

FOUR LETTERS

TO MONSIEUR DE MALESHERBES

Containing the true portrait of my character and the real motives for  
all my conduct

I

A M.

Mentmorency, January 4, 1762

I would not have taken so long to thank you for your last letter, Sir, had my diligence in answering equaled the pleasure I received from it. But, aside from the effort that it costs me to write, I thought I would do well to devote a few days to the petty annoyances of the moment so that I might not overwhelm you with my problems. Although I am by no means reconciled to what has just occurred, I am very glad that you should know about it since it has not lowered me in your esteem. I shall be more pleased with myself when you do not believe me to be better than I am.

The motives you attribute to the position I have taken since having made something of a name for myself in the world does me, perhaps, more honor than I deserve; but they are certainly closer to the truth than those credited to me by certain gentlemen of letters who base everything on reputation and judge my sentiments according to their own. My heart is far too attuned to other attachments to put much store in public opinion; I am much too fond of my pleasure and independence ever to become such a slave to vanity as they suppose. A person who has never allowed the possibility of fame and fortune to stand in the way of a rendez-vous or a pleasant supper is not likely to sacrifice his happiness simply in order to draw attention to himself; and it is hardly believable that a man who feels he has a certain talent and waits forty years to make that talent known, would be fool enough to languish till the end of his days in some out of the way place just to acquire the reputation of a misanthrope.

But, Sir, although I detest wickedness and injustice with vehemence, this passion would not be sufficiently strong in itself to make me flee the society of men were it any great sacrifice for me to do so. No, my motive is less noble and closer to myself. I was born with a natural love for solitude which has increased proportionately as I have become

better acquainted with my fellow men. I find that I am better off with the imaginary characters I have assembled around me than with the real ones I encounter in society, and that the invented company provided by my imagination has served to disgust me finally and forever with the one I have just abandoned. You picture me sad and consumed by melancholy. Ah, Sir, how wrong you are! In Paris I was so; in Paris a black bile gnawed at my heart, and the bitterness of that bile was all too apparent in everything I wrote while there. But, Sir, compare those writings to the ones I have written here in my solitude; either I am very much mistaken, or you must feel in these letters a certain serenity of soul which cannot be feigned and which enables one to judge with assurance the inner state of the author. My extreme agitation of late may have led you to another conclusion, but it is easy to see that the source of this distress does not reside in my present situation, but rather in an ever active imagination, ready to take fright at everything and magnify it to its furthest extreme. Frequent success has made me susceptible to fame; but no man exists, possessing either virtue or mobility of soul, who would not be filled with mortal despair at the thought that after his death a useful work he had written might be replaced by some pernicious text which would be published under his name, dishonoring his memory and causing great harm. This apprehension may well have accelerated the development of my disease, and had this madness come upon me in Paris, it is by no means certain that I would not have spared nature the necessity of completing the task.

For a long time I was mistaken myself as to the cause of this incurable disgust I have always felt when in society. I attributed it to frustration that my wit was not quick enough to display in conversation the modicum of intelligence I possess, and kept me from occupying that position in the world to which I believed myself entitled. But, after I had covered some paper with my scribblings and been assured that regardless of what stupidities I wrote, I was not taken for a fool; when I saw myself sought out by everyone and honored with considerations far beyond anything my most foolish vanity would have dared to claim; when, despite all this, I found the same disgust augmented rather than diminished, I came to the conclusion that it must stem from another cause, and that these rewards were not at all what I was seeking.

## LETTERS TO MALESHERBES

## I

What then ~~is~~ finally this cause? It is none other than that indomitable spirit of liberty which nothing has been able to subdue, and before which honors, wealth and even reputation are valueless to me. This spirit of liberty in my case is doubtless ~~less~~ a matter of pride than of indolence, an indolence passing all belief. Any trifle alarms it; it finds the simplest duties of civil life unbearable. A word to be said, a letter to be written, a visit to be paid, once they become an obligation, are purgatory to me. This is why, although I find ordinary dealings with mankind repellent, close friendships are so precious to me: for them there is never an obligation. One follows one's heart and everything is accomplished. This, again, is the reason why I have always been reluctant to receive favors. Any favor demands gratitude, and I feel that my heart is ungrateful for no other reason than that I find gratitude a duty. In a word, the kind of happiness I need is not so much being able to do what I want, as not having to do what I do not. A life of action holds no temptation for me, I would a hundred times rather do nothing at all than to do something against my will; and I have thought a hundred times that I would not have been too unhappy lodged in the Bastille where I would be obliged to do nothing but remain where I was.

Nevertheless, I did make some attempts in my youth to establish a position for myself. But these efforts were only aimed at earning a retreat and ease in my old age; and, since they were only made sporadically, with the fits and starts of a lazy man, they never met with the slightest success. My illness provided me with the perfect pretext for pursuing my all consuming passion. Finding it absurd to be torturing myself in order to provide for an age which I would never obtain, I gave it all up and proceeded to enjoy myself. And that, Sir, I swear is the real reason for my retirement from the world, for which our gentlemen can find no other motive than a desire for ostentation. This would suppose a constancy, or rather an obstinacy in clinging to something I find painful, and that is directly contrary to my nature.

You will tell me, Sir, that this supposed laziness of mine is not compatible with my writings over the last ten years or with the desire for fame which must have prompted them. Here we hit upon a difficulty

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## I

which obliges me to prolong this letter, and consequently forces me to finish it. I shall return to it, Sir, if you are not offended by my familiar tone; for, if I am to open up my heart to you, I know how to use no other; I shall portray myself without makeup and without modesty; I shall appear to you such as I see myself, and such as I am; for, since I pass my life in my own company, I ought to know myself. And I can see by the way those who think they know me interpret my actions and deeds that they understand nothing about me whatever. Nobody in this world knows me but myself alone. You can make your own judgements when I have finished.

Do not send back my letters, I beg you, Sir. Burn them because they are not worth the bother of keeping; but do not do so out of consideration for me. I also entreat you not even to consider trying to retrieve those ones being held by Duchene. Were I obliged to erase the traces of all my follies, there would be no end of the letters to be recovered, and I would not lift even the end of my finger to do so. For better or for worse, I am not afraid to be seen just as I am. I know my great shortcomings, and I am keenly aware of my vices. With all this, I shall die full of hope in Almighty God, and quite convinced that of all the men I have known in my life, not one was better than I.

## II

Montmorency, January 12, 1762

I shall continue to give you an account of myself, Sir, since I have now begun, for nothing could do me more harm than to be but half known; and, since my faults have not deprived me of your esteem, I trust I will not lose it because of my frankness.

An idle soul fearing the slightest task; an ardent and irascible temperament, easily moved and liable to excess regarding all that touches it; these are unlikely mates to be found in the same character, yet these same two opposites compose the basis of my own. Although I have no theories to explain this opposition, it none the less exists; I feel it is so; nothing could be more certain; and, by relating some facts, I can at least give a sort of historical account which would enable you to imagine it. In childhood I was more active than I am now, but never to the extent of other children. This boredom with everything drew me to literature at an early age. When I was six Plutarch fell into my hands, and by the time I was eight I knew it all by heart. I had read all the novels there were to read and had shed buckets of tears over them before the age when novels should hold any interest for the heart. Thence was forged my taste for the heroic/<sup>and romantic</sup> which has only increased with time, and has ended by making me dissatisfied with everything not resembling my own fantasies. In my youth, when I believed that the same people I had known in books were to be found in the real world, I would abandon myself without reserve to whomever knew how to take me in by means of a certain jargon of which I have always been the dupe. I was active because I was possessed; as I discovered my mistakes, I would change my tastes, my attachments and my plans; and all these changes were always so much time and trouble thrown away because I was searching for something that that did not exist. With experience, I began little by little to lose all hope of finding it, and, consequently, my zeal for the search languished. Embittered by injustices I had suffered or been a witness to, often troubled by the moral disorder into which, both by example and circumstances, I had myself been drawn, I began to despise both my century and my contemporaries. And, feeling that in their midst I would never find a situation capable of satisfying my heart, I began little by little

to withdraw from the society of men, creating from my imagination another society for myself which charmed me all the more because I could cultivate it without risk or pain. I found it ever trustworthy and true to my expectations.

After having spent forty years of my life dissatisfied with myself and others, I sought in vain to break the ties binding me to a society which I esteemed so little, a society which chained me to occupations least suited to my taste by needs which I believed to be those of nature, but which turned out to be nothing but convention. Then, all of a sudden, a fortunate accident occurred which revealed to me what I must do for myself and how I should regard my fellow men concerning whom my heart and mind were forever at war, and whom I still felt compelled to love despite so many reasons for hatred. I would like, Sir, to be able to paint for you that moment which made such a strange epoch in my life and which will always be present for me though I should live forever.

I was on my way to see Diderot who was then a prisoner at Vincennes; I had in my pocket a copy of the Mercur de France which I began to thumb through as I walked. Suddenly my eye falls on the topic given by the academy of Dijon, the topic which instigated my first written work. If anything ever resembled a flash of inspiration, it is the turmoil that took place within me upon reading that announcement. Suddenly I feel my spirit dazzled by a thousand brilliant insights. A host of ideas crowd in upon me all at once, troubling my mind with a force and confusion impossible to express. I feel my head spinning with a giddiness like intoxication. A violent palpitation oppresses and expands my breast, finding it no longer possible to breathe while walking, I let myself collapse beneath one of the trees which line the avenue; there I spend half an hour in such a state of agitation that on rising I discover the front of my vest to be wet with tears I never knew I had shed. Oh Sir, had I ever been able to write one quarter of what I saw and felt beneath that tree, how clearly I would have revealed all the contradictions of the social system; how forcefully I would have exposed all the abuses of our institutions; how simply I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good, and that it is only through these institutions that he becomes evil! All that I was able to retain from the flood of great truths which, for the space of a quarter of an hour, engulfed me in light as I

lay beneath that tree, is scattered all too sparsely through my three principal works, that is to say, this same first discourse, the one on inequality, and the treatise on education; these three works are inseparable, and together they form one whole. All the rest has been lost, and nothing was written down at that moment but the Prosopopoeia of Fabricius. That is how, when I least expected it, I became an author almost in spite of myself. You can easily imagine how the attraction of a first success and the hostility of my critics propelled me forward ~~and all~~ into a career of writing. Have I a talent for writing? I do not know. A strong conviction has always stood me in the stead of eloquence, and my works have inevitably been loosely structured and bad when I was not strongly convinced that I was right. Thus it may have been an unconscious return of self love that made me select my motto and make myself worthy of it; perhaps that is what made me so passionately attached to the truth, or whatever I took to be true. Had I only written for the sake of writing, I am certain I would never have been read.

After having discovered or thought I had discovered that all man's misery and wickedness was derived from his false values, I came to the conclusion that these same values must be the cause of my own unhappiness; that all my ills and vices stemmed more from my situation than from myself. Just at this time, a disease which had afflicted me since childhood was declared incurable; ~~contradicting the promises of the medical char-~~  
~~latans, who, however,~~ had never deluded me for long. I decided that if I wanted to be consistent and shake the heavy yoke of prejudice from off my shoulders once and for all, there was no time to lose. I carried out my decision with speed and courage. I have maintained it steadfastly ever since, at a cost ~~as well as~~ which only I can estimate. I alone know what obstacles I have overcome, ~~and~~ those I must still combat in order to maintain my ceaseless course against the current. I am well aware that over the last ten years I have drifted a bit off course, but if I am allowed to live another four, I estimate that you will see me shake myself a second time and remount the stream to at least my former level, there never to descend again. All the great tests have been passed, and experience has proved to me once and forever that my present state is the only one in which man can live in virtue and happiness, because it is of all states the most independent and the only one in which he is never obliged to protect his own interests by injuring another's.



I admit that the reputation I have earned with my writings has greatly aided me in carrying out my plan. One must be thought of as a good author if one wants to get away with being a poor copyist and not want for work. If I did not have the first title, they would have looked too closely at the second, and that might have been mortifying. Although I can easily face ridicule, it would be much more difficult for me to bear disdain. But, if some reputation has given me a little advantage here, it has been well compensated by all the inconveniences attached to this same renown if one does not wish to be its slave and would like to live in independence and isolation. These inconveniences are what drove me from Paris; they still pursue me here in my retreat and will most certainly drive me even further if my health permits. Still another plague of that great city was the crowd of self proclaimed friends who took charge of me and, judging my heart by theirs, determined absolutely to make me happy according to their mode and not my own. Desperate at the thought of my retreat, they pursued me there that they might rescue me. I could not have remained where I was without breaking all ties. I have only been really happy since that time.

Free! No, I am not free yet. My last works have not yet been printed, and, considering the deplorable state of my poor machine, I no longer hope to see the whole collection in print. But if, contrary to my expectations, I ever reach that point and can bid farewell once and for all to my public, believe me, Sir, on that day I will be free, or no man has ever known freedom. Oh utinam! oh thrice blessed day! But no, I will never be allowed to see it.

I have not said everything yet, Sir, and you may well have to endure another letter. Fortunately nothing obliges you to read them, and you may well have some difficulty doing so. But I pray you will forgive me; in order to recopy this long jumble of ideas I would have to redo them all, and, to tell you the truth, I do not have the courage. I find great pleasure in writing you, but I am equally fond of repose, and my health does not permit me to write for long stretches at a time.



TO MONSIEUR DE MALESHERBES

Montmerency, January 26, 1762

After having set forth the real reasons for my conduct, I would like to talk to you about my state of mind here in my retreat; but I feel that time is running out; my soul, estranged from itself, belongs entirely to my body. The decrepitude of my poor machine binds me more closely to itself with each passing day, until the moment when it will at last be wholly free. It is about my happiness that I want to talk to you, and one speaks but poorly about happiness when one is in pain.

My ills are the workings of nature, but my happiness is all my own. Despite all anyone can say, my decision was a wise one, for I have been as happy as my nature will allow: I have not sought felicity from afar, I looked for it close to myself, and there I found it. Spartien says that Similis, a courtier of Trajan, having without any personal dissatisfaction quit the court and all his official functions in order to pursue a peaceful life in the country, had these words inscribed on his tomb: I spent seventy six years on this earth, and I lived but seven. I too can say this in some respects although my sacrifice was not as great. I have only begun to live since the 9th of April, 1756.

I cannot tell you, Sir, how touched I was to learn that you considered me the most unhappy of men. The public will doubtless judge me as you do, and that too distresses me. If only I could reveal the happiness of my lot to all the universe! Everyone would want to follow my example; peace would reign on earth; men would no longer seek to harm one another, and evil would cease to exist since nothing could be gained by it. But what did I enjoy when I was alone? Myself, the universe in its entirety, everything that is, everything that could be, all that is beautiful in the world of the senses and imaginable in the realm of the intellect: I gathered around me whatever pleased my heart; my desires were the measure of my happiness. No, no sensualist has ever known such delights; I have enjoyed my fantasies a hundred times more than they their realities.

When my suffering makes me measure the long hours of the night, and a restless fever keeps me from savoring a single hour of sleep, I often find distraction from my present state by summoning up the various events

✓ of my life, those I have repented, <sup>the well as</sup> the sweet memories and the sad; and a rush of emotion helps me for a single second to forget my pain. What moments would you say, Sir, are the ones that I recall most frequently and willingly to my dreams? Not the pleasures of my youth, too rare, too intertwined with bitterness and already too distant from me now. No, it is those of my retreat, my solitary promenades, those fleeting delicious days spent entirely alone in my own company together with my good and simple housekeeper, ~~my beloved dog and my ancient cat;~~ with the birds of the field and the deer of the forest; with all of nature and its inconceivable Author. When I awake before the sun so that I can contemplate its rising from my garden, when I see that the day will be fair, my first concern is that no letters or callers should intrude to disturb its charm. Having devoted the morning to a variety of chores, performed gladly because they could always be postponed, I hasten through my dinner in order to escape unwanted callers and make myself a longer afternoon. Before one o'clock, even on the hottest days, I depart with my faithful Achate while the sun is still high, hastening my steps for fear that someone will catch me before I can slip away. But once I have rounded a certain corner, my heart pounding and bursting with joy, I begin to breathe again, feeling that I am safe; and I say to myself: Here I am, my own master for the rest of the day! I then set off at a quieter pace to seek out some secluded spot in the forest, some wild place where nothing reveals the hand of man so that there can be no sign of servitude or domination; a sanctuary where I can believe I am the first person ever to set foot, and where no uninvited third ever intrudes between myself and nature. There she seems to display herself to me with a magnificence that is always new. The gold of the broom and the purple of the heather invades my eyes with a luxury that moves my heart to tears; the majesty of the trees that cover me with their shade, the delicacy of the bushes that encircle me, the astonishing variety of herbs and flowers that I tread beneath my feet hold my spirit perpetually alternating between observation and awe. The competition of so many objects all vying for my attention, draws me endlessly from one to another, encouraging my indolent and dreamy nature, and causing me to repeat to myself time and time again: No, Solomon in all his glory was never clad as one of these.

My imagination does not leave such a lovely spot long uninhabited. I soon have it peopled with beings congenial to my heart, and, banishing afar all opinion, prejudice and artificial passion, I transport into nature's sanctuaries a people worthy of that habitation. From these I fashion a charming society of which I feel I am not unworthy. I make for myself a golden age according to my fancy; and, filling these lovely days with all the scenes of my life which have left sweet memories, as well as all these my heart could still desire, I am moved to tears thinking of the real pleasures belonging to mankind, pleasures so delicious, so pure, and henceforth so remote from men. Oh, if in these moments some thought of Paris, my century or my little bit of author's glory troubles the tranquillity of my reveries, how disdainfully I banish it without an instant's pause so that I may abandon myself without distraction to the exquisite sentiments with which my soul is full. However, I admit that on occasions, in the midst of all of this, the thought that my fantasies are but empty air will suddenly make me sad. Were all my dreams to be turned into realities they would not suffice; I would imagine, dream and desire still more. I find within myself an inexplicable emptiness which nothing is able to fill; a certain reaching out of the heart toward another sort of enjoyment of which I cannot conceive, but for which I still feel a need. And even that, Sir, is enjoyment, for it pierces my being with a vivid poignancy, an appealing sadness with which I would not part.

Soon I raise my thoughts from the surface of the earth to all beings in nature, to the universal system of things, to the incomprehensible Being who embraces all. Then, my spirit lost in that immensity, I neither think nor reason nor philosophize. With a sort of sensual pleasure, I feel myself crushed beneath the weight of this universe; I abandon myself with rapture to the confusion of those immeasurable ideas; I like, in my imagination, to lose myself in space; my heart, confined within the boundaries of being, finds itself too constricted; I am suffocating within the universe; I would like to hurl myself into the infinite. Were I to unveil all the mysteries of nature, I believe I would find my situation less delightful than this intoxicating ecstasy to which my spirit yields without a struggle, and which occasionally, in the frenzy of my rapture, makes me cry out: Oh sublime Being! Oh sublime Being! unable to say or think another word.

## LETTERS TO MALESHERBES

## III

Thus the most delightful days that human creature ever spent slip by me in perpetual delirium; and when the setting sun makes me think of turning homeward, amazed at the rapidity of time, I feel I have not taken full advantage of the day, I believe I could have enjoyed it still more, and to make up for the time that was lost, I say to myself: I shall return tomorrow.

With unhurried steps I make my way back home, my head a bit fatigued, but my heart content. Once back, I relax at my ease, abandoning myself to the impression of the objects around me, but without thinking, without imagining, without doing a single other thing than savor the calm and the happiness of my situation. I find my place for supper set outside upon the terrace. I eat with a good appetite in the midst of my small domestic circle where no image of servitude or dependence disturbs the mutual affection which unites us all. Even my dog is my friend and not my slave; we share one will, but he has never obeyed me. My gaiety throughout the evening bears witness that I have been alone all day. I am quite another person when I have been in company, rarely pleased with others, and never with myself. Then I sit grumbling and taciturn: that was told me by my housekeeper, and, since hearing it, I have found upon observation that it is inevitably the case. At last, after I have taken a final turn or two about the garden or played some little air upon my spinet, I find within my bed a repose for body and soul a hundred times sweeter than sleep itself.

These are the days that have made up the real happiness of my life, a happiness without bitterness, without cares, without regrets, and to which I would willingly have limited the whole of my existence. Yes, Sir, I would have my eternity composed of just such days, I ask no others, and cannot imagine that I am much less happy than the celestial intelligences in their divine contemplations. But a body in pain deprives the spirit of its freedom; from now on I am no longer alone, I have a guest who shadows me. I must free myself of him if I am to be my own master; and the first tastes I have had of those sweet joys have only made me await less fearfully the moment when I will be able to savor them without distraction.

## LETTERS TO MALESHERBES

## III

But here I am at the end of my second sheet, and it looks as though I would still need another. One more letter then and no more. I ask your pardon, Sir. Although I am all too fond of talking about myself, I do not like to do so with everyone; this makes me abuse my opportunity when I have someone who pleases me. Here is my fault and my excuse. I beg you to take it in good part.

## LETTERS TO MALESHERBES

## IV

A. M.

Montmorency, January 28, 1762

I have revealed to you, Sir, from the secret recesses of my heart the real motives for my retirement and for all my conduct. These motives are doubtless much less noble than you had supposed, but they are such as to satisfy me with myself while inspiring my soul with the pride of a man who feels his life to be well ordered and who, having done what was necessary to bring this about, believes he is entitled to the credit. It was not required of me to create for myself another temperament or another character, but to use the ones I had in such a way as to make me beneficial to myself without being harmful to others. Nor will I attempt to conceal from you that, despite an awareness of my faults, I have a high opinion of myself.

Your gentlemen of letters can cry out to their heart's content that a man alone is a useless thing <sup>excludes</sup> and does not fulfill his duties to society. I believe that the peasants of Montmorency are more useful members of society than the mass of idlers who are paid by the sweat of the people to gossip in the Academy six days a week; and I am happier when I can occasionally do some favor for my poor neighbors than I would be in helping to forward the ambitions of that crowd of petty intriguers who fill the whole of Paris, each aspiring to the honor of scoundrel in residence while he ought, for the good of the public as well as his own, to be sent back to the province he came from to till his land. It is something to set men an example of the life that they should lead. It is something, when I no longer have the health or strength to work with my hands, to dare to speak out from my retreat with the voice of truth. It is something to warn men of the folly of clinging to opinions which make them miserable. It is something to have helped in preventing, or at least delaying the establishment in our city of that baneful institution which d'Alembert wanted to set up in our midst that he might pay court to Voltaire at our expense. If I had lived in Geneva I would not have been able to publish my dedicatory epistle on the Discourse on Inequality

or even to have spoken in the tone I used against the establishment of a theater in that city. I would be considerably more useless to my compatriots living in their midst than I can occasionally be here in my retreat. What difference does it make what place I inhabit as long as I accomplish what I must do? Furthermore, are the inhabitants of Montmorency any less human beings than the inhabitants of Paris, And, if I can dissuade someone from sending his child to be corrupted in the city, am I doing any less good than if I were to send that child back from the city to his paternal household? Does not my very indigence prevent me from being useless in the sense that your elegant speakers understand the word? And, since I am only able to eat that bread which I myself can earn, am I not obliged to work in order to keep alive and pay society for the needs I might demand of it? True, I have refused occupations for which I was not suited. But, since I felt I lacked the talent to qualify me for the favor you wished to bestow on me, to have accepted it would have meant stealing it from some other writer as poor as myself and more capable of doing that kind of work. When you offered it to me, you assumed I was qualified to edit and to summarize a text, and that I could concern myself with matters which were indifferent to me; that not being the case, I would have deceived you; I would have been unworthy of your generosity if I had acted otherwise than I did. One can never be excused for doing something badly which one does of one's own accord. I would be dissatisfied with myself at this moment as would you, and I would not have the pleasure I now have in writing to you. Finally, as far as my strength has allowed, while I have been working for myself, I have in my own fashion done all that I could for society. If I have done little for it, I have demanded still less; and we are so well quit, in my opinion, that were I at this moment able to retire altogether and live for myself alone, I would do so without scruple. I would at any rate devote all my strength to isolating myself from the intrusion of public acclaim. Were I to live another hundred years, I would not write a single line for the press, and would not believe I had really begun to live again until I had been completely forgotten.

I admit, however, that at a certain moment I was on the point of reintegrating myself into society; this was not because I had lost my taste for solitude, but because I had another love no less compelling



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## IV

which I all but preferred to it. You would have to have known my state at that time, Sir, owing to the neglect and abandonment of my friends. You would have to have known the depth of my despair when Monsieur and Madame de Luxembourg sought to make my acquaintance in order to judge how touched I was by their overtures and caresses. I was dying; without them I would surely have perished from sorrow, and, since they restored me to life, it is only right that I should devote that life to loving them.

I have an affectionate heart, but one which is sufficient to itself. I love men too much to have to choose among them; I love them all; and it is because I love them that I hate injustice; it is because I love them that I fly from them. I suffer less from their ills when I do not see them. This interest in the species suffices to nourish my heart; I do not need particular friends, but when I have some, it is essential to me that I should not lose them, for when they separate from me they tear me apart. In this they are all the more to blame because I ask nothing more from them than friendship, and, as long as they love me and let me know that they do, I do not even need to see them. But in place of sentiment, they always wanted to substitute favors and attentions which were intended to impress the public and had nothing to do with me. While I loved them, they wanted the appearance of loving me. And I, who despise appearances in all things, could not be satisfied with this; when I found out this was all there was, I needed to know no more. They did not exactly cease to love me, I simply discovered that their love for me did not exist.

Consequently, I found myself for the first time in my life alone in my heart as well as my person, for I was left without a friend in my retreat, and that at a time when I was almost as ill as I am today. It was under these circumstances that the new attachment which was to compensate me for all the others was initiated; an attachment for which I will never be compensated because it will endure, I hope, as long as I live, and come what may, it will be the last. I cannot disguise from you, Sir, that I have a violent aversion for any class that dominates another. Indeed, it is wrong to say I cannot disguise it from you, since I have no difficulty in making you this confession,

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## IV

you who descend from an illustrious line, son of the Chancellor of France and president of a sovereign court; yes, you Sir, you who have bestowed on me a thousand favors without knowing me, and towards whom, despite my natural ingratitude, it costs me nothing to be in obligation. I hate the rich and powerful, I hate their condition, their oppression, their prejudices, their pettiness, and all their vices. And I would hate them still more did I despise them less. It was with this sentiment that I was all but borne away to the chateau of Montmorency; I saw its masters, they loved me, and I, Sir, I loved and shall love them with all the strength of my soul as long as I shall live. I would abandon for them, I do not say my life, it would be but a poor gift in my present state; I do not say my reputation among my contemporaries, which hardly interests me; but the only glory that has ever touched my heart, the honor I expect from posterity; and this will be given to me because it is my due, for posterity is always just. My heart, which does not know how to love by halves, has given itself to them without reserve, and I do not repent it. Indeed, repentance would be useless now since it is too late to retract it if I would. In the warmth of my enthusiasm, I have a hundred times been on the point of asking an asylum in their house where I might spend the rest of my days near them. And they would have been overjoyed to grant me this request if, indeed, I did not assume from their manner that the offer had long since been made. This project is certainly the one on which I have meditated the longest and with the most pleasure. Nevertheless, I was finally obliged to admit with regret that it would not be good. I was only thinking of my attachment to the persons themselves without reflecting on the intermediaries who would have kept us apart, and these were of such varied sorts, especially considering the inconvenience attached to my illness, that such a project could only be excused by the sentiment that had inspired it. Furthermore, the mode of life I would have had to adopt would be too much in conflict with all my tastes and habits; I would not have been able to have endured it for even three months. Finally, for all the closeness of our habitations, the distance between our conditions would have remained the same, and that delightful intimacy which makes up the charm of a tightly knit society would always have been absent. I would have been neither the friend nor the servant of the Marshal of

Luxembourg; I would have been his guest. Always feeling out of place, I would frequently have sighed after my old retreat; it is a hundred times better to be separated from the persons one loves and to long to be with them than to risk finding oneself longing for the contrary. Moving but a few steps might have radically altered my life. I have imagined a hundred times in my dreams that Monsieur de Luxembourg was not a duke, but simply Marshal of France, simply a country gentleman residing in some old chateau, and that J. J. Rousseau was not an author, not a composer of books, but a man of mediocre wit and few accomplishments, calling upon the seigneur of the chateau and his lady and receiving them in his house, finding in their company the happiness of his life and contributing to theirs. Now, to make this fantasy still more delightful, if you will allow me to give a little shove with my shoulder and move the chateau de Malesherbes to within half a league's distance, it seems to me, Sir, with dreams such as these, I would not be in a hurry to awaken.

But all that is over; it only remains for me to end my long dream, for the others from now on are all out of season: it will be much if I can but promise myself a few more delightful hours spent in the chateau de Montmorency. But, be that as it may, here I am such as I see myself. You must make your judgement of me from this hodgepodge I have written, if I am worth the trouble, for I cannot arrange it better and do not have the courage to begin again. If this too authentic portrait deprives me of your good will, I will only have ceased to usurp what did not belong to me; but, should I still preserve your esteem, it will become yet more precious because it will then be truly mine.