

ЖАН-ЖАК РУССО

THE CONFESSIONS OF
JEAN JACQUES
ROUSSEAU — VOLUME
10

Жан-Жак Руссо
The Confessions of Jean
Jacques Rousseau — Volume 10

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The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau — Volume 10:*

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The Confessions

of Jean Jacques

Rousseau — Volume 10

BOOK X

The extraordinary degree of strength a momentary effervescence had given me to quit the Hermitage, left me the moment I was out of it. I was scarcely established in my new habitation before I frequently suffered from retentions, which were accompanied by a new complaint; that of a rupture, from which I had for some time, without knowing what it was, felt great inconvenience. I soon was reduced to the most cruel state. The physician Thieiry, my old friend, came to see me, and made me acquainted with my situation. The sight of all the apparatus of the infirmities of years, made me severely feel that when the body is no longer young, the heart is not so with impunity. The fine season did not restore me, and I passed the whole year, 1758, in a state of languor, which made me think I was almost at the end of my career. I saw, with impatience, the closing scene approach. Recovered from the chimeras of friendship, and

detached from everything which had rendered life desirable to me, I saw nothing more in it that could make it agreeable; all I perceived was wretchedness and misery, which prevented me from enjoying myself. I sighed after the moment when I was to be free and escape from my enemies. But I must follow the order of events.

My retreat to Montmorency seemed to disconcert Madam d'Epinaÿ; probably she did not expect it. My melancholy situation, the severity of the season, the general dereliction of me by my friends, all made her and Grimm believe, that by driving me to the last extremity, they should oblige me to implore mercy, and thus, by vile meanness, render myself contemptible, to be suffered to remain in an asylum which honor commanded me to leave. I left it so suddenly that they had not time to prevent the step from being taken, and they were reduced to the alternative of double or quit, to endeavor to ruin me entirely, or to prevail upon me to return. Grimm chose the former; but I am of opinion Madam d'Epinaÿ would have preferred the latter, and this from her answer to my last letter, in which she seemed to have laid aside the airs she had given herself in the preceding ones, and to give an opening to an accommodation. The long delay of this answer, for which she made me wait a whole month, sufficiently indicates the difficulty she found in giving it a proper turn, and the deliberations by which it was preceded. She could not make any further advances without exposing herself; but after her former letters, and my sudden retreat from her house, it is

impossible not to be struck with the care she takes in this letter not to suffer an offensive expression to escape her. I will copy it at length to enable my reader to judge of what she wrote:

GENEVA, January 17, 1758.

"SIR: I did not receive your letter of the 17th of December until yesterday. It was sent me in a box filled with different things, and which has been all this time upon the road. I shall answer only the postscript. You may recollect, sir, that we agreed the wages of the gardener of the Hermitage should pass through your hands, the better to make him feel that he depended upon you, and to avoid the ridiculous and indecent scenes which happened in the time of his predecessor. As a proof of this, the first quarter of his wages were given to you, and a few days before my departure we agreed I should reimburse you what you had advanced. I know that of this you, at first, made some difficulty; but I had desired you to make these advances; it was natural I should acquit myself towards you, and this we concluded upon. Cahouet informs me that you refused to receive the money. There is certainly some mistake in the matter. I have given orders that it may again be offered to you, and I see no reason for your wishing to pay my gardener, notwithstanding our conventions, and beyond the term even of your inhabiting the Hermitage. I therefore expect, sir, that recollecting everything I have the honor to state, you will not refuse to be reimbursed for the sums you have been pleased to advance for me."

After what had passed, not having the least confidence in

Madam d' Epinay, I was unwilling to renew my connection with her; I returned no answer to this letter, and there our correspondence ended. Perceiving I had taken my resolution, she took hers; and, entering into all the views of Grimm and the Coterie Holbachique, she united her efforts with theirs to accomplish my destruction. Whilst they manoeuvred at Paris, she did the same at Geneva. Grimm, who afterwards went to her there, completed what she had begun. Tronchin, whom they had no difficulty in gaining over, seconded them powerfully, and became the most violent of my persecutors, without having against me, any more than Grimm had, the least subject of complaint. They all three spread in silence that of which the effects were seen there four years afterwards.

They had more trouble at Paris, where I was better known to the citizens, whose hearts, less disposed to hatred, less easily received its impressions. The better to direct their blow, they began by giving out that it was I who had left them. Thence, still feigning to be my friends, they dexterously spread their malignant accusations by complaining of the injustice of their friend. Their auditors, thus thrown off their guard, listened more attentively to what was said of me, and were inclined to blame my conduct. The secret accusations of perfidy and ingratitude were made with greater precaution, and by that means with greater effect. I knew they imputed to me the most atrocious crimes without being able to learn in what these consisted. All I could infer from public rumor was that this was founded upon

the four following capital offences: my retiring to the country; my passion for Madam d'Houdetot; my refusing to accompany Madam d'Epinaÿ to Geneva, and my leaving the Hermitage. If to these they added other griefs, they took their measures so well that it has hitherto been impossible for me to learn the subject of them.

It is therefore at this period that I think I may fix the establishment of a system, since adopted by those by whom my fate has been determined, and which has made such a progress as will seem miraculous to persons who know not with what facility everything which favors the malignity of man is established. I will endeavor to explain in a few words what to me appeared visible in this profound and obscure system.

With a name already distinguished and known throughout all Europe, I had still preserved my primitive simplicity. My mortal aversion to all party faction and cabal had kept me free and independent, without any other chain than the attachments of my heart. Alone, a stranger, without family or fortune, and unconnected with everything except my principles and duties, I intrepidly followed the paths of uprightness, never flattering or favoring any person at the expense of truth and justice. Besides, having lived for two years past in solitude, without observing the course of events, I was unconnected with the affairs of the world, and not informed of what passed, nor desirous of being acquainted with it. I lived four leagues from Paris as much separated from that capital by my negligence as I should have

been in the Island of Tinian by the sea.

Grimm, Diderot and D'Holbach were, on the contrary, in the centre of the vortex, lived in the great world, and divided amongst them almost all the spheres of it. The great wits, men of letters, men of long robe, and women, all listened to them when they chose to act in concert. The advantage three men in this situation united must have over a fourth in mine, cannot but already appear. It is true Diderot and D'Holbach were incapable, at least I think so, of forming black conspiracies; one of them was not base enough, nor the other sufficiently able; but it was for this reason that the party was more united. Grimm alone formed his plan in his own mind, and discovered more of it than was necessary to induce his associates to concur in the execution. The ascendancy he had gained over them made this quite easy, and the effect of the whole answered to the superiority of his talents.

It was with these, which were of a superior kind, that, perceiving the advantage he might acquire from our respective situations, he conceived the project of overturning my reputation, and, without exposing himself, of giving me one of a nature quite opposite, by raising up about me an edifice of obscurity which it was impossible for me to penetrate, and by that means throw a light upon his manoeuvres and unmask him.

This enterprise was difficult, because it was necessary to palliate the iniquity in the eyes of those of whose assistance he stood in need. He had honest men to deceive, to alienate from me the good opinion of everybody, and to deprive me of all my

friends. What say I? He had to cut off all communication with me, that not a single word of truth might reach my ears. Had a single man of generosity come and said to me, "You assume the appearance of virtue, yet this is the manner in which you are treated, and these the circumstances by which you are judged. what have you to say?" truth would have triumphed and Grimm have been undone. Of this he was fully convinced; but he had examined his own heart and estimated men according to their merit. I am sorry, for the honor of humanity, that he judged with so much truth.

In these dark and crooked paths his steps to be the more sure were necessarily slow. He has for twelve years pursued his plan and the most difficult part of the execution of it is still to come; this is to deceive the public entirely. He is afraid of this public, and dares not lay his conspiracy open.

[Since this was written he has made the dangerous step with the fullest and most inconceivable success. I am of opinion it was Tronchin who inspired him with courage, and supplied him with the means.]

But he has found the easy means of accompanying it with power, and this power has the disposal of me. Thus supported he advances with less danger. The agents of power piquing themselves but little on uprightness, and still less on candor, he has no longer the indiscretion of an honest man to fear. His safety is in my being enveloped in an impenetrable obscurity, and in concealing from me his conspiracy, well knowing that

with whatever art he may have formed it, I could by a single glance of the eye discover the whole. His great address consists in appearing to favor whilst he defames me, and in giving to his perfidy an air of generosity.

I felt the first effects of this system by the secret accusations of the Coterie Holbachiens without its being possible for me to know in what the accusations consisted, or to form a probable conjecture as to the nature of them. De Leyre informed me in his letters that heinous things were attributed to me. Diderot more mysteriously told me the same thing, and when I came to an explanation with both, the whole was reduced to the heads of accusation of which I have already spoken. I perceived a gradual increase of coolness in the letters from Madam d'Houdetot. This I could not attribute to Saint Lambert; he continued to write to me with the same friendship, and came to see me after his return. It was also impossible to think myself the cause of it, as we had separated well satisfied with each other, and nothing since that time had happened on my part, except my departure from the Hermitage, of which she felt the necessity. Therefore, not knowing whence this coolness, which she refused to acknowledge, although my heart was not to be deceived, could proceed, I was uneasy upon every account. I knew she greatly favored her sister-in-law and Grimm, in consequence of their connections with Saint Lambert; and I was afraid of their machinations. This agitation opened my wounds, and rendered my correspondence so disagreeable as quite to disgust her with

it. I saw, as at a distance, a thousand cruel circumstances, without discovering anything distinctly. I was in a situation the most insupportable to a man whose imagination is easily heated. Had I been quite retired from the world, and known nothing of the matter I should have become more calm; but my heart still clung to attachments, by means of which my enemies had great advantages over me; and the feeble rays which penetrated my asylum conveyed to me nothing more than a knowledge of the blackness of the mysteries which were concealed from my eyes.

I should have sunk, I have not a doubt of it, under these torments, too cruel and insupportable to my open disposition, which, by the impossibility of concealing my sentiments, makes me fear everything from those concealed from me, if fortunately objects sufficiently interesting to my heart to divert it from others with which, in spite of myself, my imagination was filled, had not presented themselves. In the last visit Diderot paid me, at the Hermitage, he had spoken of the article 'Geneva', which D'Alembert had inserted in the 'Encyclopedie'; he had informed me that this article, concerted with people of the first consideration, had for object the establishment of a theatre at Geneva, that measures had been taken accordingly, and that the establishment would soon take place. As Diderot seemed to think all this very proper, and did not doubt of the success of the measure, and as I had besides to speak to him upon too many other subjects to touch upon that article, I made him no answer: but scandalized at these preparatives to corruption and

licentiousness in my country, I waited with impatience for the volume of the 'Encyclopedie', in which the article was inserted; to see whether or not it would be possible to give an answer which might ward off the blow. I received the volume soon after my establishment at Mont Louis, and found the articles to be written with much art and address, and worthy of the pen whence it proceeded. This, however, did not abate my desire to answer it, and notwithstanding the dejection of spirits I then labored under, my griefs and pains, the severity of the season, and the inconvenience of my new abode, in which I had not yet had time to arrange myself, I set to work with a zeal which surmounted every obstacle.

In a severe winter, in the month of February, and in the situation I have described, I went every day, morning and evening, to pass a couple of hours in an open alcove which was at the bottom of the garden in which my habitation stood. This alcove, which terminated an alley of a terrace, looked upon the valley and the pond of Montmorency, and presented to me, as the closing point of a prospect, the plain but respectable castle of St. Gratien, the retreat of the virtuous Catinat. It was in this place, then, exposed to freezing cold, that without being sheltered from the wind and snow, and having no other fire than that in my heart; I composed, in the space of three weeks, my letter to D'Alembert on theatres. It was in this, for my 'Eloisa' was not then half written, that I found charms in philosophical labor. Until then virtuous indignation had been a substitute to Apollo, tenderness

and a gentleness of mind now became so. The injustice I had been witness to had irritated me, that of which I became the object rendered me melancholy; and this melancholy without bitterness was that of a heart too tender and affectionate, and which, deceived by those in whom it had confided, was obliged to remain concentrated. Full of that which had befallen me, and still affected by so many violent emotions, my heart added the sentiment of its sufferings to the ideas with which a meditation on my subject had inspired me; what I wrote bore evident marks of this mixture. Without perceiving it I described the situation I was then in, gave portraits of Grimm, Madam d'Epinau, Madam d' Houdetot, Saint Lambert and myself. What delicious tears did I shed as I wrote! Alas! in these descriptions there are proofs but too evident that love, the fatal love of which I made such efforts to cure myself, still remained in my heart. With all this there was a certain sentiment of tenderness relative to myself; I thought I was dying, and imagined I bid the public my last adieu. Far from fearing death, I joyfully saw it approach; but I felt some regret at leaving my fellow creatures without their having perceived my real merit, and being convinced how much I should have deserved their esteem had they known me better. These are the secret causes of the singular manner in which this work, opposite to that of the work by which it was preceded, is written.—[Discours sur l'Inegalite. Discourse on the Inequality of Mankind.]

I corrected and copied the letter, and was preparing to print

it when, after a long silence, I received one from Madam d'Houdetot, which brought upon me a new affliction more painful than any I had yet suffered. She informed me that my passion for her was known to all Paris, that I had spoken of it to persons who had made it public, that this rumor, having reached the ears of her lover, had nearly cost him his life; yet he did her justice, and peace was restored between them; but on his account, as well as on hers, and for the sake of her reputation, she thought it her duty to break off all correspondence with me, at the same time assuring me that she and her friend were both interested in my welfare, that they would defend me to the public, and that she herself would, from time to time, send to inquire after my health.

"And thou also, Diderot," exclaimed I, "unworthy friend!"

I could not, however, yet resolve to condemn him. My weakness was known to others who might have spoken of it. I wished to doubt, but this was soon out of my power. Saint Lambert shortly after performed an action worthy of himself. Knowing my manner of thinking, he judged of the state in which I must be; betrayed by one part of my friends and forsaken by the other. He came to see me. The first time he had not many moments to spare. He came again. Unfortunately, not expecting him, I was not at home. Theresa had with him a conversation of upwards of two hours, in which they informed each other of facts of great importance to us all. The surprise with which I learned that nobody doubted of my having lived with Madam

d'Epinay, as Grimm then did, cannot be equalled, except by that of Saint Lambert, when he was convinced that the rumor was false. He, to the great dissatisfaction of the lady, was in the same situation with myself, and the eclairsissements resulting from the conversation removed from me all regret, on account of my having broken with her forever. Relative to Madam d'Houdetot, he mentioned several circumstances with which neither Theresa nor Madam d'Houdetot herself were acquainted; these were known to me only in the first instance, and I had never mentioned them except to Diderot, under the seal of friendship; and it was to Saint Lambert himself to whom he had chosen to communicate them. This last step was sufficient to determine me. I resolved to break with Diderot forever, and this without further deliberation, except on the manner of doing it; for I had perceived secret ruptures turned to my prejudice, because they left the mask of friendship in possession of my most cruel enemies.

The rules of good breeding, established in the world on this head, seem to have been dictated by a spirit of treachery and falsehood. To appear the friend of a man when in reality we are no longer so, is to reserve to ourselves the means of doing him an injury by surprising honest men into an error. I recollected that when the illustrious Montesquieu broke with Father de Tournemine, he immediately said to everybody: "Listen neither to Father Tournemine nor myself, when we speak of each other, for we are no longer friends." This open and generous proceeding was universally applauded. I resolved to follow the example

with Diderot; but what method was I to take to publish the rupture authentically from my retreat, and yet without scandal? I concluded on inserting in the form of a note, in my work, a passage from the book of Ecclesiasticus, which declared the rupture and even the subject of it, in terms sufficiently clear to such as were acquainted with the previous circumstances, but could signify nothing to the rest of the world. I determined not to speak in my work of the friend whom I renounced, except with the honor always due to extinguished friendship. The whole may be seen in the work itself.

There is nothing in this world but time and misfortune, and every act of courage seems to be a crime in adversity. For that which has been admired in Montesquieu, I received only blame and reproach. As soon as my work was printed, and I had copies of it, I sent one to Saint Lambert, who, the evening before, had written to me in his own name and that of Madam d' Houdetot, a note expressive of the most tender friendship.

The following is the letter he wrote to me when he returned the copy I had sent him.

EAUBONNE, 10th October, 1758.

"Indeed, sir, I cannot accept the present you have just made me. In that part of your preface where, relative to Diderot, you quote a passage from Ecclesiastes (he mistakes, it is from Ecclesiasticus) the book dropped from my hand. In the conversations we had together in the summer, you seemed to be persuaded Diderot was not guilty of the pretended indiscretions

you had imputed to him. You may, for aught I know to the contrary, have reason to complain of him, but this does not give you a right to insult him publicly. You are not unacquainted with the nature of the persecutions he suffers, and you join the voice of an old friend to that of envy. I cannot refrain from telling you, sir, how much this heinous act of yours has shocked me. I am not acquainted with Diderot, but I honor him, and I have a lively sense of the pain you give to a man, whom, at least not in my hearing, you have never reproached with anything more than a trifling weakness. You and I, sir, differ too much in our principles ever to be agreeable to each other. Forget that I exist; this you will easily do. I have never done to men either good or evil of a nature to be long remembered. I promise you, sir, to forget your person and to remember nothing relative to you but your talents."

This letter filled me with indignation and affliction; and, in the excess of my pangs, feeling my pride wounded, I answered him by the following note:

MONTMORUNCY, 11th October, 1758.

"SIR: While reading your letter, I did you the honor to be surprised at it, and had the weakness to suffer it to affect me; but I find it unworthy of an answer.

"I will no longer continue the copies of Madam d'Houdetot. If it be not agreeable to her to keep that she has, she may send it me back and I will return her money. If she keeps it, she must still send for the rest of her paper and the money; and at the same time I beg she will return me the prospectus which she has in her

possession. Adieu, sir."

Courage under misfortune irritates the hearts of cowards, but it is pleasing to generous minds. This note seemed to make Saint Lambert reflect with himself and to regret his having been so violent; but too haughty in his turn to make open advances, he seized and perhaps prepared, the opportunity of palliating what he had done.

A fortnight afterwards I received from Madam d'Epiny the following letter:

Thursday, 26th.

"SIR: I received the book you had the goodness to send me, and which I have read with much pleasure. I have always experienced the same sentiment in reading all the works which have come from your pen. Receive my thanks for the whole. I should have returned you these in person had my affairs permitted me to remain any time in your neighborhood; but I was not this year long at the Chevrette. M. and Madam Dupin come there on Sunday to dinner. I expect M. de Saint Lambert, M. de Francueil, and Madam d'Houdetot will be of the party; you will do me much pleasure by making one also. All the persons who are to dine with me, desire, and will, as well as myself, be delighted to pass with you a part of the day. I have the honor to be with the most perfect consideration," etc.

This letter made my heart beat violently; after having for a year past been the subject of conversation of all Paris, the idea of presenting myself as a spectacle before Madam d'Houdetot,

made me tremble, and I had much difficulty to find sufficient courage to support that ceremony. Yet as she and Saint Lambert were desirous of it, and Madam d'Epinaÿ spoke in the name of her guests without naming one whom I should not be glad to see, I did not think I should expose myself accepting a dinner to which I was in some degree invited by all the persons who with myself were to partake of it. I therefore promised to go: on Sunday the weather was bad, and Madam D'Epinaÿ sent me her carriage.

My arrival caused a sensation. I never met a better reception. An observer would have thought the whole company felt how much I stood in need of encouragement. None but French hearts are susceptible of this kind of delicacy. However, I found more people than I expected to see. Amongst others the Comte d'Houdetot, whom I did not know, and his sister Madam de Blainville, without whose company I should have been as well pleased. She had the year before came several times to Eaubonne, and her sister-in-law had left her in our solitary walks to wait until she thought proper to suffer her to join us. She had harbored a resentment against me, which during this dinner she gratified at her ease. The presence of the Comte d' Houdetot and Saint Lambert did not give me the laugh on my side, and it may be judged that a man embarrassed in the most common conversations was not very brilliant in that which then took place. I never suffered so much, appeared so awkward, or received more unexpected mortifications. As soon as we had risen from table, I withdrew from that wicked woman; I had the pleasure of

seeing Saint Lambert and Madam de'Houdetot approach me, and we conversed together a part of the afternoon, upon things very indifferent it is true, but with the same familiarity as before my involuntary error. This friendly attention was not lost upon my heart, and could Saint Lambert have read what passed there, he certainly would have been satisfied with it. I can safely assert that although on my arrival the presence of Madam d'Houdetot gave me the most violent palpitations, on returning from the house I scarcely thought of her; my mind was entirely taken up with Saint Lambert.

Notwithstanding the malignant sarcasms of Madam de Blainville, the dinner was of great service to me, and I congratulated myself upon not having refused the invitation. I not only discovered that the intrigues of Grimm and the Holbachiens had not deprived me of my old acquaintance,

[Such is the simplicity of my heart was my opinion when I wrote these confessions.]

but, what flattered me still more, that Madam d'Houdetot and Saint Lambert were less changed than I had imagined, and I at length understood that his keeping her at a distance from me proceeded more from jealousy than from disesteem. This was a consolation to me, and calmed my mind. Certain of not being an object of contempt in the eyes of persons whom I esteemed, I worked upon my own heart with greater courage and success. If I did not quite extinguish in it a guilty and an unhappy passion, I at least so well regulated the remains of it that they have never

since that moment led me into the most trifling error. The copies of Madam d' Houdetot, which she prevailed upon me to take again, and my works, which I continued to send her as soon as they appeared, produced me from her a few notes and messages, indifferent but obliging. She did still more, as will hereafter appear, and the reciprocal conduct of her lover and myself, after our intercourse had ceased, may serve as an example of the manner in which persons of honor separate when it is no longer agreeable to them to associate with each other.

Another advantage this dinner procured me was its being spoken of in Paris, where it served as a refutation of the rumor spread by my enemies, that I had quarrelled with every person who partook of it, and especially with M. d'Epinay. When I left the Hermitage I had written him a very polite letter of thanks, to which he answered not less politely, and mutual civilities had continued, as well between us as between me and M. de la Lalive, his brother-in-law, who even came to see me at Montmorency, and sent me some of his engravings. Excepting the two sisters-in-law of Madam d'Houdetot, I have never been on bad terms with any person of the family.

My letter to D'Alembert had great success. All my works had been very well received, but this was more favorable to me. It taught the public to guard against the insinuations of the Coterie Holbachique. When I went to the Hermitage, this Coterie predicted with its usual sufficiency, that I should not remain there three months. When I had stayed there twenty months, and

was obliged to leave it, I still fixed my residence in the country. The Coterie insisted this was from a motive of pure obstinacy, and that I was weary even to death of my retirement; but that, eaten up with pride, I chose rather to become a victim of my stubbornness than to recover from it and return to Paris. The letter to D'Alembert breathed a gentleness of mind which every one perceived not to be affected. Had I been dissatisfied with my retreat, my style and manner would have borne evident marks of my ill-humor. This reigned in all the works I had written in Paris; but in the first I wrote in the country not the least appearance of it was to be found. To persons who knew how to distinguish, this remark was decisive. They perceived I was returned to my element.

Yet the same work, notwithstanding all the mildness it breathed, made me by a mistake of my own and my usual ill-luck, another enemy amongst men of letters. I had become acquainted with Marmontel at the house of M. de la Popliniere, and his acquaintance had been continued at that of the baron. Marmontel at that time wrote the 'Mercure de France'. As I had too much pride to send my works to the authors of periodical publications, and wishing to send him this without his imagining it was in consequence of that title, or being desirous he should speak of it in the Mercure, I wrote upon the book that it was not for the author of the Mercure, but for M. Marmontel. I thought I paid him a fine compliment; he mistook it for a cruel offence, and became my irreconcilable enemy. He wrote against the letter

with politeness, it is true, but with a bitterness easily perceptible, and since that time has never lost an opportunity of injuring me in society, and of indirectly ill-treating me in his works. Such difficulty is there in managing the irritable self-love of men of letters, and so careful ought every person to be not to leave anything equivocal in the compliments they pay them.

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