

ЖАН-ЖАК РУССО

THE CONFESSIONS OF
JEAN JACQUES
ROUSSEAU — VOLUME
03

Жан-Жак Руссо
The Confessions of Jean
Jacques Rousseau — Volume 03

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The Confessions

of Jean Jacques

Rousseau — Volume 03

BOOK III

Leaving the service of Madam de Vercellis nearly as I had entered it, I returned to my former hostess, and remained there five or six weeks; during which time health, youth, and laziness, frequently rendered my temperament importunate. I was restless, absent, and thoughtful: I wept and sighed for a happiness I had no idea of, though at the same time highly sensible of some deficiency. This situation is indescribable, few men can even form any conception of it, because, in general, they have prevented that plenitude of life, at once tormenting and delicious. My thoughts were incessantly occupied with girls and women, but in a manner peculiar to myself: these ideas kept my senses in a perpetual and disagreeable activity, though, fortunately, they did not point out the means of deliverance. I would have given my life to have met with a Miss Goton, but the time was past in which the play of infancy predominated; increase of years

had introduced shame, the inseparable companion of a conscious deviation from rectitude, which so confirmed my natural timidity as to render it invincible; and never, either at that time or since, could I prevail on myself to offer a proposition favorable to my wishes (unless in a manner constrained to it by previous advances) even with those whose scruples I had no cause to dread.

My stay at Madam de Vercellis's had procured me some acquaintance, which I thought might be serviceable to me, and therefore wished to retain. Among others, I sometimes visited a Savoyard abbe, M. Gaime, who was tutor to the Count of Melarede's children. He was young, and not much known, but possessed an excellent cultivated understanding, with great probity, and was, altogether, one of the best men I ever knew. He was incapable of doing me the service I then stood most in need of, not having sufficient interest to procure me a situation, but from him I reaped advantages far more precious, which have been useful to me through life, lessons of pure morality, and maxims of sound judgment.

In the successive order of my inclinations and ideas, I had ever been too high or too low. Achilles or Thersites; sometimes a hero, at others a villain. M. Gaime took pains to make me properly acquainted with myself, without sparing or giving me too much discouragement. He spoke in advantageous terms of my disposition and talents, adding, that he foresaw obstacles which would prevent my profiting by them; thus, according to

him, they were to serve less as steps by which I should mount to fortune, than as resources which might enable me to exist without one. He gave me a true picture of human life, of which, hitherto, I had formed but a very erroneous idea, teaching me, that a man of understanding, though destined to experience adverse fortune, might, by skilful management, arrive at happiness; that there was no true felicity without virtue, which was practicable in every situation. He greatly diminished my admiration of grandeur, by proving that those in a superior situation are neither better nor happier than those they command. One of his maxims has frequently returned to my memory: it was, that if we could truly read the hearts of others we should feel more inclination to descend than rise: this reflection, the truth of which is striking without extravagance, I have found of great utility, in the various exigences of my life, as it tended to make me satisfied with my condition. He gave me the first just conception of relative duties, which my high-flown imagination had ever pictured in extremes, making me sensible that the enthusiasm of sublime virtues is of little use in society; that while endeavoring to rise too high we are in danger of falling; and that a virtuous and uniform discharge of little duties requires as great a degree of fortitude as actions which are called heroic, and would at the same time procure more honor and happiness. That it was infinitely more desirable to possess the lasting esteem of those about us, than at intervals to attract admiration.

In properly arranging the various duties between man and

man, it was necessary to ascend to principles; the step I had recently taken, and of which my present situation was the consequence, naturally led us to speak of religion. It will easily be conceived that the honest M. Gaime was, in a great measure, the original of the Savoyard Vicar; prudence only obliging him to deliver his sentiments, on certain points, with more caution and reserve, and explain himself with less freedom; but his sentiments and councils were the same, not even excepting his advice to return to my country; all was precisely as I have since given it to the public. Dwelling no longer, therefore, on conversations which everyone may see the substance of, I shall only add, that these wise instructions (though they did not produce an immediate effect) were as so many seeds of virtue and religion in my heart which were never rooted out, and only required the fostering cares of friendship to bring to maturity.

Though my conversation was not very sincere, I was affected by his discourses, and far from being weary, was pleased with them on account of their clearness and simplicity, but above all because his heart seemed interested in what he said. My disposition is naturally tender, I have ever been less attached to people for the good they have really done me than for that they designed to do, and my feelings in this particular have seldom misled me: thus I truly esteemed M. Gaime. I was in a manner his second disciple, which even at that time was of inestimable service in turning me from a propensity to vice into which my idleness was leading me.

One day, when I least expected it, I was sent for by the Count de la Roque. Having frequently called at his house, without being able to speak with him, I grew weary, and supposing he had either forgot me or retained some unfavorable impression of me, returned no more: but I was mistaken in both these conjectures. He had more than once witnessed the pleasure I took in fulfilling my duty to his aunt: he had even mentioned it to her, and afterwards spoke of it, when I no longer thought of it myself.

He received me graciously, saying that instead of amusing me with useless promises, he had sought to place me to advantage; that he had succeeded, and would put me in a way to better my situation, but the rest must depend on myself. That the family into which he should introduce me being both powerful and esteemed, I should need no other patrons; and though at first on the footing of a servant, I might be assured, that if my conduct and sentiments were found above that station, I should not long remain in it. The end of this discourse cruelly disappointed the brilliant hopes the beginning had inspired. "What! forever a footman?" said I to myself, with a bitterness which confidence presently effaced, for I felt myself too superior to that situation to fear long remaining there.

He took me to the Count de Gauvon, Master of the Horse to the Queen, and Chief of the illustrious House of Solar. The air of dignity conspicuous in this respectable old man, rendered the affability with which he received me yet more interesting. He questioned me with evident interest, and I replied with sincerity.

He then told the Count de la Roque, that my features were agreeable, and promised intellect, which he believed I was not deficient in; but that was not enough, and time must show the rest; after which, turning to me, he said, "Child, almost all situations are attended with difficulties in the beginning; yours, however, shall not have too great a portion of them; be prudent, and endeavor to please everyone, that will be almost your only employment; for the rest fear nothing, you shall be taken care of." Immediately after he went to the Marchioness de Breil, his daughter-in-law, to whom he presented me, and then to the Abbe de Gauvon, his son. I was elated with this beginning, as I knew enough of the world already to conclude, that so much ceremony is not generally used at the reception of a footman. In fact, I was not treated like one. I dined at the steward's table; did not wear a livery; and the Count de Favria (a giddy youth) having commanded me to get behind his coach, his grandfather ordered that I should get behind no coach, nor follow any one out of the house. Meantime, I waited at table, and did, within doors, the business of a footman; but I did it, as it were, of my own free will, without being appointed to any particular service; and except writing some letters, which were dictated to me, and cutting out some ornaments for the Count de Favria, I was almost the absolute master of my time. This trial of my discretion, which I did not then perceive, was certainly very dangerous, and not very humane; for in this state of idleness I might have contracted vices which I should not otherwise have given into.

Fortunately, it did not produce that effect; my memory retained the lessons of M. Gaime, they had made an impression on my heart, and I sometimes escaped from the house of my patron to obtain a repetition of them. I believe those who saw me going out, apparently by stealth, had no conception of my business. Nothing could be more prudent than the advice he gave me respecting my conduct. My beginning was admirable; so much attention, assiduity, and zeal, had charmed everyone. The Abby Gaime advised me to moderate this first ardor, lest I should relax, and that relaxation should be considered as neglect. "Your setting out," said he, "is the rule of what will be expected of you; endeavor gradually to increase your attentions, but be cautious how you diminish them."

As they paid but little attention to my trifling talents, and supposed I possessed no more than nature had given me, there was no appearance (notwithstanding the promises of Count de Gauvon) of my meeting with any particular consideration. Some objects of more consequence had intervened. The Marquis de Breil, son of the Count de Gauvon, was then ambassador at Vienna; some circumstances had occurred at that court which for some weeks kept the family in continual agitation, and left them no time to think of me. Meantime I had relaxed but little in my attentions, though one object in the family did me both good and harm, making me more secure from exterior dissipation, but less attentive to my duty.

Mademoiselle de Breil was about my own age, tolerably

handsome, and very fair complexioned, with black hair, which notwithstanding, gave her features that air of softness so natural to the flaxen, and which my heart could never resist. The court dress, so favorable to youth, showed her fine neck and shape to advantage, and the mourning, which was then worn, seemed to add to her beauty. It will be said, a domestic should not take notice of these things; I was certainly to blame, yet I perceived all this, nor was I the only one; the maitre d' hotel and valet de chambre spoke of her sometimes at table with a vulgarity that pained me extremely. My head, however, was not sufficiently turned to allow of my being entirely in love; I did not forget myself, or my situation. I loved to see Mademoiselle de Breil; to hear her utter anything that marked wit, sense, or good humor: my ambition, confined to a desire of waiting on her, never exceeded its just rights. At table I was ever attentive to make the most of them; if her footman quitted her chair, I instantly supplied his place; in default of this, I stood facing her, seeking in her eyes what she was about to ask for, and watching the moment to change her plate. What would I not have given to hear her command, to have her look at, or speak the smallest word to me! but no, I had the mortification to be beneath her regard; she did not even perceive I was there. Her brother, who frequently spoke to me while at table, having one day said something which I did not consider obliging, I made him so arch and well-turned an answer, that it drew her attention; she cast her eyes upon me, and this glance was sufficient to fill

me with transport. The next day, a second occasion presented itself, which I fortunately made use of. A great dinner was given; and I saw, with astonishment, for the first time, the maitre d' hotel waiting at table, with a sword by his side, and hat on his head. By chance, the discourse turned on the motto of the house of Solar, which was, with the arms, worked in the tapestry: 'Tel fiert qui ne fue pas'. As the Piedmontese are not in general very perfect in the French language, they found fault with the orthography, saying, that in the word fiert there should be no 't'. The old Count de Gauvon was going to reply, when happening to cast his eyes on me, he perceived I smiled without daring to say anything; he immediately ordered me to speak my opinion. I then said, I did not think the 't' superfluous, 'fiert' being an old French word, not derived from the noun 'ferus', proud, threatening; but from the verb 'ferit', he strikes, he wounds; the motto, therefore, did not appear to mean, some threat, but, 'Some strike who do not kill'. The whole company fixed their eyes on me, then on each other, without speaking a word; never was a greater degree of astonishment; but what most flattered me, was an air of satisfaction which I perceived on the countenance of Mademoiselle de Breil. This scornful lady deigned to cast on me a second look at least as valuable as the former, and turning to her grandfather, appeared to wait with impatience for the praise that was due to me, and which he fully bestowed, with such apparent satisfaction, that it was eagerly chorused by the whole table. This interval was short, but delightful in many respects; it was one of

those moments so rarely met with, which place things in their natural order, and revenge depressed merit for the injuries of fortune. Some minutes after Mademoiselle de Breil again raised her eyes, desiring me with a voice of timid affability to give her some drink. It will easily be supposed I did not let her wait, but advancing towards her, I was seized with such a trembling, that having filled the glass too full, I spilled some of the water on her plate, and even on herself. Her brother asked me, giddily, why I trembled thus? This question increased my confusion, while the face of Mademoiselle de Breil was suffused with a crimson blush.

Here ended the romance; where it may be remarked (as with Madam Basile, and others in the continuation of my life) that I was not fortunate in the conclusion of my amours. In vain I placed myself in the antechamber of Madam de Breil, I could not obtain one mark of attention from her daughter; she went in and out without looking at me, nor had I the confidence to raise my eyes to her; I was even so foolishly stupid, that one day, on dropping her glove as she passed, instead of seizing and covering it with kisses, as I would gladly have done, I did not dare to quit my place, but suffered it to be taken up by a great booby of a footman, whom I could willingly have knocked down for his officiousness. To complete my timidity, I perceived I had not the good fortune to please Madam de Breil; she not only never ordered, but even rejected, my services; and having twice found me in her antechamber, asked me, dryly, "If I had nothing to do?" I was obliged, therefore, to renounce this dear antechamber; at

first it caused me some uneasiness, but other things intervening, I presently thought no more of it.

The disdain of Madam de Breil was fully compensated by the kindness of her father-in-law, who at length began to think of me. The evening after the entertainment, I have already mentioned, he had a conversation with me that lasted half an hour, which appeared to satisfy him, and absolutely enchanted me. This good man had less sense than Madam de Vercellis, but possessed more feeling; I therefore succeeded much better with him. He bade me attach myself to his son, the Abbe Gauvon, who had an esteem for me, which, if I took care to cultivate, might be serviceable in furnishing me with what was necessary to complete their views for my future establishment. The next morning I flew to M. the Abbe, who did not receive me as a servant, but made me sit by his fireside, and questioned me with great affability. He soon found that my education, which had attempted many things, had completed none; but observing that I understood something of Latin, he undertook to teach me more, and appointed me to attend him every morning. Thus, by one of the whimsicalities which have marked the whole course of my life, at once above and below my natural situation, I was pupil and footman in the same house: and though in servitude, had a preceptor whose birth entitled him to supply that place only to the children of kings.

The Abbe de Gauvon was a younger son, and designed by his family for a bishopric, for which reason his studies had been pursued, further than is usual with people of quality. He had been

sent to the university of Sienna, where he had resided some years, and from whence he had brought a good portion of cruscantism, designing to be that at Turin which the Abbe de Dangeau was formerly at Paris. Being disgusted with theology, he gave in to the belle-lettres, which is very frequent in Italy, with those who have entered the career of prelacy. He had studied the poets, and wrote tolerable Latin and Italian verses; in a word, his taste was calculated to form mine, and give some order to that chaos of insignificant trash with which my brain was encumbered; but whether my prating had misled him, or that he could not support the trouble of teaching the elementary parts of Latin, he put me at first too high; and I had scarcely translated a few fables of Phœdrus before he put me into Virgil, where I could hardly understand anything. It will be seen hereafter that I was destined frequently to learn Latin, but never to attain it. I labored with assiduity, and the abbe bestowed his attention with a degree of kindness, the remembrance of which, even at this time, both interests and softens me. I passed the greater part of the morning with him as much for my own instruction as his service; not that he ever permitted me to perform any menial office, but to copy, or write from his dictating; and my employment of secretary was more useful than that of scholar, and by this means I not only learned the Italian in its utmost purity, but also acquired a taste for literature, and some discernment of composition, which could not have been at La Tribu's, and which was useful to me when I afterwards wrote alone.

At this period of my life, without being romantic, I might reasonably have indulged the hope of preferment. The abbe, thoroughly pleased with me, expressed his satisfaction to everyone, while his father had such a singular affection for me, that I was assured by the Count de Favria, that he had spoken of me to the king; even Madam de Breil had laid aside her disdainful looks; in short I was a general favorite, which gave great jealousy to the other servants, who seeing me honored by the instructions of their master's son, were persuaded I should not remain their equal.

As far as I could judge by some words dropped at random, and which I reflected on afterwards, it appeared to me, that the House of Solar, wishing to run the career of embassies, and hoping perhaps in time to arrive at the ministry, wished to provide themselves with a person of merit and talents, who depending entirely on them, might obtain their confidence, and be of essential service. This project of the Count de Gauvon was judicious, magnanimous, and truly worthy of a powerful nobleman, equally provident and generous; but besides my not seeing, at that time, its full extent, it was far too rational for my brain, and required too much confinement.

My ridiculous ambition sought for fortune in the midst of brilliant adventures, and not finding one woman in all this scheme, it appeared tedious, painful and melancholy; though I should rather have thought it more honorable on this account, as the species of merit generally patronized by women is certainly

less worthy that I was supposed to possess.

Everything succeeded to my wish: I had obtained, almost forced, the esteem of all; the trial was over, and I was universally considered as a young man with flattering prospects, who was not at present in his proper sphere, but was expected soon to reach it, but my place was not assigned me by man, and I was to reach it by very difficult paths. I now come to one of those characteristic traits, which are so natural to me, and which, indeed, the reader might have observed without this reflection.

There were at Turin several new converts of my own stamp, whom I neither liked nor wish to see; but I had met with some Genevese who were not of this description, and among others a M. Mussard, nicknamed Wryneck, a miniature painter, and a distant relation. This M. Mussard, having learned my situation at the Count de Gauvon's, came to see me, with another Genevese, named Bacle, who had been my comrade during my apprenticeship. This Bacle was a very sprightly, amusing young fellow, full of lively sallies, which at his time of life appeared extremely agreeable. At once, then, behold me delighted with M. Bacle; charmed to such a degree that I found it impossible to quit him. He was shortly to depart for Geneva; what a loss had I to sustain! I felt the whole force of it, and resolving to make the best use of this precious interval, I determined not to leave him, or, rather, he never quitted me, for my head was not yet sufficiently turned to think of quitting the house without leave, but it was soon perceived that he engrossed my whole time, and

he was accordingly forbid the house. This so incensed me, that forgetting everything but my friend Bacle, I went neither to the abbe nor the count, and was no longer to be found at home. I paid no attention to repeated reprimands, and at length was threatened with dismissal. This threat was my ruin, as it suggested the idea that it was not absolutely necessary that Bacle should depart alone. From that moment I could think of no other pleasure, no other situation or happiness than taking this journey. To render the felicity still more complete, at the end of it (though at an immense distance) I pictured to myself Madam de Warrens; for as to returning to Geneva, it never entered into my imagination. The hills, fields, brooks and villages, incessantly succeeded each other with new charms, and this delightful jaunt seemed worthy to absorb my whole existence. Memory recalled, with inexpressible pleasure, how charming the country had appeared in coming to Turin; what then must it be, when, to the pleasure of independence, should be added the company of a good-humored comrade of my own age and disposition, without any constraint or obligation, but free to go or stay as we pleased? Would it not be madness to sacrifice the prospect of so much felicity to projects of ambition, slow and difficult in their execution, and uncertain in their event? But even supposing them realized, and in their utmost splendor, they were not worth one quarter of an hour of the sweet pleasure and liberty of youth.

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