

ЖАН-ЖАК РУССО

THE CONFESSIONS OF
JEAN JACQUES
ROUSSEAU — VOLUME
06

Жан-Жак Руссо

**The Confessions of Jean
Jacques Rousseau — Volume 06**

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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BOOK VI

Hoc erat in votis: Modus agri non ila magnus
Hortus ubi, et leclo vicinus aqua fons;
Et paululum sylvae superhis forel.

I cannot add, 'auctius acque di melius fecere'; but no matter, the former is enough for my purpose; I had no occasion to have any property there, it was sufficient that I enjoyed it; for I have long since both said and felt, that the proprietor and possessor are two very different people, even leaving husbands and lovers out of the question.

At this moment began the short happiness of my life, those peaceful and rapid moments, which have given me a right to say, I have lived. Precious and ever—regretted moments! Ah! recommence your delightful course; pass more slowly through my memory, if possible, than you actually did in your fugitive succession. How shall I prolong, according to my inclination, this recital at once so pleasing and simple? How shall I continue to relate the same occurrences, without wearying my readers with the repetition, any more than I was satiated with the enjoyment? Again, if all this consisted of facts, actions, or words, I could somehow or other convey an idea of it; but how shall I describe what was neither said nor done, nor even thought, but enjoyed, felt, without being able to particularize any other object of my happiness than the bare idea? I rose with the sun, and was happy; I walked, and was happy; I saw Madam de Warrens, and was happy; I quitted her, and still was happy!—Whether I rambled through the woods, over the hills, or strolled along the valley; read, was idle, worked in the garden, or gathered fruits, happiness continually accompanied me; it was fixed on no particular object, it was within me, nor could I depart from it a single moment.

Nothing that passed during that charming epocha, nothing that I did, said, or thought, has escaped my memory. The time that preceded or followed it, I only recollect by intervals, unequally and confused; but here I remember all as distinctly as if it existed at this moment. Imagination, which in my youth was perpetually anticipating the future, but now takes a retrograde course, makes some amends by these charming recollections for the deprivation of hope, which I have lost forever. I no longer see anything in the future that can tempt my wishes, it is a recollection of the past alone that can flatter me, and the remembrance of the period I am now describing is so true and lively, that it sometimes makes me happy, even in spite of my misfortunes.

Of these recollections I shall relate one example, which may give some idea of their force and precision. The first day we went to sleep at Charmettes, the way being up-hill, and Madam de Warrens rather heavy, she was carried in a chair, while I followed on foot. Fearing the chairmen would be fatigued, she got out about half-way, designing to walk the rest of it. As we passed along, she saw something blue in the hedge, and said, "There's some periwinkle in flower yet!" I had never seen any before, nor did I stop to examine this: my sight is too short to distinguish plants on the ground, and I only cast a look at this as I passed: an interval of near thirty years had elapsed before I saw any more periwinkle, at least before I observed it, when being at Cressier in 1764, with my friend, M. du Peyrou, we went up a small mountain, on the summit of which there is a level spot, called, with reason, 'Belle—vue', I was then beginning to herbalize;—walking and looking among the bushes, I

exclaimed with rapture, "Ah, there's some periwinkle!" Du Peyrou, who perceived my transport, was ignorant of the cause, but will some day be informed: I hope, on reading this. The reader may judge by this impression, made by so small an incident, what an effect must have been produced by every occurrence of that time.

Meantime, the air of the country did not restore my health; I was languishing and became more so; I could not endure milk, and was obliged to discontinue the use of it. Water was at this time the fashionable remedy for every complaint; accordingly I entered on a course of it, and so indiscreetly, that it almost released me, not only from my illness but also from my life. The water I drank was rather hard and difficult to pass, as water from mountains generally is; in short, I managed so well, that in the course of two months I totally ruined my stomach, which until that time had been very good, and no longer digesting anything properly, had no reason to expect a cure. At this time an accident happened, as singular in itself as in its subsequent consequences, which can only terminate with my existence.

One morning, being no worse than usual, while putting up the leaf of a small table, I felt a sudden and almost inconceivable revolution throughout my whole frame. I know not how to describe it better than as a kind of tempest, which suddenly rose in my blood, and spread in a moment over every part of my body. My arteries began beating so violently that I not only felt their motion, but even heard it, particularly that of the carotids, attended by a loud noise in my ears, which was of three, or rather four, distinct kinds. For instance, first a grave hollow buzzing; then a more distinct murmur, like the running of water; then an extremely sharp hissing, attended by the beating I before mentioned, and whose throbs I could easily count, without feeling my pulse, or putting a hand to any part of my body. This internal tumult was so violent that it has injured my auricular organs, and rendered me, from that time, not entirely deaf, but hard of hearing.

My surprise and fear may easily be conceived; imagining it was the stroke of death, I went to bed, and the physician being sent for, trembling with apprehension, I related my case; judging it past all cure. I believe the doctor was of the same opinion; however he performed his office, running over a long string of causes and effects beyond my comprehension, after which, in consequence of this sublime theory, he set about, 'in anima vili', the experimental part of his art, but the means he was pleased to adopt in order to effect a cure were so troublesome, disgusting, and followed by so little effect, that I soon discontinued it, and after some weeks, finding I was neither better nor worse, left my bed, and returned to my usual method of living; but the beating of my arteries and the buzzing in my ears has never quitted me a moment during the thirty years' time which has elapsed since that time.

Till now, I had been a great sleeper, but a total privation of repose, with other alarming symptoms which have accompanied it, even to this time, persuaded me I had but a short time to live. This idea tranquillized me for a time: I became less anxious about a cure, and being persuaded I could not prolong life, determined to employ the remainder of it as usefully as possible. This was practicable by a particular indulgence of Nature, which, in this melancholy state, exempted me from sufferings which it might have been supposed I should have experienced. I was incommoded by the noise, but felt no pain, nor was it accompanied by any habitual inconvenience, except nocturnal wakefulness, and at all times a shortness of breath, which is not violent enough to be called an asthma, but was troublesome when I attempted to run, or use any degree of exertion.

This accident, which seemed to threaten the dissolution of my body, only killed my passions, and I have reason to thank Heaven for the happy effect produced by it on my soul. I can truly say, I only began to live when I considered myself as entering the grave; for, estimating at their real value those things I was quitting; I began to employ myself on nobler objects, namely by anticipating those I hoped shortly to have the contemplation of, and which I had hitherto too much neglected. I had often made light of religion, but was never totally devoid of it; consequently, it cost me less pain to employ my thoughts on that subject, which is generally thought melancholy, though highly pleasing to those who make it an object of hope and consolation; Madam de Warrens, therefore, was more useful to me on this occasion than all the theologians in the world would have been.

She, who brought everything into a system, had not failed to do as much by religion; and this system was composed of ideas that bore no affinity to each other. Some were extremely good, and others very ridiculous, being made up of sentiments proceeding from her disposition, and prejudices derived from education. Men, in general, make God like themselves; the virtuous make Him good, and the profligate make Him wicked; ill-tempered and bilious devotees see nothing but hell, because they would willingly damn all mankind; while loving and gentle souls disbelieve it altogether; and one of the astonishments I could never overcome, is to see the good Fenelon speak of it in his *Telemachus* as if he really gave credit to it; but I hope he lied in that particular, for however strict he might be in regard to truth, a bishop absolutely must lie sometimes. Madam de Warrens spoke truth with me, and that soul, made up without gall, who could not imagine a revengeful and ever angry God, saw only clemency and forgiveness, where devotees bestowed inflexible justice, and eternal punishment.

She frequently said there would be no justice in the Supreme Being should He be strictly just to us; because, not having bestowed what was necessary to render us essentially good, it would be requiring more than he had given. The most whimsical idea was, that not believing in hell, she was firmly persuaded of the reality of purgatory. This arose from her not knowing what to do with the wicked, being loathed to damn them utterly, nor yet caring to place them with the good till they had become so; and we must really allow, that both in this world and the next, the wicked are very troublesome company.

It is clearly seen that the doctrine of original sin and the redemption of mankind is destroyed by this system; consequently that the basis of the Christian dispensation, as generally received, is shaken, and that the Catholic faith cannot subsist with these principles; Madam de Warrens, notwithstanding, was a good Catholic, or at least pretended to be one, and certainly desired to become such, but it appeared to her that the Scriptures were too literally and harshly explained, supposing that all we read of everlasting torments were figurative threatenings, and the death of Jesus Christ an example of charity, truly divine, which should teach mankind to love God and each other; in a word, faithful to the religion she had embraced, she acquiesced in all its professions of faith, but on a discussion of each particular article, it was plain she thought diametrically opposite to that church whose doctrines she professed to believe. In these cases she exhibited simplicity of art, a frankness more eloquent than sophistry, which frequently embarrassed her confessor; for she disguised nothing from him. "I am a good Catholic," she would say, "and will ever remain so; I adopt with all the powers of my soul the decisions of our holy Mother Church; I am not mistress of my faith, but I am of my will, which I submit to you without reserve; I will endeavor to believe all,—what can you require more?"

Had there been no Christian morality established, I am persuaded she would have lived as if regulated by its principles, so perfectly did they seem to accord with her disposition. She did everything that was required; and she would have done the same had there been no such requisition: but all this morality was subordinate to the principles of M. Tavel, or rather she pretended to see nothing in religion that contradicted them; thus she would have favored twenty lovers in a day, without any idea of a crime, her conscience being no more moved in that particular than her passions. I know that a number of devotees are not more scrupulous, but the difference is, they are seduced by constitution, she was blinded by her sophisms. In the midst of conversations the most affecting, I might say the most edifying, she would touch on this subject, without any change of air or manner, and without being sensible of any contradiction in her opinions; so much was she persuaded that our restrictions on that head are merely political, and that any person of sense might interpret, apply, or make exceptions to them, without any danger of offending the Almighty.

Though I was far enough from being of the same opinion in this particular, I confess I dared not combat hers; indeed, as I was situated, it would have been putting myself in rather awkward circumstances, since I could only have sought to establish my opinion for others, myself being an exception. Besides, I entertained but little hopes of making her alter hers, which never had any great

influence on her conduct, and at the time I am speaking of none; but I have promised faithfully to describe her principles, and I will perform my engagement—I now return to myself.

Finding in her all those ideas I had occasion for to secure me from the fears of death and its future consequences, I drew confidence and security from this source; my attachment became warmer than ever, and I would willingly have transmitted to her my whole existence, which seemed ready to abandon me. From this redoubled attachment, a persuasion that I had but a short time to live, and profound security on my future state, arose an habitual and even pleasing serenity, which, calming every passion that extends our hopes and fears, made me enjoy without inquietude or concern the few days which I imagined remained for me. What contributed to render them still snore agreeable was an endeavor to encourage her rising taste for the country, by every amusement I could possibly devise, wishing to attach her to her garden, poultry, pigeons, and cows: I amused myself with them and these little occupations, which employed my time without injuring my tranquillity, were more serviceable than a milk diet, or all the remedies bestowed on my poor shattered machine, even to effecting the utmost possible reestablishment of it.

The vintage and gathering in our fruit employed the remainder of the year; we became more and more attached to a rustic life, and the society of our honest neighbors. We saw the approach of winter with regret, and returned to the city as if going into exile. To me this return was particularly gloomy, who never expected to see the return of spring, and thought I took an everlasting leave of Charmettes. I did not quit it without kissing the very earth and trees, casting back many a wishful look as I went towards Chambery.

Having left my scholars for so long a time, and lost my relish for the amusements of the town, I seldom went out, conversing only with Madam de Warrens and a Monsieur Salomon, who had lately become our physician. He was an honest man, of good understanding, a great Cartesian, spoke tolerably well on the system of the world, and his agreeable and instructive conversations were more serviceable than his prescriptions. I could never bear that foolish trivial mode of conversation which is so generally adopted; but useful instructive discourse has always given me great pleasure, nor was I ever backward to join in it. I was much pleased with that of M. Salomon; it appeared to me, that when in his company, I anticipated the acquisition of that sublime knowledge which my soul would enjoy when freed from its mortal fetters. The inclination I had for him extended to the subjects which he treated on, and I began to look after books which might better enable me to understand his discourse. Those which mingled devotion with science were most agreeable to me, particularly Port Royal's Oratory, and I began to read or rather to devour them. One fell into my hands written by Father Lami, called 'Entretiens sur les Sciences', which was a kind of introduction to the knowledge of those books it treated of. I read it over a hundred times, and resolved to make this my guide; in short, I found (notwithstanding my ill state of health) that I was irresistibly drawn towards study, and though looking on each day as the last of my life, read with as much avidity as if certain I was to live forever.

I was assured that reading would injure me; but on the contrary, I am rather inclined to think it was serviceable, not only to my soul, but also to my body; for this application, which soon became delightful, diverted my thoughts from my disorders, and I soon found myself much less affected by them. It is certain, however, that nothing gave me absolute ease, but having no longer any acute pain, I became accustomed to languishment and wakefulness; to thinking instead of acting; in short, I looked on the gradual and slow decay of my body as inevitably progressive and only to be terminated by death.

This opinion not only detached me from all the vain cares of life, but delivered me from the importunity of medicine, to which hitherto, I had been forced to submit, though contrary to my inclination. Salomon, convinced that his drugs were unavailing, spared me the disagreeable task of taking them, and contented himself with amusing the grief of my poor Madam de Warrens by some of those harmless preparations, which serve to flatter the hopes of the patient and keep up the credit of the doctor. I discontinued the strict regimen I had latterly observed, resumed the use of wine, and lived in every respect like a man in perfect health, as far as my strength would permit, only being

careful to run into no excess; I even began to go out and visit my acquaintance, particularly M. de Conzie, whose conversation was extremely pleasing to me. Whether it struck me as heroic to study to my last hour, or that some hopes of life yet lingered in the bottom of my heart, I cannot tell, but the apparent certainty of death, far from relaxing my inclination for improvement, seemed to animate it, and I hastened to acquire knowledge for the other world, as if convinced I should only possess that portion I could carry with me. I took a liking to the shop of a bookseller, whose name was Bouchard, which was frequented by some men of letters, and as the spring (whose return I had never expected to see again) was approaching, furnished myself with some books for Charmettes, in case I should have the happiness to return there.

I had that happiness, and enjoyed it to the utmost extent. The rapture with which I saw the trees put out their first bud, is inexpressible! The return of spring seemed to me like rising from the grave into paradise. The snow was hardly off the ground when we left our dungeon and returned to Charmettes, to enjoy the first warblings of the nightingale. I now thought no more of dying, and it is really singular, that from this time I never experienced any dangerous illness in the country. I have suffered greatly, but never kept my bed, and have often said to those about me, on finding myself worse than ordinary, "Should you see me at the point of death, carry me under the shade of an oak, and I promise you I shall recover."

Though weak, I resumed my country occupations, as far as my strength would permit, and conceived a real grief at not being able to manage our garden without help; for I could not take five or six strokes with the spade without being out of breath and overcome with perspiration; when I stooped the beating redoubled, and the blood flew with such violence to my head, that I was instantly obliged to stand upright. Being therefore confined to less fatiguing employments, I busied myself about the dove—house, and was so pleased with it that I sometimes passed several hours there without feeling a moment's weariness. The pigeon is very timid and difficult to tame, yet I inspired mine with so much confidence that they followed me everywhere, letting me catch them at pleasure, nor could I appear in the garden without having two or three on my arms or head in an instant, and notwithstanding the pleasure I took in them, their company became so troublesome that I was obliged to lessen the familiarity. I have ever taken great pleasure in taming animals, particularly those that are wild and fearful. It appeared delightful to me, to inspire them with a confidence which I took care never to abuse, wishing them to love me freely.

I have already mentioned that I purchased some books: I did not forget to read them, but in a manner more proper to fatigue than instruct me. I imagined that to read a book profitably, it was necessary to be acquainted with every branch of knowledge it even mentioned; far from thinking that the author did not do this himself, but drew assistance from other books, as he might see occasion. Full of this silly idea, I was stopped every moment, obliged to run from one book to another, and sometimes, before I could reach the tenth page of what I was studying, found it necessary to turn over a whole library. I was so attached to this ridiculous method, that I lost a prodigious deal of time and had bewildered my head to such a degree, that I was hardly capable of doing, seeing or comprehending anything. I fortunately perceived, at length, that I was in the wrong road, which would entangle me in an inextricable labyrinth, and quitted it before I was irrevocably lost.

When a person has any real taste for the sciences, the first thing he perceives in the pursuit of them is that connection by which they mutually attract, assist, and enlighten each other, and that it is impossible to attain one without the assistance of the rest. Though the human understanding cannot grasp all, and one must ever be regarded as the principal object, yet if the rest are totally neglected, the favorite study is generally obscure; I was convinced that my resolution to improve was good and useful in itself, but that it was necessary I should change my method; I, therefore, had recourse to the encyclopaedia. I began by a distribution of the general mass of human knowledge into its various branches, but soon discovered that I must pursue a contrary course, that I must take each separately, and trace it to that point where it united with the rest: thus I returned to the general

synthetical method, but returned thither with a conviction that I was going right. Meditation supplied the want of knowledge, and a very natural reflection gave strength to my resolutions, which was, that whether I lived or died, I had no time to lose; for having learned but little before the age of five-and-twenty, and then resolving to learn everything, was engaging to employ the future time profitably. I was ignorant at what point accident or death might put a period to my endeavors, and resolved at all events to acquire with the utmost expedition some idea of every species of knowledge, as well to try my natural disposition, as to judge for myself what most deserved cultivation.

In the execution of my plan, I experienced another advantage which I had never thought of; this was, spending a great deal of time profitably. Nature certainly never meant me for study, since attentive application fatigues me so much, that I find it impossible to employ myself half an hour together intently on any one subject; particularly while following another person's ideas, for it has frequently happened that I have pursued my own for a much longer period with success. After reading a few pages of an author with close application, my understanding is bewildered, and should I obstinately continue, I tire myself to no purpose, a stupefaction seizes me, and I am no longer conscious of what I read; but in a succession of various subjects, one relieves me from the fatigue of the other, and without finding respite necessary, I can follow them with pleasure.

I took advantage of this observation in the plan of my studies, taking care to intermingle them in such a manner that I was never weary: it is true that domestic and rural concerns furnished many pleasing relaxations; but as my eagerness for improvement increased, I contrived to find opportunities for my studies, frequently employing myself about two things at the same time, without reflecting that both were consequently neglected.

In relating so many trifling details, which delight me, but frequently tire my reader, I make use of the caution to suppress a great number, though, perhaps, he would have no idea of this, if I did not take care to inform him of it: for example, I recollect with pleasure all the different methods I adopted for the distribution of my time, in such a manner as to produce the utmost profit and pleasure. I may say, that the portion of my life which I passed in this retirement, though in continual ill-health, was that in which I was least idle and least wearied. Two or three months were thus employed in discovering the bent of my genius; meantime, I enjoyed, in the finest season of the year, and in a spot it rendered delightful, the charms of a life whose worth I was so highly sensible of, in such a society, as free as it was charming; if a union so perfect, and the extensive knowledge I purposed to acquire, can be called society. It seemed to me as if I already possessed the improvements I was only in pursuit of: or rather better, since the pleasure of learning constituted a great part of my happiness.

I must pass over these particulars, which were to me the height of enjoyment, but are too trivial to bear repeating: indeed, true happiness is indescribable, it is only to be felt, and this consciousness of felicity is proportionately more, the less able we are to describe it; because it does not absolutely result from a concurrence of favorable incidents, but is an affection of the mind itself. I am frequently guilty of repetitions, but should be infinitely more so, did I repeat the same thing as often as it recurs with pleasure to my mind. When at length my variable mode of life was reduced to a more uniform course, the following was nearly the distribution of time which I adopted: I rose every morning before the sun, and passed through a neighboring orchard into a pleasant path, which, running by a vineyard, led towards Chambery. While walking, I offered up my prayers, not by a vain motion of the lips, but a sincere elevation of my heart, to the Great Author of delightful nature, whose beauties were so charmingly spread out before me! I never love to pray in a chamber; it seems to me that the walls and all the little workmanship of man interposed between God and myself: I love to contemplate Him in his works, which elevate my soul, and raise my thoughts to Him. My prayers were pure, I can affirm it, and therefore worthy to be heard:—I asked for myself and her from whom my thoughts were never divided, only an innocent and quiet life, exempt from vice, sorrow and want; I prayed that we might die the death of the just, and partake of their lot hereafter: for the rest, it was rather admiration and contemplation than request, being satisfied that the best means to obtain what is necessary from the

Giver of every perfect good, is rather to deserve than to solicit. Returning from my walk, I lengthened the way by taking a roundabout path, still contemplating with earnestness and delight the beautiful scenes with which I was surrounded, those only objects that never fatigue either the eye or the heart. As I approached our habitation, I looked forward to see if Madam de Warrens was stirring, and when I perceived her shutters open, I even ran with joy towards the house: if they were yet shut I went into the garden to wait their opening, amusing myself, meantime, by a retrospection of what I had read the preceding evening, or in gardening. The moment the shutter drew back I hastened to embrace her, frequently half asleep; and this salute, pure as it was affectionate, even from its innocence, possessed a charm which the senses can never bestow. We usually breakfasted on milk-coffee; this was the time of day when we had most leisure, and when we chatted with the greatest freedom. These sittings, which were usually pretty long, have given me a fondness for breakfasts, and I infinitely prefer those of England, or Switzerland, which are considered as a meal, at which all the family assemble, than those of France, where they breakfast alone in their several apartments, or more frequently have none at all. After an hour or two passed in discourse, I went to my study till dinner; beginning with some philosophical work, such as the logic of Port-Royal, Locke's Essays, Mallebranche, Leibnitz, Descartes, etc. I soon found that these authors perpetually contradict each other, and formed the chimerical project of reconciling them, which cost me much labor and loss of time, bewildering my head without any profit. At length (renouncing this idea) I adopted one infinitely more profitable, to which I attribute all the progress I have since made, notwithstanding the defects of my capacity; for 'tis certain I had very little for study. On reading each author, I acquired a habit of following all his ideas, without suffering my own or those of any other writer to interfere with them, or entering into any dispute on their utility. I said to myself, "I will begin by laying up a stock of ideas, true or false, but clearly conceived, till my understanding shall be sufficiently furnished to enable me to compare and make choice of those that are most estimable." I am sensible this method is not without its inconveniences, but it succeeded in furnishing me with a fund of instruction. Having passed some years in thinking after others, without reflection, and almost without reasoning, I found myself possessed of sufficient materials to set about thinking on my own account, and when journeys of business deprived me of the opportunities of consulting books, I amused myself with recollecting and comparing what I had read, weighing every opinion on the balance of reason, and frequently judging my masters. Though it was late before I began to exercise my judicial faculties, I have not discovered that they had lost their vigor, and on publishing my own ideas, have never been accused of being a servile disciple or of swearing 'in verba magistri'.

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