

The Creed of a Savoyard Priest

From *Emile*, Book Four (1762)

By Jean-Jacques Rousseau

My child, do not look to me for learned speeches or profound arguments. I am no great philosopher, nor do I desire to be one. I have, however, a certain amount of common-sense and a constant devotion to truth. I have no wish to argue with you nor even to convince you; it is enough for me to show you, in all simplicity of heart, what I really think. Consult your own heart while I speak; that is all I ask. If I am mistaken, I am honestly mistaken, and therefore my error will not be counted to me as a crime; if you, too, are honestly mistaken, there is no great harm done. If I am right, we are both endowed with reason, we have both the same motive for listening to the voice of reason. Why should not you think as I do?

By birth I was a peasant and poor; to till the ground was my portion; but my parents thought it a finer thing that I should learn to get my living as a priest and they found means to send me to college. I am quite sure that neither my parents nor I had any idea of seeking after what was good, useful, or true; we only sought what was wanted to get me ordained. I learned what was taught me, I said what I was told to say, I promised all that was required, and I became a priest. But I soon discovered that when I promised not to be a man, I had promised more than I could perform.

Conscience, they tell us, is the creature of prejudice, but I know from experience that conscience persists in following the order of nature in spite of all the laws of man. In vain is this or that forbidden; remorse makes her voice heard but feebly when what we do is permitted by well-ordered nature, and still more when we are doing her bidding. My good youth, nature has not yet appealed to your senses; may you long remain in this happy state when her voice is the voice of innocence. Remember that to anticipate her teaching is to offend more deeply against her than to resist her teaching; you must first learn to resist, that you may know when to yield without wrong-doing.

From my youth up I had revered the married state as the first and most sacred institution of nature. Having renounced the right to marry, I was resolved not to profane the sanctity of marriage; for in spite of my education and reading I had always led a simple and regular life, and my mind had preserved the innocence of its natural instincts; these instincts had not been obscured by worldly wisdom, while my poverty kept me remote from the temptations dictated by the sophistry of vice.

This very resolution proved my ruin. My respect for marriage led to the discovery of my misconduct. The scandal must be expiated; I was arrested, suspended, and dismissed; I was the victim of my scruples rather than of my incontinence, and I had reason to believe, from the reproaches which accompanied my disgrace, that one can often escape punishment by being guilty of a worse fault.

A thoughtful mind soon learns from such experiences. I found my former ideas of justice, honesty, and every duty of man overturned by these painful events, and day by day I was losing my hold on one or another of the opinions I had accepted. What was left was not enough to form a body of ideas which could stand alone, and I felt that the evidence on which my principles rested was being weakened; at last I knew not what to think, and I came to the same conclusion as yourself, but with this

difference: My lack of faith was the slow growth of manhood, attained with great difficulty, and all the harder to uproot.

I was in that state of doubt and uncertainty which Descartes considers essential to the search for truth. It is a state which cannot continue, it is disquieting and painful; only vicious tendencies and an idle heart can keep us in that state. My heart was not so corrupt as to delight in it, and there is nothing which so maintains the habit of thinking as being better pleased with oneself than with one's lot.

I pondered, therefore, on the sad fate of mortals, adrift upon this sea of human opinions, without compass or rudder, and abandoned to their stormy passions with no guide but an inexperienced pilot who does not know whence he comes or whither he is going. I said to myself, "I love truth, I seek her, and cannot find her. Show me truth and I will hold her fast; why does she hide her face from the eager heart that would fain worship her?"

Although I have often experienced worse sufferings, I have never led a life so uniformly distressing as this period of unrest and anxiety, when I wandered incessantly from one doubt to another, gaining nothing from my prolonged meditations but uncertainty, darkness, and contradiction with regard to the source of my being and the rule of my duties.

I cannot understand how any one can be a sceptic sincerely and on principle. Either such philosophers do not exist or they are the most miserable of men. Doubt with regard to what we ought to know is a condition too violent for the human mind; it cannot long be endured; in spite of itself the mind decides one way or another, and it prefers to be deceived rather than to believe nothing.

My perplexity was increased by the fact that I had been brought up in a church which decides everything and permits no doubts, so that having rejected one article of faith I was forced to reject the rest; as I could not accept absurd decisions, I was deprived of those which were not absurd. When I was told to believe everything, I could believe nothing, and I knew not where to stop.

I consulted the philosophers, I searched their books and examined their various theories; I found them all alike proud, assertive, dogmatic, professing, even in their so-called scepticism, to know everything, proving nothing, scoffing at each other. This last trait, which was common to all of them, struck me as the only point in which they were right. Braggarts in attack, they are weaklings in defence. Weigh their arguments, they are all destructive; count their voices, every one speaks for himself; they are only agreed in arguing with each other. I could find no way out of my uncertainty by listening to them.

I suppose this prodigious diversity of opinion is caused, in the first place, by the weakness of the human intellect; and, in the second, by pride. We have no means of measuring this vast machine, we are unable to calculate its workings; we know neither its guiding principles nor its final purpose; we do not know ourselves, we know neither our nature nor the spirit that moves us; we scarcely know whether man is one or many; we are surrounded by impenetrable mysteries. These mysteries are beyond the region of sense, we think we can penetrate them by the light of reason, but we fall back on our imagination. Through this imagined world each forces a way for himself which he holds to be right; none can tell whether his path will lead him to the goal. Yet we long to know and understand it all. The one thing we do not know is the limit of the knowable. We prefer to trust to chance and to believe what is not true, rather than to own that not one of us can see what really is. A fragment

of some vast whole whose bounds are beyond our gaze, a fragment abandoned by its Creator to our foolish quarrels, we are vain enough to want to determine the nature of that whole and our own relations with regard to it.

If the philosophers were in a position to declare the truth, which of them would care to do so? Every one of them knows that his own system rests on no surer foundations than the rest, but he maintains it because it is his own. There is not one of them who, if he chanced to discover the difference between truth and falsehood, would not prefer his own lie to the truth which another had discovered. Where is the philosopher who would not deceive the whole world for his own glory? If he can rise above the crowd, if he can excel his rivals, what more does he want? Among believers he is an atheist; among atheists he would be a believer.

The first thing I learned from these considerations was to restrict my inquiries to what directly concerned myself, to rest in profound ignorance of everything else, and not even to trouble myself to doubt anything beyond what I required to know.

I also realised that the philosophers, far from ridding me of my vain doubts, only multiplied the doubts that tormented me and failed to remove any one of them. So I chose another guide and said, "Let me follow the Inner Light; it will not lead me so far astray as others have done, or if it does it will be my own fault, and I shall not go so far wrong if I follow my own illusions as if I trusted to their deceptions."

I then went over in my mind the various opinions which I had held in the course of my life, and I saw that although no one of them was plain enough to gain immediate belief, some were more probable than others, and my inward consent was given or withheld in proportion to this improbability. Having discovered this, I made an unprejudiced comparison of all these different ideas, and I perceived that the first and most general of them was also the simplest and the most reasonable, and that it would have been accepted by every one if only it had been last instead of first. Imagine all your philosophers, ancient and modern, having exhausted their strange systems of force, chance, fate, necessity, atoms, a living world, animated matter, and every variety of materialism. Then comes the illustrious Clarke who gives light to the world and proclaims the Being of beings and the Giver of things. What universal admiration, what unanimous applause would have greeted this new system—a system so great, so illuminating, and so simple. Other systems are full of absurdities; this system seems to me to contain fewer things which are beyond the understanding of the human mind. I said to myself, "Every system has its insoluble problems, for the finite mind of man is too small to deal with them; these difficulties are therefore no final argument against any system. But what a difference there is between the direct evidence on which these systems are based! Should we not prefer that theory which alone explains all the facts, when it is no more difficult than the rest?"

Bearing thus within my heart the love of truth as my only philosophy, and as my only method a clear and simple rule which dispensed with the need for vain and subtle arguments, I returned with the help of this rule to the examination of such knowledge as concerned myself; I was resolved to admit as self-evident all that I could not honestly refuse to believe, and to admit as true all that seemed to follow directly from this; all the rest I determined to leave undecided, neither accepting nor rejecting it, nor yet troubling myself to clear up difficulties which did not lead to any practical ends.

But who am I? What right have I to decide? What is it that determines my judgments? If they are inevitable, if they are the results of the impressions I receive, I

am wasting my strength in such inquiries; they would be made or not without any interference of mine. I must therefore first turn my eyes upon myself to acquaint myself with the instrument I desire to use, and to discover how far it is reliable.

I exist, and I have senses through which I receive impressions. This is the first truth that strikes me and I am forced to accept it. Have I any independent knowledge of my existence, or am I only aware of it through my sensations? This is my first difficulty, and so far I cannot solve it. For I continually experience sensations, either directly or indirectly through memory, so how can I know if the feeling of *self* is something beyond these sensations or if it can exist independently of them?

My sensations take place in myself, for they make me aware of my own existence; but their cause is outside me, for they affect me whether I have any reason for them or not, and they are produced or destroyed independently of me. So I clearly perceive that my sensation, which is within me, and its cause or its object, which is outside me, are different things.

Thus, not only do I exist, but other entities exist also, that is to say, the objects of my sensations; and even if these objects are merely ideas, still these ideas are not me.

But everything outside myself, everything which acts upon my senses, I call matter, and all the particles of matter which I suppose to be united into separate entities I call bodies. Thus all the disputes of the idealists and the realists have no meaning for me; their distinctions between the appearance and the reality of bodies are wholly fanciful.

I am now as convinced of the existence of the universe as of my own. I next consider the objects of my sensations, and I find that I have the power of comparing them, so I perceive that I am endowed with an active force of which I was not previously aware.

To perceive is to feel; to compare is to judge; to judge and to feel are not the same. Through sensation objects present themselves to me separately and singly as they are in nature; by comparing them I rearrange them, I shift them so to speak, I place one upon another to decide whether they are alike or different, or more generally to find out their relations. To my mind, the distinctive faculty of an active or intelligent being is the power of understanding this word "is." I seek in vain in the merely sensitive entity that intelligent force which compares and judges; I can find no trace of it in its nature. This passive entity will be aware of each object separately, it will even be aware of the whole formed by the two together, but having no power to place them side by side it can never compare them, it can never form a judgment with regard to them.

To see two things at once is not to see their relations nor to judge of their differences; to perceive several objects, one beyond the other, is not to relate them. I may have at the same moment an idea of a big stick and a little stick without comparing them, without judging that one is less than the other, just as I can see my whole hand without counting my fingers. These comparative ideas, *greater*, *smaller*, together with number ideas of *one*, *two*, etc., are certainly not sensations, although my mind only produces them when my sensations occur.

We are told that a sensitive being distinguishes sensations from each other by the inherent differences in the sensations; this requires explanation. When the sensations are different, the sensitive being distinguishes them by their differences; when they are alike, he distinguishes them because he is aware of them one beyond the other.

Otherwise, how could he distinguish between two equal objects simultaneously experienced? He would necessarily confound the two objects and take them for one object, especially under a system which professed that the representative sensations of space have no extension.

When we become aware of the two sensations to be compared, their impression is made, each object is perceived, both are perceived, but for all that their relation is not perceived. If the judgment of this relation were merely a sensation, and came to me solely from the object itself, my judgments would never be mistaken, for it is never untrue that I feel what I feel.

Why then am I mistaken as to the relation between these two sticks, especially when they are not parallel? Why, for example, do I say the small stick is a third of the large, when it is only a quarter? Why is the picture, which is the sensation, unlike its model which is the object? It is because I am active when I judge, because the operation of comparison is at fault; because my understanding, which judges of relations, mingles its errors with the truth of sensations, which only reveal to me things.

Add to this a consideration which will, I feel sure, appeal to you when you have thought about it: it is this—If we were purely passive in the use of our senses, there would be no communication between them; it would be impossible to know that the body we are touching and the thing we are looking at is the same. Either we should never perceive anything outside ourselves, or there would be for us five substances perceptible by the senses, whose identity we should have no means of perceiving.

This power of my mind which brings my sensations together and compares them may be called by any name; let it be called attention, meditation, reflection, or what you will; it is still true that it is in me and not in things, that it is I alone who produce it, though I only produce it when I receive an impression from things. Though I am compelled to feel or not to feel, I am free to examine more or less what I feel.

Being now, so to speak, sure of myself, I begin to look at things outside myself, and I behold myself with a sort of shudder flung at random into this vast universe, plunged as it were into the vast number of entities, knowing nothing of what they are in themselves or in relation to me. I study them, I observe them; and the first object which suggests itself for comparison with them is myself.

All that I perceive through the senses is matter, and I deduce all the essential properties of matter from the sensible qualities which make me perceive it, qualities which are inseparable from it. I see it sometimes in motion, sometimes at rest, hence I infer that neither motion nor rest is essential to it, but motion, being an action, is the result of a cause of which rest is only the absence. When, therefore, there is nothing acting upon matter it does not move, and for the very reason that rest and motion are indifferent to it, its natural state is a state of rest.

I perceive two sorts of motions of bodies, acquired motion and spontaneous or voluntary motion. In the first the cause is external to the body moved, in the second it is within. I shall not conclude from that that the motion, say of a watch, is spontaneous, for if no external cause operated upon the spring it would run down and the watch would cease to go. For the same reason I should not admit that the movements of fluids are spontaneous, neither should I attribute spontaneous motion to fire which causes their fluidity.

You ask me if the movements of animals are spontaneous; my answer is, "I cannot tell," but analogy points that way. You ask me again, how do I know that there are

spontaneous movements? I tell you, "I know it because I feel them." I want to move my arm and I move it without any other immediate cause of the movement but my own will. In vain would any one try to argue me out of this feeling, it is stronger than any proofs; you might as well try to convince me that I do not exist.

If there were no spontaneity in men's actions, nor in anything that happens on this earth, it would be all the more difficult to imagine a first cause for all motion. For my own part, I feel myself so thoroughly convinced that the natural state of matter is a state of rest, and that it has no power of action in itself, that when I see a body in motion I at once assume that it is either a living body or that this motion has been imparted to it. My mind declines to accept in any way the idea of inorganic matter moving of its own accord, or giving rise to any action.

Yet this visible universe consists of matter, matter diffused and dead, matter which has none of the cohesion, the organisation, the common feeling of the parts of a living body, for it is certain that we who are parts have no consciousness of the whole. This same universe is in motion, and in its movements, ordered, uniform, and subject to fixed laws, it has none of that freedom which appears in the spontaneous movements of men and animals. So the world is not some huge animal which moves of its own accord; its movements are therefore due to some external cause, a cause which I cannot perceive, but the inner voice makes this cause so apparent to me that I cannot watch the course of the sun without imagining a force which drives it, and when the earth revolves I think I see the hand that sets it in motion.

If I must accept general laws whose essential relation to matter is unperceived by me, how much further have I got? These laws, not being real things, not being substances, have therefore some other basis unknown to me. Experiment and observation have acquainted us with the laws of motion; these laws determine the results without showing their causes; they are quite inadequate to explain the system of the world and the course of the universe. With the help of dice Descartes made heaven and earth; but he could not set his dice in motion, nor start the action of his centrifugal force without the help of rotation. Newton discovered the law of gravitation; but gravitation alone would soon reduce the universe to a motionless mass; he was compelled to add a projectile force to account for the elliptical course of the celestial bodies; let Newton show us the hand that launched the planets in the tangent of their orbits.

The first causes of motion are not to be found in matter; matter receives and transmits motion, but does not produce it. The more I observe the action and reaction of the forces of nature playing on one another, the more I see that we must always go back from one effect to another, till we arrive at a first cause in some will; for to assume an infinite succession of causes is to assume that there is no first cause. In a word, no motion which is not caused by another motion can take place, except by a spontaneous, voluntary action; inanimate bodies have no action but motion, and there is no real action without will. This is my first principle. I believe, therefore, that there is a will which sets the universe in motion and gives life to nature. This is my first dogma, or the first article of my creed.

How does a will produce a physical and corporeal action? I cannot tell, but I perceive that it does so in myself; I will to do something and I do it; I will to move my body and it moves, but if an inanimate body, when at rest, should begin to move itself, the thing is incomprehensible and without precedent. The will is known to me in its action, not in its nature. I know this will as a cause of motion, but to conceive of

matter as producing motion is clearly to conceive of an effect without a cause, which is not to conceive at all.

It is no more possible for me to conceive how my will moves my body than to conceive how my sensations affect my mind. I do not even know why one of these mysteries has seemed less inexplicable than the other. For my own part, whether I am active or passive, the means of union of the two substances seem to me absolutely incomprehensible. It is very strange that people make this very incomprehensibility a step towards the compounding of the two substances, as if operations so different in kind were more easily explained in one case than in two.

The doctrine I have just laid down is indeed obscure; but at least it suggests a meaning and there is nothing in it repugnant to reason or experience; can we say as much of materialism? Is it not plain that if motion is essential to matter it would be inseparable from it, it would always be present in it in the same degree, always present in every particle of matter, always the same in each particle of matter, it would not be capable of transmission, it could neither increase nor diminish, nor could we ever conceive of matter at rest. When you tell me that motion is not essential to matter but necessary to it, you try to cheat me with words which would be easier to refute if there was a little more sense in them. For either the motion of matter arises from the matter itself and is therefore essential to it; or it arises from an external cause and is not necessary to the matter, because the motive cause acts upon it; we have got back to our original difficulty.

The chief source of human error is to be found in general and abstract ideas; the jargon of metaphysics has never led to the discovery of any single truth, and it has filled philosophy with absurdities of which we are ashamed as soon as we strip them of their long words. Tell me, my friend, when they talk to you of a blind force diffused throughout nature, do they present any real idea to your mind? They think they are saying something by these vague expressions—universal force, essential motion—but they are saying nothing at all. The idea of motion is nothing more than the idea of transference from place to place; there is no motion without direction; for no individual can move all ways at once. In what direction then does matter move of necessity? Has the whole body of matter a uniform motion, or has each atom its own motion? According to the first idea the whole universe must form a solid and indivisible mass; according to the second it can only form a diffused and incoherent fluid, which would make the union of any two atoms impossible. What direction shall be taken by this motion common to all matter? Shall it be in a straight line, in a circle, or from above downwards, to the right or to the left? If each molecule has its own direction, what are the causes of all these directions and all these differences? If every molecule or atom only revolved on its own axis, nothing would ever leave its place and there would be no transmitted motion, and even then this circular movement would require to follow some direction. To set matter in motion by an abstraction is to utter words without meaning, and to attribute to matter a given direction is to assume a determining cause. The more examples I take, the more causes I have to explain, without ever finding a common agent which controls them. Far from being able to picture to myself an entire absence of order in the fortuitous concurrence of elements, I cannot even imagine such a strife, and the chaos of the universe is less conceivable to me than its harmony. I can understand that the mechanism of the universe may not be intelligible to the human mind, but when a man sets to work to explain it, he must say what men can understand.

If matter in motion points me to a will, matter in motion according to fixed laws points me to an intelligence; that is the second article of my creed. To act, to compare, to choose, are the operations of an active, thinking being; so this being exists. Where do you find him existing, you will say? Not merely in the revolving heavens, nor in the sun which gives us light, not in myself alone, but in the sheep that grazes, the bird that flies, the stone that falls, and the leaf blown by the wind.

I judge of the order of the world, although I know nothing of its purpose, for to judge of this order it is enough for me to compare the parts one with another, to study their co-operation, their relations, and to observe their united action. I know not why the universe exists, but I see continually how it is changed; I never fail to perceive the close connection by which the entities of which it consists lend their aid one to another. I am like a man who sees the works of a watch for the first time; he is never weary of admiring the mechanism, though he does not know the use of the instrument and has never seen its face. I do not know what this is for, says he, but I see that each part of it is fitted to the rest, I admire the workman in the details of his work, and I am quite certain that all these wheels only work together in this fashion for some common end which I cannot perceive.

Let us compare the special ends, the means, the ordered relations of every kind, then let us listen to the inner voice of feeling; what healthy mind can reject its evidence? Unless the eyes are blinded by prejudices, can they fail to see that the visible order of the universe proclaims a supreme intelligence? What sophisms must be brought together before we fail to understand the harmony of existence and the wonderful co-operation of every part for the maintenance of the rest? Say what you will of combinations and probabilities; what do you gain by reducing me to silence if you cannot gain my consent? And how can you rob me of the spontaneous feeling which, in spite of myself, continually gives you the lie? If organised bodies had come together fortuitously in all sorts of ways before assuming settled forms, if stomachs are made without mouths, feet without heads, hands without arms, imperfect organs of every kind which died because they could not preserve their life, why do none of these imperfect attempts now meet our eyes; why has nature at length prescribed laws to herself which she did not at first recognise? I must not be surprised if that which is possible should happen, and if the improbability of the event is compensated for by the number of the attempts. I grant this; yet if any one told me that printed characters scattered broadcast had produced the *Æneid* all complete, I would not condescend to take a single step to verify this falsehood. You will tell me I am forgetting the multitude of attempts. But how many such attempts must I assume to bring the combination within the bounds of probability? For my own part the only possible assumption is that the chances are infinity to one that the product is not the work of chance. In addition to this, chance combinations yield nothing but products of the same nature as the elements combined, so that life and organisation will not be produced by a flow of atoms, and a chemist when making his compounds will never give them thought and feeling in his crucible.

I was surprised and almost shocked when I read Neuwentit. How could this man desire to make a book out of the wonders of nature, wonders which show the wisdom of the author of nature? His book would have been as large as the world itself before he had exhausted his subject, and as soon as we attempt to give details, that greatest wonder of all, the concord and harmony of the whole, escapes us. The mere generation of living organic bodies is the despair of the human mind; the insurmountable barrier raised by nature between the various species, so that they should not mix with one another, is the clearest proof of her intention. She is not

content to have established order, she has taken adequate measures to prevent the disturbance of that order.

There is not a being in the universe which may not be regarded as in some respects the common centre of all, around which they are grouped, so that they are all reciprocally end and means in relation to each other. The mind is confused and lost amid these innumerable relations, not one of which is itself confused or lost in the crowd. What absurd assumptions are required to deduce all this harmony from the blind mechanism of matter set in motion by chance! In vain do those who deny the unity of intention manifested in the relations of all the parts of this great whole, in vain do they conceal their nonsense under abstractions, co-ordinations, general principles, symbolic expressions; whatever they do I find it impossible to conceive of a system of entities so firmly ordered unless I believe in an intelligence that orders them. It is not in my power to believe that passive and dead matter can have brought forth living and feeling beings, that blind chance has brought forth intelligent beings, that that which does not think has brought forth thinking beings.

I believe, therefore, that the world is governed by a wise and powerful will; I see it or rather I feel it, and it is a great thing to know this. But has this same world always existed, or has it been created? Is there one source of all things? Are there two or many? What is their nature? I know not; and what concern is it of mine? When these things become of importance to me I will try to learn them; till then I abjure these idle speculations, which may trouble my peace, but cannot affect my conduct nor be comprehended by my reason.

Recollect that I am not preaching my own opinion but explaining it. Whether matter is eternal or created, whether its origin is passive or not, it is still certain that the whole is one, and that it proclaims a single intelligence; for I see nothing that is not part of the same ordered system, nothing which does not co-operate to the same end, namely, the conservation of all within the established order. This being who wills and can perform his will, this being active through his own power, this being, whoever he may be, who moves the universe and orders all things, is what I call God. To this name I add the ideas of intelligence, power, will, which I have brought together, and that of kindness which is their necessary consequence; but for all this I know no more of the being to which I ascribe them. He hides himself alike from my senses and my understanding; the more I think of him, the more perplexed I am; I know full well that he exists, and that he exists of himself alone; I know that my existence depends on his, and that everything I know depends upon him also. I see God everywhere in his works; I feel him within myself; I behold him all around me; but if I try to ponder him himself, if I try to find out where he is, what he is, what is his substance, he escapes me and my troubled spirit finds nothing.

Convinced of my unfitness, I shall never argue about the nature of God unless I am driven to it by the feeling of his relations with myself. Such reasonings are always rash; a wise man should venture on them with trembling, he should be certain that he can never sound their abysses; for the most insolent attitude towards God is not to abstain from thinking of him, but to think evil of him.

After the discovery of such of his attributes as enable me to conceive of his existence, I return to myself, and I try to discover what is my place in the order of things which he governs, and I can myself examine. At once, and beyond possibility of doubt, I discover my species; for by my own will and the instruments I can control to carry out my will, I have more power to act upon all bodies about me, either to make use of or to avoid their action at my pleasure, than any of them has

power to act upon me against my will by mere physical impulsion; and through my intelligence I am the only one who can examine all the rest. What being here below, except man, can observe others, measure, calculate, forecast their motions, their effects, and unite, so to speak, the feeling of a common existence with that of his individual existence? What is there so absurd in the thought that all things are made for me, when I alone can relate all things to myself?

It is true, therefore, that man is lord of the earth on which he dwells; for not only does he tame all the beasts, not only does he control its elements through his industry; but he alone knows how to control it; by contemplation he takes possession of the stars which he cannot approach. Show me any other creature on earth who can make a fire and who can behold with admiration the sun. What! can I observe and know all creatures and their relations; can I feel what is meant by order, beauty, and virtue; can I consider the universe and raise myself towards the hand that guides it; can I love good and perform it; and should I then liken myself to the beasts? Wretched soul, it is your gloomy philosophy which makes you like the beasts; or rather in vain do you seek to degrade yourself; your genius belies your principles, your kindly heart belies your doctrines, and even the abuse of your powers proves their excellence in your own despite.

For myself, I am not pledged to the support of any system. I am a plain and honest man, one who is not carried away by party spirit, one who has no ambition to be head of a sect; I am content with the place where God has set me; I see nothing, next to God himself, which is better than my species; and if I had to choose my place in the order of creation, what more could I choose than to be a man!

I am not puffed up by this thought, I am deeply moved by it; for this state was no choice of mine, it was not due to the deserts of a creature who as yet did not exist. Can I behold myself thus distinguished without congratulating myself on this post of honour, without blessing the hand which bestowed it? The first return to self has given birth to a feeling of gratitude and thankfulness to the author of my species, and this feeling calls forth my first homage to the beneficent Godhead. I worship his Almighty power and my heart acknowledges his mercies. Is it not a natural consequence of our self-love to honour our protector and to love our benefactor?

But when, in my desire to discover my own place within my species, I consider its different ranks and the men who fill them, where am I now? What a sight meets my eyes! Where is now the order I perceived? Nature showed me a scene of harmony and proportion; the human race shows me nothing but confusion and disorder. The elements agree together; men are in a state of chaos. The beasts are happy; their king alone is wretched. O Wisdom, where are thy laws? O Providence, is this thy rule over the world? Merciful God, where is thy Power? I behold the earth, and there is evil upon it.

Would you believe it, dear friend, from these gloomy thoughts and apparent contradictions, there was shaped in my mind the sublime idea of the soul, which all my seeking had hitherto failed to discover? While I meditated upon man's nature, I seemed to discover two distinct principles in it; one of them raised him to the study of the eternal truths, to the love of justice, and of true morality, to the regions of the world of thought, which the wise delight to contemplate; the other led him downwards to himself, made him the slave of his senses, of the passions which are their instruments, and thus opposed everything suggested to him by the former principle. When I felt myself carried away, distracted by these conflicting motives, I said, No; man is not one; I will and I will not; I feel myself at once a slave and a free

man; I perceive what is right, I love it, and I do what is wrong; I am active when I listen to the voice of reason; I am passive when I am carried away by my passions; and when I yield, my worst suffering is the knowledge that I might have resisted.

Young man, hear me with confidence. I will always be honest with you. If conscience is the creature of prejudice, I am certainly wrong, and there is no such thing as a proof of morality; but if to put oneself first is an inclination natural to man, and if the first sentiment of justice is moreover inborn in the human heart, let those who say man is a simple creature remove these contradictions and I will grant that there is but one substance.

You will note that by this term *substance* I understand generally the being endowed with some primitive quality, apart from all special and secondary modifications. If then all the primitive qualities which are known to us can be united in one and the same being, we should only acknowledge one substance; but if there are qualities which are mutually exclusive, there are as many different substances as there are such exclusions. You will think this over; for my own part, whatever Locke may say, it is enough for me to recognise matter as having merely extension and divisibility to convince myself that it cannot think, and if a philosopher tells me that trees feel and rocks think in vain will he perplex me with his cunning arguments; I merely regard him as a dishonest sophist, who prefers to say that stones have feeling rather than that men have souls.

Suppose a deaf man denies the existence of sounds because he has never heard them. I put before his eyes a stringed instrument and cause it to sound in unison by means of another instrument concealed from him; the deaf man sees the chord vibrate. I tell him, "The sound makes it do that." "Not at all," says he, "the string itself is the cause of the vibration; to vibrate in that way is a quality common to all bodies." "Then show me this vibration in other bodies," I answer, "or at least show me its cause in this string." "I cannot," replies the deaf man; "but because I do not understand how that string vibrates why should I try to explain it by means of your sounds, of which I have not the least idea? It is explaining one obscure fact by means of a cause still more obscure. Make me perceive your sounds; or I say there are no such things."

The more I consider thought and the nature of the human mind, the more likeness I find between the arguments of the materialists and those of the deaf man. Indeed, they are deaf to the inner voice which cries aloud to them, in a tone which can hardly be mistaken. A machine does not think, there is neither movement nor form which can produce reflection; something within thee tries to break the bands which confine it; space is not thy measure, the whole universe does not suffice to contain thee; thy sentiments, thy desires, thy anxiety, thy pride itself, have another origin than this small body in which thou art imprisoned.

No material creature is in itself active, and I am active. In vain do you argue this point with me; I feel it, and it is this feeling which speaks to me more forcibly than the reason which disputes it. I have a body which is acted upon by other bodies, and it acts in turn upon them; there is no doubt about this reciprocal action; but my will is independent of my senses; I consent or I resist; I yield or I win the victory, and I know very well in myself when I have done what I wanted and when I have merely given way to my passions. I have always the power to will, but not always the strength to do what I will. When I yield to temptation I surrender myself to the action of external objects. When I blame myself for this weakness, I listen to my own will alone; I am a slave in my vices, a free man in my remorse; the feeling of freedom

is never effaced in me but when I myself do wrong, and when I at length prevent the voice of the soul from protesting against the authority of the body.

I am only aware of will through the consciousness of my own will, and intelligence is no better known to me. When you ask me what is the cause which determines my will, it is my turn to ask what cause determines my judgment; for it is plain that these two causes are but one; and if you understand clearly that man is active in his judgments, that his intelligence is only the power to compare and judge, you will see that his freedom is only a similar power or one derived from this; he chooses between good and evil as he judges between truth and falsehood; if his judgment is at fault, he chooses amiss. What then is the cause that determines his will? It is his judgment. And what is the cause that determines his judgment? It is his intelligence, his power of judging; the determining cause is in himself. Beyond that, I understand nothing.

No doubt I am not free not to desire my own welfare, I am not free to desire my own hurt; but my freedom consists in this very thing, that I can will what is for my own good, or what I esteem as such, without any external compulsion. Does it follow that I am not my own master because I cannot be other than myself?

The motive power of all action is in the will of a free creature; we can go no farther. It is not the word freedom that is meaningless, but the word necessity. To suppose some action which is not the effect of an active motive power is indeed to suppose effects without cause, to reason in a vicious circle. Either there is no original impulse, or every original impulse has no antecedent cause, and there is no will properly so-called without freedom. Man is therefore free to act, and as such he is animated by an immaterial substance; that is the third article of my creed. From these three you will easily deduce the rest, so that I need not enumerate them.

If man is at once active and free, he acts of his own accord; what he does freely is no part of the system marked out by Providence and it cannot be imputed to Providence. Providence does not will the evil that man does when he misuses the freedom given to him; neither does Providence prevent him doing it, either because the wrong done by so feeble a creature is as nothing in its eyes, or because it could not prevent it without doing a greater wrong and degrading his nature. Providence has made him free that he may choose the good and refuse the evil. It has made him capable of this choice if he uses rightly the faculties bestowed upon him, but it has so strictly limited his powers that the misuse of his freedom cannot disturb the general order. The evil that man does reacts upon himself without affecting the system of the world, without preventing the preservation of the human species in spite of itself. To complain that God does not prevent us from doing wrong is to complain because he has made man of so excellent a nature, that he has endowed his actions with that morality by which they are ennobled, that he has made virtue man's birthright. Supreme happiness consists in self-content; that we may gain this self-content we are placed upon this earth and endowed with freedom, we are tempted by our passions and restrained by conscience. What more could divine power itself have done on our behalf? Could it have made our nature a contradiction, and have given the prize of well-doing to one who was incapable of evil? To prevent a man from wickedness, should Providence have restricted him to instinct and made him a fool? Not so, O God of my soul, I will never reproach thee that thou hast created me in thine own image, that I may be free and good and happy like my Maker!

It is the abuse of our powers that makes us unhappy and wicked. Our cares, our sorrows, our sufferings are of our own making. Moral ills are undoubtedly the work

of man, and physical ills would be nothing but for our vices which have made us liable to them. Has not nature made us feel our needs as a means to our preservation? Is not bodily suffering a sign that the machine is out of order and needs attention? Death. ... Do not the wicked poison their own life and ours? Who would wish to live for ever? Death is the cure for the evils you bring upon yourself; nature would not have you suffer perpetually. How few sufferings are felt by man living in a state of primitive simplicity! His life is almost entirely free from suffering and from passion; he neither fears nor feels death; if he feels it, his sufferings make him desire it; henceforth it is no evil in his eyes. If we were but content to be ourselves we should have no cause to complain of our lot; but in the search for an imaginary good we find a thousand real ills. He who cannot bear a little pain must expect to suffer greatly. If a man injures his constitution by dissipation, you try to cure him with medicine; the ill he fears is added to the ill he feels; the thought of death makes it horrible and hastens its approach; the more we seek to escape from it, the more we are aware of it; and we go through life in the fear of death, blaming nature for the evils we have inflicted on ourselves by our neglect of her laws.

O Man! seek no further for the author of evil; thou art he. There is no evil but the evil you do or the evil you suffer, and both come from yourself. Evil in general can only spring from disorder, and in the order of the world I find a never-failing system. Evil in particular cases exists only in the mind of those who experience it; and this feeling is not the gift of nature, but the work of man himself. Pain has little power over those who, having thought little, look neither before nor after. Take away our fatal progress, take away our faults and our vices, take away man's handiwork, and all is well.

Where all is well, there is no such thing as injustice. Justice and goodness are inseparable; now goodness is the necessary result of boundless power and of that self-love which is innate in all sentient beings. The omnipotent projects himself, so to speak, into the being of his creatures. Creation and preservation are the everlasting work of power; it does not act on that which has no existence; God is not the God of the dead; he could not harm and destroy without injury to himself. The omnipotent can only will what is good. Therefore he who is supremely good, because he is supremely powerful, must also be supremely just, otherwise he would contradict himself; for that love of order which creates order we call goodness and that love of order which preserves order we call justice.

Men say God owes nothing to his creatures. I think he owes them all he promised when he gave them their being. Now to give them the idea of something good and to make them feel the need of it, is to promise it to them. The more closely I study myself, the more carefully I consider, the more plainly do I read these words, "Be just and you will be happy." It is not so, however, in the present condition of things, the wicked prospers and the oppression of the righteous continues. Observe how angry we are when this expectation is disappointed. Conscience revolts and murmurs against her Creator; she exclaims with cries and groans, "Thou hast deceived me."

"I have deceived thee, rash soul! Who told thee this? Is thy soul destroyed? Hast thou ceased to exist? O Brutus! O my son! let there be no stain upon the close of thy noble life; do not abandon thy hope and thy glory with thy corpse upon the plains of Philippi. Why dost thou say, 'Virtue is naught,' when thou art about to enjoy the reward of virtue? Thou art about to die! Nay, thou shalt live, and thus my promise is fulfilled."

One might judge from the complaints of impatient men that God owes them the reward before they have deserved it, that he is bound to pay for virtue in advance. Oh! let us first be good and then we shall be happy. Let us not claim the prize before we have won it, nor demand our wages before we have finished our work. "It is not in the lists that we crown the victors in the sacred games," says Plutarch, "it is when they have finished their course."

If the soul is immaterial, it may survive the body; and if it so survives, Providence is justified. Had I no other proof of the immaterial nature of the soul, the triumph of the wicked and the oppression of the righteous in this world would be enough to convince me. I should seek to resolve so appalling a discord in the universal harmony. I should say to myself, "All is not over with life, everything finds its place at death." I should still have to answer the question, "What becomes of man when all we know of him through our senses has vanished?" This question no longer presents any difficulty to me when I admit the two substances. It is easy to understand that what is imperceptible to those senses escapes me, during my bodily life, when I perceive through my senses only. When the union of soul and body is destroyed, I think one may be dissolved and the other may be preserved. Why should the destruction of the one imply the destruction of the other? On the contrary, so unlike in their nature, they were during their union in a highly unstable condition, and when this union comes to an end they both return to their natural state; the active vital substance regains all the force which it expended to set in motion the passive dead substance. Alas! my vices make me only too well aware that man is but half alive during this life; the life of the soul only begins with the death of the body.

But what is that life? Is the soul of man in its nature immortal? I know not. My finite understanding cannot hold the infinite; what is called eternity eludes my grasp. What can I assert or deny, how can I reason with regard to what I cannot conceive? I believe that the soul survives the body for the maintenance of order; who knows if this is enough to make it eternal? However, I know that the body is worn out and destroyed by the division of its parts, but I cannot conceive a similar destruction of the conscious nature, and as I cannot imagine how it can die, I presume that it does not die. As this assumption is consoling and in itself not unreasonable, why should I fear to accept it?

I am aware of my soul; it is known to me in feeling and in thought; I know what it is without knowing its essence; I cannot reason about ideas which are unknown to me. What I do know is this, that my personal identity depends upon memory, and that to be indeed the same self I must remember that I have existed. Now after death I could not recall what I was when alive unless I also remembered what I felt and therefore what I did; and I have no doubt that this remembrance will one day form the happiness of the good and the torment of the bad. In this world our inner consciousness is absorbed by the crowd of eager passions which cheat remorse. The humiliation and disgrace involved in the practice of virtue do not permit us to realise its charm. But when, freed from the illusions of the bodily senses, we behold with joy the supreme Being and the eternal truths which flow from him; when all the powers of our soul are alive to the beauty of order and we are wholly occupied in comparing what we have done with what we ought to have done, then it is that the voice of conscience will regain its strength and sway; then it is that the pure delight which springs from self-content, and the sharp regret for our own degradation of that self, will decide by means of overpowering feeling what shall be the fate which each has prepared for himself. My good friend, do not ask me whether there are other sources of happiness or suffering; I cannot tell; that which my fancy pictures is

enough to console me in this life and to bid me look for a life to come. I do not say the good will be rewarded, for what greater good can a truly good being expect than to exist in accordance with his nature? But I do assert that the good will be happy, because their maker, the author of all justice, who has made them capable of feeling, has not made them that they may suffer; moreover, they have not abused their freedom upon earth and they have not changed their fate through any fault of their own; yet they have suffered in this life and it will be made up to them in the life to come. This feeling relies not so much on man's deserts as on the idea of good which seems to me inseparable from the divine essence. I only assume that the laws of order are constant and that God is true to himself.

Do not ask me whether the torments of the wicked will endure for ever, whether the goodness of their creator can condemn them to the eternal suffering; again, I cannot tell, and I have no empty curiosity for the investigation of useless problems. How does the fate of the wicked concern me? I take little interest in it. All the same I find it hard to believe that they will be condemned to everlasting torments. If the supreme justice calls for vengeance, it claims it in this life. The nations of the world with their errors are its ministers. Justice uses self-inflicted ills to punish the crimes which have deserved them. It is in your own insatiable souls, devoured by envy, greed, and ambition, it is in the midst of your false prosperity, that the avenging passions find the due reward of your crimes. What need to seek a hell in the future life? It is here in the breast of the wicked.

When our fleeting needs are over, and our mad desires are at rest, there should also be an end of our passions and our crimes. Can pure spirits be capable of any perversity? Having need of nothing, why should they be wicked? If they are free from our gross senses, if their happiness consists in the contemplation of other beings, they can only desire what is good; and he who ceases to be bad can never be miserable. This is what I am inclined to think though I have not been at the pains to come to any decision. O God, merciful and good, whatever thy decrees may be I adore them; if thou shouldst commit the wicked to everlasting punishment, I abandon my feeble reason to thy justice; but if the remorse of these wretched beings should in the course of time be extinguished, if their sufferings should come to an end, and if the same peace shall one day be the lot of all mankind, I give thanks to thee for this. Is not the wicked my brother? How often have I been tempted to be like him? Let him be delivered from his misery and freed from the spirit of hatred that accompanied it; let him be as happy as I myself; his happiness, far from arousing my jealousy, will only increase my own.

Thus it is that, in the contemplation of God in his works, and in the study of such of his attributes as it concerned me to know, I have slowly grasped and developed the idea, at first partial and imperfect, which I have formed of this Infinite Being. But if this idea has become nobler and greater it is also more suited to the human reason. As I approach in spirit the eternal light, I am confused and dazzled by its glory, and compelled to abandon all the earthly notions which helped me to picture it to myself. God is no longer corporeal and sensible; the supreme mind which rules the world is no longer the world itself; in vain do I strive to grasp his inconceivable essence. When I think that it is he that gives life and movement to the living and moving substance which controls all living bodies; when I hear it said that my soul is spiritual and that God is a spirit, I revolt against this abasement of the divine essence; as if God and my soul were of one and the same nature! As if God were not the one and only absolute being, the only really active, feeling, thinking, willing being, from whom we derive our thought, feeling, motion, will, our freedom and our very

existence! We are free because he wills our freedom, and his inexplicable substance is to our souls what our souls are to our bodies. I know not whether he has created matter, body, soul, the world itself. The idea of creation confounds me and eludes my grasp; so far as I can conceive of it I believe it; but I know that he has formed the universe and all that is, that he has made and ordered all things. No doubt God is eternal; but can my mind grasp the idea of eternity? Why should I cheat myself with meaningless words? This is what I do understand; before things were—God was; he will be when they are no more, and if all things come to an end he will still endure. That a being beyond my comprehension should give life to other beings, this is merely difficult and beyond my understanding; but that Being and Nothing should be convertible terms, this is indeed a palpable contradiction, an evident absurdity.

God is intelligent, but how? Man is intelligent when he reasons, but the Supreme Intelligence does not need to reason; there is neither premise nor conclusion for him, there is not even a proposition. The Supreme Intelligence is wholly intuitive, it sees what is and what shall be; all truths are one for it, as all places are but one point and all time but one moment. Man's power makes use of means, the divine power is self-active. God can because he wills; his will is his power. God is good; this is certain; but man finds his happiness in the welfare of his kind, God's happiness consists in the love of order; for it is through order that he maintains what is, and unites each part in the whole. God is just; of this I am sure, it is a consequence of his goodness; man's injustice is not God's work, but his own; that moral justice which seems to the philosophers a presumption against Providence, is to me a proof of its existence. But man's justice consists in giving to each his due; God's justice consists in demanding from each of us an account of that which he has given us.

If I have succeeded in discerning these attributes of which I have no absolute idea, it is in the form of unavoidable deductions, and by the right use of my reason; but I affirm them without understanding them, and at bottom that is no affirmation at all. In vain do I say, God is thus, I feel it, I experience it, none the more do I understand how God can be thus.

In a word: the more I strive to envisage his infinite essence the less do I comprehend it; but it is, and that is enough for me; the less I understand, the more I adore. I abase myself, saying, "Being of beings, I am because thou art; to fix my thoughts on thee is to ascend to the source of my being. The best use I can make of my reason is to resign it before thee; my mind delights, my weakness rejoices, to feel myself overwhelmed by thy greatness."

Having thus deduced from the perception of objects of sense and from my inner consciousness, which leads me to judge of causes by my native reason, the principal truths which I require to know, I must now seek such principles of conduct as I can draw from them, and such rules as I must lay down for my guidance in the fulfilment of my destiny in this world, according to the purpose of my Maker. Still following the same method, I do not derive these rules from the principles of the higher philosophy, I find them in the depths of my heart, traced by nature in characters which nothing can efface. I need only consult myself with regard to what I wish to do; what I feel to be right is right, what I feel to be wrong is wrong; conscience is the best casuist; and it is only when we haggle with conscience that we have recourse to the subtleties of argument. Our first duty is towards ourself; yet how often does the voice of others tell us that in seeking our good at the expense of others we are doing ill? We think we are following the guidance of nature, and we are resisting it; we listen to what she says to our senses, and we neglect what she says to our heart; the

active being obeys, the passive commands. Conscience is the voice of the soul, the passions are the voice of the body. Is it strange that these voices often contradict each other? And then to which should we give heed? Too often does reason deceive us; we have only too good a right to doubt her; but conscience never deceives us; she is the true guide of man; it is to the soul what instinct is to the body; he who obeys his conscience is following nature and he need not fear that he will go astray. This is a matter of great importance, continued my benefactor, seeing that I was about to interrupt him; let me stop awhile to explain it more fully.

The morality of our actions consists entirely in the judgments we ourselves form with regard to them. If good is good, it must be good in the depth of our heart as well as in our actions; and the first reward of justice is the consciousness that we are acting justly. If moral goodness is in accordance with our nature, man can only be healthy in mind and body when he is good. If it is not so, and if man is by nature evil, he cannot cease to be evil without corrupting his nature, and goodness in him is a crime against nature. If he is made to do harm to his fellow-creatures, as the wolf is made to devour his prey, a humane man would be as depraved a creature as a pitiful wolf; and virtue alone would cause remorse.

My young friend, let us look within, let us set aside all personal prejudices and see whither our inclinations lead us. Do we take more pleasure in the sight of the sufferings of others or their joys? Is it pleasanter to do a kind action or an unkind action, and which leaves the more delightful memory behind it? Why do you enjoy the theatre? Do you delight in the crimes you behold? Do you weep over the punishment which overtakes the criminal? They say we are indifferent to everything but self-interest; yet we find our consolation in our sufferings in the charms of friendship and humanity, and even in our pleasures we should be too lonely and miserable if we had no one to share them with us. If there is no such thing as morality in man's heart, what is the source of his rapturous admiration of noble deeds, his passionate devotion to great men? What connection is there between self-interest and this enthusiasm for virtue? Why should I choose to be Cato dying by his own hand, rather than Cæsar in his triumphs? Take from our hearts this love of what is noble and you rob us of the joy of life. The mean-spirited man in whom these delicious feelings have been stifled among vile passions, who by thinking of no one but himself comes at last to love no one but himself, this man feels no raptures, his cold heart no longer throbs with joy, and his eyes no longer fill with the sweet tears of sympathy, he delights in nothing; the wretch has neither life nor feeling, he is already dead.

There are many bad men in this world, but there are few of these dead souls, alive only to self-interest, and insensible to all that is right and good. We only delight in injustice so long as it is to our own advantage; in every other case we wish the innocent to be protected. If we see some act of violence or injustice in town or country, our hearts are at once stirred to their depths by an instinctive anger and wrath, which bids us go to the help of the oppressed; but we are restrained by a stronger duty, and the law deprives us of our right to protect the innocent. On the other hand, if some deed of mercy or generosity meets our eye, what reverence and love does it inspire! Do we not say to ourselves, "I should like to have done that myself"? What does it matter to us that two thousand years ago a man was just or unjust? and yet we take the same interest in ancient history as if it happened yesterday. What are the crimes of Cataline to me? I shall not be his victim. Why then have I the same horror of his crimes as if he were living now? We do not hate the wicked merely because of the harm they do to ourselves, but because they are

wicked. Not only do we wish to be happy ourselves, we wish others to be happy too, and if this happiness does not interfere with our own happiness, it increases it. In conclusion, whether we will or not, we pity the unfortunate; when we see their suffering we suffer too. Even the most depraved are not wholly without this instinct, and it often leads them to self-contradiction. The highwayman who robs the traveller, clothes the nakedness of the poor; the fiercest murderer supports a fainting man.

Men speak of the voice of remorse, the secret punishment of hidden crimes, by which such are often brought to light. Alas! who does not know its unwelcome voice? We speak from experience, and we would gladly stifle this imperious feeling which causes us such agony. Let us obey the call of nature; we shall see that her yoke is easy and that when we give heed to her voice we find a joy in the answer of a good conscience. The wicked fears and flees from her; he delights to escape from himself; his anxious eyes look around him for some object of diversion; without bitter satire and rude mockery he would always be sorrowful; the scornful laugh is his one pleasure. Not so the just man, who finds his peace within himself; there is joy not malice in his laughter, a joy which springs from his own heart; he is as cheerful alone as in company, his satisfaction does not depend on those who approach him; it includes them.

Cast your eyes over every nation of the world; peruse every volume of its history; in the midst of all these strange and cruel forms of worship, among this amazing variety of manners and customs, you will everywhere find the same ideas of right and justice; everywhere the same principles of morality, the same ideas of good and evil. The old paganism gave birth to abominable gods who would have been punished as scoundrels here below, gods who merely offered, as a picture of supreme happiness, crimes to be committed and lust to be gratified. But in vain did vice descend from the abode of the gods armed with their sacred authority; the moral instinct refused to admit it into the heart of man. While the debaucheries of Jupiter were celebrated, the continence of Xenocrates was revered; the chaste Lucrece adored the shameless Venus; the bold Roman offered sacrifices to Fear; he invoked the god who mutilated his father, and he died without a murmur at the hand of his own father. The most unworthy gods were worshipped by the noblest men. The sacred voice of nature was stronger than the voice of the gods, and won reverence upon earth; it seemed to relegate guilt and the guilty alike to heaven.

There is therefore at the bottom of our hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue, by which, in spite of our maxims, we judge our own actions or those of others to be good or evil; and it is this principle that I call conscience.

But at this word I hear the murmurs of all the wise men so-called. Childish errors, prejudices of our upbringing, they exclaim in concert! There is nothing in the human mind but what it has gained by experience; and we judge everything solely by means of the ideas we have acquired. They go further; they even venture to reject the clear and universal agreement of all peoples, and to set against this striking unanimity in the judgment of mankind, they seek out some obscure exception known to themselves alone; as if the whole trend of nature were rendered null by the depravity of a single nation, and as if the existence of monstrosities made an end of species. But to what purpose does the sceptic Montaigne strive himself to unearth in some obscure corner of the world a custom which is contrary to the ideas of justice? To what purpose does he credit the most untrustworthy travellers, while he refuses to believe the greatest writers? A few strange and doubtful customs, based on local

causes, unknown to us; shall these destroy a general inference based on the agreement of all the nations of the earth, differing from each other in all else, but agreed in this? O Montaigne, you pride yourself on your truth and honesty; be sincere and truthful, if a philosopher can be so, and tell me if there is any country upon earth where it is a crime to keep one's plighted word, to be merciful, helpful, and generous, where the good man is scorned, and the traitor is held in honour.

Self-interest, so they say, induces each of us to agree for the common good. But how is it that the good man consents to this to his own hurt? Does a man go to death from self-interest? No doubt each man acts for his own good, but if there is no such thing as moral good to be taken into consideration, self-interest will only enable you to account for the deeds of the wicked; possibly you will not attempt to do more. A philosophy which could find no place for good deeds would be too detestable; you would find yourself compelled either to find some mean purpose, some wicked motive, or to abuse Socrates and slander Regulus. If such doctrines ever took root among us, the voice of nature, together with the voice of reason, would constantly protest against them, till no adherent of such teaching could plead an honest excuse for his partisanship.

It is no part of my scheme to enter at present into metaphysical discussions which neither you nor I can understand, discussions which really lead nowhere. I have told you already that I do not wish to philosophise with you, but to help you to consult your own heart. If all the philosophers in the world should prove that I am wrong, and you feel that I am right, that is all I ask.

For this purpose it is enough to lead you to distinguish between our acquired ideas and our natural feelings; for feeling precedes knowledge; and since we do not learn to seek what is good for us and avoid what is bad for us, but get this desire from nature, in the same way the love of good and the hatred of evil are as natural to us as our self-love. The decrees of conscience are not judgments but feelings. Although all our ideas come from without, the feelings by which they are weighed are within us, and it is by these feelings alone that we perceive fitness or unfitness of things in relation to ourselves, which leads us to seek or shun these things.

To exist is to feel; our feeling is undoubtedly earlier than our intelligence, and we had feelings before we had ideas. Whatever may be the cause of our being, it has provided for our preservation by giving us feelings suited to our nature; and no one can deny that these at least are innate. These feelings, so far as the individual is concerned, are self-love, fear, pain, the dread of death, the desire for comfort. Again, if, as it is impossible to doubt, man is by nature sociable, or at least fitted to become sociable, he can only be so by means of other innate feelings, relative to his kind; for if only physical well-being were considered, men would certainly be scattered rather than brought together. But the motive power of conscience is derived from the moral system formed through this twofold relation to himself and to his fellow-men. To know good is not to love it; this knowledge is not innate in man; but as soon as his reason leads him to perceive it, his conscience impels him to love it; it is this feeling which is innate.

So I do not think, my young friend, that it is impossible to explain the immediate force of conscience as a result of our own nature, independent of reason itself. And even should it be impossible, it is unnecessary; for those who deny this principle, admitted and received by everybody else in the world, do not prove that there is no such thing; they are content to affirm, and when we affirm its existence we have quite as good grounds as they, while we have moreover the witness within us, the

voice of conscience, which speaks on its own behalf. If the first beams of judgment dazzle us and confuse the objects we behold, let us wait till our feeble sight grows clear and strong, and in the light of reason we shall soon behold these very objects as nature has already showed them to us. Or rather let us be simpler and less pretentious; let us be content with the first feelings we experience in ourselves, since science always brings us back to these, unless it has led us astray.

Conscience! Conscience! Divine instinct, immortal voice from heaven; sure guide for a creature ignorant and finite indeed, yet intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and evil, making man like to God! In thee consists the excellence of man's nature and the morality of his actions; apart from thee, I find nothing in myself to raise me above the beasts—nothing but the sad privilege of wandering from one error to another, by the help of an unbridled understanding and a reason which knows no principle.

Thank heaven we have now got rid of all that alarming show of philosophy; we may be men without being scholars; now that we need not spend our life in the study of morality, we have found a less costly and surer guide through this vast labyrinth of human thought. But it is not enough to be aware that there is such a guide; we must know her and follow her. If she speaks to all hearts, how is it that so few give heed to her voice? She speaks to us in the language of nature, and everything leads us to forget that tongue. Conscience is timid, she loves peace and retirement; she is startled by noise and numbers; the prejudices from which she is said to arise are her worst enemies. She flees before them or she is silent; their noisy voices drown her words, so that she cannot get a hearing; fanaticism dares to counterfeit her voice and to inspire crimes in her name. She is discouraged by ill-treatment; she no longer speaks to us, no longer answers to our call; when she has been scorned so long, it is as hard to recall her as it was to banish her.

How often in the course of my inquiries have I grown weary of my own coldness of heart! How often have grief and weariness poured their poison into my first meditations and made them hateful to me! My barren heart yielded nothing but a feeble zeal and a lukewarm love of truth. I said to myself: Why should I strive to find what does not exist? Moral good is a dream, the pleasures of sense are the only real good. When once we have lost the taste for the pleasures of the soul, how hard it is to recover it! How much more difficult to acquire it if we have never possessed it! If there were any man so wretched as never to have done anything all his life long which he could remember with pleasure, and which would make him glad to have lived, that man would be incapable of self-knowledge, and for want of knowledge of goodness, of which his nature is capable, he would be constrained to remain in his wickedness and would be for ever miserable. But do you think there is any one man upon earth so depraved that he has never yielded to the temptation of well-doing? This temptation is so natural, so pleasant, that it is impossible always to resist it; and the thought of the pleasure it has once afforded is enough to recall it constantly to our memory. Unluckily it is hard at first to find satisfaction for it; we have any number of reasons for refusing to follow the inclinations of our heart; prudence, so called, restricts the heart within the limits of the self; a thousand efforts are needed to break these bonds. The joy of well-doing is the prize of having done well, and we must deserve the prize before we win it. There is nothing sweeter than virtue; but we do not know this till we have tried it. Like Proteus in the fable, she first assumes a thousand terrible shapes when we would embrace her, and only shows her true self to those who refuse to let her go.

Ever at strife between my natural feelings, which spoke of the common weal, and my reason, which spoke of self, I should have drifted through life in perpetual uncertainty, hating, evil, loving good, and always at war with myself, if my heart had not received further light, if that truth which determined my opinions had not also settled my conduct, and set me at peace with myself. Reason alone is not a sufficient foundation for virtue; what solid ground can be found? Virtue we are told is love of order. But can this love prevail over my love for my own well-being, and ought it so to prevail? Let them give me clear and sufficient reason for this preference. Their so-called principle is in truth a mere playing with words; for I also say that vice is love of order, differently understood. Wherever there is feeling and intelligence, there is some sort of moral order. The difference is this: the good man orders his life with regard to all men; the wicked orders it for self alone. The latter centres all things, round himself; the other measures his radius and remains on the circumference. Thus his place depends on the common centre, which is God, and on all the concentric circles which are His creatures. If there is no God, the wicked is right and the good man is nothing but a fool.

My child! May you one day feel what a burden is removed when, having fathomed the vanity of human thoughts and tasted the bitterness of passion, you find at length near at hand the path of wisdom, the prize of this life's labours, the source of that happiness which you despaired of. Every duty of natural law, which man's injustice had almost effaced from my heart, is engraven there, for the second time in the name of that eternal justice which lays these duties upon me and beholds my fulfilment of them. I feel myself merely the instrument of the Omnipotent, who wills what is good, who performs it, who will bring about my own good through the co-operation of my will with his own, and by the right use of my liberty. I acquiesce in the order he establishes, certain that one day I shall enjoy that order and find my happiness in it; for what sweeter joy is there than this, to feel oneself a part of a system where all is good? A prey to pain, I bear it in patience, remembering that it will soon be over, and that it results from a body which is not mine. If I do a good deed in secret, I know that it is seen, and my conduct in this life is a pledge of the life to come. When I suffer injustice, I say to myself, the Almighty who does all things well will reward me: my bodily needs, my poverty, make the idea of death less intolerable. There will be all the fewer bonds to be broken when my hour comes.

Why is my soul subjected to my senses, and imprisoned in this body by which it is enslaved and thwarted? I know not; have I entered into the counsels of the Almighty? But I may, without rashness, venture on a modest conjecture. I say to myself: If man's soul had remained in a state of freedom and innocence, what merit would there have been in loving and obeying the order he found established, an order which it would not have been to his advantage to disturb? He would be happy, no doubt, but his happiness would not attain to the highest point, the pride of virtue, and the witness of a good conscience within him; he would be but as the angels are, and no doubt the good man will be more than they. Bound to a mortal body, by bonds as strange as they are powerful, his care for the preservation of this body tempts the soul to think only of self, and gives it an interest opposed to the general order of things, which it is still capable of knowing and loving; then it is that the right use of his freedom becomes at once the merit and the reward; then it is that it prepares for itself unending happiness, by resisting its earthly passions and following its original direction.

If even in the lowly position in which we are placed during our present life our first impulses are always good, if all our vices are of our own making, why should we

complain that they are our masters? Why should we blame the Creator for the ills we have ourselves created, and the enemies we ourselves have armed against us? Oh, let us leave man unspoilt; he will always find it easy to be good and he will always be happy without remorse. The guilty, who assert that they are driven to crime, are liars as well as evil-doers; how is it that they fail to perceive that the weakness they bewail is of their own making; that their earliest depravity was the result of their own will; that by dint of wishing to yield to temptations, they at length yield to them whether they will or no and make them irresistible? No doubt they can no longer avoid being weak and wicked, but they need not have become weak and wicked. Oh, how easy would it be to preserve control of ourselves and of our passions, even in this life, if with habits still unformed, with a mind beginning to expand, we were able to keep to such things as we ought to know, in order to value rightly what is unknown; if we really wished to learn, not that we might shine before the eyes of others, but that we might be wise and good in accordance with our nature, that we might be happy in the performance of our duty. This study seems tedious and painful to us, for we do not attempt it till we are already corrupted by vice and enslaved by our passions. Our judgments and our standards of worth are determined before we have the knowledge of good and evil; and then we measure all things by this false standard, and give nothing its true worth.

There is an age when the heart is still free, but eager, unquiet, greedy of a happiness which is still unknown, a happiness which it seeks in curiosity and doubt; deceived by the senses it settles at length upon the empty show of happiness and thinks it has found it where it is not. In my own case these illusions endured for a long time. Alas! too late did I become aware of them, and I have not succeeded in overcoming them altogether; they will last as long as this mortal body from which they arise. If they lead me astray, I am at least no longer deceived by them; I know them for what they are, and even when I give way to them, I despise myself; far from regarding them as the goal of my happiness, I behold in them an obstacle to it. I long for the time when, freed from the fetters of the body, I shall be myself, at one with myself, no longer torn in two, when I myself shall suffice for my own happiness. Meanwhile I am happy even in this life, for I make small account of all its evils, in which I regard myself as having little or no part, while all the real good that I can get out of this life depends on myself alone.

To raise myself so far as may be even now to this state of happiness, strength, and freedom, I exercise myself in lofty contemplation. I consider the order of the universe, not to explain it by any futile system, but to revere it without ceasing, to adore the wise Author who reveals himself in it. I hold intercourse with him; I immerse all my powers in his divine essence; I am overwhelmed by his kindness, I bless him and his gifts, but I do not pray to him. What should I ask of him—to change the order of nature, to work miracles on my behalf? Should I, who am bound to love above all things the order which he has established in his wisdom and maintained by his providence, should I desire the disturbance of that order on my own account? No, that rash prayer would deserve to be punished rather than to be granted. Neither do I ask of him the power to do right; why should I ask what he has given me already? Has he not given me conscience that I may love the right, reason that I may perceive it, and freedom that I may choose it? If I do evil, I have no excuse; I do it of my own free will; to ask him to change my will is to ask him to do what he asks of me; it is to want him to do the work while I get the wages; to be dissatisfied with my lot is to wish to be no longer a man, to wish to be other than what I am, to wish for disorder and evil. Thou source of justice and truth, merciful

and gracious God, in thee do I trust, and the desire of my heart is—Thy will be done. When I unite my will with thine, I do what thou doest; I have a share in thy goodness; I believe that I enjoy beforehand the supreme happiness which is the reward of goodness.

In my well-founded self-distrust the only thing that I ask of God, or rather expect from his justice, is to correct my error if I go astray, if that error is dangerous to me. To be honest I need not think myself infallible; my opinions, which seem to me true, may be so many lies; for what man is there who does not cling to his own beliefs; and how many men are agreed in everything? The illusion which deceives me may indeed have its source in myself, but it is God alone who can remove it. I have done all I can to attain to truth; but its source is beyond my reach; is it my fault if my strength fails me and I can go no further; it is for Truth to draw near to me.

The good priest had spoken with passion; he and I were overcome with emotion. It seemed to me as if I were listening to the divine Orpheus when he sang the earliest hymns and taught men the worship of the gods. I saw any number of objections which might be raised; yet I raised none, for I perceived that they were more perplexing than serious, and that my inclination took his part. When he spoke to me according to his conscience, my own seemed to confirm what he said.

“The novelty of the sentiments you have made known to me,” said I, “strikes me all the more because of what you confess you do not know, than because of what you say you believe. They seem to me very like that theism or natural religion, which Christians profess to confound with atheism or irreligion which is their exact opposite. But in the present state of my faith I should have to ascend rather than descend to accept your views, and I find it difficult to remain just where you are unless I were as wise as you. That I may be at least as honest, I want time to take counsel with myself. By your own showing, the inner voice must be my guide, and you have yourself told me that when it has long been silenced it cannot be recalled in a moment. I take what you have said to heart, and I must consider it. If after I have thought things out, I am as convinced as you are, you will be my final teacher, and I will be your disciple till death. Continue your teaching however; you have only told me half what I must know. Speak to me of revelation, of the Scriptures, of those difficult doctrines among which I have strayed ever since I was a child, incapable either of understanding or believing them, unable to adopt or reject them.”

“Yes, my child,” said he, embracing me, “I will tell you all I think; I will not open my heart to you by halves; but the desire you express was necessary before I could cast aside all reserve. So far I have told you nothing but what I thought would be of service to you, nothing but what I was quite convinced of. The inquiry which remains to be made is very different. It seems to me full of perplexity, mystery, and darkness; I bring to it only doubt and distrust. I make up my mind with trembling, and I tell you my doubts rather than my convictions. If your own opinions were more settled I should hesitate to show you mine; but in your present condition, to think like me would be gain. Moreover, give to my words only the authority of reason; I know not whether I am mistaken. It is difficult in discussion to avoid assuming sometimes a dogmatic tone; but remember in this respect that all my assertions are but reasons to doubt me. Seek truth for yourself; for my own part I only promise you sincerity.

“In my exposition you find nothing but natural religion; strange that we should need more! How shall I become aware of this need? What guilt can be mine so long as I serve God according to the knowledge he has given to my mind, and the feelings he

has put into my heart? What purity of morals, what dogma useful to man and worthy of its author, can I derive from a positive doctrine which cannot be derived without the aid of this doctrine by the right use of my faculties? Show me what you can add to the duties of the natural law, for the glory of God, for the good of mankind, and for my own welfare; and what virtue you will get from the new form of religion which does not result from mine. The grandest ideas of the Divine nature come to us from reason only. Behold the spectacle of nature; listen to the inner voice. Has not God spoken it all to our eyes, to our conscience, to our reason? What more can man tell us? Their revelations do but degrade God, by investing him with passions like our own. Far from throwing light upon the ideas of the Supreme Being, special doctrines seem to me to confuse these ideas; far from ennobling them, they degrade them; to the inconceivable mysteries which surround the Almighty, they add absurd contradictions, they make man proud, intolerant, and cruel; instead of bringing peace upon earth, they bring fire and sword. I ask myself what is the use of it all, and I find no answer. I see nothing but the crimes of men and the misery of mankind.

“They tell me a revelation was required to teach men how God would be served; as a proof of this they point to the many strange rites which men have instituted, and they do not perceive that this very diversity springs from the fanciful nature of the revelations. As soon as the nations took to making God speak, every one made him speak in his own fashion, and made him say what he himself wanted. Had they listened only to what God says in the heart of man, there would have been but one religion upon earth.

“One form of worship was required; just so, but was this a matter of such importance as to require all the power of the Godhead to establish it? Do not let us confuse the outward forms of religion with religion itself. The service God requires is of the heart; and when the heart is sincere that is ever the same. It is a strange sort of conceit which fancies that God takes such an interest in the shape of the priest’s vestments, the form of words he utters, the gestures he makes before the altar and all his genuflections. Oh, my friend, stand upright, you will still be too near the earth. God desires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; this duty belongs to every religion, every country, every individual. As to the form of worship, if order demands uniformity, that is only a matter of discipline and needs no revelation.

“These thoughts did not come to me to begin with. Carried away by the prejudices of my education, and by that dangerous vanity which always strives to lift man out of his proper sphere, when I could not raise my feeble thoughts up to the great Being, I tried to bring him down to my own level. I tried to reduce the distance he has placed between his nature and mine. I desired more immediate relations, more individual instruction; not content to make God in the image of man that I might be favoured above my fellows, I desired supernatural knowledge; I required a special form of worship; I wanted God to tell me what he had not told others, or what others had not understood like myself.

“Considering the point I had now reached as the common centre from which all believers set out on the quest for a more enlightened form of religion, I merely found in natural religion the elements of all religion. I beheld the multitude of diverse sects which hold sway upon earth, each of which accuses the other of falsehood and error; which of these, I asked, is the right? Every one replied, ‘My own;’ every one said, ‘I alone and those who agree with me think rightly, all the others are mistaken.’ And how do you know that your sect is in the right? Because God said so. And how do you know God said so? And who told you that God said

it? My pastor, who knows all about it. My pastor tells me what to believe and I believe it; he assures me that any one who says anything else is mistaken, and I give no heed to them.

“What! thought I, is not truth one; can that which is true for me be false for you? If those who follow the right path and those who go astray have the same method, what merit or what blame can be assigned to one more than to the other? Their choice is the result of chance; it is unjust to hold them responsible for it, to reward or punish them for being born in one country or another. To dare to say that God judges us in this manner is an outrage on his justice.

“Either all religions are good and pleasing to God, or if there is one which he prescribes for men, if they will be punished for despising it, he will have distinguished it by plain and certain signs by which it can be known as the only true religion; these signs are alike in every time and place, equally plain to all men, great or small, learned or unlearned, Europeans, Indians, Africans, savages. If there were but one religion upon earth, and if all beyond its pale were condemned to eternal punishment, and if there were in any corner of the world one single honest man who was not convinced by this evidence, the God of that religion would be the most unjust and cruel of tyrants.

“Let us therefore seek honestly after truth; let us yield nothing to the claims of birth, to the authority of parents and pastors, but let us summon to the bar of conscience and of reason all that they have taught us from our childhood. In vain do they exclaim, ‘Submit your reason;’ a deceiver might say as much; I must have reasons for submitting my reason.

“All the theology I can get for myself by observation of the universe and by the use of my faculties is contained in what I have already told you. To know more one must have recourse to strange means. These means cannot be the authority of men, for every man is of the same species as myself, and all that a man knows by nature I am capable of knowing, and another may be deceived as much as I; when I believe what he says, it is not because he says it but because he proves its truth. The witness of man is therefore nothing more than the witness of my own reason, and it adds nothing to the natural means which God has given me for the knowledge of truth.

“Apostle of truth, what have you to tell me of which I am not the sole judge? God himself has spoken; give heed to his revelation. That is another matter. God has spoken, these are indeed words which demand attention. To whom has he spoken? He has spoken to men. Why then have I heard nothing? He has instructed others to make known his words to you. I understand; it is men who come and tell me what God has said. I would rather have heard the words of God himself; it would have been as easy for him and I should have been secure from fraud. He protects you from fraud by showing that his envoys come from him. How does he show this? By miracles. Where are these miracles? In the books. And who wrote the books? Men. And who saw the miracles? The men who bear witness to them. What! Nothing but human testimony! Nothing but men who tell me what others told them! How many men between God and me! Let us see, however, let us examine, compare, and verify. Oh! if God had but deigned to free me from all this labour, I would have served him with all my heart.

“Consider, my friend, the terrible controversy in which I am now engaged; what vast learning is required to go back to the remotest antiquity, to examine, weigh, confront prophecies, revelations, facts, all the monuments of faith set forth throughout the

world, to assign their date, place, authorship, and occasion. What exactness of critical judgment is needed to distinguish genuine documents from forgeries, to compare objections with their answers, translations with their originals; to decide as to the impartiality of witnesses, their common-sense, their knowledge; to make sure that nothing has been omitted, nothing added, nothing transposed, altered, or falsified; to point out any remaining contradictions, to determine what weight should be given to the silence of our adversaries with regard to the charges brought against them; how far were they aware of those charges; did they think them sufficiently serious to require an answer; were books sufficiently well known for our books to reach them; have we been honest enough to allow their books to circulate among ourselves and to leave their strongest objections unaltered?

“When the authenticity of all these documents is accepted, we must now pass to the evidence of their authors’ mission; we must know the laws of chance, and probability, to decide which prophecy cannot be fulfilled without a miracle; we must know the spirit of the original languages, to distinguish between prophecy and figures of speech; we must know what facts are in accordance with nature and what facts are not, so that we may say how far a clever man may deceive the eyes of the simple and may even astonish the learned; we must discover what are the characteristics of a prodigy and how its authenticity may be established, not only so far as to gain credence, but so that doubt may be deserving of punishment; we must compare the evidence for true and false miracles, and find sure tests to distinguish between them; lastly we must say why God chose as a witness to his words means which themselves require so much evidence on their behalf, as if he were playing with human credulity, and avoiding of set purpose the true means of persuasion.

“Assuming that the divine majesty condescends so far as to make a man the channel of his sacred will, is it reasonable, is it fair, to demand that the whole of mankind should obey the voice of this minister without making him known as such? Is it just to give him as his sole credentials certain private signs, performed in the presence of a few obscure persons, signs which everybody else can only know by hearsay? If one were to believe all the miracles that the uneducated and credulous profess to have seen in every country upon earth, every sect would be in the right; there would be more miracles than ordinary events; and it would be the greatest miracle if there were no miracles wherever there were persecuted fanatics. The unchangeable order of nature is the chief witness to the wise hand that guides it; if there were many exceptions, I should hardly know what to think; for my own part I have too great a faith in God to believe in so many miracles which are so little worthy of him.

“Let a man come and say to us: Mortals, I proclaim to you the will of the Most Highest; accept my words as those of him who has sent me; I bid the sun to change his course, the stars to range themselves in a fresh order, the high places to become smooth, the floods to rise up, the earth to change her face. By these miracles who will not recognise the master of nature? She does not obey impostors, their miracles are wrought in holes and corners, in deserts, within closed doors, where they find easy dupes among a small company of spectators already disposed to believe them. Who will venture to tell me how many eye-witnesses are required to make a miracle credible? What use are your miracles, performed in proof of your doctrine, if they themselves require so much proof? You might as well have let them alone.

“There still remains the most important inquiry of all with regard to the doctrine proclaimed; for since those who tell us God works miracles in this world, profess that the devil sometimes imitates them, when we have found the best attested

miracles we have got very little further; and since the magicians of Pharaoh dared in the presence of Moses to counterfeit the very signs he wrought at God's command, why should they not, behind his back, claim a like authority? So when we have proved our doctrine by means of miracles, we must prove our miracles by means of doctrine, for fear lest we should take the devil's doings for the handiwork of God. What think you of this dilemma?

"This doctrine, if it comes from God, should bear the sacred stamp of the godhead; not only should it illumine the troubled thoughts which reason imprints on our minds, but it should also offer us a form of worship, a morality, and rules of conduct in accordance with the attributes by means of which we alone conceive of God's essence. If then it teaches us what is absurd and unreasonable, if it inspires us with feelings of aversion for our fellows and terror for ourselves, if it paints us a God, angry, jealous, revengeful, partial, hating men, a God of war and battles, ever ready to strike and to destroy, ever speaking of punishment and torment, boasting even of the punishment of the innocent, my heart would not be drawn towards this terrible God, I would take good care not to quit the realm of natural religion to embrace such a religion as that; for you see plainly I must choose between them. Your God is not ours. He who begins by selecting a chosen people, and proscribing the rest of mankind, is not our common father; he who consigns to eternal punishment the greater part of his creatures, is not the merciful and gracious God revealed to me by my reason.

"Reason tells me that dogmas should be plain, clear, and striking in their simplicity. If there is something lacking in natural religion, it is with respect to the obscurity in which it leaves the great truths it teaches; revelation should teach us these truths in a way which the mind of man can understand; it should bring them within his reach, make him comprehend them, so that he may believe them. Faith is confirmed and strengthened by understanding; the best religion is of necessity the simplest. He who hides beneath mysteries and contradictions the religion that he preaches to me, teaches me at the same time to distrust that religion. The God whom I adore is not the God of darkness, he has not given me understanding in order to forbid me to use it; to tell me to submit my reason is to insult the giver of reason. The minister of truth does not tyrannise over my reason, he enlightens it.

"We have set aside all human authority, and without it I do not see how any man can convince another by preaching a doctrine contrary to reason. Let them fight it out, and let us see what they have to say with that harshness of speech which is common to both.

"*Inspiration.* Reason tells you that the whole is greater than the part; but I tell you, in God's name, that the part is greater than the whole.

"*Reason.* And who are you to dare to tell me that God contradicts himself? And which shall I choose to believe, God who teaches me, through my reason, the eternal truth, or you who, in his name, proclaim an absurdity?

"*Inspiration.* Believe me, for my teaching is more positive; and I will prove to you beyond all manner of doubt that he has sent me.

"*Reason.* What! you will convince me that God has sent you to bear witness against himself? What sort of proofs will you adduce to convince me that God speaks more surely by your mouth than through the understanding he has given me?

“Inspiration. The understanding he has given you! Petty, conceited creature! As if you were the first impious person who had been led astray through his reason corrupted by sin.

“Reason. Man of God, you would not be the first scoundrel who asserts his arrogance as a proof of his mission.

“Inspiration. What! do even philosophers call names?

“Reason. Sometimes, when the saints set them the example.

“Inspiration. Oh, but I have a right to do it, for I am speaking on God’s behalf.

“Reason. You would do well to show your credentials before you make use of your privileges.

“Inspiration. My credentials are authentic, earth and heaven will bear witness on my behalf. Follow my arguments carefully, if you please.

“Reason. Your arguments! You forget what you are saying. When you teach me that my reason misleads me, do you not refute what it might have said on your behalf? He who denies the right of reason, must convince me without recourse to her aid. For suppose you have convinced me by reason, how am I to know that it is not my reason, corrupted by sin, which makes me accept what you say? Besides, what proof, what demonstration, can you advance, more self-evident than the axiom it is to destroy? It is more credible that a good syllogism is a lie, than that the part is greater than the whole.

“Inspiration. What a difference! There is no answer to my evidence; it is of a supernatural kind.

“Reason. Supernatural! What do you mean by the word? I do not understand it.

“Inspiration. I mean changes in the order of nature, prophecies, signs, and wonders of every kind.

“Reason. Signs and wonders! I have never seen anything of the kind.

“Inspiration. Others have seen them for you. Clouds of witnesses—the witness of whole nations. . . .

“Reason. Is the witness of nations supernatural?

“Inspiration. No; but when it is unanimous, it is incontestable.

“Reason. There is nothing so incontestable as the principles of reason, and one cannot accept an absurdity on human evidence. Once more, let us see your supernatural evidence, for the consent of mankind is not supernatural.

“Inspiration. Oh, hardened heart, grace does not speak to you.

“Reason. That is not my fault; for by your own showing, one must have already received grace before one is able to ask for it. Begin by speaking to me in its stead.

“Inspiration. But that is just what I am doing, and you will not listen. But what do you say to prophecy?

“Reason. In the first place, I say I have no more heard a prophet than I have seen a miracle. In the next, I say that no prophet could claim authority over me.

“Inspiration. Follower of the devil! Why should not the words of the prophets have authority over you?

“Reason. Because three things are required, three things which will never happen: firstly, I must have heard the prophecy; secondly, I must have seen its fulfilment; and thirdly, it must be clearly proved that the fulfilment of the prophecy could not by any possibility have been a mere coincidence; for even if it was as precise, as plain, and clear as an axiom of geometry, since the clearness of a chance prediction does not make its fulfilment impossible, this fulfilment when it does take place does not, strictly speaking, prove what was foretold.

“See what your so-called supernatural proofs, your miracles, your prophecies come to: believe all this upon the word of another, submit to the authority of men the authority of God which speaks to my reason. If the eternal truths which my mind conceives of could suffer any shock, there would be no sort of certainty for me; and far from being sure that you speak to me on God’s behalf, I should not even be sure that there is a God.

“My child, here are difficulties enough, but these are not all. Among so many religions, mutually excluding and proscribing each other, one only is true, if indeed any one of them is true. To recognise the true religion we must inquire into, not one, but all; and in any question whatsoever we have no right to condemn unheard. The objections must be compared with the evidence; we must know what accusation each brings against the other, and what answers they receive. The plainer any feeling appears to us, the more we must try to discover why so many other people refuse to accept it. We should be simple, indeed, if we thought it enough to hear the doctors on our own side, in order to acquaint ourselves with the arguments of the other. Where can you find theologians who pride themselves on their honesty? Where are those who, to refute the arguments of their opponents, do not begin by making out that they are of little importance? A man may make a good show among his own friends, and be very proud of his arguments, who would cut a very poor figure with those same arguments among those who are on the other side. Would you find out for yourself from books? What learning you will need! What languages you must learn; what libraries you must ransack; what an amount of reading must be got through! Who will guide me in such a choice? It will be hard to find the best books on the opposite side in any one country, and all the harder to find those on all sides; when found they would be easily answered. The absent are always in the wrong, and bad arguments boldly asserted easily efface good arguments put forward with scorn. Besides books are often very misleading, and scarcely express the opinions of their authors. If you think you can judge the Catholic faith from the writings of Bossuet, you will find yourself greatly mistaken when you have lived among us. You will see that the doctrines with which Protestants are answered are quite different from those of the pulpit. To judge a religion rightly, you must not study it in the books of its partisans, you must learn it in their lives; this is quite another matter. Each religion has its own traditions, meaning, customs, prejudices, which form the spirit of its creed, and must be taken in connection with it.

“How many great nations neither print books of their own nor read ours! How shall they judge of our opinions, or we of theirs? We laugh at them, they despise us; and if our travellers turn them into ridicule, they need only travel among us to pay us back in our own coin. Are there not, in every country, men of common-sense, honesty, and good faith, lovers of truth, who only seek to know what truth is that they may profess it? Yet every one finds truth in his own religion, and thinks the religion of other nations absurd; so all these foreign religions are not so absurd as they seem to us, or else the reason we find for our own proves nothing.

“We have three principal forms of religion in Europe. One accepts one revelation, another two, and another three. Each hates the others, showers curses on them, accuses them of blindness, obstinacy, hardness of heart, and falsehood. What fair-minded man will dare to decide between them without first carefully weighing their evidence, without listening attentively to their arguments? That which accepts only one revelation is the oldest and seems the best established; that which accepts three is the newest and seems the most consistent; that which accepts two revelations and rejects the third may perhaps be the best, but prejudice is certainly against it; its inconsistency is glaring.

“In all three revelations the sacred books are written in languages unknown to the people who believe in them. The Jews no longer understand Hebrew, the Christians understand neither Hebrew nor Greek; the Turks and Persians do not understand Arabic, and the Arabs of our time do not speak the language of Mahomet. Is not it a very foolish way of teaching, to teach people in an unknown tongue? These books are translated, you say. What an answer! How am I to know that the translations are correct, or how am I to make sure that such a thing as a correct translation is possible? If God has gone so far as to speak to men, why should he require an interpreter?

“I can never believe that every man is obliged to know what is contained in books, and that he who is out of reach of these books, and of those who understand them, will be punished for an ignorance which is no fault of his. Books upon books! What madness! As all Europe is full of books, Europeans regard them as necessary, forgetting that they are unknown throughout three-quarters of the globe. Were not all these books written by men? Why then should a man need them to teach him his duty, and how did he learn his duty before these books were in existence? Either he must have learnt his duties for himself, or his ignorance must have been excused.

“Our Catholics talk loudly of the authority of the Church; but what is the use of it all, if they also need just as great an array of proofs to establish that authority as the other seeks to establish their doctrine? The Church decides that the Church has a right to decide. What a well-founded authority! Go beyond it, and you are back again in our discussions.

“Do you know many Christians who have taken the trouble to inquire what the Jews allege against them? If any one knows anything at all about it, it is from the writings of Christians. What a way of ascertaining the arguments of our adversaries! But what is to be done? If any one dared to publish in our day books which were openly in favour of the Jewish religion, we should punish the author, publisher, and bookseller. This regulation is a sure and certain plan for always being in the right. It is easy to refute those who dare not venture to speak.

“Those among us who have the opportunity of talking with Jews are little better off. These unhappy people feel that they are in our power; the tyranny they have suffered makes them timid; they know that Christian charity thinks nothing of injustice and cruelty; will they dare to run the risk of an outcry against blasphemy? Our greed inspires us with zeal, and they are so rich that they must be in the wrong. The more learned, the more enlightened they are, the more cautious. You may convert some poor wretch whom you have paid to slander his religion; you get some wretched old-clothes-man to speak, and he says what you want; you may triumph over their ignorance and cowardice, while all the time their men of learning are laughing at your stupidity. But do you think you would get off so easily in any place where they knew they were safe? At the Sorbonne it is plain that the Messianic prophecies refer to

Jesus Christ. Among the rabbis of Amsterdam it is just as clear that they have nothing to do with him. I do not think I have ever heard the arguments of the Jews as to why they should not have a free state, schools and universities, where they can speak and argue without danger. Then alone can we know what they have to say.

“At Constantinople the Turks state their arguments, but we dare not give ours; then it is our turn to cringe. Can we blame the Turks if they require us to show the same respect for Mahomet, in whom we do not believe, as we demand from the Jews with regard to Jesus Christ in whom they do not believe? Are we right? On what grounds of justice can we answer this question?

“Two-thirds of mankind are neither Jews, Mahometans, nor Christians; and how many millions of men have never heard the name of Moses, Jesus Christ, or Mahomet? They deny it; they maintain that our missionaries go everywhere. That is easily said. But do they go into the heart of Africa, still undiscovered, where as yet no European has ever ventured? Do they go to Eastern Tartary to follow on horseback the wandering tribes, whom no stranger approaches, who not only know nothing of the pope, but have scarcely heard tell of the Grand Lama? Do they penetrate into the vast continents of America, where there are still whole nations unaware that the people of another world have set foot on their shores? Do they go to Japan, where their intrigues have led to their perpetual banishment, where their predecessors are only known to the rising generation as skillful plotters who came with feigned zeal to take possession in secret of the empire? Do they reach the harems of the Asiatic princes to preach the gospel to those thousands of poor slaves? What have the women of those countries done that no missionary may preach the faith to them? Will they all go to hell because of their seclusion?

“If it were true that the gospel is preached throughout the world, what advantage would there be? The day before the first missionary set foot in any country, no doubt somebody died who could not hear him. Now tell me what we shall do with him? If there were a single soul in the whole world, to whom Jesus Christ had never been preached, this objection would be as strong for that man as for a quarter of the human race.

“If the ministers of the gospel have made themselves heard among far-off nations, what have they told them which might reasonably be accepted on their word, without further and more exact verification? You preach to me God, born and dying, two thousand years ago, at the other end of the world, in some small town I know not where; and you tell me that all who have not believed this mystery are damned. These are strange things to be believed so quickly on the authority of an unknown person. Why did your God make these things happen so far off, if he would compel me to know about them? Is it a crime to be unaware of what is happening half a world away? Could I guess that in another hemisphere there was a Hebrew nation and a town called Jerusalem? You might as well expect me to know what was happening in the moon. You say you have come to teach me; but why did you not come and teach my father, or why do you consign that good old man to damnation because he knew nothing of all this? Must he be punished everlastingly for your laziness, he who was so kind and helpful, he who sought only for truth? Be honest; put yourself in my place; see if I ought to believe, on your word alone, all these incredible things which you have told me, and reconcile all this injustice with the just God you proclaim to me. At least allow me to go and see this distant land where such wonders, unheard of in my own country, took place; let me go and see why the inhabitants of Jerusalem put their God to death as a robber. You tell me they did not

know he was God. What then shall I do, I who have only heard of him from you? You say they have been punished, dispersed, oppressed, enslaved; that none of them dare approach that town. Indeed they richly deserved it; but what do its present inhabitants say of their crime in slaying their God? They deny him; they too refuse to recognise God as God. They are no better than the children of the original inhabitants.

“What! In the very town where God was put to death, neither the former nor the latter inhabitants knew him, and you expect that I should know him, I who was born two thousand years after his time, and two thousand leagues away? Do you not see that before I can believe this book which you call sacred, but which I do not in the least understand, I must know from others than yourself when and by whom it was written, how it has been preserved, how it came into your possession, what they say about it in those lands where it is rejected, and what are their reasons for rejecting it, though they know as well as you what you are telling me? You perceive I must go to Europe, Asia, Palestine, to examine these things for myself; it would be madness to listen to you before that.

“Not only does this seem reasonable to me, but I maintain that it is what every wise man ought to say in similar circumstances; that he ought to banish to a great distance the missionary who wants to instruct and baptise him all of a sudden before the evidence is verified. Now I maintain that there is no revelation against which these or similar objections cannot be made, and with more force than against Christianity. Hence it follows that if there is but one true religion and if every man is bound to follow it under pain of damnation, he must spend his whole life in studying, testing, comparing all these religions, in travelling through the countries in which they are established. No man is free from a man’s first duty; no one has a right to depend on another’s judgment. The artisan who earns his bread by his daily toil, the ploughboy who cannot read, the delicate and timid maiden, the invalid who can scarcely leave his bed, all without exception must study, consider, argue, travel over the whole world; there will be no more fixed and settled nations; the whole earth will swarm with pilgrims on their way, at great cost of time and trouble, to verify, compare, and examine for themselves the various religions to be found. Then farewell to the trades, the arts, the sciences of mankind, farewell to all peaceful occupations; there can be no study but that of religion, even the strongest, the most industrious, the most intelligent, the oldest, will hardly be able in his last years to know where he is; and it will be a wonder if he manages to find out what religion he ought to live by, before the hour of his death.

“Hard pressed by these arguments, some prefer to make God unjust and to punish the innocent for the sins of their fathers, rather than to renounce their barbarous dogmas. Others get out of the difficulty by kindly sending an angel to instruct all those who in invincible ignorance have lived a righteous life. A good idea, that angel! Not content to be the slaves of their own inventions they expect God to make use of them also!

“Behold, my son, the absurdities to which pride and intolerance bring us, when everybody wants others to think as he does, and everybody fancies that he has an exclusive claim upon the rest of mankind. I call to witness the God of Peace whom I adore, and whom I proclaim to you, that my inquiries were honestly made; but when I discovered that they were and always would be unsuccessful, and that I was embarked upon a boundless ocean, I turned back, and restricted my faith within the limits of my primitive ideas. I could never convince myself that God would require

such learning of me under pain of hell. So I closed all my books. There is one book which is open to every one—the book of nature. In this good and great volume I learn to serve and adore its Author. There is no excuse for not reading this book, for it speaks to all in a language they can understand. Suppose I had been born in a desert island, suppose I had never seen any man but myself, suppose I had never heard what took place in olden days in a remote corner of the world; yet if I use my reason, if I cultivate it, if I employ rightly the innate faculties which God bestows upon me, I shall learn by myself to know and love him, to love his works, to will what he wills, and to fulfil all my duties upon earth, that I may do his pleasure. What more can all human learning teach me?

“With regard to revelation, if I were a more accomplished disputant, or a more learned person, perhaps I should feel its truth, its usefulness for those who are happy enough to perceive it; but if I find evidence for it which I cannot combat, I also find objections against it which I cannot overcome. There are so many weighty reasons for and against that I do not know what to decide, so that I neither accept nor reject it. I only reject all obligation to be convinced of its truth; for this so-called obligation is incompatible with God’s justice, and far from removing objections in this way it would multiply them, and would make them insurmountable for the greater part of mankind. In this respect I maintain an attitude of reverent doubt. I do not presume to think myself infallible; other men may have been able to make up their minds though the matter seems doubtful to myself; I am speaking for myself, not for them; I neither blame them nor follow in their steps; their judgment may be superior to mine, but it is no fault of mine that my judgment does not agree with it.

“I own also that the holiness of the gospel speaks to my heart, and that this is an argument which I should be sorry to refute. Consider the books of the philosophers with all their outward show; how petty they are in comparison! Can a book at once so grand and so simple be the work of men? Is it possible that he whose history is contained in this book is no more than man? Is the tone of this book, the tone of the enthusiast or the ambitious sectary? What gentleness and purity in his actions, what a touching grace in his teaching, how lofty are his sayings, how profoundly wise are his sermons, how ready, how discriminating, and how just are his answers! What man, what sage, can live, suffer, and die without weakness or ostentation? When Plato describes his imaginary good man, overwhelmed with the disgrace of crime, and deserving of all the rewards of virtue, every feature of the portrait is that of Christ; the resemblance is so striking that it has been noticed by all the Fathers, and there can be no doubt about it. What prejudices and blindness must there be before we dare to compare the son of Sophronisca with the son of Mary. How far apart they are! Socrates dies a painless death, he is not put to open shame, and he plays his part easily to the last; and if this easy death had not done honour to his life, we might have doubted whether Socrates, with all his intellect, was more than a mere sophist. He invented morality, so they say; others before him had practised it; he only said what they had done, and made use of their example in his teaching. Aristides was just before Socrates defined justice; Leonidas died for his country before Socrates declared that patriotism was a virtue; Sparta was sober before Socrates extolled sobriety; there were plenty of virtuous men in Greece before he defined virtue. But among the men of his own time where did Jesus find that pure and lofty morality of which he is both the teacher and pattern? The voice of loftiest wisdom arose among the fiercest fanaticism, the simplicity of the most heroic virtues did honour to the most degraded of nations. One could wish no easier death than that of Socrates, calmly discussing philosophy with his friends; one could fear nothing worse than that

of Jesus, dying in torment, among the insults, the mockery, the curses of the whole nation. In the midst of these terrible sufferings, Jesus prays for his cruel murderers. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a philosopher, the life and death of Christ are those of a God. Shall we say that the gospel story is the work of the imagination? My friend, such things are not imagined; and the doings of Socrates, which no one doubts, are less well attested than those of Jesus Christ. At best, you only put the difficulty from you; it would be still more incredible that several persons should have agreed together to invent such a book, than that there was one man who supplied its subject matter. The tone and morality of this story are not those of any Jewish authors, and the gospel indeed contains characters so great, so striking, so entirely inimitable, that their invention would be more astonishing than their hero. With all this the same gospel is full of incredible things, things repugnant to reason, things which no natural man can understand or accept. What can you do among so many contradictions? You can be modest and wary, my child; respect in silence what you can neither reject nor understand, and humble yourself in the sight of the Divine Being who alone knows the truth.

“This is the unwilling scepticism in which I rest; but this scepticism is in no way painful to me, for it does not extend to matters of practice, and I am well assured as to the principles underlying all my duties. I serve God in the simplicity of my heart; I only seek to know what affects my conduct. As to those dogmas which have no effect upon action or morality, dogmas about which so many men torment themselves, I give no heed to them. I regard all individual religions as so many wholesome institutions which prescribe a uniform method by which each country may do honour to God in public worship; institutions which may each have its reason in the country, the government, the genius of the people, or in other local causes which make one preferable to another in a given time or place. I think them all good alike, when God is served in a fitting manner. True worship is of the heart. God rejects no homage, however offered, provided it is sincere. Called to the service of the Church in my own religion, I fulfil as scrupulously as I can all the duties prescribed to me, and my conscience would reproach me if I were knowingly wanting with regard to any point. You are aware that after being suspended for a long time, I have, through the influence of M. Mellarède, obtained permission to resume my priestly duties, as a means of livelihood. I used to say Mass with the levity that comes from long experience even of the most serious matters when they are too familiar to us; with my new principles I now celebrate it with more reverence; I dwell upon the majesty of the Supreme Being, his presence, the insufficiency of the human mind, which so little realises what concerns its Creator. When I consider how I present before him the prayers of all the people in a form laid down for me, I carry out the whole ritual exactly; I give heed to what I say, I am careful not to omit the least word, the least ceremony; when the moment of the consecration approaches, I collect my powers, that I may do all things as required by the Church and by the greatness of this sacrament; I strive to annihilate my own reason before the Supreme Mind; I say to myself, Who art thou to measure infinite power? I reverently pronounce the sacramental words, and I give to their effect all the faith I can bestow. Whatever may be this mystery which passes understanding, I am not afraid that at the day of judgment I shall be punished for having profaned it in my heart.

Honoured with the sacred ministry, though in its lowest ranks, I will never do or say anything which may make me unworthy to fulfil these sublime duties. I will always preach virtue and exhort men to well-doing; and so far as I can I will set them a good example. It will be my business to make religion attractive; it will be my business to

strengthen their faith in those doctrines which are really useful, those which every man must believe; but, please God, I shall never teach them to hate their neighbour, to say to other men, You will be damned; to say, No salvation outside the Church. If I were in a more conspicuous position, this reticence might get me into trouble; but I am too obscure to have much to fear, and I could hardly sink lower than I am. Come what may, I will never blaspheme the justice of God, nor lie against the Holy Ghost.

“I have long desired to have a parish of my own; it is still my ambition, but I no longer hope to attain it. My dear friend, I think there is nothing so delightful as to be a parish priest. A good clergyman is a minister of mercy, as a good magistrate is a minister of justice. A clergyman is never called upon to do evil; if he cannot always do good himself, it is never out of place for him to beg for others, and he often gets what he asks if he knows how to gain respect. Oh! if I should ever have some poor mountain parish where I might minister to kindly folk, I should be happy indeed; for it seems to me that I should make my parishioners happy. I should not bring them riches, but I should share their poverty; I should remove from them the scorn and opprobrium which are harder to bear than poverty. I should make them love peace and equality, which often remove poverty, and always make it tolerable. When they saw that I was in no way better off than themselves, and that yet I was content with my lot, they would learn to put up with their fate and to be content like me. In my sermons I would lay more stress on the spirit of the gospel than on the spirit of the church; its teaching is simple, its morality sublime; there is little in it about the practices of religion, but much about works of charity. Before I teach them what they ought to do, I would try to practise it myself, that they might see that at least I think what I say. If there were Protestants in the neighbourhood or in my parish, I would make no difference between them and my own congregation so far as concerns Christian charity; I would get them to love one another, to consider themselves brethren, to respect all religions, and each to live peaceably in his own religion. To ask any one to abandon the religion in which he was born is, I consider, to ask him to do wrong, and therefore to do wrong oneself. While we await further knowledge, let us respect public order; in every country let us respect the laws, let us not disturb the form of worship prescribed by law; let us not lead its citizens into disobedience; for we have no certain knowledge that it is good for them to abandon their own opinions for others, and on the other hand we are quite certain that it is a bad thing to disobey the law.

“My young friend, I have now repeated to you my creed as God reads it in my heart; you are the first to whom I have told it; perhaps you will be the last. As long as there is any true faith left among men, we must not trouble quiet souls, nor scare the faith of the ignorant with problems they cannot solve, with difficulties which cause them uneasiness, but do not give them any guidance. But when once everything is shaken, the trunk must be preserved at the cost of the branches. Consciences, restless, uncertain, and almost quenched like yours, require to be strengthened and aroused; to set the feet again upon the foundation of eternal truth, we must remove the trembling supports on which they think they rest.

“You are at that critical age when the mind is open to conviction, when the heart receives its form and character, when we decide our own fate for life, either for good or evil. At a later date, the material has hardened and fresh impressions leave no trace. Young man, take the stamp of truth upon your heart which is not yet hardened. If I were more certain of myself, I should have adopted a more decided and dogmatic tone; but I am a man ignorant and liable to error; what could I do? I have opened my heart fully to you; and I have told what I myself hold for certain and

sure; I have told you my doubts as doubts, my opinions as opinions; I have given you my reasons both for faith and doubt. It is now your turn to judge; you have asked for time; that is a wise precaution and it makes me think well of you. Begin by bringing your conscience into that state in which it desires to see clearly; be honest with yourself. Take to yourself such of my opinions as convince you; reject the rest. You are not yet so depraved by vice as to run the risk of choosing amiss. I would offer to argue with you, but as soon as men dispute they lose their temper; pride and obstinacy come in, and there is an end of honesty. My friend, never argue; for by arguing we gain no light for ourselves or for others. So far as I myself am concerned, I have only made up my mind after many years of meditation; here I rest, my conscience is at peace, my heart is satisfied. If I wanted to begin afresh the examination of my feelings, I should not bring to the task a purer love of truth; and my mind, which is already less active, would be less able to perceive the truth. Here I shall rest, lest the love of contemplation, developing step by step into an idle passion, should make me lukewarm in the performance of my duties, lest I should fall into my former scepticism without strength to struggle out of it. More than half my life is spent; I have barely time to make good use of what is left, to blot out my faults by my virtues. If I am mistaken, it is against my will. He who reads my inmost heart knows that I have no love for my blindness. As my own knowledge is powerless to free me from this blindness, my only way out of it is by a good life; and if God from the very stones can raise up children to Abraham, every man has a right to hope that he may be taught the truth, if he makes himself worthy of it.

“If my reflections lead you to think as I do, if you share my feelings, if we have the same creed, I give you this advice: Do not continue to expose your life to the temptations of poverty and despair, nor waste it in degradation and at the mercy of strangers; no longer eat the shameful bread of charity. Return to your own country, go back to the religion of your fathers, and follow it in sincerity of heart, and never forsake it; it is very simple and very holy; I think there is no other religion upon earth whose morality is purer, no other more satisfying to the reason. Do not trouble about the cost of the journey, that will be provided for you. Neither do you fear the false shame of a humiliating return; we should blush to commit a fault, not to repair it. You are still at an age when all is forgiven, but when we cannot go on sinning with impunity. If you desire to listen to your conscience, a thousand empty objections will disappear at her voice. You will feel that, in our present state of uncertainty, it is an inexcusable presumption to profess any faith but that we were born into, while it is treachery not to practise honestly the faith we profess. If we go astray, we deprive ourselves of a great excuse before the tribunal of the sovereign judge. Will he not pardon the errors in which we were brought up, rather than those of our own choosing?

“My son, keep your soul in such a state that you always desire that there should be a God and you will never doubt it. Moreover, whatever decision you come to, remember that the real duties of religion are independent of human institutions; that a righteous heart is the true temple of the Godhead; that in every land, in every sect, to love God above all things and to love our neighbour as ourself is the whole law; remember there is no religion which absolves us from our moral duties; that these alone are really essential, that the service of the heart is the first of these duties, and that without faith there is no such thing as true virtue.

“Shun those who, under the pretence of explaining nature, sow destructive doctrines in the heart of men, those whose apparent scepticism is a hundredfold more self-assertive and dogmatic than the firm tone of their opponents. Under the arrogant

claim, that they alone are enlightened, true, honest, they subject us imperiously to their far-reaching decisions, and profess to give us, as the true principles of all things, the unintelligible systems framed by their imagination. Moreover, they overthrow, destroy, and trample under foot all that men reverence; they rob the afflicted of their last consolation in their misery; they deprive the rich and powerful of the sole bridle of their passions; they tear from the very depths of man's heart all remorse for crime, and all hope of virtue; and they boast, moreover, that they are the benefactors of the human race. Truth, they say, can never do a man harm. I think so too, and to my mind that is strong evidence that what they teach is not true.

“My good youth, be honest and humble; learn how to be ignorant, then you will never deceive yourself or others. If ever your talents are so far cultivated as to enable you to speak to other men, always speak according to your conscience, without caring for their applause. The abuse of knowledge causes incredulity. The learned always despise the opinions of the crowd; each of them must have his own opinion. A haughty philosophy leads to atheism just as blind devotion leads to fanaticism. Avoid these extremes; keep steadfastly to the path of truth, or what seems to you truth, in simplicity of heart, and never let yourself be turned aside by pride or weakness. Dare to confess God before the philosophers; dare to preach humanity to the intolerant. It may be you will stand alone, but you will bear within you a witness which will make the witness of men of no account with you. Let them love or hate, let them read your writings or despise them; no matter. Speak the truth and do the right; the one thing that really matters is to do one's duty in this world; and when we forget ourselves we are really working for ourselves. My child, self-interest misleads us; the hope of the just is the only sure guide.”

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