts to compel them to conform with my fortune, I wish rather to form my fortune on them. Doubtless that will not fulfil my desires; everything that would please me is a thousand leagues away, but I will not put myself under compulsion, I would rather yield my life! It is only on those conditions that I preserve it, and I suffer less from the griefs that my passions bring me than I do from the trouble of continually crossing them. I am not ignorant of the advantages of pleasant intercourse; I have always greatly desired it, and I do not hide in solitude. But I set less store by men of letters than you do. I only judge by their works; for I confess I have no acquaintance among authors, but I say frankly that, with the exception of a few great geniuses and a few original men whose names I respect, the others do not impress me. I begin to see that the greater part of them only know what others have thought, that they do not feel, that they have no soul, that their criticism only re-

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flects the taste of the age or of those in authority; for they do not penetrate into the heart of things. They have no principles of their own, or if they have, so much the worse; they oppose conventional prejudices with false, useless, or tiresome knowledge, and a mind dulled with toil, and therefore I imagine that it is not their genius that made them turn to knowledge, but their incapacity for affairs, the rebuffs which they have encountered in the world, jealousy, ambition, education, chance. So that to live with such men you need a great stock of knowledge that satisfies neither heart nor mind, and which fills up the greater part of one's youth." As a matter of fact Vauvenargues never became a man of letters in the professional sense of the term. With him a life of action was ever superior to a life of thought, and he only entered on the second when the first became impossible.

Another of Vauvenargues's correspondents was Fauris de Saint-Vincens, a scholar and an antiquary, three years his junior. The letters written by him are deeply interesting, and touch on all subjects likely to be discussed between young men of a thoughtful turn of mind. They extend from 1739 to 1747, and give a fairly full history of Vauvenargues's active and spiritual life. They contain, perhaps, his most intimate utterances on religion, faith, and friendship. A

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Introduction few passages will suffice to prove their interest and value. Saint-Vincens had been dangerously ill, and Vauvenargues writes thus to him concerning the uses of religion and faith at such a time :—

Aug. 8, 1739.

“ I am not surprised at the security with which you regarded the approach of death ; yet it is very sad to die in the flower of one’s youth ! but religion, as you say, provides great resources ; it is fortunate at such a moment to possess perfect faith. By the side of Eternity, life seems but a moment, and human happiness but a dream ; and to speak frankly, it is not only against death that the forces of Faith are to be arrayed ; there are no misfortunes that it does not mitigate, no tears that it does not dry, no losses that it does not make good ; it affords consolation for contempt, poverty, misfortune, lack of health—the hardest of all the afflictions that can try men—and there is none so humiliated, so forsaken who, in his despair and distress does not find in it support, hope, courage ; but this same Faith, which is the consolation of the wretched, is the torture of the happy ; it poisons their pleasures, troubles their present joy, causes them to regret the past and fear the future ; indeed, it tyrannizes over their passions, and aims at depriving them of the two sources whence nature causes our

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good and evil fortune to flow, self-love and pleasure, that is to say the pleasures of the senses and all the joys of the heart.” Introduction

Oct. 10, 1739.

“No more poignant picture could be traced than that you draw of a dying man who lived amid pleasures, persuaded of their innocence by the liberty, duration or sweetness of their usage, and who is suddenly recalled to the prejudices of his education, and brought back to Faith by the sentiment of his end, by the terror of the future, by the danger of scepticism, by the tears which are shed over him, and last by the impressions of all who surround him. With most men of the world it is the heart which doubts; when the heart is converted all is done, it carries them along; the mind follows the heart’s impulses by custom and by reason. *I have never been against*; but there are unbelievers whose error lies deeper; their too curious intellect has spoiled their emotions.”

Vauvenargues never wholly gave up religion. His attitude towards it is perhaps best indicated in the expressions that he had never been against it, and that he thought it possible to be a Christian “without being a Capuchin.”

Another time he has something to say on friendship:—

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Nov. 3, 1740.

“Truly, my dear Saint-Vincens, nothing is perfect without friendship, nothing is whole, nothing sensible.

“I pity those who neglect it, and who seek their happiness only in themselves. There are moments of strength, moments of elevation, passion and enthusiasm in which the soul may suffice for itself and disdain all help, intoxicated with its own greatness. . . . The fire of pride, of glory, consumes itself very soon if it derives no nourishment from without. It falls, it perishes, it is extinguished, and then, man suffers pain. . . . Men make one society: the entire Universe is only one whole. In the whole of Nature there is only one soul, one body. He who cuts himself off from that body causes the life in him to perish. He withers, he is consumed in a terrible languor, he is worthy of compassion.”

These letters, too, give us a poignant picture of the manner in which Vauvenargues was, throughout his life, hampered by poverty. We learn the expedients to which he was reduced, the borrowings and the makeshifts, the debts he was forced to contract in order to keep up his position in the army. In a passage that has a sort of ironical humour, he tells Saint-Vincens

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that a man of whom he seeks to borrow money has daughters, and that if he will lend him the desired sum, it occurs to him he might promise to marry one of them in two years' time, with a reasonable dowry! Introduction

Vauvenargues took part in the war of the Austrian Succession, and in 1742 was in the terrible retreat from Prague to Egra, compared by Voltaire to the retreat of the Ten Thousand. The cold was intense and the army suffered horrible tortures. Vauvenargues, constitutionally weak, never properly recovered from the privations endured on the march. His friend, Paul Hippolyte Emmanuel de Seytres, the young man for whom he wrote the "Conseils à un jeune homme," died at the age of eighteen, during the siege of Prague. In his memory Vauvenargues wrote an "Éloge Funébre." Its eloquence was evidently inspired by Fénelon, and although it will not rank high among compositions of the kind, or among Vauvenargues's works, we are told that he set more store by it than by any other of his productions, and that he was continually retouching it. The most interesting passages are those that reveal De Seytres's personality, the most illuminating of which is, perhaps, the brief sentence, "he was insensible to the pleasure of talking about himself, the bond of feeble friendships."

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Introduction At length the state of Vauvenargues's health rendered it necessary for him to renounce the military life. He had traversed great perils and had won no glory, but still eager for a life of action, he turned his thoughts to diplomacy. He sent letters asking for employment to the King and to Amelot, the minister for foreign affairs, but even a second application brought no result. About this time, Vauvenargues wrote to Voltaire touching a question of criticism concerning the genius of Corneille and Racine. The great man, fully alive to his young correspondent's ability and originality, replied, and sent Vauvenargues a copy of his works. Thus began a friendship ended only by death. Voltaire obtained from Amelot the promise of a post for Vauvenargues in the diplomatic service. But unluckily he was attacked by small-pox of the most malignant type; the little health he still possessed was completely ruined; the disease left him almost blind, it was impossible that he should avail himself of the minister's offer.

Everything now pointed to the literary life, and accordingly, in 1745, acting under the advice of Voltaire and Mirabeau, Vauvenargues went to Paris. The difficulty of the step was enhanced by his poverty; he was forced to live in modest lodgings and to lead a very retired life.

Notwithstanding his dislike for the professional

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man of letters, Vauvenargues had, in his leisure moments, found time to record his thoughts in writing, and in February, 1746, published anonymously a duodecimo volume of less than 400 pages, containing an "Introduction to the knowledge of the human mind; Reflexions on various subjects; Advice to a young man; Critical reflexions on various poets; Fragments on the orators and on La Bruyère; Meditation on faith; Paradoxes mingled with reflexions and maxims." A few days after its publication Voltaire wrote to the author giving it the very highest praise. He characterized it as one of the best books "we have had in our language." It had, however, no success with the public, yet acting always under Voltaire's advice, Vauvenargues issued a second edition in 1747. He corrected in it faults of style that had been pointed out to him, suppressed over two hundred of the maxims as too obscure, too common-place, or useless, changed the order of the maxims he retained, developed some, added others.¹ Meanwhile he was dying in slow agony and dire poverty, yet heroic to the end, Voltaire could say of him "I

¹ This second edition, the title of which was altered to *Réflexions et Maximes*, contained 330 maxims. The number was subsequently made up from the author's MSS. to 945. Those that appear in the present translation are mainly drawn from the 1747 issue, the last to appear during the author's lifetime.

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Introduction saw him the most unfortunate and the most serene of men." His whole life may be read in his "characters"—Clazomenes and Pherecides. "When fortune seemed to tire of persecuting him, when a too tardy hope began to alleviate his misery, death confronted him."

Vauvenargues died 28 May, 1747. He had not completed his thirty-second year. For half a century the work he left behind him remained unnoticed. In 1797, a new edition in two volumes appeared, quickly followed by another in 1806. Since, there have been many others, the best critical edition being that edited in two volumes by Gilbert¹ in 1857.

V

"The essence of aphorism is the compression of a mass of thought into a single saying . . . it is good sense brought to a point."—JOHN MORLEY.

Philosophy, like art and poetry, must have its source in the clear comprehension of the universe. . . . Men's actions depend in equal measure on both head and heart. . . . Philosophy is not an algebra sum. Vauvenargues is quite right when he says "Great thoughts come from the heart."—SCHOPENHAUER.

Rare indeed are the cases in which a man escapes the influences of his time. Vauven-

¹ Jean Desiré Louis Gilbert (1819-1870), whose *Éloge* on Vauvenargues prefixed to this edition won him the *prix d'éloquence* at the French Academy in 1857.

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argues was strangely little touched by them. The scepticism of the first half of the eighteenth century, its contempt for the past, its frivolous society, a society without dignity or conviction, produced on him little or no effect. We look in vain in Vauvenargues's writings for the keen cynicism and delicate satire of La Rochefoucauld, or for the more brutal methods of Chamfort or Rivarol. Vauvenargues had no desire to display the vices of men, his aim was to show of what their virtues made them capable. Were it not for an occasional reference to some custom essentially belonging to the France of his time, there would be little to mark internally the period to which his work belongs.

The maxims form the most interesting part of Vauvenargues's writings, but it is not wise to ignore or underrate other portions of them, especially the *Characters*. His method of painting character differs considerably from that of La Bruyère. Vauvenargues has himself described it. He disapproved of the unwritten law that forced writers who drew "characters" to limit themselves to the manners of their time or their country; a little more liberty was advisable, and authors should be permitted to leave their age on condition that they never left nature. He did not seek to describe men of the world, nor the absurdities of the great. He preferred

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Introduction to render, so far as he could, rather what fitted all men than what was only applicable to a few, and was more touched by the picture of a single virtue than by the numberless little defects so pleasing to superficial minds. Vauvenargues's characters are full of himself. As we said above, Clazomenes and Pherecides sum up his life. The characters that follow take us through different phases of it. There are portraits of military men, and of active, firm, ambitious characters having insight into human character and so able to lead men. These would seem to point to his experiences in the army, and to his attempts to enter diplomacy. By contrast he draws a few characters of vain, weak, inconsequential persons, and, lastly, portraits of insipid or frivolous authors represent his literary period.

The enthusiastic student of Vauvenargues will of course read all that he has written, but those who, without so much study, wish to gain a clear idea of his philosophy and teaching may confine themselves to the maxims after they have once become acquainted with the personality of the man through his correspondence and the *Characters*. As writers of maxims and aphorisms the French stand easily first ; no one disputes their supremacy. No other of the world's great literatures can point to the long line of authors, among whom we may name at random Pascal, La

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Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, Chamfort, Rivarol, De Bonald, Joubert, who have excelled in that form of composition. The reason is not far to seek. The marvellous clarity and terseness of the French language, the ready wit of the Frenchman, and his capacity for handling words with lightness and dexterity, for expressing much in small compass, are just the qualifications that make for perfection in maxim writing. It is the Frenchman who has made conversation a fine art, and who has studied anxiously and lovingly the art of expressing in words delicate shades of thought and feeling. The French excel in the *conte* or short tale for similar reasons. Even Goethe with all his genius, and wisdom, and knowledge of men cannot be said to have written maxims that are successful as maxims.

Regarded solely from the standpoint of literary style Vauvenargues's maxims often fall short of perfection. He was not a man of letters by profession, and understood the art of writing, as an art, scarcely at all. His criticism of other authors is all but valueless. He judged them entirely by their effect on himself, and forgot that the first duty of a critic is to have preferences and no exclusions. He considered that Molière chose *sujets trop bas*, and praised Boileau with enthusiasm. Some of his criticisms, however, contain certain general views that are

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Introduction universally true. For example, he infers from the number of worthless books that cannot possibly live, issued from the presses of his day, that the taste of the majority is not correct. The mass of bad books is caused by the fact that writers do not follow the maxim—"Before you can write you must have thought; before you can excite emotion in others you must have felt it yourself; before you can convince you must know with certainty. Every effort made to seem what you are not, only serves to prove more clearly what you are." He declared that "all fiction that does not paint nature is insipid," and that what people so eagerly seek in novels is "the image of a living and passionate truth."

As Vauvenargues was no man of letters by profession, so was he no philosopher by profession, observing at leisure and making that, and that alone, the business of his life. He was a man who had suffered and had thought, and his sufferings and reflexions led him to certain conceptions of life and conduct which he embodied in his maxims. His main article of faith was that man should be guided by his passions equally with his reason; that only by such means could right action be possible; only by such means could a harmonious existence be assured. He even thought that our passions, wisely developed and followed, might be more likely to lead us on

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the right road than if we listened to reason alone. Regarding the passions as the principle of all moral activity, as the very life of the soul, he writes to Mirabeau—"We are generally masters of our actions, but scarcely ever of our passions. It is foolish to struggle against them when there is nothing vicious in them, and even unjust to complain of them. For life without passions resembles death, and I compare a man without passions to a book of logic ; he is only of use to those who read him. He has no life in him, he does not feel, he enjoys nothing, not even his thoughts." Although it is true that suppression of real, sincere feeling may prove as harmful to character as a too great readiness to yield to it, the doctrine would scarcely be a safe one for weak men. What Vauvenargues really meant was that a man's character should be developed on every side. He believed in the importance of character, much as thoughtful men who have the welfare and progress of the human race at heart are beginning to believe in it now.

Vauvenargues saw clearly the faults and vices of men, but was full of that large toleration for weakness that is ever the hall-mark of a superior mind. He believed in human goodness, that in all men lies something of good which should be cherished and developed. This point of view made him sympathize with ordinary mortals,

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Introduction their hopes and fears, their weakness and their strength, and we contend that if only Vauvenargues's *Maxims* were better known, more widely spread abroad, there is no philosophy that would more appeal to the average human being than that which they contain. A long line of moralists before him had written of the duties of men. He was no mere preaching moralist; it was his chief aim to spread clearness and light over the difficulty of attaining to virtue, of resisting temptation to sin. The first impulse of the human heart when brought face to face with weakness is to pity, it is the second impulse that moves us to condemn; second thoughts are not always best. Yet Vauvenargues's tenderness of heart has no resemblance to the sentimentalism of the Richardsonian period, or to the philanthropy of our own. The professional philosopher in all ages, and rightly, is more interested in the destiny of the human race than in that of the individual; Vauvenargues, without altogether losing sight of the species, is more interested in the lot of the individual. Some find Vauvenargues's classic prototype in Voltaire; we are inclined to regard him as a disciple to a great extent of Pascal and Fénelon. However that may be, Rousseau is undoubtedly his intellectual successor. Like La Bruyère, Vauvenargues seems to have loved and observed

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external nature ; a number of beautiful similes from nature are to be found in the maxims. He compares an old man's advice to winter sunshine, and the sudden end of a long and prosperous career to the dissipation of summer heat by one stormy day, and further shows his feeling for nature in such sentences as "The tempests of youth are mingled with days of brilliant sunshine"; "The days of early spring have less beauty than the budding virtue of a youth"; "The light of dawn is not so sweet as the first glimpses of glory." Delille was nine years old when Vauvenargues died, and the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, in which Rousseau was the first to draw his countrymen's attention to the beauty and influence of natural scenery, did not appear until the end of 1760.

While La Bruyère paints a picture of humanity and draws from it no conclusions; while Pascal suffers from, and is irritated by humanity, although he continues to esteem it, and his maxims are often perverted by his systematic views on religion; while La Rochefoucauld's maxims, true as they are of all selfish persons, and of all persons in proportion as they are selfish, succeed in slandering mankind; Vauvenargues's maxims act like a strengthening tonic. He restores to humanity its virtues, puts the spur where others put the curb, preaches

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Introduction liberality even to extravagance, boldness even to rashness, advocates all that makes life strong and beautiful. His own life was certainly a restless striving for glory, but not for glory that should aggrandize himself, but for the glory born of valiant service to his country. Maybe that his sympathy with the imperfections of humanity, his serenity under a cruel destiny, his earnest desire to discover the good in men, give him a more enduring place in the "choir invisible" than the more active kind of glory he so ardently sought.

VI

"No music is more agreeable than variations of well-known airs."—JOURBET.

This little introduction would, perhaps, be more incomplete than it is, if we did not briefly mention the French maxim writers who lived after Vauvenargues.

Nicolas Chamfort (1741-1794) is sometimes called "La Rochefoucauld-Chamfort," because his conclusions about men and morals resemble, if we can imagine such a person, those of a more philosophic La Rochefoucauld, living, not in the seventeenth, but in the eighteenth century. Chamfort's maxims are always incisive and

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witty; sometimes they are cruel, pessimistic, or even of a distorted truth. It seems strange that the same man who wrote, "The most wasted of all days is that on which we have not laughed," could also write, "There are few vices that prevent a man having many friends, in the degree that too great qualities may prevent many friendships," or "Life is a disease for which sleep consoles us every sixteen hours; it is a palliative; death is the remedy." Chamfort lost his illusions too soon, yet his cynicism, which has a flavour of that of Swift, was absolutely sincere, for few have had keener insight into the weaknesses of men. But his philosophy of life is unsatisfying, and we read his maxims for the sake of their brilliance rather than for that of their truth.

Antoine Rivarol (1753-1801) combated the sophisms and the revolutionary excesses of the Revolution. He emigrated in 1792 and died at Berlin. It was he who said "Printing is the artillery of thought." It was his desire that men should be guided by reason, and for that purpose adorned his maxims of reason with an inimitable wit and brilliance of style. With Vauvenargues he believed in the power of the heart. "The heart," he writes, "is the infinite in man, the mind has its bounds. We do not love God with all our mind, we love Him with all our heart. I have noticed that the people

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Introduction who lack heart, and the number is larger than one thinks, have an excessive self-love, and a certain poverty of mind—for the heart rectifies everything in man—and that such persons are jealous and ungrateful, and that it is only necessary to do them a favour to make enemies of them.”

The Vicomte de Bonald (1753–1840), a devoted royalist, published works in support of his party, among them a few maxims which uphold his views of society and government. He said many true and witty things. As examples, let us take the two following sentences: “Follies committed by the sensible, extravagances uttered by the clever, crimes committed by the good—that is what makes revolutions:” “a man of genius only needs a wife of sense: more than one genius in a house is too much.”

But, in our opinion, since Vauvenargues, there has only been one maxim writer in France who ranks beside his seventeenth century brethren, and that one is Joseph Joubert (1754–1824). He wrote in fragments for himself alone, and had, perhaps, no intention of composing a book of maxims at all. For he published nothing in his life-time. Fourteen years after his death a small volume was issued by Chateaubriand containing “Thoughts” that at once assured Joubert a high place among French moralists and

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maxim writers. As a moralist his chief desire was, perhaps, to induce men to desist from loving the future at the expense of the past, and thus his teaching was a protest against the negative philosophy of the Revolution period. Of his forerunners he most resembles Vauvenargues. He lived too much in himself, too little in outside things, to be compared with La Bruyère, he was not a despairing soul like Pascal; but he possessed the same generosity and natural elevation of thought, the same enthusiasm for all that is beautiful and good, the same delicacy of feeling, the same combination of charm and austerity that distinguish Vauvenargues. He has even been called the Christian Vauvenargues. We must not press the comparison too closely. Joubert had wider horizons and a surer judgment as a critic. He is, it would seem, the last of the maxim writers, the last composer, so far, of variations on the well-known themes of religion, conduct, love and literature.

LA BRUYÈRE

THE ABSENT-MINDED MAN

CHARACTERS

THE ABSENT-MINDED MAN

ENALCAS comes downstairs, opens the door to go out and shuts it again; he perceives that his night-cap is still on, and examining himself a little more carefully, discovers that only one side of his face is shaved, that his sword is on his right side, that his stockings are hanging about his heels, and his shirt out of his breeches. If he walks abroad he feels something strike him roughly on the face or stomach; he cannot imagine what it is, until opening his eyes and looking up he sees in front of him the shaft of a cart, or a long plank of wood, carried on a workman's shoulder. He has been seen to knock up against a blind man, when their limbs become entangled and each falls backward. Sometimes he has run right up against a prince, and has scarcely had time to squeeze himself against the wall in order to make room for his highness to pass. He seeks,

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The Absent-Minded Man rummages, mislays, gets angry, and calls his servants one after the other : they lose everything, put nothing in its place ; he asks for his gloves which he has on his hands, like the woman who asked for her mask when she had it on her face. He enters the drawing-room, passes under a chandelier, to which his periwig hitches and is left hanging ; the courtiers stare and laugh. Menalcas also stares, and laughs louder than the rest, and searches through the assembly for the poor mortified creature who has lost his wig. In his walks about town he thinks that he has lost his way, puts himself into a fret, and asks of the passers-by where he is : they tell him the name of his own street, he at once enters his own house but hastily runs out again, fancying himself mistaken. He comes out of the law-courts, and finding a coach at the bottom of the steps takes it for his own and gets in, the coachman whips up the horses and thinks he is driving his master home. Menalcas leaps out, crosses the court-yard, goes upstairs, walks through the ante-room and the other apartments, everything is familiar, nothing new to him, he sits down and rests, as he would at home. The master of the house arrives, Menalcas rises to receive him, treats him with great ceremony, begs him to sit down, and pays him all the attention due to a guest ; he talks, muses, and talks again ;

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the master of the house is bored and greatly astonished. Menalcas is not less so, but does not say what he thinks, that the other is some impertinent, idle person who will at length withdraw; he hopes so, and possesses his soul in patience, but it may be night-time before he is undeceived.

The Absent-Minded Man

Another time he visits a lady and, imagining that she is visiting him, he sits down in her arm-chair and has no idea of giving it up; he finds that the lady is paying him a somewhat long visit and every moment expects her to get up and go, but as that does not happen and he is growing hungry, and it is nearly night, he asks her to sup with him; she laughs, and so loudly, that he comes to his senses.

He gets married in the morning, forgets all about it in the evening, and goes home at night as if nothing had happened. A few years later he loses his wife, she dies in his arms, he goes to the funeral, and the next day, when his servants announce dinner, he asks if his wife is ready and if she has been told.

It is also he who, entering a church, takes the blind beggar at the door for a pillar and his dish for the holy water vase, dips his hand in, when suddenly he hears the pillar speak and ask for alms; he walks down the nave, thinks he sees a praying desk and throws himself heavily on his

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

The Absent-
Minded Man

knees; the machine bends, pushes him, strives to cry out, and Menalcas is astonished to find himself kneeling on the legs of a little man, resting on his back, his two arms passed over his shoulders, and his joined hands holding his nose and shutting his mouth; he retires in confusion and kneels elsewhere. He takes a prayer-book from his pocket, as he thinks, but it is his slipper, that he had inadvertently pocketed before going out. He is scarcely out of the church when a footman runs after him and asks, with a laugh, if he has not got Monseigneur's slipper. Menalcas shows him his and says "these are all the slippers I have about me;" nevertheless, on searching, he finds the slipper of the Bishop of —, whom he had just been visiting because he was kept at home by illness, and before leaving him had picked up the slipper as though it had been one of his gloves which had fallen on the ground. He once lost at cards all the money he had in his purse, went into his study, opened a cupboard, took out a money-box, withdrew the coins he wanted, and, as he thought, locked it up again in the cupboard. To his surprise he heard a barking in the cupboard he had just closed, and, astonished at such a prodigy, he opened it again, and burst out laughing to see his dog, whom he had locked up for his money-box.

THE ABSENT-MINDED MAN

The Absent-
Minded Man

He plays at backgammon and asks for something to drink ; it is his turn to play, and having the dice box in one hand and the glass in the other, being very thirsty, he gulps down the dice, and almost the box as well, throwing the liquor on the board and half drowning his antagonist.

Once when boating he asked the time, and some one handed him a watch ; he had hardly taken hold of it, when, forgetting all about the time and the watch, he threw it into the river as if it were something that was in his way.

He writes a long letter, sands the paper several times, and always throws the sand into the ink-pot, but that is not all, he writes another letter, and having sealed them both makes a mistake in the addresses ; one of them is to a duke, who, on opening the letter, reads the following : " Mr. Oliver, do not fail to send me by return a load of hay." His farmer receives the other letter, opens it and reads : " My Lord, I have received with the utmost submission the commands your Grace has been pleased to give me." He writes another at night, and after sealing it puts out the candle : he is surprised to find himself in the dark, and is at a loss to conceive how it happened.

Coming down the stairs at the Louvre he meets a man going up. " Oh," says Menalcas, " you are the very person I was looking for," takes him by the hand, makes him come down

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The Absent-
Minded Man

with him, crosses several court-yards, walks from room to room backwards and forwards, then looking more closely at the man he has been dragging about with him for the last quarter of an hour, wonders who ever it can be, has nothing to say to him, lets him go, and turns another way.

He often asks a question and is already out of sight before you have time to reply, or he asks you how your father is, and when you say that he is very ill, Menalcas shouts back that he is very glad. He happens to meet you another time, he is charmed to see you, he has just come from your house where he had been to tell you some important news, he looks at your hand: "What a fine ruby you have. Is it a Balas ruby?" Then he leaves you, goes on his way, and that is the important business about which he was so anxious to speak to you.

He begins a story and forgets to finish it, bursts out laughing to himself at something that strikes his mind, and replies to his own thought, he hums a tune, whistles, upsets his chair, utters a plaintive cry, yawns, thinking himself to be alone. When he is at table he insensibly crumbles a heap of bread upon his plate, it is true that his neighbours want it, as well as their knives and forks, which he imagines to be all for his use.

THE ABSENT-MINDED MAN

Chancing to find himself in the company of a young widow, he speaks to her of her deceased husband, and asks the cause of his death ; the lady, whose grief was naturally revived by this discourse, wept and sobbed, and told him all the details of her husband's illness, from the beginning of the fever to the supreme agony. "Madam," asks Menalcas, who had apparently listened to her with the greatest attention, "had you never another but him?"

The Absent-Minded Man

One morning, he bids the dinner be hastened, rises before dessert, and takes leave of the company, yet you are sure to find him that day in every place in the city except where he had the appointment which caused him to neglect his dinner, and to go afoot in case he should have to wait for the carriage. You may hear him shout, scold, put himself into a rage with one of his servants. He is astounded he does not come. "Where can he be?" he says, "what is he doing, where is he to be found? If he does not come immediately, I shall discharge him at once." The servant arrives. Menalcas asks him in a fury where he has been. The man replies that he has just returned from the errand on which his master sent him, and gives a faithful account of his commission.

You will often take him for what he is not ; for a fool, because he listens little, and speaks

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The Absent-Minded Man

less ; for an idiot, because he talks to himself and is subject to involuntary grimaces and movements of the head ; for haughty and discourteous, because when you salute him he takes no notice of you ; for a man without consideration for others, because he speaks of bankruptcy in a family that lies under that ban ; of executions and scaffolds before a man whose father was beheaded ; of mean extraction, before wealthy farmers of the revenue who try to pass for noblemen. In short, he seems as if he were not present, and did not hear what was being talked about. He thinks and talks at the same time, but what he says is rarely what he is thinking of, consequently there is seldom any coherence in his talk ; he says no when he ought to say yes, and yes, supposing that he is saying no. When he answers you his eyes may be fixed on yours, but it does not follow that he sees you. He is not looking at you, nor at any one, nor at anything in the world. All that you can drag from him in his most communicative moments are such words as " Yes indeed ; it is true ; good ; all the better ; I think so ; certainly ; oh, heaven ! " and other equally appropriate monosyllables. Then he is never with those with whom he seems to be : he addresses his footman as Sir, and his friend as James ; a prince of the blood as His Reverence, and a Jesuit as Your Highness.


THE ABSENT-MINDED MAN

When he is at mass, if the priest sneezes, he cries out loud "God bless you." He chances to be in the company of a judge, a man of grave disposition, venerable by his age, character and dignity, who asks him about a certain event, and demands if the circumstances were so, "Yes, miss," replies Menalcas.

The Absent-Minded Man

Once when he was returning from the country his footmen plotted to rob him, and succeeded in their plan. They jumped off the carriage, held the torch under his nose, demanded his purse, which he delivered to them. Having reached home he told his adventure to his friends, and when they questioned him as to details, said, "Ask my servants; they were there."

THE RICH MAN

ITON has a fresh complexion, a full face, a steady, determined eye, is broad shouldered and broad chested, and has a firm, deliberate gait. He speaks confidently, and makes his interlocutor repeat what he says, and is only indifferently pleased with whatever is said. He pulls out a big handkerchief and blows his nose with much noise. He spits all about and sneezes very loudly. He dozes in the day-time, he sleeps soundly at night, he snores in company. He takes up more room than any one else at table and on the public promenade. In walking with his equals he takes the middle place. When he stops, they stop; he walks on, they walk on; all are ruled by him. He interrupts, and takes up those whose turn it is to speak, but he is never interrupted, he is listened to as long as he likes to speak; all are of his opinion, all believe the news he tells. If he sits down, he lolls in an armchair, crosses his legs, wrinkles his brows, pulls his hat over his eyes that he may see nobody, then pushing

THE RICH MAN

it back shows a haughty and supercilious expression of countenance. He is merry, for ever laughing, impatient, arrogant, choleric, irreligious, politic, mysterious about the events of the time. He believes that he has talent and wit. He is rich.

The Rich
Man

THE POOR MAN

PHEDON has hollow eyes, a red complexion, a dried up body, and a thin face. He sleeps little and very lightly. He is moody, a dreamer, and possessing intelligence, appears stupid. He neglects to say what he knows, or to speak of events with which he is acquainted. If sometimes he does speak, he comes lamely off; he thinks that he must be boring those to whom he is talking. He speaks concisely, but coldly. He does not rivet the attention of his hearers, nor does he amuse them. He applauds, he smiles at what others say to him, he is of their opinion. He is eager to perform little services for them, he is a flatterer, ever anxious to please. He is mysterious about his own affairs, and sometimes a liar; he is superstitious, full of scruples and very timid. He steps softly and lightly, he seems afraid to tread the ground. He walks with eyes cast down, not daring to raise them to the passers-by. He is never among those who meet in order to converse. He places himself

THE POOR MAN

behind him who is speaking, listens to what is said as if by stealth and withdraws if any one looks at him. He neither occupies nor retains any place. He goes about with his shoulders shrugged, his hat pulled down over his eyes that he may not be recognized. He wraps himself in his cloak; there is no street or gallery so thronged and crowded but he finds a way through it without jostling, and steals along unperceived. If he is asked to sit down, he seats himself on the edge of the chair; in conversation he speaks softly and indistinctly. He is, nevertheless, candid with his friends on public affairs, is irritated with the times, regards neither ministers nor government favourably. He only opens his mouth to reply, he coughs, blows his nose under his hat, spits almost upon himself, waits until he is alone to sneeze, or if that is impossible, contrives that no one shall hear him. He costs nobody a compliment nor a greeting. He is poor.

The Poor
Man

THE ENTHUSIASTIC COLLECTOR



COLLECTING is not a taste for what is good and beautiful, but for what is rare and unique, for things that other men do not possess. Neither is it a desire for what is perfect, but for what is most run after, what is the fashion. It is not an amusement, but a passion, and often so violent a one that it yields to love and ambition only in the pettiness of its object. Neither is it a passion for everything that is scarce and in vogue, but only for some particular object that is rare and at the same time the fashion.

The amateur of flowers has a garden in the suburbs of the town; he goes there at dawn and leaves at sunset. He seems as if planted there and to have taken root amid his tulips. Standing before the *Hermit* he opens his eyes wide, rubs his hands, stoops down, looks at it more closely; he has never seen it look so beautiful before; he is in an ecstasy of joy. He quits that for the *Oriental*, thence to the *Widow*, proceeds to the *Cloth of Gold*, and then on to the

THE ENTHUSIASTIC COLLECTOR

The
Enthusiastic
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Agatha. At last he returns to the *Hermit*, where he stays, and, tired with his perambulations, sits down and forgets his dinner in contemplating and admiring its lights and shades, its expanse piece by piece. But God and Nature are not what he admires in all that; he goes no further than the bulb of his tulip, which he would not part with for a thousand crowns, though he would give it away for nothing if tulips should grow out of fashion and carnations should become the flower in vogue. This reasonable creature, who has a soul, and professes a religion, returns home tired and famished, but infinitely pleased with his day; he has seen tulips!

Talk to another amateur of the rich crops, of the plentiful harvest, of the good vintage! You discover that he is only interested in fruit, and does not understand a word you say. Speak to him of figs or melons, tell him the pear-trees this year are bowed down with the weight of their fruit, that peaches are abundant; nothing of that is in his way, he cares only for plums. But if you proceed to discuss plums in general you get no reply, he is only fond of a certain species of them, and sneers at the mention of any others. He leads you to the tree, with much ado gathers the exquisite plum, divides it, taking one half himself and giving you the other. "What pulp," he says; "just taste it. Isn't it divine?"

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The
Enthusiastic
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You'll find nothing to match it in the whole world." And at this his nostrils are inflated; he can scarcely hide his joy and vanity under a semblance of modesty. Oh, what a really divine personage! A man never enough to be praised and admired; a man to be celebrated through all the ages! Let me examine his mien and shape while he lives, that I may impress on my mind the features and expression of a man who alone among mortals possesses such a plum!

A satirist relates how there are men who, either through restlessness or curiosity, make long voyages, yet keep no journal and write no accounts of their travels; who go to see, and see nothing or forget what they have seen; who desire only to get acquainted with new turrets and steeples, and to cross rivers that are not named the Seine or the Loire; who leave their country in order to return to it again; who like to be away in order that they may one day have returned from a long distance. Having spoken so far, he adds that books are more instructive than travel, and having given me to understand that he possesses a library, I express a wish to see it. I pay him a visit, and he receives me in a house where, on the staircase itself, I am ready to faint at the scent of the Russian leather in which his books are bound. To revive me he shouts at me that they are all

THE ENTHUSIASTIC COLLECTOR

gilt edged and beautifully tooled in gold, that the editions are most rare, enumerates the titles of the best of them, and tells me that in some portions of the library, the volumes are so cunningly simulated as to deceive the eye, to be taken for real books resting on the shelves. He adds that he never reads or sets foot in his library, that he is there now only to do me pleasure. I thank him for his kindness, and wish no more than he does ever again to see the tan-pit that he calls his library.

The
Enthusiastic
Collector

THE MAN OF LETTERS




GO to your door, Clitophon ; my need of your interest gets me early out of my bed and my room. Would to heaven I had no occasion to solicit or be troublesome to you ! Your servants tell me that you are engaged, and that it will be quite an hour before you can see me. I return within the time, and am told that you are gone out. What is it, Clitophon, that you have to do of such importance in your most retired study, that you cannot afford me a moment ? You file papers, collate a register, you sign documents. I only had one thing to ask you, and you but one word to answer, *yes* or *no*. If you would be esteemed, do good offices to your dependants ; you will gain more credit by that conduct than by making yourself inaccessible. O, you person of importance, oppressed with business, when you stand in need of my assistance, come to the solitude of my apartment ! The philosopher is accessible. I shall not put you off till another day. You will find me turning over the books

THE MAN OF LETTERS

The Man
of Letters

of Plato, which treat of the spirituality of the soul, and of its differentia from the body; or pen in hand calculating the distances of Saturn and Jupiter. I admire the works of God, and endeavour, by knowing the truth, to regulate my intelligence and to become a better man. Pray enter, all my doors are open to you, my ante-room is not made for you to tire yourself in with waiting; come straight in and find me without troubling to send in your name. You bring me something more precious than gold and silver if it is an opportunity for me to oblige you. Tell me, what can I do for you? Must I leave my books, my studies, my writing, the line I have just begun? It is a happy interruption for me if I can be of use to you. The manipulator of money, the man of business is a bear that is not to be tamed. You can scarcely ever see him at home. What do I say? You do not see him at all, for at first it is you cannot see him yet—soon you see him no more. While on the other hand, the man of letters is as accessible as the common roadway. He is seen by every one, at all times, and in all conditions: at table, in bed, naked, dressed, well or ill. He cannot play the person of importance, nor does he wish to do so.

THE DRAWING-ROOM PEDANT

ERMAGORAS does not know who is king of Hungary, and is astonished not to hear mention of the king of Bohemia.

Do not speak to him of the wars of Flanders or Holland, or at least you must excuse him from answering the questions you ask concerning them. He does not know when they began or ended, those battles and sieges are all new to him. But he is learned in the wars of the giants, and can relate their progress and all the details of the campaign ; nothing has escaped him. With equal fluency he discourses of the terrible downfall of the Babylonian and Assyrian Empires, he is learned in the Egyptians and their dynasties. He has never seen Versailles, and never will see it, but he has almost seen the tower of Babel and counted its stories ; he knows how many architects were employed, and what were their names. If he knows Henry IV to be the son of Henry III, it is as much as I can affirm. Ask him about the houses of France, Austria, and Bavaria. "What trifles !" he ex-

THE DRAWING-ROOM PEDANT

claims, and rolls off from memory a list of the kings of Media and Babylon; and the names of Apronal, Herigebal, Noesnemordach, Mardokempad are as familiar to him as those of Valois and Bourbon are to us. He asks if the Emperor is married, but needs no one to tell him that Ninus had two wives. He hears that the king enjoys excellent health, and he remembers that Thetmosis, a king of Egypt, was a valetudinarian and that he inherited that condition from his grandfather, Alpharmutosis. What is there that he does not know? What in the whole of antiquity is hidden from him? He will tell you that Semiramis, or, as some will have it, Serimaris, talked so much like her son Ninyas that they were not to be distinguished by their speech; but he dares not decide whether the mother had a manly voice like her son, or the son an effeminate voice like his mother. He informs you that Nimbrot was left-handed and Sesostris ambidexter; that it is an error to imagine that one of the Artaxerxes was called Longimanus because his arms reached down to his knees, and not because one of his arms was longer than the other: he adds that although some grave authors state that it was his right arm, he has certain proof that it was the left.

The Drawing-Room Pedant

THE MAN OF UNIVERSAL
KNOWLEDGE



ARRIAS has read and seen everything, at least he would have it thought so. He gives himself out to be a man of universal knowledge and would rather lie than be silent or appear ignorant of anything. At dinner conversation turned on a great man at a northern court. Arrias broke in and would not permit those who were talking to say what they knew, but discoursed concerning that far-off land as if he were a native of it. He described the manners of its court, its women, its laws and customs; he told stories of what happened there, and thinking them extremely entertaining, was the first to laugh uproariously at them. Some one presumes to contradict him, and clearly demonstrates that what he says is not true. Arrias is not disconcerted; on the contrary he takes arms against his antagonist: "I aver nothing but what I know to be true. I had it from Sethon,

THE MAN OF UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE

the French ambassador to that court, who returned to Paris a few days ago, and is my familiar friend. I questioned him closely and he concealed nothing from me." He continued his story with even more confidence than he had begun it, when one of the guests informed him that he had been speaking to Sethon himself, lately arrived from his embassy.

The Man of
Universal
Knowledge

THE MAN WHO WILL BE
COMFORTABLE



ERMIPPUS is the slave of what he calls *his little comforts* ; to them he sacrifices received customs, usages, fashions, nay even decorum. He seeks them in everything, discards a less for a greater, neglects none that are practicable, makes a study of them, and not a day passes that he does not make some new discovery of the kind. Dinner and supper he leaves to others, he scarcely admits the existence of the terms, he eats when he is hungry, and then only of the dishes he likes best. He must see his bed made, but what hand is skilful or well trained enough to make it so that he may sleep as he desires to sleep. He seldom goes abroad, but loves to keep his room, where, in the garb of a sick man, he is neither idle nor busy, but incessantly employed in doing nothing. Others are slavishly dependent on smiths and joiners, according to their needs ; as for him if filing is in question, he has a file ; if sawing, a saw ; and pincers if something has to

THE MAN WHO WILL BE COMFORTABLE

be pulled out. In fact there is no tool imaginable that he does not possess, and those infinitely better and more to his liking than any used by professional workmen; he has, too, new ones and unknown ones that have no name, inventions of his own, of which he has almost forgotten the use. No one can be compared to him for doing with despatch and without labour any useless piece of work. He had to take ten steps to go from his bed to his wardrobe, he has now so arranged his room that he has only to take nine; how many steps saved in the course of a life-time! It is usual to turn the key, thrust or pull, before you open a door. What a fatigue! He knows how to save himself such an unnecessary exertion, but the method is a mystery he keeps to himself. He is in truth a great master of springs and mechanism, such at least as the world could do very well without. He brings light to his apartments otherwise than through the window, he has found the secret of going up and down the house otherwise than by the staircase, and is studying how to get in and out more conveniently than by the door.

The Man
who will be
comfortable

NEWSMONGERS, PESSIMISTS AND
OPTIMISTS



HOSE who sit peacefully by their own fire-sides, and live in the midst of their families and in a town where nothing is to be feared for the safety of their lives or property, are the men who generally breathe fire and sword, talk continually of war, pillage, conflagrations and massacres, are out of patience that the armies which are carrying on the campaign do not meet, or if once in sight of each other, that they do not give battle, or if they engage, that the combat was not more bloody, and that scarcely ten thousand men were killed. Sometimes they go so far as to forget their dearest interests, their repose and safety, out of their love for change, their desire for novelty, or for things out of the ordinary. Some would even like to see the enemy at the gates of the city, barricades thrown up, and chains stretched for the mere pleasure of hearing or telling the news.

Demophilus, on my right, laments and cries :

NEWSMONGERS

“All is lost, all is up with the country, at least it is on the brink of ruin. How can we resist so strong and general a coalition? By what means may we, I dare not say conquer, but even make head against such numerous and powerful enemies? The whole of history does not afford an example. A hero, an Achilles would succumb. We have committed gross errors. I know what I am talking about, I have been a soldier myself, and reading has likewise taught me much.” Then he speaks with admiration of Olivier le Daim and Jacques Cœur: “Those were men,” he says, “those were ministers.” He retails his news, which is sure to be the most disadvantageous and melancholy that can be forged. Now a party of our men have fallen into an ambuscade and been cut to pieces, now some troops shut up in a castle have surrendered at discretion and been put to the sword; and if you tell him that the report is false or needs confirmation he does not listen to you, he adds that a general has been killed; and although you assure him that he is only slightly wounded, he deplures his death, pities his widow and children, and bemoans his own loss; he has lost a good friend and a kind patron. He tells you that the German cavalry are invincible, and turns pale if you but mention the Imperial Cuirassiers. “If we attack that place,” he continues, “we shall be obliged to

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raise the siege, and if we lose it the enemy will be at our frontiers," whence Demophilus hastens them into the heart of the kingdom. He already hears the alarm sounded from the belfries, he is in fear for his property and his lands. Whither shall he remove his money, his furniture, his family? Where shall he take refuge? In Switzerland or Venice?

But, on my left, Basilides raises an army of three hundred thousand men in a minute; he will not abate you a single brigade. He has a list of the squadrons, battalions, generals and officers, not omitting the artillery and baggage. He assigns these forces their various parts. Some he sends into Germany, others into Flanders, reserves a certain number for the Alps, a lesser for the Pyrenees, and transports the rest beyond sea. He knows the marches of these forces, he can tell what they will do and what they will not do, you would think he had the king's ear or was in the minister's confidence. If the enemy lost a battle with nine to ten thousand killed, he declares it to be thirty thousand, neither more nor less, for his numbers are always fixed and certain, as with a well-informed man. If he hears in the morning that we have lost a paltry village, he not only sends an excuse to the friends he had invited to dinner, but he fasts, and if he sups, it is without appetite.

NEWSMONGERS

If we besiege a place, naturally strong, regularly fortified, and well stored with ammunition and food, besides a good garrison commanded by a brave general, he tells you that the town has its weak, ill-fortified spots, that they want powder, and that the governor wants experience, and that it must capitulate after eight days' open trenches. At another time he runs in all out of breath, and as soon as he has recovered a little, exclaims, "Here's news! they are beaten, totally routed; the general, the superior officers, at least a great part of them, are killed; all have perished. There's slaughter! It must be confessed that we enjoy great good fortune." Then he sits down and breathes once again after this extraordinary news, which, however, lacks one detail, namely, that there never was any such battle. He assures us further that a certain prince withdraws from the league and abandons his confederates, and that another is ready to take the same step, he firmly believes with the populace that a third is dead, and names the place of his burial, and even when the whole town is undeceived, persists in laying wagers on it. He has indubitable information that Tekeli is making great progress against the Emperor; that the Grand Signior is making formidable preparations, does not desire a peace, and that his Vizier will once more sit down before Vienna. He claps

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his hands and is in ecstasy over this event, in which he firmly believes. He talks of nothing but laurels, triumphs, and trophies. He says in common talk, "Our august hero, our mighty potentate, our invincible monarch." Make him, if you can, say simply, "the king has a great many enemies, they are powerful, united, exasperated; he has overcome them and I hope will always overcome them." That style, too bold and decisive for Demophilus, is neither pompous nor exaggerated enough for Basilides. He has very different phrases in his head; he is composing inscriptions for the triumphal arches and pyramids which will adorn the metropolis at the conqueror's entry, and as soon as he hears that the armies are in sight of each other, or that a town is invested, he orders his robes to be aired against the *Te Deum*.

THE MAN OF CAPRICE

THE MAN OF CAPRICE



HE capricious man is not one man but several; he multiplies himself as often as he changes his tastes and his manners. He is not this minute what he was the last, and will not be the next what he is now; he succeeds himself. Do not ask him of what party he is, but what are his parties? Nor of what humour, but how many sorts of humour he has? Are you not mistaken? Is it Euthychrates whom you met? How cold he is to day! Yesterday he sought you out and caressed you; his friends were quite jealous. Does he remember you? Tell him your name.

THE LITTLE "GREAT MAN"

PAMPHILUS does not converse with the people he meets in the rooms of the palace, or in the courtyards, but by his gravity and the raising of his voice, he seems to receive them, grant them audience, and dismiss them. He has a parcel of terms, at once civil and haughty, and an imperious courtesy which he uses without discernment, and a false dignity which lowers him and is vastly embarrassing to those who are his friends and who do not desire to despise him.

A Pamphilus is full of himself; he never loses sight of himself, of his greatness, his alliances, his offices, his dignity; so to speak he collects them all together, and wraps himself in them in order to demonstrate his great worth. He mentions: "My order, my blue ribbon," and displays or hides it, both from ostentation. In short, Pamphilus would be great and believes that he is so; but he is nothing of the kind, only a mere imitation of a great man. If ever he smiles on an inferior, on a wit, he chooses his

THE LITTLE "GREAT MAN"

The Little
"Great
Man"

time so well that he is never caught in such familiarity. If, unfortunately, he was surprised in any condescension to a person who is not rich or powerful, or the friend of a minister, or his ally, or his servant, he would blush up to his ears. He is inexorably severe to him who has not yet made his fortune. He meets you one day in the gallery and avoids you; the next day coming upon you in a less public place, or, if equally public, in company of persons of importance, he goes up to you with confidence, and says: "Yesterday you would not look at me," and then he leaves you hastily to accost a lord or some great official. If he finds such persons talking with you, he interrupts and carries them off. You meet him another time, he will not stop; you must run after him and talk so loud that the passers-by wonder and stare. Thus the Pamphiluses always seem to be on a stage, actors of comedy, a kind of men nourished in falsehood, and who hate nothing so much as to be natural.

We can never say enough of the Pamphiluses; they are servile and timorous before princes and ministers; proud and overbearing to those who possess nothing but virtue; dumb and confused before the learned; talkative, bold, and positive with the ignorant. They talk of war to a lawyer, politics to a financier, history to women,

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The Little
"Great
Man"

poetry to men of science, and mathematics to poets. They do not trouble themselves with maxims, and less with principles. They live at random, pushed and driven by the wind of favour, and the allurements of wealth. They have no opinions of their own, they borrow them as they want them, and he to whom they apply for them is neither wise, learned, nor virtuous, but a man of fashion.

THE PARVENU

THE PARVENU



HEAR much talk of the Sannions ; “ the same name, the same arms ; the older branch, the younger branch, the youngest branch of the youngest house ; the armorial bearings of the first are without quarterings, the second with a label, and the third with a bordure indented. Their colour and metal are the same as those of the Bourbons, and like them they bear two and one. It is true they are not *Fleurs de Lis*, but the Sannions are satisfied, and perhaps believe in their hearts their bearings as noble ; at least they are not inferior to those of persons of the first quality. Their arms are to be seen on their windows, their castle gates, their justiciary pillars, where many a man is hanged who only deserved banishment. They strike the eye everywhere ; on their furniture, on their locks ; their carriages are covered with them, and their liveries are as resplendent as their coats of arms. But I should like to say to the Sannions : “ Your folly is premature, you should wait at least until your race has existed for a

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

The Parvenu century. Those who have met and spoken with your grandfather are old and cannot live long. Who then would be able to say ‘ He kept a shop and sold very dear ? ’ ”

The Sannions and the Crispins like still better to be thought extravagant and able to spend money. They bore you with a long story of a fête or banquet they gave, they confide to you their losses at play, and they complain loudly of that which they had not thought to lose. They speak in a mysterious jargon of certain women of their acquaintance, they have a hundred amusing stories to tell each other, “ they have just made some curious discoveries,” and pass with each other for men of great intrigue. One of them going to bed late in the country, and who loves to sleep long, rises early, dons his gaiters and a shooting coat, belt, and powder flask, and takes his gun, and is a sportsman if only he could shoot ! He returns at night, wet and weary, without having hit anything. But he goes shooting again on the morrow, and so spends every day in missing thrushes and partridges.

THE BOURGEOIS

THE BOURGEOIS THEN AND NOW



THE Roman Emperors never triumphed so nicely, commodiously and surely over wind, rain, dust, and sun as the citizens of Paris when they drive about the town. What a distance from this custom to the rule of their ancestors ! They did not understand how to deprive themselves of necessities in order to have luxuries, nor did they prefer show to substance. Their houses were not lighted with wax candles, and they warmed themselves at a small fire. Wax lights were for altars and palaces. They did not rise from a bad dinner to get into a coach, but, convinced that men had legs given them to walk with, they used them. In dry weather they kept themselves clean, and in wet they did not mind soiling their shoes, as little troubled to cross a street or square as a sportsman trudging over a ploughed field or a soldier into the damp trenches. They had not then invented harnessing two men to a Sedan chair ; their magistrates themselves walked to the courts with as good a grace as Augustus to the Capitol. In those days


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The
Bourgeois
then and
now

pewter shone on their tables and sideboards, brass and iron on their chimney pieces, while silver and gold lay safe in their coffers. Women were then waited on by women, who were likewise employed in the service of the kitchen. The fine names of tutors and governesses were not unknown to our fathers ; they knew to whose care were entrusted the children of kings and princes. But they shared the service of their domestics towards their children, and were content to superintend their immediate education themselves. Everything they did was suitable to their circumstances, their expenditure was proportioned to their income, their liveries, equipages, furniture, table, town and country houses were all in proportion to their revenue and circumstances. Less desirous of spending or increasing their patrimony than of keeping it, they left it entire to their heirs and passed from a quiet life to a peaceful death. They did not complain that the times were hard, that poverty abounded, that money was scarce. They had less than we have, and yet they had enough ; and were richer by their economy and moderation than by their revenues and lands. In those days they believed in the maxim that what is splendour, sumptuousness, magnificence in people of rank is profusion, foolishness, and ostentation in private men.

THE MONEY GRUBBER

THE MONEY GRUBBER

 HERE are some sordid souls, grovelling in filth and ordure, to whom interest and gain are what glory and virtue are to fine minds. They are sensible of but one pleasure, to acquire, or at least never to lose. They are covetous and greedy to a farthing, busied sorely about their debtors, ever anxious about a debasing of the coinage, plunged and almost buried in contracts, title deeds, and mortgages. Such people are neither relations, friends, citizens, Christians, nor even men : they have money.

THE AFFECTED TALKER


“**W**HAT do you say? What? I don’t understand. Would you mind beginning again? I comprehend you still less. I can partly guess your meaning—you want to tell me, Acis, that it is cold. Why don’t you say it is cold? You want to inform me that it is raining or snowing. Well then, say it rains, it snows. You find me looking well, and wish to congratulate me on that circumstance. Then say ‘You look well.’ ‘Oh!’ you reply, but that is so plain and clear, any one might have said it. What does that matter, Acis? Is it so great a harm to be intelligible, and to speak like the rest of the world? There is one thing, Acis, which you and your companions want, although you haven’t an idea of it, one thing you lack, and that is wit. That is not all, there is another thing of which you have too much, and that is the opinion that you have more of it than other men; that is the source of all your bombastic, barbarous, and grotesque phrases which mean nothing. Next time you address

THE AFFECTED TALKER

anybody I shall pluck you by the sleeve and whisper : Don't pretend that you have wit, have none, that is your part. Cultivate, if you can, simple language such as those employ in whom you find no wit ; maybe then, people will think you have some yourself."

The
Affected
Talker

THE PERFECT WOMAN

E said that wit in that beautiful lady¹ was a diamond set to best advantage, and continuing to speak of her added: "A flavour of reason and charm combined strikes all who talk to her. She possesses qualities which would make a perfect friend, and also those which would lead you beyond the bounds of friendship. Too young and beautiful not to please, but too modest to seek to do so, she esteems men only for their merit, and thinks of them only as friends. Full of vivacity, and capable of deep feeling, she surprises and interests, and although she per-

¹ This lady was Catherine Turgot, daughter of the Saint-Clair Turgot, *doyen de conseil*. She married in 1686 at the age of thirteen, Gilles d'Aligre de Boislandry. For seven years M. and Mme. de Boislandry lived happily together. Then M. de Boislandry took exception to his wife's conduct and they separated. In 1694 the poet Chaulieu became Catherine's lover, and it was he who revealed the identity of La Bruyère's Arthenice. Chaulieu addresses her in his poems as Iris. Having become a widow she married as her second husband M. de Chevilly in 1712, and nothing further is known of her except that she died in 1737. La Bruyère probably describes her as she was in the early days of her first marriage.

THE PERFECT WOMAN

The Perfect
Woman

fectly understands the delicate and fine shades of conversation, makes sometimes sallies so happy that, among other pleasures they afford, they always dispense with a reply. She talks with you like one who is unlearned, who doubts and seeks to be enlightened ; she listens to you like one who knows a great deal, who fully comprehends the value of what you are saying, with whom nothing of what you say will be lost. Far from seeking to show her wit by contradicting you, and from imitating Elvira, who would rather be thought smart than sensible and discreet, she adopts your ideas, believes them to be her own, even extends and embellishes them ; thus you are delighted to have thought so well, and to have spoken so much better than you had imagined. She despises vanity whether she speaks or writes, she neglects figures of speech where reason is in question, she understands that the truest eloquence is simplicity. If it be a matter of doing some one a service, of making your interests concur, leaving fine words and phrases to Elvira, who uses them on all occasions, Arthenice employs only sincerity, ardour, earnestness, and persuasion. She finds her chief pleasure in reading, and in conversing with persons of worth and reputation, and this not so much to be known to them, as to know them. She may be praised in advance for all

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

The Perfect Woman the wisdom which will one day be hers, and for all the merit which the future holds for her ; for possessing, with an unexceptional conduct, better intentions, and sure principles useful to those who, like her, are exposed to flattering attentions, and being of a retiring nature without being brusque, and even a little inclined to avoid society, she only wants opportunity, or, so to speak, a stage in order to display all her virtues.”

THE COQUETTE

THE COQUETTE



ARGIRA pulls off her glove to show her beautiful hand, and never forgets to let her little shoe be seen that supposes a small foot. She laughs equally at things funny and serious, in order to show her fine set of teeth. If she shows her ears, it is because they are well formed. If she does not dance, it is because she is dissatisfied with her figure, which is indeed not of the slimmest. She understands all her points with the exception of one, that she is perpetually talking and lacks intelligence.

THE FASHIONABLE DANDY




AT church Iphis sees a new-fashioned shoe. He looks at his own and blushes for it, he cannot think himself dressed.

He went to mass only to be seen, and now he hides himself, kept at home by the foot for the rest of the day. He has a soft hand and preserves it by using a scented paste. He takes care to laugh often in order to show his teeth, and is, indeed, perpetually smiling. He surveys his legs, looks at himself in the glass, and nobody could be more pleased with another than he is with himself. He has acquired a soft clear voice, and fortunately talks with fluency. He has a movement of the head, and a kind of expression in the eyes, both of which he does not neglect to use to the best advantage. His gait is slow, and his attitudes prettily studied. Occasionally he puts on a little rouge, but not habitually. It is true that he wears breeches and a hat, and that he has neither ear-rings nor necklace, therefore I have not put him in my chapter "of women."

THE EGOIST

THE EGOIST

NATHON lives for nobody but himself, and for him the rest of the world are as if they were not. Not content with the best seat at table, he must take up the room of two others; he forgets that dinner is for the rest of the company as well as for him. He lays hold of every dish, and must taste of them all before he can decide of which to eat. He makes himself at home wherever he may be, and whether at church or at the play behaves as if he were in his own room. When he drives, he must always sit backwards; sitting forwards, he says, makes him feel faint. When he travels in company he goes before the rest into the inns, and picks out for himself the best room and the best bed and appropriates everything to his own use. His own servants, as well as those of others, hasten to serve him. He worries every one, puts himself out for none, pities none, recognizes no troubles but his own, no sufferings but his own, laments nobody's death, and to prevent his own would willingly consent to the extinction of mankind.

THE MAN OF CONVENTION

NARCISSUS rises in the morning to go to bed at night, has a fixed hour for his toilette like a woman, and attends mass regularly every day. He is good company, and may be counted on for a third or fifth at ombre or reversi. He sits for four hours together at Aricia's, where every evening he ventures his five or six pistoles. He never misses reading the newspapers, and is acquainted with the works of Cyrano de Bergerac and others, and some collections of poems. He accompanies ladies in the public promenades, and is religiously punctual in his visits. He will do the same to-morrow as he has done to-day, and as he did yesterday, and he will die after having lived so.

THE RESIDUARY LEGATEE

THE RESIDUARY LEGATEE



TIUS hears a will read with tearful eyes and swollen lids, and is overcome with grief at the loss of a friend by whose death he will inherit a fortune: one clause bestows on him the succession of a post, another house property, a third gives him a fine country estate, and a fourth makes him master of a richly-furnished house situated in the best part of Paris; his grief increases, the tears run down his cheeks. How can he refrain from weeping? He has now an office, a town house, and a country house, both well furnished, he will be able to keep his carriage and a well-provided table. "Was there ever a more honest, a better man than my poor friend?" But here is a codicil that must be read; it makes Maevius residuary legatee, and sends Titius back to his garret without sinecure, horses, lands, or money. He dries his tears; it is now the turn of Maevius to weep.

FOOLS



FOOL is an automaton, a machine with springs which turn him about always in one manner, and preserve his equilibrium. He is ever the same, and never changes. If you have seen him once you have seen him at every moment and period of his life. He is at best but as the lowing ox or the whistling blackbird. He is fixed and obstinate, I may say, by nature. What appears least in him is his soul; that has neither activity nor energy; it reposes.

THE GREAT CONDÉ

THE GREAT CONDÉ

(Æmilius)



EMILIUS was born what the greatest men do not become but by force of rules, study, and practice. He had no more to do in his early years than to give himself up to the bent of his natural talents and of his genius. He performed actions before he had gained knowledge, or rather he had knowledge without ever having learnt. Shall I say that his boyish games were so many victories? It would make a life of brilliant success and great exploits only to have performed the actions of his youth. All the opportunities that have since offered for conquest he has embraced, and those which did not exist his virtue and his good fortune created, admirable alike for the things he did and for those which he could have done. He was looked on as a man incapable of yielding to an enemy, or of giving way under numbers of obstacles. He was regarded as a soul of a superior order, full of resource and intelligence, and who saw more

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

The Great
Condé

than others, like him who at the head of legions was for them a presage of victory, and who was in his single person worth several legions. He was great in prosperity, greater even in adversity; the raising of a siege or a retreat have gained him more honour than his successes, such things come only second to battles won and towns taken. He was filled equally with glory and modesty. He has been heard to say "I fled," with the same grace that he said "We beat them." He is devoted to the State, to his family and its head, true to God and man, as much an admirer of merit as if he had been himself less well acquainted with it, a man sincere, simple, magnanimous, in whom none of the virtues were wanting but the inferior ones.

FONTENELLE

FONTENELLE

(Cydias)



SCANIUS is a statuary, Hegion a founder, Aeschines a fuller, and Cydias a wit. He has a sign, a workshop, commissions, and apprentices who work under him. It will be a month before you can have the stanzas he promised you, unless he breaks his word to Dosithea, who has ordered an elegy from him. He has also an idyll on the stocks for Crantor which is occupying him closely, and for which he expects generous remuneration. Prose, poetry, what do you desire? He is equally successful in both. Do you want letters of condolence, or about an absence, he will undertake them, or there are plenty ready-made if you will step into his shop and choose. He has a friend whose sole function on earth is to speak of him continually in society, and then to introduce him into houses as a man of rare gifts and exquisite conversation. And then like a singer or a lute-player in the presence of persons to whom he


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Fontenelle has been talked of, Cydias, after coughing and smoothing his ruffles, stretching forth his hand and spreading his fingers, gravely utters his volatilized ideas and his sophisticated arguments. Differing from those who, agreeing in principle, and recognizing reason and truth, interrupt each other only to prove how their sentiments agree, he only opens his mouth to contradict. "It seems to me," he says condescendingly, "that it is just the reverse of what you say," or "I must differ from you," or "I was formerly under the same infatuation, but . . . there are three things," he adds, "to consider," and he never fails to bring forward a fourth. He is a rapid talker, whose first aim at coming into an assembly is to get among the women, that he may amaze them by exhibiting his wondrous talents. For whether he speaks or writes he must not be suspected of aiming at the presentment of truth or falsehood, reason or absurdity; he equally avoids agreeing with or holding a similar opinion to the rest. Thus he often waits until all the company have spoken their thoughts on some casual subject, not seldom introduced by himself, and then holds forth dogmatically, and as he imagines decisively and unanswerably, on entirely new themes. Cydias is the equal of Lucian and Seneca, ranks himself above Plato, Virgil, and Theocritus, and his flatterers confirm him every

FONTENELLE

day in that opinion. United in taste and interest with the detractors of Homer, he waits calmly until men shall be undeceived and shall prefer modern poets to him. In that case he ranks himself at the head of the latter, and he knows to whom to adjudge the second place. In short he is a cross between a pedant and a *précieux*, made to be admired by middle-class folk and provincials, a man in whom, nevertheless, nothing great is to be seen except the opinion he holds of himself. Fontenelle

LA FONTAINE

ERE is a man who appears coarse, heavy, stupid ; he is unable to speak of or describe what he may just have seen, but when he begins to write he is the model of story-tellers. He makes everything speak that does not speak, animals, trees, stones ; his works are full of lightness, elegance, good humour, and delicacy.


He is more uniform than Marot, and more a poet than Voiture. He has the playfulness, the happy turn of phrase, the simplicity of both. He instructs while he jests, and persuades men to virtue by the organs of beasts. He confers sublimity on the meanest subject. Unique in his way of writing, always original whether he invents or translates, he surpasses his models, and is himself a model difficult to imitate.

A GOOD KING

A GOOD KING

WHEN, towards sunset on a fine day, you see a large flock dispersed over a hillside, quietly grazing the wild thyme, or nibbling in a meadow the short tender grass that has escaped the reaper's scythe, the shepherd, careful and diligent, stands upright among his sheep; he does not let them from his sight, he follows them, leads them, changes their pasture. If they go astray, he gathers them together again. If a hungry wolf approaches, he lets loose his dog, and so puts him to flight. He cherishes and protects them. At dawn he is already in the field, which he does not quit till sunset. What anxiety! What vigilance! What slavery! Which condition appears the most free and desirable, that of the shepherd or the sheep? Is the flock made for the shepherd, or the shepherd for the flock? Here we have a real image of a king and his people, if he is a good king.

THE PEOPLE

 CERTAIN wild animals, male and female, are to be seen spread over the land. They are dark-skinned, tanned by the sun, chained as it were to the earth which they dig and plough with invincible steadiness. They have something like an articulate voice, and when they stand erect, reveal a human face, and are, in fact, men. At night they retire into their burrows, where they live on black bread, water and roots. They spare other men the trouble of sowing, toiling and reaping for their sustenance, and thus deserve at least not to want the bread for which they themselves have toiled.

PICTURES OF NATURE

PICTURES OF NATURE

I.



AM approaching a small town and am already on an eminence whence I can see it. It is situated on the hill-side, a river washes its walls and then winds through beautiful meadows, while a thick forest protects it from the cold north winds. The atmosphere is so clear that I can count its towers and steeples; it looks as if painted on the slope of the hill. I am enchanted and exclaim: "How delightful it would be to live in so delicious a spot, under so serene a sky!" I enter the town, and have not spent two nights there when I become like its inhabitants, and want to get out of it.

II.

Observe, Lucilius, that spot of earth so much more beautiful and pleasing than the land contiguous to it. Here are spaces of ground amid which are dispersed pools and fountains; there, endless espalier walks which shelter you from

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Pictures of Nature the north wind. On one side is a thick wood which affords you shade from the sun, and on another an enchanting view. Lower is a rivulet which once flowed in its hidden course between willows and poplars, and is now become a banked up canal. Spacious, cool avenues are lost in the distance, and announce to you the whereabouts of the house, which is surrounded by water.

TOWN'S IGNORANCE OF THE COUNTRY

THE TOWN'S IGNORANCE OF THE COUNTRY



IN the town people are brought up in total ignorance of, and a blamable indifference regarding, things of the country.

They can scarcely distinguish between flax and hemp, wheat and rye, and either of those from barley, they only care for eating, drinking and dressing. It is useless to speak to inhabitants of a town of pastures, copses, aftermath and second crops, such terms are Greek to them. If you talk to some of them of weights, tariffs and the rate of interest ; to others of appeals, petitions, decrees and injunctions, they will eagerly listen. They know the world and what in it is least beautiful, and least pleasing. They know nothing about nature, her origins, her progress, her gifts and bounties. Their ignorance is often voluntary, and founded upon the conceit they have of their own vocations and talents. There is not a pettifogger of them all who, sitting in his gloomy and smoky study, his mind full of dark chicanery, does not set himself higher than the labourer,

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

The Town's
Ignorance of
the Country

who praises God, tills the earth, sows in due season and gathers in rich harvests, and if at any time he hears talk of the first inhabitants of the earth, or of the patriarchs, with their rural and well-ordered lives, he is astonished that any one could have lived at a time when there were neither attorneys, nor counsellors, nor judges, nor solicitors; neither does he understand how men could have done without the bar and lawyers' clerks and coffee-houses.


REALISM AND THE STAGE

REALISM AND THE STAGE



It is not sufficient that the morals of the stage shall not be bad, they should be decent and instructive. Some things are so low, so mean, so insipid and so insignificant in themselves that it is not permitted to the poet to pay attention to them, nor possible for the spectators to be amused by them. The peasant or the drunkard may furnish some scenes for the farce-writer, but they scarcely enter into true comedy; how then can they furnish the basis or the principal action of comedy? "Such characters," you say, "are natural." By that rule, the audience would be pleased with a lackey whistling, or a drunkard snoring. Could anything be more natural? It is the way of an effeminate fellow to get up late, spend part of the day at his toilet, look at himself in the glass, perfume himself, put on patches, receive notes and answer them. Bring that part on to the stage. The longer you make it last, one act, two acts, the more natural and true to its original it will be, but also the more insipid and dull.

TIME

VERY hour in itself is for each one of us unique ; once past, it has gone for ever, and not millions of ages will bring it back. Days, months, and years are fled away, and irrecoverably lost in the abysm of time. Time itself shall be destroyed ; it is but a point in the immense space of eternity, and it will be effaced. There are several light and frivolous circumstances of time which are unstable and pass away ; such I call fashions, greatness, favour, wealth, power, authority, independence, pleasure, gaiety, superfluity. What will become of those fashions when time itself shall have disappeared ? Only virtue, so little the fashion, stretches beyond time.

A MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY

A MEMBER OF A MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY



ARSENES contemplates mankind from the summit of self-conceit, and at the distance from which he beholds them, seems frightened at their littleness. Praised and extolled to the skies by a knot of persons who form a mutual admiration society, he thinks with the little merit he has to possess all that it is possible to have, all that he will never possess. Filled with sublime ideas, he scarcely finds time to pronounce a few oracles. Elevated by his character above human judgment he leaves to vulgar souls the merit of a regular, orderly life, and is only responsible for his inconsistencies to the circle of friends who worship him; they alone judge correctly, think correctly, they alone write or ought to write. There is, indeed, no work of genius, however well received by the world, and universally liked by men of sense, which he approves, or which he would even condescend to read. He is incapable of being corrected by this portrait, which he will not read.

BRIEF REFLEXIONS ON MEN AND
THINGS



EVERYTHING has been said, and we are come too late by the seven thousand years that men have lived and thought. The finest and best things about morality have already been appropriated, and nothing is left for us but to glean after the ancients, and the cleverest of the moderns.

We must only seek to think and speak correctly without desiring to lead others to our tastes and feelings; that would be too large an undertaking.

It is not so easy to make a name by an excellent work, as to make an indifferent work valued through the name already acquired.

There are some things that will not bear mediocrity; poetry, music, painting, oratory.

It is a sorry commendation that is made of a heap of epithets; deeds and the manner of relating them speak a man's praise.

REFLEXIONS ON MEN AND THINGS

The pleasure of criticism deprives us of that of being profoundly touched by the finest things.

Brief Reflexions on Men and Things

It is a happiness to be nobly descended; it is not a lesser happiness to have so much merit that nobody enquires whether you are so or not.

A beautiful face is the most beautiful of all sights, and the sweetest music is the sound of the voice of her whom we love.

Women are all extremes: they are either better or worse than men.

Women exceed the generality of men in love, but men are their superiors in friendship.

Most women judge of a man's merit and looks by the impression that they make on him, and very rarely allow either to a man who is indifferent to them.

The woman who has her eyes constantly fixed on the same person, or who is always turning them from him, makes us conclude one and the same thing of her.

It costs a woman little to tell what she does not feel, it costs a man still less to express what he does feel.

There are few wives so perfect as not to give their husbands cause to repent of marriage at

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Brief Reflex-
ions on
Men and
Things

least once a day, or to envy him who is un-
married.

The passionless woman is she who has not
yet seen the man she is to love.

Pure friendship is something that cannot be
tasted by the mediocre.

Love and friendship exclude each other.

However fastidious we may be in love, we
forgive more faults in love than in friendship.

To be but in the company of those we love,
satisfies us. It does not signify whether we
speak to them or not, whether we think of them
or of indifferent things : to be near them is all.

That love can die is proof of man's limitations,
and that the heart has its bounds.

It is a weakness to love ; it is sometimes
another weakness to be cured of it.

To be deprived of the person we love is happi-
ness compared to living with one we hate.

The things we most desire never happen, or
if they happen, it is neither at the time nor under
the circumstances when they would have given
most pleasure.

We must laugh before we are happy, for fear
of dying before we have laughed.

REFLEXIONS ON MEN AND THINGS

There are some places we admire, and others we love and where we should like to live.

Brief Reflexions on Men and Things

In the course of our lives there are some forbidden pleasures and engagements so dear and tender that it is but natural at least to desire that they were allowed. Nothing can be more charming than they are except it be the pleasure of renouncing them by the strength of virtue.

You cannot go far in friendship if you are not willing to forgive each other little failings.

A king lacks nothing but the pleasures of private life : he can only be consoled for so great a loss by the charms of friendship and by the fidelity of his friends.

There are some strange fathers who seem, during the whole course of their lives, to be preparing reasons why their children should be easily consoled at their deaths.

The man who says he was not born happy may at least become so through the happiness of his friends or relations. But envy robs him of that last resource.

Take away passion, interest, injustice ; what a calm there would be in the greatest cities ! The necessaries of life do not occasion a third of the embarrassment.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Brief Reflexions on Men and Things

If life be miserable, to live is painful ; if happy, to die is terrible. Both come to the same thing.

There are but three events which happen to mankind, birth, life and death. Of their birth they know nothing, they suffer when they die, and neglect to live.

Children have neither past nor future, but what never happens with us, they enjoy the present.

All our misfortunes proceed from our inability to be alone ; hence gaming, dissipation, wine, women, ignorance, slander, envy, neglect of God and ourselves.

Instead of being frightened or ashamed at the name of philosopher, everybody ought to have a strong tincture of philosophy. It becomes every one ; its practice is useful to people of all ages, sexes and conditions ; it comforts us under the happiness of others, under unworthy preferences, disappointments, the decay of our strength and beauty ; it arms us against poverty, old age, disease and death ; against fools and buffoons ; it enables us to live without a wife, or to endure her with whom we live.

All confidence is dangerous if it is not absolute. In most circumstances it is needful either to tell all or to conceal all.

VAUVENARGUES

CLAZOMENES

CHARACTERS

CLAZOMENES, OR UNFORTUNATE VIRTUE



CLAZOMENES has experienced all the miseries of humanity. Disease took possession of him from his childhood, and deprived him in youth of all the pleasures of a young man. He had too his secret griefs, for despite his poverty, he possessed pride and ambition. He saw himself in his misfortunes despised by those whom he loved. The insult undermined his courage, and he was wounded by those on whom he could not be revenged. His talents, his unceasing industry, his application to good works, could not soften his hard lot. His wisdom could not keep him from committing irreparable faults. He suffered the ills he did not deserve, and those induced by his imprudence. When fortune seemed to tire of persecuting him, when a too tardy hope began to alleviate his misery, death confronted him, surprising him at a period when his affairs were in the greatest dis-

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Clazomenes,
or
Unfortunate
Virtue

order. He had the bitter pain of not leaving behind him property enough to pay his debts; he could not save his virtue from that blot. If a reason for so cruel a destiny is sought, I think it would be difficult to find one. Is there any use in asking why very skilful gamblers are ruined at play while other men make their fortunes at it? Or why we see years without spring or autumn in which the fruits of the year wither in their blossoms? However, we must not think that Clazomenes would have wished to exchange his misery for the prosperity of weak men. Fortune can make sport of the wisdom of brave men, but it is not in her power to break their courage.

PHERECIDES

PHERECIDES, OR AMBITION DECEIVED

PHERECIDES sacrificed a mediocre fortune to hopes that were scarcely wise. He entered on several careers at the same time, and not understanding how to curb his desires he trusted too implicitly to his ambition and his courage. He persists that circumstances and the world were against him. He thought a man could control his own destiny, and that it depended neither on his position nor on the waywardness of human affairs. He overtaxed his strength, he relied unsuccessfully on his own resources, he could not overcome adversity. He saw his equals leave the ranks and by various chances pass him in the race. Some owed their advance to gambling, others to rich inheritances, others again to the favour of the great, or to quite frivolous talents, but talents loved of the world; others again succeeded by dancing well, by the possession of pleasing features, beautiful hair or fine teeth. Pherecides committed an irreparable fault, he wished to hasten

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Pherecides,
or
Ambition
Deceived

his destiny. He neglected the means that would have led to fortune slowly and gradually, but perhaps surely. Instead of applying himself with unceasing industry to one object, he aimed too high and cultivated no special talent. The great advantages he sought made him despise the small ones within his reach and he obtained neither. The haughty disposition that he vainly tried to conceal, deprived him of the assistance of men in office, so that the elevation of his soul, his mind and his merit were harmful to his advancement and his aims. Had he expected less of his resources, he would have better proportioned his hopes and his actions to his circumstances; mature and moderate minds do not force their future, they proportion their enterprises to their circumstances, they await their fortune from events, and sometimes win it without trouble. But it is one of the illusions of youth to believe that everything can be done by our own strength and intelligence, and to desire to rise by our own industry, or by paths that merit alone cannot open to men without fortune. Pherecides was reduced to regret the very advantages he had despised. The people he wished to excel found themselves naturally above him, and no one pitied his misfortunes or deigned to discover their cause.

CYRUS

CYRUS, OR THE UNQUIET MIND.



CYRUS hid, under a simple and calm exterior, an eager, unquiet mind. Outwardly he had the insensibility and indifference which so often cover a wounded soul, greatly taken up with itself. More unquiet in repose than in action, his stirring, ambitious mind keeps him busy without relaxation, and when he has no business he tires and spends himself in reflection. Too free and too bold in his ideas to set bounds to his passions, readier to love strong vices than feeble virtues, he follows all his feelings with independence, and like a man who believes himself master of his fate and is only responsible to himself for his conduct, he subordinates all rules to his instinct. He lacks those insignificant talents which raise mediocre men in inferior circumstances, men who have not to contend with such serious passions. He is above the reputation gained by frivolous attractions, and the fortune which shuts a man up in the precincts of a town or small province, the ordinary outcome of a

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Cyrus, or
The Unquiet
Mind

somewhat narrow wisdom. He is eloquent, simple, vehement, profound, discerning, and impenetrable even to his friends. Endowed with insight into men, exhibiting without envy the merit of others, and relying on his own, he is insinuating and bold, equally suited to persuade by force of reason or by the charms of seduction. He is fertile and powerful in resources for making facts and minds bend to his purposes ; he is sincere by character, but makes an artifice of the truth, and is more dangerous when he speaks the truth than deceivers are by their subterfuges and falsehoods. He is one of those men whom other men misunderstand, whom the mediocrity of their fortune disguises and degrades, and whom only prosperity could develop and put in their right place.

TITUS

TITUS, OR ENERGY



TITUS rises without assistance, and without a fire during the winter. When the servants come into his room they find on his table a pile of letters that he has written by candle-light ready for the post. He begins several pieces of work at once and finishes them with incredible speed ; his impatient genius does not permit him to polish them. Whatever he undertakes, it is impossible for him to linger over it ; if he put any matter aside, he would feel uneasy until he was able to take it up again. Although occupied with affairs of so serious a nature, he is to be met in society, just like any idle man. He does not confine himself to one sort of society, but cultivates several sorts at the same time, and maintains relations with numerous persons, both within and without the kingdom. He has travelled, he has written, he has been at Court and at the wars ; he excels in several callings, and knows both men and books. He has enjoyed all sorts of pleasures but has not on that account neglected his business. He


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Titus,
or Energy

employs the time spent in society in forming intrigues, and cultivating his friends. He does not understand how people can talk for the sake of talking, or act only in order to be doing something, and it is evident that his mind suffers when necessity or politeness uselessly put a curb on it. If he seeks pleasure, he does not take less trouble about that than about more serious matters, and the employment thus given to his mind is more important to him than the particular pleasure he pursues. In sickness, or in health he preserves the same energy. He prosecutes a law suit on a day on which he has taken physic ; another time, he composes verses with a fever on him, and when his friends beg him to take care of himself, " Eh ! " he says, " how can I just now ? Just look at the business with which I am overwhelmed," although, to be exact, he has no business that is not purely voluntary. Prostrated by a dangerous illness, he had himself dressed so that he might put his papers in order. He remembered how Vespasian desired to die standing.

PHOCAS

PHOCAS, OR FALSE ECCENTRICITY

LL that is false displeases and wounds us in whatever shape it presents itself. Since men, compliant by preference and intention, embrace without selection the ideas of everybody, who would believe that others exist who pride themselves in not thinking like any one else thinks, and in not borrowing their opinions from any one? Never speak of eloquence to Phocas, or, if you wish to please him, do not mention Cicero, for he will immediately eulogize Abdallah, Abutaleb and Mahomet, and assure you that nothing equals the sublimity of the Arabs. If some old comedy, the author of which is long since forgotten, is revived on the stage, it is that piece which he admires and prefers before all ; he finds the plot ingenious, and the poetry and the situations inimitable. If war is the topic, you must not speak to him of Turenne or the great Condé ; he places far above them

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Phocas, or
False
Eccentricity

certain ancient generals about whom only their names and one or two disputed battles are known. In fact, on every occasion, if you mention two great men, be sure that he will always choose the least famous for his hero. In all respects one of the most mediocre of men, he stupidly thinks to make himself original by means of affectation and he aims at nothing more. He avoids agreeing with anybody, and disdains to speak to the point, provided he speaks differently from the rest. He studies in puerile fashion to be incoherent in his talk like a man who only thinks and speaks by sudden inspirations and flashes. Tell him seriously a serious thing, he will reply by a jest; speak to him of frivolous things, he will begin a serious discourse. He disdains to contradict, but he continually interrupts, and often, instead of answering you, turns away his eyes like a man in profound thought; he has an absent-minded far-away air, and a disdainful expression of countenance. His part is to appear dominated by his imagination, and to pay no heed to the intelligence of others. He wishes to make you understand that nothing you can say has any interest for him because he is too far above your ideas. His conversation, his manners, his love, even his silence, warn you that you can say nothing that is new to a man who thinks and feels as he does. He is a feeble-minded man who,

PHOCAS

disbelieving that merit can advance him, thinks to impress humanity by his affectations, and to be taken for an original merely by throwing aside reason.

Phocas, or
False
Eccentricity

THEOPHILUS, OR THE PROFOUND MIND



THEOPHILUS was imbued from his youth with the great and praiseworthy curiosity of knowing mankind and the various characters of nations; but, in pursuing that object, he did not neglect the men with whom he had to pass the greatest part of his life, for he did not resemble those who undertake long journeys in order to see, so they say, other manners, and who have never examined those of their own country. Urged by this powerful instinct, and perhaps also by some more secret ambition, he spent his best days in study and travel, and his life, always laborious, was always unquiet. Endowed by nature with extraordinary, profound, and clear penetration, he never speaks without a purpose, and his is no mind to cause weariness; his keen and active intelligence early caused him to apply himself to great affairs and solid eloquence; his words are simple, but bold and forcible; he sometimes speaks with a freedom that cannot do him any hurt, but which turns aside a defiant spirit in

THEOPHILUS

others. Nature placed in his heart the desire of insinuating himself and descending into the hearts of men who inspire and teach the hidden seductions of eloquence; yet he seems a man who does not seek to penetrate others, but who follows the vivacity of his humour. When he wishes to make a reserved man speak he contradicts him violently in order to rouse him, and insensibly engages him in talk in which he is obliged to reveal himself; even if he use dissimulation, his dissimulation and his silence have a meaning for Theophilus, who knows the things his interlocutor hides, and profits almost equally by candour and dissimulation, by indiscretion and silence, so difficult is it to escape him. He manipulates and plays a mind, turns over its pages just as we glance through a book we have in our hands, and which we open at a passage that pleases us; and this he does with such an air of innocence, with so little preparation, and so rapidly that those whom he has surprised by his words flatter themselves that they read his most secret thoughts. As he never wastes time in unnecessary talking, nor makes false steps, nor useless preparations, he is able to shorten the most contentious matters, the most difficult negotiations, and his flexible genius lends itself to every kind of character without abandoning his own. He is the affectionate friend, the father, the adviser and confidant of


Theophilus,
or the Pro-
found Mind

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

**Theophilus, or the Pro-
found Mind** those who surround him. We find in him a man simple, without ostentation, familiar, popular. When we have been talking to him for an hour we think we know him, but his talent is to lay bare the characters of others and to conceal his own. Theophilus is a proof that skilfulness is not solely an art, as false men imagine it to be ; a vivid imagination, great sense, an eloquent soul, easily subjugate the most guarded and defiant minds, and a superior intelligence conceals thoughts much more surely than do falsehood and dissimulation, always useless as trickery against prudence.

VARUS

VARUS, OR LIBERALITY

ARUS hates useless luxury and purposeless profusion. He dresses simply, goes afoot, likes order in his affairs, and retires at times into the country so as to spend less. But he is kind to those who are unfortunate, liberal and lavish where the interests of his fortune are concerned, grateful for the slightest service, and considerate towards all who suffer. If he has to give money to a man who makes no ceremony about receiving it, who is besides poor and of low rank, Varus's only fear is of giving it him in a manner that might make him feel his position. He embraces him, shakes hands with him, in a way apologizes for his kind deed. He says that between friends everything is in common, and such kindly conduct raises the soul of the poor man so that he in his turn apologizes for the poverty that compels him to ask assistance. Varus replies: "My friend, mankind has only attached shame to receiving in order to avenge themselves for the shame they have in giving; but, believe me, more generosity is required for accepting a friend's help than for

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Varus, or
Liberality

giving it him." Varus has everything that money can procure, and deserves to be sought out; for at need on important occasions he borrows, and he never hesitates to put himself out in order to satisfy himself, if need be, or to satisfy his friends. As he was not born rich he is reduced to owe largely, but he is never unpunctual in his payments. He pays at the date fixed, and all purses are open to him because his probity is known and his orderly conduct makes him seem quite at ease when he is most involved. In that way he has sufficient for his gifts and his own kind heart. But if any one, hearing his generosity talked of, attempts to make a dupe of him, after the manner of rascals who always think themselves cleverer than honest men, Varus, who can penetrate the most secret thoughts, and who knows mankind well, easily sees through the rascal's purpose, and takes delight in playing with him. Instead of giving him time to state his demand, he is first, and says: "Well, my friend, you are out very early to-day. Have you some important business on hand? Are you by any chance seeking an honest money lender? You'll have a vast deal of trouble to find him, I assure you. I know people who have been wanting a hundred pistoles for the last three weeks, and can't find them, even with good interest." The rascal, ashamed and confused at being found out—for the best

VARUS

Varus, or
Liberality

way to unmask a man who is prepared is to be beforehand with him—replies that in truth he has lost large sums at cards the last few days, but, fortunately, he has been able to pay off his debts. Glad to have baffled him, Varus pretends to believe him, and treats him with the utmost civility. They are already risen and near the door when the borrower, beginning to regret his feeling of shame, and who is besides somewhat reassured by Varus's manner, says: "I regret that I did pay So-and-so for I haven't a crown left; if you could possibly lend me four pistoles, I will return them to-morrow morning. "What!" exclaims Varus, "can a man like you possibly be in want of four pistoles? How have you let yourself come to that pass? What's the use of possessing such intelligence? What do you do with it? How do you employ it?" "I don't exactly know, but you would be doing me a great favour if you would lend me those four pistoles." "Oh! as to that, my dear fellow, it's quite impossible, for it was of myself I was speaking just now. I have been seeking money for the last month, and it is a consolation to find that a man like you is in equally low water." Then he accompanies him to the door, overwhelms him with those protestations that rascals are so fond of employing and are always so surprised to find in the mouths of honest folk.

ACESTES, OR YOUNG LOVE



YOUNG man who is in love for the first time in his life is no more a libertine, nor dissipated, nor ambitious ; all his passions are suspended, one alone fills his heart. If, perchance, he finds himself at a concert where the music is passionate, the symphony alone moves him without any accompaniment of words ; tears are seen to flow from his eyes, and he is compelled to leave the assembly in which he is not at ease and shut himself up at home ; he turns aside from those he meets, he wishes to hide his tears. Sitting at his table, he begins a letter, and tears it up, he strides up and down his room, mutters incoherent words ; he is no longer himself, no one recognizes him. Acestes idolizes a woman by whom he believes himself loved in return. He sees her in his sleep, speaks to her, listens to her, and thinks she listens to him. He dreams that he is travelling alone with her through a wood, over rocks and burning sand ; they reach a land of savages ; the people crowd round them and

ACESTES

enquire with curiosity about their fortunes. **Acestes, or**
Another time he dreams that he is in a battle, **Young Love**
and that, covered with wounds and glory, he is
about to die in his mistress's arms; for a young
man's imagination easily produces all the
chimeras that our romancers only compose after
many wakeful nights. Acestes is timid with his
mistress; although the bloom of youth is still on
his countenance he is uneasy when he is with
her. He forgets when he sees her what he had
prepared to say to her; but sometimes he speaks
to her without preparation, with that fire and
impetuosity which the most poignant and
eloquent of the passions inspire; he has a
torrent of words at once strong and tender; he
draws tears from this woman who loves another;
then he throws himself at her feet and demands
pardon for offences he has not committed. At
length his charm and sincerity prevail over the
vows of a rival less affectionate than he, and love,
time, caprice, reward so pure a passion. He re-
turns home preoccupied and saddened; love brings
goodness into an innocent and sensitive heart;
suspicion, envy, interest, hatred, have no place
in a loving happy heart. Acestes's joy, transport,
silence and distraction cannot be described. All
who depend on him share in his happiness; his
servants whom he ordered to await him at home
are not there; Acestes by nature quick tempered

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Acestes, or
Young Love

and impatient, is not angry, and when, apologizing for their late arrival, they come, he tells them that they did well to amuse themselves, and that he would be sorry to spoil any one's pleasure. Then if some poor wretch approaches him, Acestes gives him his purse, for pity accompanies love, and says to him "I am only too happy to be able to alleviate your woes; if all men would help each other, there would be none unfortunate; but the frightful and inexorable hardness of rich men causes them to retain everything for themselves, and thus it is avarice alone which causes all the miseries of the earth." Acestes only prides himself on being good; he forgives his enemies, he goes to see a man who wished to injure him. "Happy," says he, "are those who have passions that render them less hard-hearted, less arrogant, less fastidious, less conventional! Oh! if men could always be affectionate, generous, modest!" While he is busied with these reflections, some young men of his acquaintance laugh at the passion by which he is consumed, and above all at his fine ideas about love. He replies: "Thank God, I have not learnt to despise the love which pleases me, in order to diminish my pleasures. I esteem human things because I am a man, and do not pride myself on finding in my imagination the things I find more easily in nature. Interest, vanity,

ACESTES

ambition, may possibly some day dry up my heart and cause the natural feeling in it to perish, but at least I need not go to meet that misfortune. Do you then think yourselves more clever to be undeceived so early about the so-called illusions of youth? You have grown old, my friends, before your time and without having enjoyed nature; you are already disgusted with its pleasures. I pity you, for it is an error to seek elsewhere than in feeling what neither intellect nor custom, neither art nor science, can supply.”

Acestes, or
Young Love

THE MAN OF THE WORLD



MAN of the world is not he who best knows other men, who has the most foresight or skill in affairs, who is best informed either through experience or study. He is neither a good economist nor a man of learning, nor a politician, nor an intelligent officer, nor a hard-working magistrate; he is a man who is ignorant of nothing, yet who knows nothing, who, plying his own calling, whatever it may be, very ill, thinks himself capable of carrying on that of others very well. He is possessed of much useless wit; he can say flattering things that do not flatter, and sensible things that do not instruct; he can convince no one although he speaks well. For he is endowed with the sort of eloquence which creates trifles or brings them into prominence, and only succeeds in crushing great subjects. He is as acute regarding the absurdity and outward seeming of men as he is blind to their depth of mind. He is rich in words and in all outward things, and, unable to take the lead by good

THE MAN OF THE WORLD

The Man of
the World

sense, is compelled to make an appearance by eccentricity; and dreading to be tiresome by reason, is tiresome by his inconsequence and digressions. He is cheerful without being gay, and vivacious without being passionate. He has need of constant change of place and aims, and cannot make up for his lack of depth by the variety of his amusements. If several persons of that character meet together, and some game cannot be arranged, such men, although they teem with wit, have not enough of it to keep up a half-hour's conversation, even with the ladies, or to prevent their being greatly bored with each other. All the facts, all the news, all the jests, all the reflexions are exhausted in a moment. He who is not occupied in playing cards is obliged to look on at the game so as not to find himself by the fire-side with another man to whom he has nothing to say, All those amiable persons who have banished reason from their talk clearly demonstrate how little it is to be dispensed with. False things may supply conversation that pricks the mind's surface, but only true things penetrate the heart, create interest, and are never exhausted.

THE PROFICIENT IN THE ART OF
DEALING WITH MANKIND

HE who knows men and understands how to deal with them has no need of the vulgar artifices of flattery in order to win hearts. He is candid, ingenious, and friendly; he does not display a vain pomp of expression, nor does he adorn his conversation with figures of speech that would only serve to show off his own intelligence without interesting other people. Wherever he may chance to meet him, at table, on a journey, at the play, in a minister's waiting room, or at the prince's palace, if he finds himself in the company of a man likely to listen to him, he joins him, gains influence over him, persuades him by appealing to the serious and sensitive side of his mind, forces him to open his heart, excites and awakes in him passions and interests that were dormant or that he did not recognize, foresees or guesses his thoughts, and winds himself in a moment into his entire confidence. Thus he can win those whom he does not know, as he can preserve the

SAVOIR VIVRE

regard of those he has already won. He enters so deeply into the character of his interlocutor, what he says to him is so nicely proportioned to his thoughts and feelings, that where others would comprehend nothing, or take no pleasure, he understands all. Thus he prefers a *tête-à-tête*; but if circumstances compel him to speak before several persons of varying manners or opinions, or if he has to decide between two men who do not agree, since he knows the different sides of human affairs, since he can exhaust the for and against of every subject, and set all in the best light and reconcile opposite views, he quickly seizes the hidden point by which diverse opinions may be reconciled, and his conclusion is of such a nature that none of those who submitted themselves to his counsel can object to it. He does not know how to shine at a supper party or in a scrappy, interrupted conversation, where each speaker follows the vivacity of his imagination or humour without reflexion, but the art of pleasing and dominating in serious conversation, gentle acquiescence, and the charms of attractive intercourse, are the amiable gifts which nature has accorded him. He is the most eloquent man in the world when it is a question of softening a haughty mind, or of rousing a weak one, of consoling an unhappy man, or of inspiring a timid and reserved one with

The Pro-
ficient in the
Art of Deal-
ing with
Mankind

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The Pro-
ficient in the
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courage and confidence. He knows how to soften, conquer, convince, rouse, according to need; he has the sort of mind which serves to rule men's hearts, and which is suited for anything of which the end is noble, useful, great.

BRUTUS AND A ROMAN YOUTH

DIALOGUE

BRUTUS AND A ROMAN YOUTH

The Young Man :

ILLUSTRIOUS shade, deign to show me affection. You were my model so long as I lived ; like you I was ambitious, I tried to imitate your other virtues. Fortune was against me, I have foiled its hatred, I have escaped its severity by killing myself.

Brutus :

You made that decision very young, my friend. Had you no resources left in the world ?

The Young Man :

I thought none remained to me except chance, and I could not wait.

Brutus :

What right had you to expect anything of fortune ? Did you come of a noble house ?

The Young Man :

My birth was lowly ; I desired to ennoble myself by virtue and fame.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Dialogue

Brutus :

What means did you take to raise yourself ? for surely you had not merely a vague desire to make your fortune without striving for a special object.

The Young Man :

I hoped to advance by my intelligence and courage ; I felt that I possessed a lofty mind.

Brutus :

And so you cultivated some talent ? For you knew that no man gets on by magnanimity unless he is in a position to develop it in great affairs ?

The Young Man :

I knew the human heart a little ; I understood the spirit of finesse and skilful management ; I hoped to make myself master of the minds of other men ; by that means a man can attain anything.

Brutus :

Yes, if you are already some way advanced in your career, and acquainted with the great. But what had you done towards obtaining your end and making yourself known ? Had you distinguished yourself in the wars ?

The Young Man :

I conducted myself with coolness in all dangers,

BRUTUS AND A ROMAN YOUTH

and I did my duty. But I had little taste for the details of my occupation. I thought I should have done better in high affairs, but I neglected to make a reputation in lower ones.

Dialogue

Brutus :

And you believe that this talent of yours for high affairs would be guessed if you showed it in lower ones ?

The Young Man :

That is exactly what I *did* imagine, illustrious shade, for I had no experience of life, and no one had instructed me in the ways of the world. I had not been brought up for fortune.

Brutus :

Had you cultivated the art of eloquence ?

The Young Man :

I cultivated it as far as the occupation of war permitted. I loved literature and poetry, but all that was useless under the rule of Tiberius, who only cared for politics, and, in his old age, despised the arts. At Rome eloquence no longer led to honours ; it was a talent quite useless for making a man's fortune, and there was scant opportunity for practising it.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Dialogue

Brutus :

You should have devoted yourself to the things that would render you agreeable to your master, and useful to your country under the conditions in which it then was.

The Young Man :

I recognized the truth of what you say, but I discovered it too late, and I killed myself to punish myself for my faults.

Brutus :

Your faults are not unpardonable, my friend. You did not take the right road to fortune : but you might have succeeded by other means, since thousands have got on without merit and without calculable industry. You are too hard on yourself : like the generality of men you judge of your conduct by its success.

The Young Man :

It is a sweet consolation, oh great shade ! that you should make excuses for me. I never dared to open my heart to any one so long as I lived. You are the first to whom I have confessed my ambition, and who has pardoned my ill fortune.

Brutus :

Alas ! if I had known you in the world I should have tried to console you in your mis-

BRUTUS AND A ROMAN YOUTH

fortunes. I see that you lack neither virtue, nor intelligence, nor courage. In more favourable times you would have made your fortune, for you have a Roman heart. Dialogue

The Young Man:

If that is so, my dear Brutus, I do not regret my misfortune. Fortune is partial and unjust ; it is not a great evil to miss it when we feel certain that we deserved it. And when it is attained unworthily and by an unjust title, it matters little, for then it only serves to make greater faults, and to increase vices.

HEGESIPPUS



HEGESIPPUS passes rapidly from violent feeling to its opposite, and his passions are exhausted by their own vivacity. Feeble and strong, encouraged by the least success and thrown into consternation by the least misfortune, excessive joy soon throws him into sadness, hope into despair; and hate once satisfied awakes in him the extreme of pity. He is subject to repent without proportion things which he desired and executed without moderation. Quick to grow excited, he cannot exist in indifference. When he lacks anything his ardent imagination occupies him secretly with the objects his heart demands, and all his schemes are as extreme as his feelings. He esteems little what he does not desire or admire, and what he does not regard with passion he considers to be without interest. He passes swiftly from one idea to another, and he exhausts in a moment the feeling that sways him, but no one enters with more truth into the personage whom his passions make him deceive, and he is almost sin-

HEGESIPPUS

Hegesippus


cere in his tricks because he feels, in spite of himself, all that he desires to feign. He is the least suited for affairs that demand sequence and patience ; he becomes attached to people and disgusted with them most promptly, urges a single interest very vivaciously, but is entirely incapable of conducting several at a time. He either entirely neglects little things or worries himself absurdly over them ; he has the greatest confidence in himself and his schemes, but his imagination far outstrips his powers of execution. He is destined by nature to commit great faults because he imagines too vividly and undertakes too rashly what he has conceived with transport. He possesses, however, real and lofty courage, which makes him take up from reflexion affairs of which he despairs by feeling. Sometimes he is rebuffed by the slightest obstacles, but does not generally succumb to the greatest. Intrepid in despair, he counteracts the changefulness of his humour by resolution and prudence ; he even derives virtues from his weakness, and repairs the inequalities of his heart by the wisdom of his mind. Equable minds are often mediocre, and we must learn to esteem those men who by sudden fits succeed in raising themselves to all the virtues although they cannot long remain there. Their heart goes out towards generosity, courage, pity, and immediately yields to opposite im-

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Hegesippus pulses. Such virtues are not false for being sudden, they sometimes go farther towards heroism than moderation and wisdom, which, more subject to common laws, have neither the vigour nor the boldness that is the sign of independence.

THE INCONSTANT MAN

THE INCONSTANT MAN

UCH a man seems really to possess more than one character. A powerful imagination makes his soul take the shape of all the objects that affect it; he suddenly astonishes the world by acts of generosity and courage which were never expected of him, the image of virtue inflames, elevates, softens, masters his heart, he receives the impressions of the greatest examples and surpasses them. But when his imagination has grown cold his courage droops, his generosity sinks, and the vices opposed to those virtues take possession of his mind and soul, and after reigning there supreme for a short space yield to other objects. The actions of men of that character have no relevance one with another, they do not resemble each other any more than their thoughts, which vary ceaselessly; they possess, in some sort, inspiration. He who trusts in their words and their friendship lacks prudence; they are not deceitful, but they are inconstant. We cannot say that they have a great or a strong or a weak

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

The Incon-
stant Man

or a light nature ; it is a swift and imperious imagination reigning supreme over their whole being which subjugates their genius and which prescribes for them in turn the great deeds and the faults, the heights and the littlenesses, the enthusiasms and disgusts, in short, all the different lines of conduct which we wrongly ascribe to hypocrisy or folly.

LYCAS


LYCAS, OR THE FIRM MAN



O a self-reliant, bold, and imperious nature Lycas unites a spirit of reflexion and profundity which moderates the counsels of his passions, which leads him by impenetrable motives, and causes him to advance to his ends by a variety of roads. He is one of those long-sighted men who consider events from afar, who always finish any design they have begun, who, in order to attain their end, know how to yield or to resist at the right moment, who are capable, I will not say of dissembling a misfortune or an offence, but of raising themselves above it instead of allowing themselves to be depressed by it. They are deep natures, independent by their firmness in suffering all, in daring all; who, whether they resist their inclinations through foresight or whether from pride and a secret consciousness of their resources, they defy what is called prudence, always in good as in evil cheat the most acute conjectures, so greatly does their habit of being master of themselves lead them to display what of their character or their ruling passions they desire to let others see.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

T is easier to say new things than to reconcile those which have already been said.

Clearness is the ornament of deep thought.

Obscurity is the kingdom of error.

Where an author often errs is in believing that he can express things exactly as he sees or feels them.

We should be more tolerant of the ideas contained in a piece of writing if we conceived them in the same way as their author.

We rarely fathom another's thoughts ; consequently if it happens that later a similar reflexion occurs to us, so many sides does it present which had escaped us that we are easily persuaded it is new.

To praise moderately is always a sign of mediocrity.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

Rapid fortunes of any kind are the least solid, because they are rarely the result of merit. The perfect but laborious outcome of prudence is always of tardy growth.

Reflexions
and Maxims

Prosperity makes few friends.

Sometimes a lengthened period of prosperity melts away in a moment; just as the heat of summer flies before a day of tempest.

Courage has more resources against misfortune than has reason.

Reason and independence are incompatible with weakness.

War is less burdensome than servitude.

Servitude degrades men even to making them love it.

Before attacking an abuse we must find out if its foundations can be destroyed.

We have no right to render miserable those whom we cannot render good.

No one can be just who is not humane.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions and Maxims Some authors regard morality in the same light as we regard modern architecture. Convenience is the first thing to be looked for.

No one likes to be pitied for his faults.

The tempests of youth are mingled with days of brilliant sunshine.

Women and young people do not distinguish their esteem from their inclinations.

Habit is everything—even in love.

Few passions are constant, but many are sincere.

It is proof of a narrow mind when things worthy of esteem are distinguished from things worthy of love. Great minds naturally love whatever is worthy of their esteem.

When we feel that we lack the wherewithal to secure a certain man's esteem, we come very near hating him.

Pleasures teach princes to recognize their *genus*.

The man who can render his wealth useful, practises a great and noble economy.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

Fools do not understand men of intelligence.

Reflexions
and Maxims

A man can hardly be said to have made a fortune if he does not know how to enjoy it.

To attain fortune, you must act warily. You must be supple and amusing. You must be concerned in plots and yet offend no one; you must make yourself agreeable to women, and to men in power, take your share of business and pleasure, hide your secret, and know how to bore yourself a whole night at table and play three games of quadrille without leaving your chair. Even after all that you can be certain of nothing. How much annoyance and anxiety might be spared if glory was only to be attained by merit.

The man who rises before eight o'clock in the morning to hear a case in court, or to see an exhibition of pictures at the Louvre, or to attend the rehearsal of a new play, and who prides himself on being a judge of every sort of work done by other people, is a man who often lacks nothing but intelligence and taste.

We are less offended by the contempt of fools than by the moderate esteem of men of intelligence.

You sometimes offend a man by bestowing on

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions and Maxims him praise which marks out the limit of his deserving; few men are modest enough to endure being appreciated.

It is difficult to esteem a man as he desires to be esteemed.

Reason and extravagance, virtue and vice, have their favoured ones. Contentment is not a sign of merit.

Should calmness of mind be regarded as a proof of virtue? Good health ensures it.

The moderation of great men only sets a limit to their vices. The moderation of weak men is mediocrity.

There are none so sour as those who are sweet to order.

What is arrogance in the weak is elevation in the strong; just as the strength of the sick is frenzy and that of the whole is vigour.

One does not gain much by mere cleverness.

Consciousness of our strength increases it.

It is not true that poverty calls forth virtue in men more than wealth does.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

You must maintain strength of body in order to preserve strength of mind. Reflexions
and Maxims

Those who think they have no need of others become unreasonable.

Every man thinks himself worthy of the highest office ; but nature, who has not made him capable of holding it, likewise makes him able to live contentedly in the lowest.

Men despise great projects when they do not feel themselves capable of great successes.

Great men undertake great things because the things are great ; fools undertake them because they deem them easy.

It is sometimes easier to form a party than to attain by degrees the head of a party already formed.

Those who do not know how to gain by intercourse with others are not generally very accessible.

Extreme distrust is not less harmful than its opposite ; the greater part of men are useless to him who will not risk being deceived.

Everything is to hoped, everything to be feared, from time and from mankind.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions The bad are always greatly surprised to find
and Maxims cleverness in the good.

Too much and too little reserve about our affairs testify equally to a weak mind.

The maxims of men reveal their hearts.

Few maxims are true in every respect.

We find in ourselves what others hide from us ; and we recognize in others what we hide from ourselves.

Men say few solid things when they try to say extraordinary things.

The best authors say too much.

A man who neither dines nor sups at home thinks himself vastly occupied. And another who spends the morning at his toilette, and in giving audience to his embroiderer, laughs at the idleness of a newsmonger who takes a walk every day before dinner.

Few men would be happy if others had the determining of their occupations and pleasures.

If passion sometimes counsels greater boldness

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

than does reflexion, it gives more strength to execute it. Reflexions
and Maxims

If passion commits more faults than judgment does, those who govern commit more faults by reason than do private men.

Great thoughts come from the heart.¹

Magnanimity owes no account to prudence of its motives.²

No one is more liable to make mistakes than he who acts only on reflexion.

Conscience, the organ of the feeling which dominates us and of the opinions which rule us, is presumptuous in the strong, timid in the weak and unfortunate, uneasy in the undecided.

Strength or weakness at the hour of death depends on the nature of the last illness.

Disease extinguishes courage in some men, fear, and even love of life, in others.

It is unjust to exact of a soul crushed and vanquished by some irremediable evil, that it

¹ "Très beau," said Voltaire of this maxim, "Vauvenargues se peignait lui-même."

² Voltaire.—"C'est grand."

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions and Maxims shall preserve the same strength it had at other times. Are we surprised if a sick man cannot walk, or keep awake, or stand upright? Would it not be more strange if he was the same man as when he was well? If we have a headache, or have slept badly, we are excused for feeling incapable of work, and yet no one suspects us of being always lazy. Shall we deny a dying man the privilege we grant a man with a headache? And dare we assert that the man who lacks courage in his last agony never possessed that virtue when he was well.

To accomplish great things we must live as though we had never to die.

The thought of death deceives us; for it causes us to neglect to live.

I sometimes say to myself: "Life is too short to be worth troubling about." Yet if a bore calls on me, prevents me from going out or from dressing myself, I lose patience and cannot endure to be bored for half an hour.

The falsest of all philosophies is that which, under the pretext of delivering men from the embarrassment of their passions, counsels idleness, and the abandonment and neglect of themselves.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

If all our foresight cannot render our lives happy, how much less our indifference. Reflexions
and Maxims

No one says in the morning : A day is soon past, let us wait for the night. On the contrary, in the evening we consider what we shall do next day. We should be very sorry to spend even one day at the mercy of time and of bores. We should not dare leave the disposal of a few hours to chance, and we are right. For who can be certain of spending an hour without being bored, if he takes no care to fill even that short period according to his pleasure. Yet what we cannot be certain of for an hour, we sometimes feel assured of for life, and say :—“ If death is the end of everything, why give ourselves so much trouble ? We are extremely foolish to make such a pother about the future : that is to say, we are extremely foolish not to entrust our destinies to chance, and to provide for the interval which lies between us and death.

Reason and emotion counsel and supplement each other. Whoever heeds only the one, and puts aside the other, recklessly deprives himself of a portion of the aid granted us for the regulation of our conduct.

We owe perhaps to the passions the greatest advantages of the intellect.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions
and Maxims

In the childhood of nations, as in that of individuals, feeling precedes reflexion, and is their first teacher.

Young people suffer less from their faults than from the prudence of the old.

The counsels of the old, like the winter sun, shine, but give no heat.

The common excuse of those who bring misfortune on others, is that they desire their good.

It is unjust to exact that men shall do out of deference to our advice what they have no desire to do for themselves.

Whoever is more severe than the laws is a tyrant.

To punish unnecessarily is to entrench on God's clemency.

Mercy is of greater value than justice.

We censure the unfortunate for the slightest faults, and pity them little for the greatest misfortunes.

We reserve our indulgence for the perfect.

No man is weak from choice.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

The most odious form of ingratitude, yet the most common and the most ancient, is that of children towards their fathers. Reflexions
and Maxims

Generosity is affected by the misfortunes of others as if it were itself responsible for them.

We are not greatly pleased that our friends should respect our good qualities if they venture to perceive our faults.

We do not condole with a man for being a fool, and perhaps rightly ; but it is very delightful to imagine that it is his fault.

We can love with all our hearts those in whom we recognize great faults. It would be impertinent to believe that perfection alone has the right to please us ; sometimes our weaknesses attach us to each other as much as our virtues.

If our friends do us a service, we think they owe it to us by their title of friend. We never think that they do not owe us their friendship.

More fortunes are made by energy than by prudence.

Nature does not seem to have made man for independence.

Dependence is born of society.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions and Maxims

In order to protect himself from force, man was obliged to submit to justice. Justice or force : he was compelled to choose between the two masters, so little are we made to be independent.

With kings, nations, and private individuals, the strongest assume to themselves rights over the weakest, and the same rule is followed by animals, by matter, by the elements, so that everything is performed in the universe by violence. And that order which we blame with some appearance of justice is the most universal, most absolute, most unchangeable, and most ancient law of nature.

The weak wish to be dependent in order to be protected : those who fear men love the laws.

He who knows how to suffer everything can dare everything.

There are insults which we have to condone if we would not compromise our honour.

It is good to be firm by temperament and pliant by reflexion.

The weak sometimes wish to be thought wicked, but the wicked wish to be thought virtuous.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

The law of the mind is not different from that of the body, which can only be supported by continual nourishment. Reflexions
and Maxims

The fruits of work form the sweetest of pleasures.

It is of no use to possess a lively wit if it is not of right proportion : the perfection of a clock is not to go fast, but to be accurate.

Those who laugh at serious tastes have a serious affection for trifles.

We judge works of genius as we would mechanical productions. When we buy a ring we say, that one is too big, the other is too small, until we find one that fits our finger. But none are left at the jeweller's, for what is too small for one exactly fits another.

The fool who has a good memory is full of thoughts and facts. But he does not know how to draw conclusions, and everything depends on that.

I do not approve the maxim which desires *a man to know a little of everything*. Superficial knowledge, knowledge without principles, is almost always useless and sometimes harmful knowledge.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions
and Maxims

It is true that the greater number of men are scarcely capable of profound knowledge, but it is equally true that the superficial knowledge they seek only serves to satisfy their vanity. It is hurtful to those who possess true genius; for it necessarily draws them away from their main object, wastes their industry over details and subjects foreign to their needs and natural talent, and lastly does not serve, as they flatter themselves, to prove the breadth of their mind. In all ages there have been men of very moderate intelligence who knew much, and on the contrary, men of the highest intelligence who knew very little. Ignorance is not lack of intelligence, nor knowledge a proof of genius.

There is perhaps as much truth among men as error, as many good qualities as bad, as much pleasure as pain; but we desire to control human nature, to try to raise ourselves above our species, and to enrich ourselves with the consideration of which we try to despoil it. We are so presumptuous that we think we can separate our personal interest from that of humanity, and slander mankind without compromising ourselves. That absurd vanity has filled the books of philosophers with invectives against nature. Man is now in disgrace with all who think, and the prize is to him who loads him with the most

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vices ; but maybe he is on the point of improvement, and of compelling all his virtues to be restored to him. For nothing is stable, and philosophy has its fashions like dress, music, or architecture.

Reflexions
and Maxims

As soon as an opinion becomes common it is sufficient reason for men to abandon it and to uphold the opposite opinion until that in its turn grows old, and they require to distinguish themselves by other things. Thus if they attain their goal in some art or science, we must expect them soon to cast it aside to acquire some fresh fame, and this is partly the reason why the most splendid ages degenerate so quickly, and, scarcely emerged from barbarism, plunge into it again.

Great men in teaching weak men to reflect have set them on the road of error.

The comtemplative man, lying in a luxuriously furnished room, abuses the soldier who spends the winter nights on the banks of a river, and silently, under arms, watches over the safety of his country.

A hero does not seek glory in order to carry hunger and misery into the home of his enemies, but to endure them for his country : he does not desire to cause death but to brave it.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions and Maxims Vice stirs up war : virtue fights. If there was no virtue we should have unbroken peace.

It is not true that equality is a law of nature. Nature has made nothing equal, her sovereign law is subordination and dependence.

Necessity moderates more troubles than reason.

Necessity embitters the evils which it cannot cure.

The favourites of fortune or of fame topple from their pedestals before our eyes without diverting us from ambition.

Patience is the art of hoping.

Despair puts the last touch not only to our misery but also to our weakness.

Neither the gifts nor the blows of fortune equal those of nature ; in generosity and in rigour nature is alike supreme.

We are forced to respect the gifts of nature, which study and fortune cannot give.

The generality of men are so bound within the sphere of their circumstances that they have not even the courage to get out of them through their ideas, and if we see a few whom, in a way, specu-

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lation over great things makes incapable of mean ones, we find still more with whom the practice of small things takes away the feeling for great ones. Reflexions
and Maxims

The most absurd and the most rash hopes have sometimes been the cause of extraordinary success.

Great resources of mind and heart are needed to enjoy sincerity when it wounds, or to practise it without giving offence : few men have depth enough to hear or to tell the truth.

However we may be reproached for our vanity we have need sometimes to be assured of our merits.¹

We are rarely consoled for great humiliations ; we forget them.

The less power a man has in the world, the more he may commit faults with impunity, or possess in vain true merit.

Mediocre minds do not feel the extremes of good and evil.

Persons of rank do not talk about such trifles

¹ 'And to have our most obvious advantages pointed out to us.'—Later addition by Vauvenargues.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions as the common people do; but the common
and Maxims people do not busy themselves about such frivolous things as do persons of rank.

We sometimes seek the society of men who impose on us by their outward appearance, just as young men lovingly follow a mask, taking it for the most beautiful woman in the world, and worry it until they force it to reveal itself, only to show them a little man with dark complexion and beard.

It is easy to criticize an author: it is difficult to appreciate him.

If we only consider a few of the works of the best authors we are tempted to despise them; to appreciate them fairly we must read all.

Men are not to be judged by what they do not know, but by what they know, and by the manner in which they know it.

A liar is a man who does not know how to deceive, a flatterer one who only deceives fools: he who knows how to make skilful use of the truth, and understands its eloquence, can alone pride himself on his cleverness.

The maxim that *men are not to be praised before their death* was invented by envy and too lightly

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adopted by philosophers. I, on the contrary, maintain that they ought to be praised in their lifetime if they merit it ; but jealousy and calumny, roused against their virtue or their talent, labour to degrade them if any one ventures to bear testimony to them. It is unjust criticism that they should fear to hazard, not sincere praise.

Reflexions
and Maxims

We are very wrong to think that some fault or other can exclude all virtue, or to consider the alliance of good and evil as a monstrosity or an enigma. It is lack of insight that causes us to reconcile so few things.

Is it against reason or justice to love ourselves ?
And why is self-love always a vice ?

He who seeks glory by the path of virtue has no idea of asking what is to be his reward.

The greater works of the human mind are assuredly the least perfect ; the laws which are the most splendid invention of reason have not been able to secure peace for a nation without diminishing its liberty.

The common people and the nobles have neither the same vices nor the same virtues.

We have neither the strength nor the opportunity to accomplish all the good and all the evil which we design.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions and Maxims Intellectual mediocrity and sloth make more philosophers than reason or reflexion.

Commerce is the school of cozenage.

As it is natural to believe many things without proof, so, despite all proof, is it natural to disbelieve others.

Faith is the consolation of the wretched and the terror of the happy.

The shortness of life can neither dissuade us from its pleasures, nor console us for its pains.

Who are those that declare that the world has grown old? I easily believe them. Ambition, fame, love, in short all the passions of earlier ages, do not create the same disorder and the same noise. It is not perhaps that those passions are less keen to-day than they were formerly, but that they are disavowed and combated. I say that the world is like an old man who has preserved the desires of his youth, but who is ashamed of them, and hides them either because he is disillusionized of the merit of many things or because he wishes to appear so.

Men dissimulate their dearest, most constant, and most virtuous inclinations from weakness and a fear of being contemned.

We are too inattentive or too much occupied

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with ourselves to understand each other. Who- ever has seen masks at a ball dance amicably together, and hold hands without knowing each other, to part the moment after to see each other no more, nor to regret each other, can form some idea of society.

Reflexions
and Maxims

As there are many soldiers, and few brave ones, so there are many versifiers and almost no poets. Men crowd into honourable careers without other vocation than their vanity, or at best their love of fame.

Everything has its reason, and everything happens as it ought; there is nothing against feeling nor nature. I agree, but I am not anxious that people should agree with me.

Children are taught to fear and obey; the avarice, pride, or timidity of parents teaches children economy, arrogance, or submission. They are also encouraged to be imitators, a course to which they are already only too much inclined. No one thinks of making them original, courageous, independent.

If children had teachers for judgment and eloquence just as they have for languages, if their memory was exercised less than their energy or their natural genius, if instead of deadening their

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions and Maxims vivacity of mind we tried to elevate the free scope and impulses of their souls, what might not result from a fine disposition? As it is, we forget that courage, or love of truth and glory are the virtues that matter most in youth; and our one endeavour is to subdue our children's spirits, in order to teach them that dependance and suppleness are the first laws of success in life.

It is in our own mind and not in exterior objects that we perceive most things; fools know scarcely anything because they are empty, and their heart is narrow; but great souls find in themselves a number of exterior things; they have no need to read or to travel or to listen or to work to discover the highest truths; they have only to delve into themselves and search, if we may say so, their own thoughts.

A prince who is only good loves his servants, his ministers, his family, his favourite, and is not attached to his State; it is a great king who loves his people.

A prince is great and lovable when he has the virtues of a king, and the weaknesses of a private man.

Mediocre talent does not prevent great fortune, but neither procures it nor deserves it.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

When we are convinced of some great truths, and feel our convictions keenly, we must not fear to express it, although others have said it before us. Every thought is new when an author expresses it in a manner peculiar to himself.

Reflexions
and Maxims

Gaming, devoutness, wit, are three great advantages for women past their youth.

It cannot be a vice in men to be sensible of their strength.

The great do not know the common people, and have no desire to know them.

Nothing endures except truth.

It is not exactly truth which is most wanting in men's ideas, but precision and exactitude. Absolute falseness is seldom met with in their thoughts, and truth, pure and complete, is still more rarely to be found in their expressions.

We have not time enough to reflect on all our actions.

Every condition has its errors and its lights; every nation has its morals and its genius, according to its fortune; the Greeks, whom we surpass in fastidiousness, surpassed us in simplicity.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

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and Maxims

How few exact thoughts there are, and how many still remain for well-balanced minds to develop.

He who needs a motive for lying is not born a liar.

Whatever affection we have for our friends or relations, the happiness of others never suffices for our own.

Great men are sometimes so even in small things.

If a man is endowed with a noble and courageous soul, if he is painstaking, proud, ambitious, without meanness, of a profound and deep-seated intelligence, I dare assert that he lacks nothing to be neglected by the great and men in high office, who fear, more than other men, those whom they cannot dominate.

The greatest evil that fortune can bring to men is to endow them with feeble resources and yet to make them ambitious.

Mediocre men sometimes fear great office, and when they do not aim at it, or when they refuse it, all that is to be concluded is that they are aware of their mediocrity.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

War is waged at the present time between European nations so humanely, so skilfully, and with so little profit, that without a paradox it may be compared to the litigation of private persons where the expenses diminish the principal, and where men employ cunning rather than strength.

Reflexions
and Maxims

Men are so born for dependence that even the laws that govern their weakness do not suffice them: fortune has not given them masters enough, fashion must compensate for this, and rule them even to the cut of their shoes.

The best things are the most common. You can purchase the mind of Pascal for a crown. Pleasures even cheaper are sold to those who give themselves up to them. It is only luxuries and objects of caprice that are rare and difficult to obtain; unfortunately they are the only things that touch the curiosity and taste of ordinary men.

We must not be timid from a fear of committing faults: the greatest fault of all is to deprive oneself of experience.

The days of early spring have less beauty than the budding virtue of a youth.

The light of the dawn is not so sweet as the first glimpses of fame.

LA BRUYÈRE AND VAUVENARGUES

Reflexions
and Maxims

Courage is the light of adversity.

Wisdom is the tyrant of the weak.

Peace renders nations happier and men weaker.

We must not be too much afraid of being deceived.

Nature has endowed mankind with divers talents. Some are born to invent, others to embellish ; but the gilder attracts more attention than the architect.

Nothing is more severe than justice.

We are not always as unjust to our enemies as we are to our relations.

In friendship, in marriage, in love, or in any other sort of intercourse, we desire to gain ; and as the intercourse between friends, lovers, relations, brothers, and so forth is of a greater magnitude than any other, it is not surprising to find in it more ingratitude and injustice.

The things we know best are those we have not learned.

There does not exist a man sufficiently intelligent never to be tiresome.

REFLEXIONS AND MAXIMS

Whatever taste we may have for high affairs, there is no reading so tiresome and wearying as that of a treaty between princes.

Reflexions
and Maxims

As nature has not made all men equal by merit, it seems she cannot make them so by fortune.

