英文世界名人傳記

盧騷

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

FAMOUS FOLK SERIES

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

CHAPTER I

YOUTH

The first man to preach effectively the gospel of the common man in history was Jean Jacques Rousseau.[1] Rousseau caused a more complete revolution in thought and practice than any man or group of men that we have ever seen. His character was many-sided. In it there was an extraordinary combination, of strength and weakness, of truth and falsity, of that which is attractive with that which is repulsive. Consequently to estimate aright the ideas and purposes of the man, one must lay aside all prejudices in considering the man himself and the form in which he expressed his ideas.

Rousseau was born at Geneva on June 28, 1712. He was of old French stock. His father, Isaac Rousseau, was a watchmaker. He was a reversion to an old French type. But his restlessness, his eager emotion, his quick and punctilious[2] sense of personal dignity, his heedlessness of ordered affairs, were not common in Geneva. This disorder of spirit descended in modified form to the son. Before he was seven years old he had learned from

[1] Rousseau (rōō/sō′).
[2] punctilious (pŭŋk-tĭl′ĭ-ŭs; -yŭs), exact in forms.

his father to indulge a passion for the reading of romances. The child and the man passed whole nights in a fictitious world, reading to one another in turn.

This had the direct and fatal effect in the young Rousseau's case of deadening that sense of the actual relations of things to one another in the objective[1] world. "I had no idea of real things," he said, "though all the sentiments were already familiar to me. Nothing had come to me by conception, everything by sensation. These confused emotions, striking me one after another, did not warp a reason that I did not yet possess, but they gradually shaped in me a reason of another cast and temper, and gave me bizarre[2] and romantic ideas of human life, of which neither reflection nor experience has ever been able wholly to cure me."

The mother of Jean Jacques, Suzanne Bernard, was the daughter of a Geneva minister.[3] She died in childbirth. Rousseau, who was the second son, was brought up in a haphazard[4] fashion.

Rousseau had one brother who passed through a boyhood of revolt. Finally he ran away into Germany, where he was lost from sight and knowledge of his kinsmen forever. Jean Jacques was thus left virtually an only child.

When the boy was ten years old his father got entangled[5] in a dispute with a fellow citizen, and being condemned to a short term of imprisonment abandoned

[1] objective, external.
[2] bizarre (bĭ-zär′), fantastical.
[3] minister, a pastor.
[4] haphazard (hăp′hăz′ărd), determined by chance.
[5] entangled, to involve in complication.

Geneva and took refuge at Lyons.[1] Rousseau was taken charge of by his mother's relations and was sent to school at the neighboring village of Bossey under the care of a pastor named M. Lambercier.[2]

At Bossey Rousseau acquired a piece of experience. It was the knowledge of injustice and wrongful suffering. Circumstances brought him under suspicion of having broken the teeth of another man's comb. He was innocent. He did not complain to his elders of the case but feared chastisement.[3] However, he already discovered the existence of injustice in his own world. He wrote: "This first sentiment of violence and injustice has remained so deeply engraved in my soul, that all the ideas relating to it bring my first emotion back to me; and this sentiment, though only relative to myself in its origin, has taken such consistency, and become so disengaged from all personal interest, that my heart is inflamed at the sight or story of any wrongful action, just as much as if its effect fell on my own person. When I read of the cruelties of some ferocious tyrant, or the subtle atrocities of some villain of a priest, I would fain start on the instant to poniard such wretches, though I were to perish a hundred times for the deed. . . . This movement may be natural to me, and I believe it is so; but the profound recollection of the first injustice I suffered was too long and too fast bound up with it, not to have strengthened it enormously." "Here," he added, "was the term of the serenity of my childish

[1] Lyons (lī'ŭnz), a city of southeastern France.
[2] Lambercier (lăm-bĕr-sĕ [?]).
[3] chastisement (chăs'tĭz-mĕnt), punishment.

days. From this moment I ceased to enjoy a pure happiness, and I feel even at this day that the reminiscence of the delights of my infancy here comes to an end. . . . Even the country lost in our eyes that charm of sweetness and simplicity which goes to the heart; it seemed somber and deserted, and was as if covered by a veil, hiding its beauties from our sight. We no longer tended our little gardens, our plants, our flowers. We went no more lightly to scratch the earth, shouting for joy as we discovered the germ of the seed we had sown."

Leaving Bossey, Rousseau returned to Geneva, and passed two or three years with his uncle, learning something of drawing and something of Euclid,[1] for the former of which he showed special inclination. The uncle was a man of pleasure. His son was Rousseau's constant comrade. "Our friendship filled our hearts so amply, that if we were only together, the simplest amusements were a delight." They made kites, cages, bows and arrows, drums, houses.

At the age of eleven Jean Jacques was sent by his uncle into a notary's[2] office. His master, however, found or thought him incapable and dismissed him. After a short time (April 25, 1725) he was apprenticed afresh, this time to an engraver. He did not dislike the work, but was or thought himself cruelly treated. In 1728 he ran away. But for this, wrote the unhappy man long years after, "I should have passed, in the bosom of my religion, of my native land, of my family, and my

[1] Euclid (ū'klid), a Greek geometer (350–300 B.C.)

[2] notary, a public officer who attests or certifies deeds, takes affidavits, protests negotiable paper, etc.

friends, a mild and peaceful life, such as my character required, in the uniformity of work which suited my taste, and of a society after my heart. I should have been a good Christian, good citizen, good father of a family, good friend, good craftsman, good man in all. I should have been happy in my condition, perhaps I might have honored it; and after living a life obscure and simple, but even and gentle, I should have died peacefully in the midst of my own people. Soon forgotten, I should at any rate have been regretted as long as any memory of me was left."

Then began an extraordinary series of wanderings and adventures.

CHAPTER II

ROUSSEAU AS A VAGABOND

Now Rousseau became a common vagabond.[1] This life, continued for several years, had the merit of strengthening both his love for, and his knowledge of, nature. This life again made him bring a fierce fire to the attack upon the old order.

Influence of Madame de Warens

Rousseau first fell in with some proselytizers[2] of the Roman faith at Confignon in Savoy, but he never really meant to change his religion. Thereupon he was sent to Madame de Warens (or Vuarrens) at Annecy, a young and pretty widow who was herself a convert. She read the letters he brought, and entertained their bearer cheerfully. Her influence, however, was not immediately exercised. The youth was passed on to Turin,[3] where there was an institution specially devoted to the reception of neophytes.[4] His experiences here were unsatisfactory, but he adjured only and was rewarded by being presented with twenty

[1] vagabond (văg′ȧ-bŏnd), one who wanders about with no fixed dwelling.
[2] proselytizers (prŏs′ĕ-lĭ-tīz′ĕrz; -lĭt-īz′ĕrz), new converts.
[3] Turin, chief city of Piedmont, Italy.
[4] neophytes (nē′ō-fīts), new converts.

francs and sent about his business. He passed his days in wandering about the streets of Turin and seeing the wonders of a capital. He went regularly to Mass, watched the pomp of the court, and counted upon stirring a passion in the breast of a princess. A more important circumstance was the effect of the Mass in awakening his latent passion for music.

When the end of the twenty francs began to seem a thing possible, the poor youth tried to get work as an engraver. Later he established himself as footman to a Madame de Vercellis. With her he passed three months, and at the end of that time she died. Here occurred the famous incident of the theft of a ribbon. When Madame de Vercellis died, a ribbon of old rose color was missing. It was found in his possession. People asked him whence he had taken it. He replied that it had been given to him by Marion, a young maid in the house. At this epoch he was dominated by his undisciplined sensations. "Never," he said, in his account of this hateful action, "was wickedness further from me than at this cruel moment; and when I accused the poor girl, it is contradictory and yet it is true that my affection for her was the cause of what I did. She was present to my mind, and I threw the blame from myself on to the first object that presented itself. When I saw her appear my heart was torn, but the presence of so many people was too strong for my remorse. I feared punishment very little; I only feared disgrace, but I feared that more than death, more than crime, more than anything in the world. I would fain have buried myself in the depths of the earth; invincible shame prevailed

over all, shame alone caused my effrontery,[1] and the more criminal I became, the more intrepid was I made by the fright of confessing it. I could see nothing but the horror of being recognized and declared publicly to my face a thief, liar, and traducer."

After an interval of six weeks Rousseau again found another place with the Comte de Gouvon.[2] This new master treated him with a certain unusual considerateness. His son condescended to teach the youth Latin, and Rousseau presumed to entertain a passion for one of the daughters of the house, to whom he paid silent homage in the odd shape of attending to her wants at table with special solicitude. In this situation he had an excellent chance of ultimate advancement. But his imagination again went over the journey across the mountains; the fields, the woods, the streams, began to absorb his whole life. He recalled that without duty or constraint or obligation he would be more happy. On these principles he neglected his duties so recklessly that he was dismissed from his position.

The vagabond then resolved to return to Madame de Warens. Here he remained until 1738. His room looked over gardens and a stream, and beyond them stretched a far landscape. "It was the first time since leaving Bossey that I had green before my windows. Always shut in by walls, I had nothing under my eyes but housetops and the dull grey of the streets. How moving and delicious this novelty was to me! It

[1] effrontery, shameless boldness.
[2] Comte de Gouvon (kôNt dẽ Gŭ′vŏn [?]).

brightened all the tenderness of my disposition. I counted the landscape among the kindnesses of my dear benefactress; it seemed as if she had brought it there expressly for me. I placed myself there in all peacefulness with her; she was present to me everywhere among the flowers and the verdure; her charms and those of spring were all mingled together in my eyes. My heart, which had hitherto been stifled, found itself more free in this ample space, and my sighs had more liberal vent among these orchard gardens." During this time he acquired much of his knowledge of books and his principles of judging them. He saw much of the lives of the poor and of the world's ways with them. Above all, his ideal was revolutionized, and the recent dreams of grandeur and of palaces were replaced by a new conception of blessedness of life, that never afterwards faded from his vision. The notions or aspirations which he had picked up from a few books formed his character.

Rousseau liked the spot very much. He had no other desires but existed in a state of ravishing calm, enjoying without knowing what. He wrote: "I could have passed my whole life and eternity itself in this way, without an instant of weariness. She is the only person with whom I never felt that dryness in conversation, which turns the duty of keeping it up into a torment. Our intercourse was not so much conversation as an inexhaustible stream of chatter, which never came to an end until it was interrupted from without. I only felt all the force of my attachment for her when she was out of my sight. So long as I could see her I was merely happy and satisfied, but my disquiet in her absence

went so far as to be painful. I shall never forget how one holiday, while she was at vespers, I went for a walk outside the town, my heart full of her image and of an eager desire to pass all my days by her side. I had sense enough to see that for the present this was impossible, and that the bliss which I relished so keenly must be brief. This gave to my musing a sadness which was free from everything somber, and which was moderated by pleasing hope. The sound of the bells, which has always moved me to a singular degree, the singing of the birds, the glory of the weather, the sweetness of the landscape, the scattered rustic dwellings in which my imagination placed our common home;—all this so struck me with a vivid, tender, sad, and touching impression that I saw myself as in an ecstasy transported into the happy time and the happy place where my heart, possessed of all the felicity that could bring it delight, without even dreaming of the pleasures of sense, should share joys inexpressible."

Madame de Warens was very kind to Rousseau. She thought it necessary to complete his education. So he was sent to the seminarists of St. Lazare to learn Latin for the priestly offices. But he was very antipathetic[1] to his instructor, whose appearance happened to be displeasing to him. For this reason the seminarists reported that their pupil was not even good enough for a priest. He next decided to try music. But his music teacher, Le Mâitre, belonged to the great class of irregular and disorderly natures. He could not work

[1] antipathetic (an/ti-pă-thĕt/ik), opposite.

without the wine cup. Rousseau paid no respect to him. In one of his incomprehensible freaks he set off for Lyons. After abandoning his companion in an epileptic fit, he returned to Annecy to find Madame de Warens gone. Then for some months he relapsed into the life of vagabondage.

On the expedition Rousseau paid an hour's visit to his father who had settled and remarried at Nyon. He now came to Lausanne, where he undertook to teach music. From Lausanne he went to Neuchâtel. Then he became, or says he became, secretary to a Greek archimandrite[1] who was traveling in Switzerland to collect subscriptions for the rebuilding of the Holy Sepulcher.[2] In this position he remained for a few weeks, until the French minister at Soleure[3] dispatched him to Paris to be the attendant of a young officer. A few days in the famous city convinced him that here was not what he sought, and he again turned his face southwards in search of Madame de Warens.

This was in the summer of 1732. Rousseau traveled alone and on foot from Soleure to Paris and from Paris back again to Lyons. This was part of the training which served him in the stead of books. Such a life was agreeable and significant to him. "Never," he said, "did I think so much, exist so much, be myself so much, as in the journeys that I have made alone and on foot. Walking has something about it which animates and enlivens my ideas. I can hardly think while I am still;

[1] archimandrite (är/kĭ-măn′drīt), a chief of a monastery.
[2] Sepulcher (sĕp′ŭl-kẽr), a grave.
[3] Soleure (sō′lûr′), a district of northwestern Switzerland.

my body must be in motion, to move my mind. The sight of the country, the succession of agreeable views, open air, good appetite, the freedom of the alehouse, the absence of everything that could make me feel dependence, or recall me to my situation—all this sets my soul free, gives me a greater boldness of thought. I dispose of all nature as its sovereign lord; my heart, wandering from object to object, mingles and is one with the things that soothe it, wraps itself up in charming images, and is intoxicated by delicious sentiment. Ideas come as they please, not as I please; they do not come at all, or they come in a crowd, overwhelming me with their number and their force. When I came to a place I only thought of eating, and when I left it I only thought of walking. I felt that a new paradise awaited me at the door, and I thought of nothing but of hastening in search of it."

It was, then, sometime towards the middle of 1732 that Rousseau arrived at Chambéri,[1] and finally took up his residence with Madame de Warens. He, for a time, had unimportant employments in the service of the Sardinian Crown. Later he was installed by Madame de Warens, whom he assisted in some singularly indefinite way in the transaction of her very indefinite and miscellaneous affairs. She diverted herself with him, with music and with chemistry. Sometimes she tried to have him taught both dancing and fencing. In 1736 Madame de Warens, partly for Rousseau's health, took a country house, les Charmettes,[2] a short distance

[1] Chambéri, capital of Savoy.
[2] les Charmettes (lē chär′mĕts [?]).

from Chambéri. Here in summer, and in the town during winter, Rousseau led a delightful life. In a desultory way he did a good deal of reading. It was Voltaire's "Letters on the English" which first drew him seriously to study. He also delved in Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding." But unfortunately his health again became bad. He was recommended to go to Montpellier[1] to consult the physicians. By his own account this journey to Montpellier was in reality a voyage à Cythère[2] in company with a certain Madame de Larnage. This being so, he could hardly complain when on returning he found that his official position in Madame de Warens household had been taken by a person named Vintzenrild.

Genesis of Political Speculation

In 1740 Rousseau left les Charmettes and became tutor at Lyons to the children of M. de Mably, elder brother of the philosophic *abbé*[3] of the same name (1709–85) and of the still more notable Condillac (1714–80). But Rousseau did not like teaching and was a bad teacher. After a visit to les Charmettes, finding that his place there was finally occupied, he once more went to Paris in 1741 to make his fortune by a new method of musical notation, which he had invented. The scheme of his invention and the principles on which he defended it are worth mentioning. To begin with the aim of the scheme was practical and popular; to

[1] Montpellier (môn/pĕ/lyā/), a city of southern France.
[2] voyage à Cythère, voyage to Cythère.
[3] *abbé* (à/bā/), an abbot.

reduce the difficulty of learning music to the lowest possible point, and so to bring the most delightful of the arts within the reach of the largest possible number of people. Evidently such music was most accessible to the thousands, and it was always the thousands of whom Rousseau thought. However, this plan of musical notation was unfavorably received by the Académie des Sciences,[1] where it was read in August, 1742.

This failure made him complete idleness and peace of mind. As he had only a few coins left, he had to make applications for a position. Consequently Madame Dupin, wife of one of the richest men in France, to whose house he had obtained the entry, procured him the honorable post of secretary to M. de Montaigne, French Ambassador at Venice. With him he stayed for about eighteen months. He had as usual infinite complaints to make of his employer and some strange stories to tell. At length he threw up his situation and returned to Paris (1745).

His residence in Venice, though short, was on the whole one of his few really social and worth-while periods. He made friends and kept them. More important than this was the circumstance that the sight of the defects of the government of the Venetian Republic drew his mind to political speculation, and suggested to him the composition of a book called "Institutions Politiques."[2] The work, as thus designed and named, was never written, but the idea of it, after many years

[1] Académie des Sciences, Academy of Sciences.
[2] Institutions Politiques, Political Institutions.

of meditation, ripened first in the "Discourse on Inequality," and then in the "Social Contract."

Love Is Blind

After leaving Venice Rousseau took up his quarters at a small hotel not far from the Sorbonne.[1] Here was a kitchenmaid, some two twenty years old, whose name was Theresa Le Vasseur.[2] Rousseau was moved with pity. From pity he advanced to some warmer sentiment. This was the beginning of a union. She thought she saw in him a worthy soul; and he was convinced that he saw in her a woman of sensibility, simple and free from trick. She had little beauty, no education or understanding. She could never be taught to read. She could never follow the order of the twelve months of the year, nor master a single arithmetical figure, nor count a sum of money, nor reckon the price of a thing. But he made himself happy with her.

At the time when the connection with Theresa le Vasseur was formed, Rousseau did not know how to gain bread. He composed the musical diversion of the Muses Galantes. But it brought him no money. Then he fell back on a sort of secretaryship to Madame Dupin and her son-in-law, M. de Francueil, for which he received the moderate income of nine hundred francs.

Five-and-twenty years after the beginning of their acquaintance, the wedding ceremony took place which anybody but himself would recognize as constituting a

[1] Sorbonne (sô-bōn [?]).
[2] Theresa le Vasseur (tē-rē′sȧ; tă-rā′să lẽ vȧ-sĭr).

marriage. What happened appears to have been this. Seated at table with Theresa and two guests, one of them the mayor of the place, he declared that she was his wife. "This good and seemly engagement was contracted," he said, "in all the simplicity but also in all the truth of nature, in the presence of two men of worth and honor. . . . During the short and simple act, I saw the honest pair melted in tears."

Five children in all were born to the couple. But they were dropped into oblivion in the box of the asylum for foundlings.[1] Neither the father nor the mother took any precautions.

[1] foundlings, deserted or exposed infants.