

ЖАН-ЖАК РУССО

THE CONFESSIONS OF
JEAN JACQUES
ROUSSEAU — VOLUME
02

Жан-Жак Руссо
The Confessions of Jean
Jacques Rousseau — Volume 02

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The Confessions

of Jean Jacques

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BOOK II

The moment in which fear had instigated my flight, did not seem more terrible than that wherein I put my design in execution appeared delightful. To leave my relations, my resources, while yet a child, in the midst of my apprenticeship, before I had learned enough of my business to obtain a subsistence; to run on inevitable misery and danger: to expose myself in that age of weakness and innocence to all the temptations of vice and despair; to set out in search of errors, misfortunes, snares, slavery, and death; to endure more intolerable evils than those I meant to shun, was the picture I should have drawn, the natural consequence of my hazardous enterprise. How different was the idea I entertained of it!—The independence I seemed to possess was the sole object of my contemplation; having obtained my liberty, I thought everything attainable: I entered with confidence on the vast theatre of the world, which my merit was to captivate:

at every step I expected to find amusements, treasures, and adventures; friends ready to serve, and mistresses eager to please me; I had but to show myself, and the whole universe would be interested in my concerns; not but I could have been content with something less; a charming society, with sufficient means, might have satisfied me. My moderation was such, that the sphere in which I proposed to shine was rather circumscribed, but then it was to possess the very quintessence of enjoyment, and myself the principal object. A single castle, for instance, might have bounded my ambition; could I have been the favorite of the lord and lady, the daughter's lover, the son's friend, and protector of the neighbors, I might have been tolerably content, and sought no further.

In expectation of this modest fortune, I passed a few days in the environs of the city, with some country people of my acquaintance, who received me with more kindness than I should have met with in town; they welcomed, lodged, and fed me cheerfully; I could be said to live on charity, these favors were not conferred with a sufficient appearance of superiority to furnish out the idea.

I rambled about in this manner till I got to Confignon, in Savoy, at about two leagues distance from Geneva. The vicar was called M. de Pontverre; this name, so famous in the history of the Republic, caught my attention; I was curious to see what appearance the descendants of the gentlemen of the spoon exhibited; I went, therefore, to visit this M. de Pontverre, and

was received with great civility.

He spoke of the heresy of Geneva, declaimed on the authority of holy mother church, and then invited me to dinner. I had little to object to arguments which had so desirable a conclusion, and was inclined to believe that priests, who gave such excellent dinners, might be as good as our ministers. Notwithstanding M. de Pontverre's pedigree, I certainly possessed most learning; but I rather sought to be a good companion than an expert theologian; and his Frangi wine, which I thought delicious, argued so powerfully on his side, that I should have blushed at silencing so kind a host; I, therefore, yielded him the victory, or rather declined the contest. Any one who had observed my precaution, would certainly have pronounced me a dissembler, though, in fact, I was only courteous.

Flattery, or rather condescension, is not always a vice in young people; 'tis oftener a virtue. When treated with kindness, it is natural to feel an attachment for the person who confers the obligation; we do not acquiesce because we wish to deceive, but from dread of giving uneasiness, or because we wish to avoid the ingratitude of rendering evil for good. What interest had M. de Pontverre in entertaining, treating with respect, and endeavoring to convince me? None but mine; my young heart told me this, and I was penetrated with gratitude and respect for the generous priest; I was sensible of my superiority, but scorned to repay his hospitality by taking advantage of it. I had no conception of hypocrisy in this forbearance, or thought of changing my

religion, nay, so far was the idea from being familiar to me, that I looked on it with a degree of horror which seemed to exclude the possibility of such an event; I only wished to avoid giving offence to those I was sensible caressed me from that motive; I wished to cultivate their good opinion, and meantime leave them the hope of success by seeming less on my guard than I really was. My conduct in this particular resembled the coquetry of some very honest women, who, to obtain their wishes, without permitting or promising anything, sometimes encourage hopes they never mean to realize.

Reason, piety, and love of order, certainly demanded that instead of being encouraged in my folly, I should have been dissuaded from the ruin I was courting, and sent back to my family; and this conduct any one that was actuated by genuine virtue would have pursued; but it should be observed that though M. de Pontverre was a religious man, he was not a virtuous one, but a bigot, who knew no virtue except worshipping images and telling his beads, in a word, a kind of missionary, who thought the height of merit consisted in writing libels against the ministers of Geneva. Far from wishing to send me back, he endeavored to favor my escape, and put it out of my power to return even had I been so disposed. It was a thousand to one but he was sending me to perish with hunger, or become a villain; but all this was foreign to his purpose; he saw a soul snatched from heresy, and restored to the bosom of the church: whether I was an honest man or a knave was very immaterial, provided I went to mass.

This ridiculous mode of thinking is not peculiar to Catholics; it is the voice of every dogmatical persuasion where merit consists in belief, and not in virtue.

"You are called by the Almighty," said M. de Pontverre; "go to Annecy, where you will find a good and charitable lady, whom the bounty of the king enables to turn souls from those errors she has happily renounced." He spoke of a Madam de Warrens, a new convert, to whom the priests contrived to send those wretches who were disposed to sell their faith, and with these she was in a manner constrained to share a pension of two thousand francs bestowed on her by the King of Sardinia. I felt myself extremely humiliated at being supposed to want the assistance of a good and charitable lady. I had no objection to be accommodated with everything I stood in need of, but did not wish to receive it on the footing of charity and to owe this obligation to a devotee was still worse; notwithstanding my scruples the persuasions of M. de Pontverre, the dread of perishing with hunger, the pleasures I promised myself from the journey, and hope of obtaining some desirable situation, determined me; and I set out though reluctantly, for Annecy. I could easily have reached it in a day, but being in no great haste to arrive there, it took me three. My head was filled with the ideas of adventures, and I approached every country-seat I saw in my way, in expectation of having them realized. I had too much timidity to knock at the doors, or even enter if I saw them open, but I did what I dared—which was to sing under those

windows that I thought had the most favorable appearance; and was very much disconcerted to find I wasted my breath to no purpose, and that neither old nor young ladies were attracted by the melody of my voice, or the wit of my poetry, though some songs my companions had taught me I thought excellent and that I sung them incomparably. At length I arrived at Annecy, and saw Madam de Warrens.

As this period of my life, in a great measure, determined my character, I could not resolve to pass it lightly over. I was in the middle of my sixteenth year, and though I could not be called handsome, was well made for my height; I had a good foot, a well turned leg, and animated countenance; a well proportioned mouth, black hair and eyebrows, and my eyes, though small and rather too far in my head, sparkling with vivacity, darted that innate fire which inflamed my blood; unfortunately for me, I knew nothing of all this, never having bestowed a single thought on my person till it was too late to be of any service to me. The timidity common to my age was heightened by a natural benevolence, which made me dread the idea of giving pain. Though my mind had received some cultivation, having seen nothing of the world, I was an absolute stranger to polite address, and my mental acquisitions, so far from supplying this defect, only served to increase my embarrassment, by making me sensible of every deficiency.

Depending little, therefore, on external appearances, I had recourse to other expedients: I wrote a most elaborate letter,

where, mingling all the flowers of rhetoric which I had borrowed from books with the phrases of an apprentice, I endeavored to strike the attention, and insure the good will of Madam de Warrens. I enclosed M. de Pontverre's letter in my own and waited on the lady with a heart palpitating with fear and expectation. It was Palm Sunday, of the year 1728; I was informed she was that moment gone to church; I hasten after her, overtake, and speak to her.—The place is yet fresh in my memory—how can it be otherwise? often have I moistened it with my tears and covered it with kisses.—Why cannot I enclose with gold the happy spot, and render it the object of universal veneration? Whoever wishes to honor monuments of human salvation would only approach it on their knees.

It was a passage at the back of the house, bordered on the left hand by a little rivulet, which separated it from the garden, and, on the right, by the court yard wall; at the end was a private door which opened into the church of the Cordeliers. Madam de Warrens was just passing this door; but on hearing my voice, instantly turned about. What an effect did the sight of her produce! I expected to see a devout, forbidding old woman; M. de Pontverre's pious and worthy lady could be no other in my conception; instead of which, I see a face beaming with charms, fine blue eyes full of sweetness, a complexion whose whiteness dazzled the sight, the form of an enchanting neck, nothing escaped the eager eye of the young proselyte; for that instant I was hers!—a religion preached by such missionaries

must lead to paradise!

My letter was presented with a trembling hand; she took it with a smile—opened it, glanced an eye over M. de Pontverre's and again returned to mine, which she read through and would have read again, had not the footman that instant informed her that service was beginning—"Child," said she, in a tone of voice which made every nerve vibrate, "you are wandering about at an early age—it is really a pity!"—and without waiting for an answer, added—"Go to my house, bid them give you something for breakfast, after mass, I will speak to you."

Louisa—Eleanora de Warrens was of the noble and ancient family of La Tour de Pit, of Vevay, a city in the country of the Vaudois. She was married very young to a M. de Warrens, of the house of Loys, eldest son of M. de Villardin, of Lausanne; there were no children by this marriage, which was far from being a happy one. Some domestic uneasiness made Madam de Warrens take the resolution of crossing the Lake, and throwing herself at the feet of Victor Amadeus, who was then at Evian; thus abandoning her husband, family, and country by a giddiness similar to mine, which precipitation she, too, has found sufficient time and reason to lament.

The king, who was fond of appearing a zealous promoter of the Catholic faith, took her under his protection, and complimented her with a pension of fifteen hundred livres of Piedmont, which was a considerable appointment for a prince who never had the character of being generous; but finding his

liberality made some conjecture he had an affection for the lady, he sent her to Annecy escorted by a detachment of his guards, where, under the direction of Michael Gabriel de Bernex, titular bishop of Geneva, she abjured her former religion at the Convent of the Visitation.

I came to Annecy just six years after this event; Madam de Warrens was then eight—and—twenty, being born with the century. Her beauty, consisting more in the expressive animation of the countenance, than a set of features, was in its meridian; her manner soothing and tender; an angelic smile played about her mouth, which was small and delicate; she wore her hair (which was of an ash color, and uncommonly beautiful) with an air of negligence that made her appear still more interesting; she was short, and rather thick for her height, though by no means disagreeably so; but there could not be a more lovely face, a finer neck, or hands and arms more exquisitely formed.

Her education had been derived from such a variety of sources, that it formed an extraordinary assemblage. Like me, she had lost her mother at her birth, and had received instruction as it chanced to present itself; she had learned something of her governess, something of her father, a little of her masters, but copiously from her lovers; particularly a M. de Tavel, who, possessing both taste and information, endeavored to adorn with them the mind of her he loved. These various instructions, not being properly arranged, tended to impede each other, and she did not acquire that degree of improvement her natural

good sense was capable of receiving; she knew something of philosophy and physic, but not enough to eradicate the fondness she had imbibed from her father for empiricism and alchemy; she made elixirs, tinctures, balsams, pretended to secrets, and prepared magestry; while quacks and pretenders, profiting by her weakness, destroyed her property among furnaces, drugs and minerals, diminishing those charms and accomplishments which might have been the delight of the most elegant circles. But though these interested wretches took advantage of her ill-applied education to obscure her natural good sense, her excellent heart retained its purity; her amiable mildness, sensibility for the unfortunate, inexhaustible bounty, and open, cheerful frankness, knew no variation; even at the approach of old age, when attacked by various calamities, rendered more cutting by indigence, the serenity of her disposition preserved to the end of her life the pleasing gayety of her happiest days.

Her errors proceeded from an inexhaustible fund of activity, which demanded perpetual employment. She found no satisfaction in the customary intrigues of her sex, but, being formed for vast designs, sought the direction of important enterprises and discoveries. In her place Madam de Longueville would have been a mere trifler, in Madam de Longueville's situation she would have governed the state. Her talents did not accord with her fortune; what would have gained her distinction in a more elevated sphere, became her ruin. In enterprises which suited her disposition, she arranged the plan in her imagination,

which was ever carried of its utmost extent, and the means she employed being proportioned rather to her ideas than abilities, she failed by the mismanagement of those upon whom she depended, and was ruined where another would scarce have been a loser. This active disposition, which involved her in so many difficulties, was at least productive of one benefit as it prevented her from passing the remainder of her life in the monastic asylum she had chosen, which she had some thought of. The simple and uniform life of a nun, and the little cabals and gossipings of their parlor, were not adapted to a mind vigorous and active, which, every day forming new systems, had occasions for liberty to attempt their completion.

The good bishop of Bernex, with less wit than Francis of Sales, resembled him in many particulars, and Madam de Warrens, whom he loved to call his daughter, and who was like Madam de Chantel in several respects, might have increased the resemblance by retiring like her from the world, had she not been disgusted with the idle trifling of a convent. It was not want of zeal prevented this amiable woman from giving those proofs of devotion which might have been expected from a new convert, under the immediate direction of a prelate. Whatever might have influenced her to change her religion, she was certainly sincere in that she had embraced; she might find sufficient occasion to repent having abjured her former faith, but no inclination to return to it. She not only died a good Catholic, but truly lived one; nay, I dare affirm (and I think I have had the opportunity

to read the secrets of her heart) that it was only her aversion to singularity that prevented her acting the devotee in public; in a word, her piety was too sincere to give way to any affectation of it. But this is not the place to enlarge on her principles: I shall find other occasions to speak of them.

Let those who deny the existence of a sympathy of souls, explain, if they know how, why the first glance, the first word of Madam de Warrens inspired me, not only with a lively attachment, but with the most unbounded confidence, which has since known no abatement. Say this was love (which will at least appear doubtful to those who read the sequel of our attachment) how could this passion be attended with sentiments which scarce ever accompany its commencement, such as peace, serenity, security, and confidence. How, when making application to an amiable and polished woman, whose situation in life was so superior to mine, so far above any I had yet approached, on whom, in a great measure, depended my future fortune by the degree of interest she might take in it; how, I say with so many reasons to depress me, did I feel myself as free, as much at my ease, as if I had been perfectly secure of pleasing her! Why did I not experience a moment of embarrassment, timidity or restraint? Naturally bashful, easily confused, having seen nothing of the world, could I, the first time, the first moment I beheld her, adopt caressing language, and a familiar tone, as readily as after ten years' intimacy had rendered these freedoms natural? Is it possible to possess love, I will not say without desires, for

I certainly had them, but without inquietude, without jealousy? Can we avoid feeling an anxious wish at least to know whether our affection is returned? Yet such a question never entered my imagination; I should as soon have inquired, do I love myself; nor did she ever express a greater degree of curiosity; there was, certainly, something extraordinary in my attachment to this charming woman and it will be found in the sequel, that some extravagances, which cannot be foreseen, attended it.

What could be done for me, was the present question, and in order to discuss the point with greater freedom, she made me dine with her. This was the first meal in my life where I had experienced a want of appetite, and her woman, who waited, observed it was the first time she had seen a traveller of my age and appearance deficient in that particular: this remark, which did me no injury in the opinion of her mistress, fell hard on an overgrown clown, who was my fellow guest, and devoured sufficient to have served at least six moderate feeders. For me, I was too much charmed to think of eating; my heart began to imbibe a delicious sensation, which engrossed my whole being, and left no room for other objects.

Madam de Warrens wished to hear the particulars of my little history—all the vivacity I had lost during my servitude returned and assisted the recital. In proportion to the interest this excellent woman took in my story, did she lament the fate to which I had exposed myself; compassion was painted on her features, and expressed by every action. She could not exhort me to return to

Geneva, being too well aware that her words and actions were strictly scrutinized, and that such advice would be thought high treason against Catholicism, but she spoke so feelingly of the affliction I must give her(my) father, that it was easy to perceive she would have approved my returning to console him. Alas, she little thought how powerfully this pleaded against herself; the more eloquently persuasive she appeared, the less could I resolve to tear myself from her. I knew that returning to Geneva would be putting an insuperable barrier between us, unless I repeated the expedient which had brought me here, and it was certainly better to preserve than expose myself to the danger of a relapse; besides all this, my conduct was predetermined, I was resolved not to return. Madam de Warrens, seeing her endeavors would be fruitless, became less explicit, and only added, with an air of commiseration, "Poor child! thou must go where Providence directs thee, but one day thou wilt think of me."—I believe she had no conception at that time how fatally her prediction would be verified.

The difficulty still remained how I was to gain a subsistence? I have already observed that I knew too little of engraving for that to furnish my resource, and had I been more expert, Savoy was too poor a country to give much encouragement to the arts. The above-mentioned glutton, who eat for us as well as himself, being obliged to pause in order to gain some relaxation from the fatigue of it, imparted a piece of advice, which, according to him, came express from Heaven; though to judge by its effects it appeared

to have been dictated from a direct contrary quarter: this was that I should go to Turin, where, in a hospital instituted for the instruction of catechumens, I should find food, both spiritual and temporal, be reconciled to the bosom of the church, and meet with some charitable Christians, who would make it a point to procure me a situation that would turn to my advantage. "In regard to the expenses of the journey," continued our advisor, "his grace, my lord bishop, will not be backward, when once madam has proposed this holy work, to offer his charitable donation, and madam, the baroness, whose charity is so well known," once more addressing himself to the continuation of his meal, "will certainly contribute."

I was by no means pleased with all these charities; I said nothing, but my heart was ready to burst with vexation. Madam de Warrens, who did not seem to think so highly of this expedient as the projector pretended to do, contented herself by saying, everyone should endeavor to promote good actions, and that she would mention it to his lordship; but the meddling devil, who had some private interest in this affair, and questioned whether she would urge it to his satisfaction, took care to acquaint the almoners with my story, and so far influenced those good priests, that when Madam de Warrens, who disliked the journey on my account, mentioned it to the bishop, she found it so far concluded on, that he immediately put into her hands the money designed for my little viaticum. She dared not advance anything against it; I was approaching an age when a woman like her could not, with

any propriety, appear anxious to retain me.

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