Cervantes, Rabelais and Montaigne. For some years he assisted E. V. Rice in editing the Penguin Classics. He collected the three books of Comic and Curious Verse and anthologies of Latin American and Cuban writing. With his son Mark Cohen he also edited the Penguin Dictionary of Quotations and two editions of its companion Dictionary of Modern Quotations. He frequently visited Spain and made several visits to Mexico, Cuba and other Spanish American countries. J. M. Cohen died in 1989.
BOOK ONE

1712-1719 I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray shall be myself. Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different. Whether Nature did well or ill in breaking the mould in which she formed me, is a question which can only be resolved after the reading of my book.

Let the last trump sound when it will, I shall come forward with this work in my hand, to present myself before my Sovereign Judge, and proclaim aloud: "Here is what I have done, and if by chance I have used some immaterial embellishment it has been only to fill a void due to a defect of memory. I may have taken for fact what was no more than probability, but I have never put down as true what I knew to be false. I have displayed myself as I was, as vile and desplicable when my behaviour was such, as good, generous, and noble when I was so. I have bared my secret soul as 'Thou thyself hast seen it, Eternal Being!' So let the numberless legion of my fellow men gather round me, and hear my confessions. Let them groan at my depravities, and blush for my misdeeds. But let each one of them reveal his heart at the foot of Thy throne with equal sincerity, and may any man who dares, say 'I was a better man than he.'"

I was born at Geneva in 1712, the son of Isaac Rousseau, a citizen of that town, and Susanne Bernard, his wife. My father’s inheritance, being a fifteenth part only of a very small property which had been divided among as many children, was almost nothing, and he relied for his living entirely on his trade of watchmaker, at which he was very highly skilled. My mother was the daughter of a minister of religion and rather better-off. She had besides both intelligence and beauty, and my father had not found it easy to win her. Their love had begun almost with their birth; at eight or nine they would walk together every evening along La Treille, and at ten they were inseparable. Sympathy and mental affinity strengthened in them a feeling first
formed by habit. Both, being affectionate and sensitive by nature, were only waiting for the moment when they would find similar qualities in another; or rather the moment was waiting for them, and both threw their affections at the first heart that opened to receive them. Fate, by appearing to oppose their passion, only strengthened it. Unable to obtain his mistress, the young lover set out his heart with grief, and she counselled him to travel and forget her. He travelled in vain, and returned more in love than ever, to find her he loved still faithful and fond. After such a proof, it was inevitable that she should love one another for all their lives. They swore to do so, and Heaven smiled on their vows.

Gabriel Bernard, one of my mother's brothers, fell in love with one of my father's sisters, and she refused to marry him unless her brother could marry my mother at the same time. Love overcame all obstacles, and the two pairs were wedded on the same day. So it was that my uncle married my aunt, and their children became my double first cousins. Within a year both couples had a child, but at the end of that time each of them was forced to separate.

My uncle Bernard, who was an engineer, went to serve in the Empire and Hungary under Prince Eugène, and distinguished himself at the siege and battle of Belgrade. My father, after the birth of my only brother, left for Constantinople, where he had been called to become watchmaker to the Sultan's Seraglio. While he was away my mother's beauty, wit, and talents brought her admirers, one of the most pressing of whom was M. de la Closure, the French Resident in the city. His feelings must have been very strong, for thirty years later I have seen him moved when merely speaking to me about her. But my mother had more than her virtue with which to defend herself; she

adept talents much above her station. For her father the minister, who adored her, had taken great pains with her education. She drew, sang, and played accompaniments on the harp; she was well read and wrote very fine verses. Here is an impromptu which she composed as she was walking with her sister-in-law and her two children, apropos some remark made about her absent husband and brother:

Ces deux messieurs qui sont absents,  
Nous sont chers de bien des manières:  
Ce sont nos amis, nos sœurs,  
Ce sont nos mués, nos sœurs,  
Et les pères de ces enfants.

[These two absent gentlemen are dear to us in many ways. They are our friends and our sisters, they are our husbands and our brothers, and they are these children's fathers.]

deeply loved my father, and urged him to come back. He threw up everything to do so, and I was the unhappy fruit of his return. For ten months later I was born, a poor and sickly child, and cost my mother her life. So my birth was the first of my misfortunes.

I never knew how my father stood up to his loss, but I know that he never got over it. He seemed to see her again in me, but could never forget that I had robbed him of her; he never kissed me that I did not know by his sighs and his convulsive embrace that there was a bitter grief mingled with his affection, a grief which nevertheless intensified his feeling for me. When he said to me, 'Jean-Jacques, let us talk of your mother,' I would reply: 'Very well, father, but we are sure to cry.' 'Ah,' he would say with a groan, 'Give her back to me, console me for her, fill the void she has left in my heart! Should I love you so if you were not more to me than a son?' Forty years after he lost her he died in the arms of a second wife, but with his first wife's name on his lips, and her picture imprinted upon his heart.

Such were my parents. And of all the gifts with which Heaven endowed them, they left me but one, a sensitive heart. It had been the making of their happiness, but for me it has been the cause of all the misfortunes in my life.

I was almost born dead, and they had little hope of saving me. I brought with me the seed of a disorder which has grown stronger with the years, and now gives me only occasional intervals of relief in which to suffer more painfully in some other way. But one of my father's sisters, a nice sensible woman, bestowed such care on me that I survived; and now, as I write this, she is still alive at the age of eighty, nursing a husband rather younger than herself but ruined by drink. My dear aunt, I pardon you for causing me to live, and I deeply regret that I cannot repay you in the evening of your days all the care and affection you lavished on me at the dawn of mine. My nurse Jacqueline is still alive too, and healthy and strong. Indeed the fingers that opened my eyes at birth may well close them at my death.

I felt before I thought: which is the common lot of man, though more pronounced in my case than in another's. I know nothing of myself till I was five or six. I do not know how I learnt to read. I only remember my first books and their effect upon me; it is from my earliest reading that I date the unbroken consciousness of my own existence. My mother had penned some novels, and my father and I began to read them after our supper. At first it was only to give me some practice in reading. But soon my interest in this entertaining literature became so
strong that we read by turns continuously, and spent whole nights so engaged. For we could never leave off till the end of the book. Sometimes my father would say with shame as we heard the morning larks: 'Come, let us go to bed. I am more of a child than you are.'

In a short time I acquired by this dangerous method, not only an extreme facility in reading and expressing myself, but a singular insight for my age into the passions. I had no idea of the facts, but I was already familiar with every feeling. I had grasped nothing; I had sensed everything. These confused emotions which I experienced one after another, did not warp my reasoning powers in any way, for as yet I had none. But they shaped them after a special pattern, giving me the strangest and most romantic notions about human life, which neither experience nor reflection has ever succeeded in curing me of.

1719-1723 The novels gave out in the summer of 1719, and that winter we changed our reading. Having exhausted my mother's library, we turned to that portion of her father's which had fallen to us. Fortunately it contained some good books, as it could hardly fail to do, for the collection had been formed by a minister, who deserved the title, a man of learning, after the fashion of his day, but of taste and good sense as well. Le Sueur's History of Church and Empire, Bossuet's Discourse upon Universal History, Plutarch's Lives, Nani's History of Venice, Ovid's Metamorphoses, La Bruyère, Fontenelle's Worlds and his Dialogues with the Dead, and some volumes of Molière were transported to my father's workshop, where I read them to him every day while he worked.

Thus I acquired a sound taste, which was perhaps unique for my years. Plutarch, of them all, was my especial favourite, and the pleasure I took in reading and re-reading him did something to cure me of my passion for novels. Soon indeed I came to prefer Agestias, Bruttus, and Aristides to Orondates, Artamines, and Juba. It was this enthralling reading, and the discussions it gave rise to between my father and myself, that created in me that proud and intractable spirit, that impatience with the yoke of servitude, which has afflicted me throughout my life, in those situations least fitted to afford it scope. Continuously preoccupied with Rome and Athens, living as one might say with their great men, myself born the citizen of a republic and the son of a father whose patriotism was his strongest passion, I took fire by his example and pictured myself as a Greek or a Roman. I became indeed that character whose life I was reading; the recital of his constancy or his daring deeds so carrying me away that my eyes sparkled and my voice rang. One day when I was reading the story of Scævola over table, I frightened them all by putting out my hand and grasping a chafing-dish in imitation of that hero.

I had one brother seven years older than myself; who was learning my father's trade. The extraordinary affection lavished upon me led to his being somewhat neglected, which I consider very wrong. Moreover his education had suffered by this neglect, and he was acquiring low habits even before he arrived at an age at which he could in fact indulge them. He was apprenticed to another master, with whom he took the same liberties as he had taken at home. I hardly ever saw him. Indeed, I hardly say that I ever knew him, but I did not cease to love him dearly, and he loved me as well as a second child can love. I remember once when my father was correcting him severely and angrily, throwing myself impetuously between them, and clasping my arms tightly around him. Thus I covered him with my body, and received the blows intended for him. So obstinately did I maintain my hold that, either as a result of my tearful cries or so as not to hurt me more than him, my father let him off his punishment. In the end my brother became so bad that he ran away and completely disappeared. We heard some time later that he was in Germany. But he did not write at all, and we had no more news of him after that. So it was that I became an only son.

But if that poor lad's upbringing was neglected, it was a different matter with his brother. No royal child could be more scrupulously cared for than I was in my early years. I was idolized by everyone around me, and what is rarer, always treated as a beloved son, never as a spoiled child. Never once, until I left my father's house, was I allowed to run out alone into the road with the other children. They never had to repress or to indulge in me any of those wayward humours that are usually attributed to Nature, but which are all the product of education alone. I had the faults of my years. I was a chattering, I was greedy, and sometimes I lied. I would have stolen fruit or sweets or any kind of eatable; but I never took delight in being naughty or destructive, or in accustoming other people or torturing poor animals. However, I do remember once having made water in one of our neighbour's cooking-pots while she was at church; her name was Mme Cloz. I will even admit that the thought of it still makes me laugh, because Mme Cloz, although a good woman on the whole, was the grumpiest old body I
have ever met. And that is a brief and truthful account of all my childish misdeeds.

How could I have turned out wicked when I had nothing but examples of kindness before my eyes, none but the best people in the world around me? My father, my aunt, my nurse, our friends and relations and everyone near me, may not have done my every bidding, but they did love me, and I loved them in return. My desires were so rarely excited and so rarely thwarted, that it never came into my head to have any. I could swear indeed that until I was put under a master I did not so much as know what it was to want my own way. When I was not reading or writing with my father, or going out for walks with my nurse, I spent all my time with my aunt, watching her embroider, hearing her sing, always sitting or standing beside her; and I was happy. Her cheerfulness and kindliness and her pleasant face have left such an impression upon me that I can still remember her manner, her attitude and the way she looked. I recall too her affectionate little remarks, and I could still describe her clothes and her head-dress, not forgetting the two curls of black hair she combed over her temples in the fashion of the day.

I am quite sure that it is to her I owe my taste, or rather my passion, for music, though it did not develop in me till long afterwards. She knew an enormous number of songs and tunes which she sang in a thin voice, that was very sweet. Such was the severity of this excellent woman that it kept melancholy and sadness away, not only from her but from anyone who came near her; and such delight did I take in her singing that not only have many of her songs remained in my memory, but even now that I have lost her, others which I had completely forgotten since my childhood come back to me as I grow older, with a charm that I cannot express. It may seem incredible but, old dotard that I am, eaten up with cares and infirmities, I still find myself weeping like a child as I hum her little airs in my broken, tremulous voice. There is one in particular, the whole tune of which has come back to me. But the second half of the words persistently defies all my efforts to remember them, though I have a confused memory of the rhymes. Here is the opening and as much as I can recall of the rest:

Thyrsis, I dare not come
To listen to your playing
Under the elm.
For round our farm
Do you know what they're saying?

A shepherd born
Who faithfully swore
Nothing to fear
But never is a rose without a thorn.

I strive in vain to account for the strange effect which that song has on my heart, but I cannot explain why I am moved. All I know is that I am quite incapable of singing it to the end without breaking into tears. Countless times I have made up my mind to write to Paris and find out the rest of the words, if there is anyone who still knows them. But I am almost sure that the pleasure I derive from recalling the tune would partly vanish, once I had proof that anyone but my poor aunt Susan had sung it.

Such were the first affections of my daunging years; and thus there began to form in me, or to display itself for the first time, a heart at once proud and affectionate, and a character at once effeminate and inflexible, which by always wavering between weakness and courage, between self-indulgence and virtue, has throughout my life set me in conflict with myself, to such effect that abstinence and enjoyment, pleasure and prudence have alike eluded me.

The course of my education was interrupted by an accident, the consequences of which have influenced the rest of my life. My father quarrelled with M. Gautier, a French captain with relations on the Council. This Gautier was a braggart and a coward who, happening to bleed at the nose, revenged himself by accusing my father of having drawn his sword against him in the city. When they decided to put my father in prison, however, he insisted that, according to the law, his accuser should be arrested also; and when he failed to get his way he preferred to leave Geneva and remain abroad for the rest of his life rather than lose both liberty and honour by giving in.

I stayed behind in the charge of my uncle Bernard, who was then employed on the city's fortifications. His elder daughter was dead, but he had a son of my age, and we were sent together to Bossey to board with the pastor, M. Lambercier, to learn Latin and all that sorry nonsense as well that goes by the name of education.

Two years' sojourn in that village somewhat modified my harsh Roman manners, and brought me back to the stage of childhood. At Geneva, where nothing was demanded of me, I loved steady reading, which was almost my sole amusement; at Bossey the work I had to do made me prefer games, which I played as a relaxation. The country too was such a fresh experience that I could never have enough of it.
Indeed the taste that I got for it was so strong that it has remained inextinguishable, and the memory of the happy days I spent there has made me long regrettably for a country life and its pleasures at every stage of my existence, till now, when I am in the country once more. M. Lambeceier was a very intelligent man; though he did not neglect our lessons, he did not load us with excessive work; and the proof of his capability is that, despite my dislike for composition, I have never looked back with distaste on my lesson times with him. I may not have learnt very much from him, but what I did learn I learnt without difficulty and I have remembered it all.

The simplicity of this rural existence brought me one invaluable benefit; it opened my heart to friendship. Up to that time I had known nothing but lofty and theoretical emotions. Living peacefully side by side with my cousin Bernard gave me a bond of affection with him, and in a very short time I felt a greater attachment for him than I had ever felt for my brother, an attachment that has never disappeared. He was a tall, lank, sickly boy, as mild in spirit as he was weak in body, and he never abused his favoured position in the house as my guardian’s son. We shared the same studies, the same amusements, and the same tastes; we were on our own and of the same age, and each of us needed a companion; to be separated would have broken our hearts. Seldom though we had the opportunity of proving our attachment to one another, it was extremely strong. For not only could we not have lived one moment apart, but we never imagined that we could ever be parted. Being both of a nature easily awayed by affection, and tractable so long as there was no attempt at constraint, we were always in agreement on all subjects, and if the favour of our guardians gave him some advantage when they were present, the ascendency was mine when we were alone – which redressed the balance. At our lessons I prompted him if he broke down; and when I had written my exercise I helped him with his. In our sports too I was the more active, and always took the lead. In fact our two natures agreed so well, and our friendship was so mutual and whole-hearted that for five complete years, both at Bonne and at Geneva, we were almost inseparable. We often fought, I confess, but no one ever had to part us. Not one of our quarrels lasted more than a quarter of an hour, and not once did either of us complain of the other. It may be said that these observations are puerile, but the relationship they describe is perhaps a unique one in all the history of childhood.

The manner of my life at Bonne suited me so well that if only it had lasted longer it could not have failed to fix my character for ever. It was founded on the affectionate, tender, and peaceful emotions. There was never, I believe, a creature of our kind with less vanity than I. By sudden transports I achieved moments of bliss, but immediately afterwards I relapsed into languor. My strongest desire was to be loved by everyone who came near me. I was gentle, so was my cousin, and so were our guardians. For a whole two years I was neither the witness nor the victim of any violence. Everything served to strengthen the natural disposition of my heart. Nothing seemed to me so delightful as to see everyone pleased with me and with everything. I shall always remember repeating my catechism in church, where nothing upset me more than the grief and anxious look on Mlle Lambeceier’s face when I hesitated. This made me unhappier than did my shame at faltering in public, though that too disconcerted me exceedingly. For although I was not very susceptible to praise, I was always extremely sensitive to disgrace. But I may say now that the expectation of a scolding from Mlle Lambeceier alarmed me less than the fear of annoying her.

Neither she nor her brother was lacking in severity when necessary. But as their severity was almost always just and never excessive, I took it to heart and never resented it. I was more upset at displeasing them, however, than at being punished; and a word of rebuke was more painful to me than a blow. It embarrasses me to be more explicit, but it is necessary nevertheless, how differently people would treat children if only they saw the eventual results of the indiscriminate, and often culpable, methods of punishment they employ! The magnitude of the lesson to be derived from so common and unfortunate a case as my own has resolved me to write it down.

Since Mlle Lambeceier treated us with a mother’s love, she had also a mother’s authority, which she exercised sometimes by inflicting on us such childish chastisements as we had earned. For a long while she confined herself to threats, and the threat of a punishment entirely unknown to me frightened me sufficiently. But when in the end I was beaten I found the experience less dreadful in fact than in anticipation; and the very strange thing was that this punishment increased my affection for the inflicter. It required all the strength of my devotion and all my natural gentleness to prevent my deliberately earning another beating; I had discovered in the shame and pain of the punishment an admixture of sensuality which had left me rather eager than otherwise for a repetition by the same hand. No doubt, there being some degree of precocious sensuality in all this, the same punishment at the hands of
her brother would not have seemed pleasant at all. But he was of too kindly a disposition to be likely to take over this duty; and so, if I refrained from earning a fresh punishment, it was only out of fear of annoying Mlle Lambierier; so much am I swayed by kindness, even by kindness that is based on sensuality, that it has always prevailed with me over sensuality itself.

The next occasion, which I postponed, although not through fear, occurred through no fault of mine—that is to say I did not act deliberately. But I may say that I took advantage of it with an easy conscience. This second occasion, however, was also the last. For Mlle Lambierier had no doubt detected signs that this punishment was not having the desired effect. She announced, therefore, that she would abandon it, since she found it too exhausting. Hitherto we had always slept in her room, and sometimes, in winter, in her bed. Two days afterwards we were made to sleep in another room, and henceforward I had the honour, willingly though I would have dispensed with it, of being treated as a big boy.

Who could have supposed that this childish punishment, received at the age of eight at the hands of a woman of thirty, would determine my tastes and desires, my passions, my very self for the rest of my life, and that in a sense diametrically opposed to the one in which they should normally have developed. At the moment when my senses were aroused my desires took a false turn and, confusing themselves to this early experience, never act about seeking a different one. With sensuality burning in my blood almost from my birth, I kept myself pure and unsmirched up to an age when even the coldest and most backward natures have developed. Tormented for a long while by I knew not what, I leaned feverishly on lovely women, recalling them ceaselessly to my imagination, but only to make use of them in my own fashion as so many Mlle Lambieriers.

My morals might well have been impaired by these strange tastes, which persisted with a depraved and insane intensity. But in fact they kept me pure even after the age of puberty. If ever education was chaste and decent, mine was. My three aunts were not only women of remarkable virtue, but examples of a modesty that has long since disappeared from womankind. My father was a pleasure lover, but a gallant of the old school, and never made a remark in the hearing of those women he loved most that would have brought a blush to a virgin’s cheek; and never was the respect due to children more scrupulously observed than in my family and in my case. I did not find the slightest difference in this respect at M. Lampricier’s; a very good servant maid was dismissed for a dubious word pronounced in our hearing. Not only had I not till adolescence any clear ideas concerning sexual intercourse, but my muddled thoughts on the subject always assumed odious and disgusting shapes. I had a horror of prostitutes which has never left me, and I could not look on a debauchee without contempt and even fear. Such had been my horror of immorality, even since the day when, on my way to Petit Soconex along the wooded road, I saw the holes in the earth on either side where I was told such people performed their fornications. When I thought of this I was always reminded of the coupling of dogs, and my stomach turned over at the very thought.

These adolescent prejudices would themselves have been sufficient to retard the first explosions of an inflammable temperament. But they were reinforced, as I have said, by the effect upon me of the promptings of sensuality. Imagining no pleasures other than those I had known, I could not, for all the restless timbres in my veins, direct my desires towards any other form of gratification. Always I stopped short of imagining those satisfactions which I had been taught to loathe, and which, little though I suspected it, were in fact not so far divorced from those I envisaged. In my mad fantasies, my wild fits of eroticism, and in the strange behaviour which they sometimes drove me to, I always invoked, imaginatively, the aid of the opposite sex, without so much as dreaming that a woman could serve any other purpose than the one I listed for.

Not only, therefore, did I, though ardent, lascivious, and precocious by nature, pass the age of puberty without desiring or knowing any other sensual pleasures than those which Mlle. Lambierier had, in all innocence, acquainted me with; but when finally, in the course of years, I became a man I was preserved by that very perversity which might have been my undoing. My old childish tastes did not vanish, but became so intimately associated with those of maturity that I could never, when sensually aroused, keep the two apart. This peculiarity, together with my natural timidity, has always made me very backward with women, since I have never had the courage to be frank or the power to get what I wanted, it being impossible for the kind of pleasure I desired—to which the other kind is no more than a consummation—to be taken by him who wants it, or to be guessed at by the woman who could grant it. So I have spent my days in silent longing in the presence of those I most loved. I never dared to reveal my strange
taste, but at least I got some pleasure from situations which pandered to the thought of it. To fall on my knees before a masterful mistress, to obey her commands, to have to beg for her forgiveness, have been to me the most delicate of pleasures; and the more my vivid imagination heated my blood the more like a spellbound lover I looked. As can be imagined, this way of making love does not lead to rapid progress, and is not very dangerous to the virtue of the desired object. Consequently I have possessed few women, but I have not failed to get a great deal of satisfaction in my own way, that is to say imaginatively. So it is that my sensibility, combined with my timidity and my romantic nature, have preserved the purity of my feelings and my morals, by the aid of those same tastes which might, with a little more boldness, have plunged me into the most brutal sensuality.

Now I have made the first and most painful step in the dark and miry maze of my confessions. It is the ridiculous and the shameful, not one's criminal actions, that is hardest to confess. But henceforth I am certain of myself; after what I have just had the courage to say, nothing else will defeat me. How much it has cost me to make such revelations can be judged when I say that though sometimes labouring under passions that have robbed me of sight, of hearing, and of my senses, though sometimes trembling convulsively in my whole body in the presence of the woman I loved, I have never, during the whole course of my life, been able to force myself, even in moments of extreme intimacy, to confess my peculiarities and implore her to grant the one favour which was lacking. That confession I was only able to make once, when I was a child to a child of my own age, and then it was she who made the first overtures.

When I trace my nature back in this way to its earliest manifestations, I find features which may appear incompatible, but which have nevertheless combined to form a strange, simple, and uniform whole. I find other features, however, which, though similar in appearance, have formed by a concatenation of circumstances combinations so different that one could never suppose them to be in any way related to one another. Who would imagine, for instance, that I owe one of the most vigorous elements in my character to the same origins as the weakness and sensuality that flows in my veins? Before we leave the subject I have been dwelling on, I will show it under a very different light.

One day I was learning my lessons alone in the room next to the kitchen, where the servant had left Mlle Lamberciére's combs to dry on

the stove top. Now when she came to take them off, she discovered that the teeth of one were broken off, all down one side. Who was to be blamed for this? I was the only person who had been in the room; but I said I had not touched it. M. and Mlle Lamberciére jointly lectured, pressed, and threatened me; but I stubbornly maintained my denial. Appearances were too strong for me, however, and all my protest were overruled, although this was the first time that I had been convicted of a downright lie. They took the matter seriously, as it deserved. The mischief, the untruth, and my persistent denials, all seemed to deserve a punishment; but this time it was not Mlle Lamberciére who inflicted it. They wrote to my Uncle Bernard, and he came. My cousin was accused of another crime no less grave; we were awarded the same chastisement, which was a severe one. If they had intended to alloy my depraved tastes for ever by using the evil as its own remedy, they could not have gone about it in a better way. For a long time my desires left me in peace.

They were unable to force me to the confession they required. Though the punishment was several times repeated and I was reduced to the most deplorable condition, I remained inflexible. I would have died rather than give in, and I was resolved to. So force had to yield before the diabolical obstinacy of a child. For that is what they called my persistence. But finally I emerged from that cruel ordeal shattered but triumphant.

It is now nearly fifty years since this occurrence, and I have no fear of a fresh punishment for the offence. But I declare before Heaven that I was not guilty. I had not broken, nor so much as touched, the comb. I had not gone near the stove, nor so much as thought of doing so. But do not ask me how the mischief occurred. I have no idea, and I cannot understand it. But I do most positively know that I was innocent.

Imagine a person timid and docile in ordinary life, but proud, fiery, and indecible when roused, a child who has always been controlled by the voice of reason, always treated with kindness, fairness, and indulgence, a creature without a thought of injustice, now for the first time suffering a most grave one at the hands of the people he loves best and mostly deeply respects. Imagine the revolution in his ideas, the violent change of his feelings, the confusion in his heart and brain, in his small intellectual and moral being! I say, imagine all this if you can. For myself I do not feel capable of unravelling the strands, or even remotely following all that happened at that time within me.

I had not yet sufficient reasoning power to realize the extent to which
appearances were against me, to put myself in my elders' position. I clung to my own, and all I felt was the cruelty of an appalling punishment for a crime I had not committed. The physical pain was bad enough, but I hardly noticed it; what I felt was indignation, rage, and despair. My cousin was in a more or less similar case; he had been punished for what had only been a mistake but was taken for a premeditated crime, and he, following my example, got into a rage, and so to speak, worked himself up to the same pitch as myself. Lying together in the same bed, we embraced wildly, almost stifling one another; and when our young hearts were somewhat assuaged and we could give voice to our anger, we sat up and shouted a hundred times in unison at the tops of our voices: 'Carnifex!' 'carnifex!' 'carnifex!'

I feel my pulse beat faster once more as I write. I shall always remember that time if I live to be a thousand. That first meeting with violence and injustice has remained so deeply engraved on my heart that any thought which recalls it summons back this first emotion. The feeling was only a personal one in its origins, but it has since assumed such a consistency and has become so divorced from personal interests that my blood boils at the sight or the tale of any injustice, whoever may be the sufferer and wherever it may have taken place, in just the same way as if I were myself its victim. When I read of the cruelties of a fierce tyrant, of the nubile machinations of a rascally priest, I would gladly go and stab the wretch myself, even if it were to cost me my life a hundred times over. I have often run till I dropped, flinging stones at some cock or cow or dog, or any animal that I saw tormenting another because it felt itself the stronger. This is an innate characteristic in me. Indeed I think it is. But the memory of the first injustice I suffered was so painful, so persistent, and so intricately bound up with it that, however strong my initial bent in that direction, this youthful experience must certainly have powerfully reinforced it.

There ended the serenity of my childish life. From that moment I never again enjoyed pure happiness, and even to-day I am conscious that memory of childhood's delights stops short at that point. We stayed some months longer at Boysy. We lived as we are told the first man lived in the earthly paradise, but we no longer enjoyed it; in appearance our situation was unchanged, but in reality it was an entirely different kind of existence. No longer were we young people bound by ties of respect, intimacy, and confidence to our guardians; we no longer looked on them as gods who read our hearts; we were less ashamed of wrongdoing, and more afraid of being caught; we began to be secretive, to rebel, and to lie. All the vices of our years began to corrupt our innocence and to give an ugly turn to our amusements.

Even the country no longer had for us those sweet and simple charms that touch the heart; it seemed to our eyes depressing and empty, as if it had been covered by a veil that cloaked its beauties. We gave up tending our little gardens, our herbs and flowers. We no longer went out to scratch the surface of the ground and shout with delight at finding one of the seeds we had sown beginning to sprout. We grew to dislike that life; and they grew to dislike us. So my uncle took us away, and we left M. and Mme. Lambertiers, with few regrets on either side, each party having grown weary of the other.

More than thirty years have passed since my departure from Boysy without my once recalling my stay there in any consecutive way or with any pleasure. But now that I have passed my prime and am declining into old age, I find these memories reviving as others fade, and stampering themselves on my mind with a charm and vividness of outline that grows from day to day. It is as if, feeling my life escaping from me, I were trying to recapture it at its beginnings. The smallest events of that time please me by the mere fact that they are of that time. I remember places and people and moments in all their detail. I can see the man- or maid-servant bustling about the room, a swallow flying in at the window, a fly alighting on my hand while I am saying my lesson. I can see the whole arrangement of the room in which we lived, on the right of which was M. Lambertier's study, with an engraving of all the popes, a barometer, and a large almanac on the walls. The windows were darkened by raspberry canes, which sometimes grew into the room; for the garden climbed steeply above the back of the house, and overshadowed it. I am well aware that the reader does not require information, but, I, on the other hand, feel impelled to give it to him. Why should I not relate all the little incidents of that happy time, that still give me a flutter of pleasure to recall—six or seven of them at least. . . . Or let us strike a bargain. I will let you off live and be content with one, just one, so long as I am allowed to take as long as I like in telling it, in order to prolong my pleasure.

If I were not concerned for yours, I might choose the tale of Mlle Lambertier's unfortunate tumble at the end of the field, which caused her to display her full back view to the King of Sardinia as he passed. But the incident of the walnut tree on the terrace pleases me better. For I took part in it, whereas I was only a spectator of Mlle Lambertier's
tumble; and I assure you that I did not find the least cause for laughter in an accident which, though comical in itself, filled me with alarm on behalf of one whom I loved as a mother, or perhaps even more dearly.

Outside the gate into the courtyard, on the left as you came in, was a terrace on which we often sat of an afternoon, although it was fully exposed to the sun. In order to provide some shade, however, M. Lambertcer had a walnut tree planted there. Its planting was carried out with all solemnity; we two boarders were its godparents, and whilst the hole was being filled we each held the tree with one hand, singing triumphal songs. Now for its watering a kind of trench was left all round it, and every day my cousin and I eagerly watched the watering ceremony, which confirmed us in our natural belief that it was a finer thing to plant a tree on a terrace than a flag in the breeze. We resolved, therefore, to win that glory for ourselves and share it with no one.

For that purpose we went and cut a slip from a young willow, and planted it on the terrace some eight or ten feet from the sacred walnut. Nor did we omit to dig a trench round our tree, but the difficulty was to obtain the wherewithal to fill it. For our water was brought from a considerable distance, and we children were not allowed to run out and fetch it. Nevertheless our willow could not thrive without it, and for some days we resorted to every sort of device for getting it, to such good effect that it budded beneath our eyes, putting out little leaves whose growth we measured hour by hour, in the firm belief that, though it was not a foot high, it would not be long before it cast us a shade.

Now our tree was our sole preoccupation, and we went about in a sort of fever, incapable of applying ourselves to our lessons or to anything else. Our elders, therefore, unable to make out the cause of the trouble, kept us more confined than ever; and the fatal moment drew near when our water would give out. We were desperate at the thought of watching our tree perish to death. Finally invention's mother, necessity, suggested a way of keeping it alive and saving ourselves from death by despair. Our plan was to make an underground tunnel which would secretly bring to the willow some of the water which was given to the walnut tree. Febrilishly we undertook our enterprise, but at first it did not succeed; the tunnel filled up with dirt, and everything went wrong. But nothing deterred us: 'Labor omnis vincit impressus.' We dug away more earth and deepened our trench to give the water a flow; and we cut some boxes into little narrow boards, putting some of them flat at the bottom and propping others at angles at each side to make a triangular channel for our stream. Where it flowed in we planted thin sticks at intervals to form a gaiting or trap that would hold up the fine earth and stones, and keep the channel free for the water. Then we carefully covered our work, treading the soil well down, and on the day when it was completed waited in an ecstasy of alternate hope and fear for watering time. After centuries of delay the hour came round at last, and M. Lambertcer emerged, as usual, to witness the ceremony, throughout which we both stood behind him, to hide our tree. For, most fortunately, he had his back to it.

A few months after the first bucket was poured in we saw a trickle of water flow into our trench. At this sight our caution deserted us, and we set up such shouts of joy that M. Lambertcer turned round; which was a pity since he had just been observing with delight how good the soil was around his tree and how greedily it absorbed the water. Shocked, however, to see it providing for two trenches, he also set up a shout. Then, taking a closer look, he discovered our trick and sent straight for a masteck, which quickly knocked a few of our boards flying. 'An aqueduct! an aqueduct!' he cried, and raised down his merciless blows on every side. Each one of them pierced us to the heart. In a moment the boards, the masteck, the trench, and the willow were all destroyed, and the earth all round was ploughed up. But, in the course of all this frightful business, the only words uttered were his cries of 'An aqueduct! an aqueduct!' as he knocked everything to pieces.

It may be supposed that the incident had unpleasant consequences for the young architects. But not so. That was all. M. Lambertcer did not utter a word of reproach, did not look sternly upon us, and never mentioned the matter at all, though we heard his full-throated laugh ring out shortly afterwards from his sister's room. You could hear M. Lambertcer's laugh from afar. What was even more surprising, however, was that the first shock was over, we were not very disturbed ourselves. We planted another tree in another place, and often reminded one another of the first one's unhappy fate, by significantly repeating 'An aqueduct! an aqueduct!' Before that time I had had occasional bounts of conceit and fancied myself an Aristides or a Brunus; but this was my first well-defined attack of vanity. To have built an aqueduct with our own hands and set a cutting to compete with a large tree seemed to me the very height of glory, the meaning of which I understood better at ten than did Caesar at thirty.

The memory of that incident so stuck in my mind — or was so
forcibly recalled to it—that one of my dearest plans, on revisiting Geneva in 1734, was to go back to Bessey, and see the memorials of my youth, chief among them that well-loved walnut tree, which by that time would have been a third of a century old. But I was so besieged by people, so little my own master, that I could not find a moment in which to please myself. It is unlikely that I shall ever have this opportunity again. But though I have lost all hope of ever seeing it now, I still long to do so, and were I ever to return to that dear village and find my walnut tree still alive, I should most probably water it with my tears.

On my return to Geneva I stayed for two or three years with my uncle, waiting for them to decide what should be done with me. He intended his own son for an engineer, and so made him learn drawing and taught him the elements of Euclid. I shared these lessons with him, and got a taste for them, especially for the drawing. In the meantime they were discussing whether to make me a watchmaker, a lawyer, or a minister. My preference was for the ministry, for I fancied myself as a preacher. But the little income from my mother’s property had to be divided between my brother and myself, and was not enough for me to study on. Since I was too young, however, for a decision to be really urgent, I remained provisionally at my uncle’s more or less wasting my time, but paying all the same—as was only right—quite a little for my board.

My uncle, like my father, was a pleasure lover, but had not learnt, like him, enough self-master to do his duty. So he paid very little attention to us. My aunt was a religious woman, of a rather picturesque turn, who preferred singing her psalms to looking after our education. So we were allowed almost complete freedom, which we never abused. We were sufficient company for one another, and almost inseparable. So we were not tempted to mix with the riff-raff of our own age, and did not pick up any of those loose habits that idleness might have led us into. But I am wrong to speak of us as idle; never in our lives were we less so, and the lucky thing was that all the cares that attracted us, one after another, kept us together, busily occupied at home, and not tempted even to go out in the road. We constructed cages, pipes, kites, drums, and model houses, toy guns and bows, and blunted my poor old grandfather’s tools, imitating him in his craft of watchmaking. But our especial preference was for scribbling on paper, drawing, colour washing, painting, and generally wasting the materials. An Italian showman came to Geneva, a man by the name of Gamba-Corta, and we went to see him once, but refused to go again. He gave a marionette show, and we made marionettes; his marionettes acted a kind of comedy, and we made up comedies for ours. Then, producing our voices from deep in our throats in unskilful imitation of Mr Punch, we performed these charming comedies, which our unfortunate relatives were patient enough to sit through. But one day Uncle Bernard read us a very fine sermon in his serious style, and we then began to make up sermons. These details are not very interesting, I admit, but they serve to show that our early education was on the right lines. For though we were almost our own masters at a very early age, we were scarcely ever tempted to misuse our time. So little were we in need of companions, indeed, that we even neglected opportunities for finding them. When we went for walks we watched the children’s games without envy, from a distance, and did not so much as think of joining in. Our own friendship so filled our hearts that we had only to be together and the simplest pleasures were delightful.

By dint of always being together we became noticeable, especially since, my cousin being so tall and I so short, we made a curiously assorted pair. His long, thin shape and his little face like a wrinkled apple, his soft expression and slovenly gait, incited the children to make fun of him. In their dialect they gave him the nickname of Barnà Béda, and as soon as we came out we heard Barnà Béda shouted all around us. He could bear this more patiently than I. I got angry, and wanted to fight, which was just what the little devils wanted. I fought, and was beaten. My poor cousin did his best to back me up; but he was not strong and one punch sent him over. Then I lost my temper, but although I caught plenty of blows on my head and shoulders it was not me they were after but Barnà Béda. However I had made things so much worse by my headstrong temper that we dared not go out except when we were in class, through fear of being booted and followed by the schoolchildren.

So already I was a lighter of wrongs. To be a proper knight-errant I only needed a lady; I acquired two. Every now and then I used to go and see my father at Nyon, a little village in the Vaudois where he had settled. He was very well liked, and his popularity extended to me. During the little time I spent with him everyone competed to entertain me. A certain Mme de Vulson, in particular, showered me with kisses and, to complete my happiness, her daughter adopted me as her young man. It is obvious what purpose a young man of eleven serves for a girl.

[Barnà is the name in the medieval Roméo de Renard, and the local pronunciation seems to have been Barnà.]
of twenty-two. Such artful maidens know how to make use of little men as covers for their affairs with their elders, or to tempt real lovers by making an attractive show with unreal ones. But I did not see any disparity between us and took the matter seriously. I gave myself to her with all my heart, or rather with all my head, for my love, desperate though it was, was almost entirely of the imagination. Nevertheless I indulged in emotional scenes, agonies, and furies which were quite ridiculous.

I know two very distinct sorts of love, both real but with practically nothing in common except that they are alike extremely violent and different in every way from a mere friendly affection. The whole course of my life has been divided between these two quite separate emotions, and I have even experienced them both simultaneously. For instance, at the time I am speaking of, whilst so public and tyrannically monopolizing Mlle de Vulinon that I could not bear any man to come near her, I was having very short but very passionate encounters with a little Mlle Goton, who was so kind as to play the schoolmistress to me — and that was all. But that all meant everything. It seemed the height of bliss. For, suspecting already the key to the mystery although I could only make childish use of it, I compensated myself, behind Mlle de Vulinon's back, for the use she put me to as a mask for her other amours. But, to my great mortification, my secret was discovered — or rather less well kept by my little schoolmistress than by me — and very soon we were separated.

She was indeed a strange little person, was Mlle Goton. She was not beautiful, but her face was not easy to forget. I can remember it yet, rather vividly at times for an old fool. Her eyes, especially, but her figure and her manner too, were out of keeping with her years. She had a proud, rather overbearing way with her which very well suited her schoolmistress's role, and indeed had given us the first idea for it. But the oddest thing about her was a mixture of boldness and modesty difficult to imagine. She took the greatest liberties with me, but never allowed me to take any with her; she treated me exactly like a child, which makes me imagine that she had either ceased to be one herself, or that she was so childish, on the other hand, that she only saw the danger she was exposing herself to as a game.

I gave myself over entirely, as you might say, to both these young ladies, so completely in fact that when I was with either of them I never thought of the other. But, on the other hand, there was no similarity between the emotions each of them roused in me. I could have spent my whole life with Mlle de Vulinon without a thought of leaving her; but when I met her my pleasure was a calm one, never bordering on passion. I liked her best in fine company; her sense of humour, her sharp tongue, my jealousies even, attached me to her and made her interesting. I swelled with pride when she preferred me to grown-up rivals, whom she appeared to slight. I was in a torment, but I loved my torment. Applause, encouragement, and laughter excited me and raised my spirits. I indulged in bursts of anger and sulks of wit. In company I was beside myself with love for her; alone with her, I should have been constrained and cold, perhaps bored. All the same I was tenderly concerned for her, I suffered when she was ill, I would have sacrificed my health to restore hers — and I knew very well from experience the difference between sickness and health. When I was away from her I thought of her and missed her; when we were together her kisses warmed my heart, but did not rouse my senses. I was on terms of easy familiarity with her, for I asked no more of her in imagination than she gave me in fact. All the same I could not have borne to see her give as much to others. I loved her as a brother, but with a lover's jealousy.

But if I had so much as supposed that Mlle Goton could lavish on anyone else the attentions I received at her hands I should have been jealous as a Turk, and as savage as a tiger. For the favours she granted me were favours to be begged for on bended knee. On greeting Mlle de Vulinon I had a feeling of lively pleasure, but was undisturbed. But I had only to see Mlle Goton, and my eyes were blind to all else, my senses soaring. With Mlle de Vulinon I was familiar without familiarity; but before Mlle Goton I trembled with agitation even at the height of our greatest intimacies. I think that if I had remained longer with her it would have killed me; I should have been choked by the beatings of my own heart. I was equally afraid of displeasing either; but to one I was obedient, to the other submissive. I would not have offended Mlle de Vulinon for anything in the world; but if Mlle Goton had commanded me to jump into the flames I think I should have obeyed her hesitatingly.

Fortunately for us both, my affair, or rather my meetings, with Mlle Goton, did not last long. My connexion with Mlle de Vulinon also, though far less dangerous and rather longer in duration, concluded in catastrophe. Such things should always end on a somewhat romantic note, offering opportunities for a scene. My relations with Mlle de Vulinon, though less passionate than those with Mlle Goton, had
been perhaps the more binding. We never parted without tears, and each time I left her I suffered a strange and overpowering sense of emptiness. I could talk and think of nothing but her. My grief, therefore, was deep and genuine; but I think that, at bottom, my violent feelings were not for her; the amusements of which she was the centre had their share in them too. To assuage the pain of separation we carried on a correspondence pathetic enough to melt a stone, till finally I triumphed; she could stand it no longer. She came to Greece to see me, and for a moment my head was completely turned. For the two days of her stay I was intoxicated, beside myself, and when she left I longed to throw myself in the water after her. For a while I rent the air with my cries. A week later she sent me some sweets and some gloves, which would have seemed a most charming attention if I had not heard at the same time that she had married, and that the visit she had so graciously paid me was for the purpose of buying her wedding-dress. It would be purposeless to describe my fury; I swore in my exalted rage that I would never look on the treacherous creature again. I could not think of any worse way of punishing her. But she survived. Twenty years later, when I was staying with my father and had gone rowing with him on the lake, I saw some ladies in a boat close by, and asked him who they were. 'Why,' he exclaimed with a smile, 'doesn't your heart tell you? It's your old love, Mme Cézanne - l'âme de Vénéon she was.' I started at that almost forgotten name; but I told the boatman to change course. It was not worth while breaking my vow, and renewing a twenty-year-old quarrel with a woman of forty, though then I was in a very good position to take my revenge.

1723-1728 Thus, before my future career was decided, I wasted the most precious period of my childhood in foolishness. After lengthy discussions, however, as to my natural bent, they fixed on the profession for which I was least fitted, and sent me to M. Masseron, the City Registrar, to learn - as my Uncle Bernard put it - the profitable art of pettifogging. This term vastly displeased me; my proud nature was very little flattered by the prospect of earning a pile of money in ignoble ways. The job itself seemed unbearable; the hard work and obedience required repelled me even more, and I never entered the office without a feeling of disgust, which grew stronger with each day. M. Masseron, for his part, was displeased with me, treated me with contempt, and constantly

scolded me for my idleness and stupidity. Every day he told me a new
tale about how my uncle had assured him that I was clever and knew a great deal, whereas really I did not know a thing. He had been promised a bright

future really, but he had got a donkey. Finally I was

ignominiously discharged from the office for my ineptitude, and M.

Masseron's clerk's proclaimed that all I was good for was to handle a

watchmaker's life.

With my vocation thus decided I was apprenticed, though not to a

watchmaker but to an engraver. The Registraire's contempt had

completely humiliated me, and I obeyed without a murmur. M.

Daumier, my master, was an odious, violent young man who

managed in a very short time to quench all the fire of my childhood,

and to coarsen my affection and lively nature; he reduced me in spirit

as well as in fact to my true condition of apprentice. My Latin, my

interest in history and antiquities, were for a long time forgotten; and

I did not so much as remember that the Romans had ever existed.

When I went to see my father he no longer treated me as his idol; and

for the ladies I had ceased to be the gallant Jean-Jacques. I was so

conscious, indeed, that M. and Mme Lamberier would not have

wished me to have the place of my simple amusements, and soon not a

memory of them was left. Despite my excellent upbringing, I must

have had a strong inclination towards degeneracy; for I degenerated

very rapidly, and without the least difficulty; never did a precocious

César so promptly become a Laridon.6

My trade did not dispense me from myself. I had a strong taste for draw-
ing, and quite enjoyed using etching tools. Furthermore engraving for

the watch trade demanded very limited talents, and I had hopes of

pursuing a career as a printer. I should have succeeded indeed, if brutality and

arrogance had never been my constant companions. I was engraving medals of a sort to serve me and my fellows as the

insignia of an order of chivalry, when I was caught by my master at this

illegal pursuit and severely beaten. He accused me of teaching myself
to forge money, for these medals of ours bore the arms of the Republic

to forge money, for these medals of ours bore the arms of the Republic

6 'Oh! combien de Césars deviendront Laridons.' (How many Cæsars will

become low dogs.) La Fontaine.
true coin, and knew more about the making of Roman denarius than of our three sous bits.

My master's tyranny finally made a trade which I should have liked quite unbearable to me, and drove me to vices I should otherwise have despised, such as falsehood, idleness, and theft. Nothing has taught me better the difference between filial dependence and abject slavery than memory of the changes which this period worked in my character.

Being shy and timid by nature, there was no fault so foreign to my character as presumption. I had enjoyed simple liberty, which hitherto had only been restricted by degrees but which now completely vanished. I had been bold at home, free at M. Lambertier's and prudent at my uncle's; at my master's I was afraid, and from thenceforth I was a lost creature. I was used to living on terms of perfect equality with my elders; to knowing of no pleasures that were not within my grasp, to seeing no dish of which I did not have a share, to having no desires that I did not express; to letting every thought in my heart rise to my lips. Imagine my fate in a house where I dared not open my mouth, where I had to leave the table before the meal was half over, and the room as soon as I had no more duties to perform there. Continually confined to my work, I saw enjoyments everywhere for other people and privations for me alone. The thought of the liberty in which the master and journeyman lived doubled the weight of my misery. When there were arguments on subjects about which I knew best I dared not open my mouth. Everything I saw about me I grieved in my heart, only because I was deprived of everything. There was no end to ease and gaiety and to those happy expressions that had often earned me exemption from punishment when I most richly deserved it. I cannot avoid a smile when I recall how one evening, at home, I was sent to bed without my supper for some piece of nonsense, and as I passed through the kitchen with my miserable hunk of bread, saw and smelt the joint turning on the jack. My father and the others were standing in front of the fire and, as I went by, I had to say good-night to everyone. This ceremony over, I cast a sidelong glance at that joint, which looked and smelt so good that I could not help making it a bow too, and saying wretchedly, 'Good night, joint!' This display of naiveté so amused everyone that I was allowed to stay up for supper after all. Perhaps a similar remark would have had the same success at my master's, but I am sure that it would never have occurred to me or, if it had, that I would never have dared to make it.

So it was that I learnt to covet in silence, to conceal, to dissimulate.
only an apprentice. So it is that in every situation the powerful rogue protects himself at the expense of the feeble and innocent.

Thus I learnt that stealing was not so terrible as I had thought; and I soon turned my new knowledge to such good account that nothing I coveted and that was in my reach was safe from me. I was not exactly undernourished at my master's; the modesty of the fare was only painful to me when compared to the luxury he enjoyed. The custom of sending young people away from table when those dishes are brought on that tempt them most seems to me calculated to make them not only greedy but dishonest. I soon became both, and came off pretty well in general, though very badly when I was caught.

One memory of an apple-hunt that cost me dear still makes me shudder and laugh at the same time. These apples were at the bottom of a cupboard which was lit from the kitchen through a high lattice. One day when I was alone in the house I climbed on the kneading trough to peer into this garden of the Hesperides at those precious fruits I could not touch. Then I went to fetch the spat to see if it would reach; it was too short. So I lengthened it with one which was used for game - my master being very fond of hunting. I probed several times in vain, but at last I felt with delight that I was bringing up an apple. I raised it very gently, and was just on the point of grasping it. What was my grief to find that it was too big to pass the lattice! I resorted to the most ingenious devices to get it through. I had to find supports to keep the spat in position, a knife long enough to cut the apple in two, and a latch to hold it up. With time and perseverance I managed to divide it, and was in hopes of then bringing the pieces through one after the other. But the moment they were apart they both fell back into the cupboard.

Kind reader, sympathise with me in my grief!

I did not lose courage, but I had lost a great deal of time, and was afraid of being caught. So I put off the attempt till next day, when I hoped to be more successful, and resumed my work as calmly as if I had done nothing wrong, without a thought for the two awkward witnesses testifying against me in the larder.

Next day, when the opportunity offered, I made a fresh attempt. I climbed on my perch, fastened the two spits together, straightened them, and was just going to probe... But unfortunately the dragon was not asleep; the larder door suddenly opened; my master came out, folded his arms, looked at me, and said 'Bravo!' The pen falls from my hand.

Soon I had received so many beatings that I grew less sensitive to
ream. This strange desire is connected with one of the principal facets in my character, which has had considerable influence on my conduct and which it is important to explain.

My passions are extremely strong, and while I am under their sway nothing can equal my impetuosity. I am amenable to no restraint, respect, fear, or decorum. I am cynical, bold, violent, and daring. No shame can stop me, no fear of danger alarms me. Except for the one object in my mind, the universe is non-existent. But all this lasts only a moment; and the next moment plunges me into complete annihilation. Catch me in a calm mood, I am all innocence and timidity. Everything alarms me, everything discourages me. I am frightened by a buzzing fly. I am too lazy to speak a word or make a gesture. So much am I a slave to fears and shame that I long to vanish from mortal sight. If action is necessary I do not know what to do; if I must speak I do not know what to say; if anyone looks at me I drop my eyes. When roused by passion, I can sometimes find the right words to say, but in ordinary conversation I can find none, none at all. I find conversation unbearable owing to the very fact that I am obliged to speak.

Furthermore, none of my dominant desires are for things that can be bought. All I need are simple pleasures, and money poisons them all. I am fond, for example, of a good meal, but cannot stand the boredom of polite company or the gross manners of an inn. I can only enjoy eating with a friend; when I am alone it is impossible, because my imagination is always busy with something else and I take no pleasure in my food. If the fire in my blood demands women, the emotion in my heart cries more loudly for love. Women who could be bought would lose all their charm for me. I doubt whether I could even take advantage of the situation. It is the same with all pleasures within my reach. If they are not to be had for nothing, they have no attraction for me. The only things I like are things that belong to no one but the first person who knows how to enjoy them.

Money has never seemed to me as precious as people think it. Indeed it has never seemed to me very useful. For it has no value in itself and must be transformed to be enjoyed. One must bargain and purchase and often be cheated, paying dear for poor services. I want an article of quality; but my money is sure to obtain a poor one. I pay a lot for a new laid egg, and it proves stale; for a ripe fruit, and it is green; for a girl, and she is debauched. I enjoy good wine, but where can I get it? At a wine merchant’s? Notwithstanding all my precautions he will poison me. Supposing I insist on getting what I want. What trouble

...and embarrassment I must put myself to! I must use friends and correspondents, give orders, write, go hither and thither, wait; and often I shall be cheated in the end. What a trouble my money is! I am not fond enough of good wine to disturb myself to that extent.

Countless times, during my apprenticeship and since, I have gone out with the idea of buying some dainty. As I come to the pastrycook’s I catch sight of the women behind the counter and can already imagine them laughing amongst themselves and making fun of the greedy youngster. Then I pass a fruitseller’s, and look at the ripe pears out of the corner of my eye; the scent of them tempts me. But two or three young people over there are looking at me; a man I know is standing in front of the shop; I can see a girl coming in the distance. Is not she our maid servant? My short sight is constantly deceiving me. I take everyone who passes for someone I know. I am frightened by everything and discover obstacles everywhere. As my discomfort grows my desire increases. But in the end I go home like an idiot, consumed by longing and with money enough in my pocket to satisfy it, but not having dared to buy anything.

I should involve myself in the most boring details were I to continue on the subject of my money and its spending — by me or by other people — and to relate all the embarrassment and shame, the repugnance and discomfort and repulsion I have always felt in regard to it. But as the reader learns more of my life, he will get to know my disposition and feel all this for himself without my needing to tell him.

Once this is clear, he will have no difficulty in understanding one of the apparent contradictions in my character: the combination of an almost sacred avarice with the greatest contempt for money. It is a commodity that I find so unmanageable that it does not even occur to me to desire it when I have not got it, and when I have it I keep it for a long while without spending it, since I never know how to use it satisfactorily. But if an agreeable and convenient occasion arises I make such good use of it that my purse is empty before I have noticed it. Do not expect to find in me, however, that peculiarity of misers — spending in order to make a display. On the contrary I spend in secret and for pleasure. Far from calling attention to my spending, I conceal it. I am so conscious that money is not for me that I am almost ashamed of having any and still more ashamed of employing it. If I had ever had a sufficient income to live comfortably I should never have been tempted to be miserly, I am quite sure. I should have spent my whole income and never tried to increase it. But my precarious position always frighten...
me. I love liberty; I hate embarrassment, worry, and constraint. So long as the money lasts in my purse, it assures me of independence and relieves me of the need of plotting to obtain more, a need which has always appalled me. So afraid am I to see it end that I treasure it. Money in one’s possession is the instrument of liberty; money one pursues is the symbol of servitude. That is why I hold fast to what I have, but covet no more.

My disinterestedness, therefore, is a sign of indolence; the pleasure of possession is not worth the trouble involved in acquisition. And my mad spending is a sign of indolence too; when the occasion for spending agreeably arises, too much one cannot be made of it. I am less tempted by money than by things, because between money and the desired object there is always an intermediary, whereas between a thing and its enjoyment there is none. If I see something, it tempts me. But if all I see is the way of acquiring it, I am not tempted. I have been a thief, and sometimes I still steal trifles that tempt me, and that I had rather take than ask for. But, in youth or age, I do not remember ever having taken a farthing from anyone, except on one occasion, almost fifteen years ago, when I stole seven livres ten sous. The incident is worth the telling, for it involves such an absurd mixture of boldness and stupidity that I should find it most difficult to believe if it concerned anyone but myself.

It was in Paris. I was walking, at about five o’clock, with M. de Franqueuil in the Palais-Royal when he took out his watch, looked at it, and said, ‘Let us go to the Opera.’ I agreed, and we went. He bought two tickets for the amphitheatre, gave me one and went on ahead with the other. I followed him in, but on reaching the doorway found it congested. When I looked in, I saw that everyone was standing. So, thinking I might easily be lost in the crowd, or at least make M. de Franqueuil think so, I went out again, presented my ticket, asked for my money back, and walked away. But what I had not suspected was that the moment I got to the door everyone sat down and M. de Franqueuil clearly perceived that I was no longer there.

Nothing could have been so far from my natural disposition as this act. But I note it as a proof that there are moments of a kind of delirium, in which men cannot be judged by what they do. I did not exactly steal that money. What I stole was the use of it. But it was a theft and, what is more, it was a disgraceful one.

I should never finish this story were I to follow out every occasion during my apprenticeship on which I passed from sublime heroism to the depths of villany. However, though I assumed the vice of my station, I found it impossible to acquire a taste for them. My comrades’ amusements bored me; and when too much constraint made my work repulsive too, I grew weary of everything. In that state I re-acquired my love of reading, which I had long ago lost. The time for books I stole from my work, and that brought me fresh punishments. But, spurred on by opposition, this taste soon became a furious passion. Mme La Tribu’s famous lending library provided reading of all sorts. Good or bad was alike to me. I did not choose, I read everything with equal avidity. I read at my bench, I read on errands, I read in the lavatory, and was oblivious of myself for hours on end. I read till my head spun, I did nothing but read. My master spied on me, caught me, beat me, and took away my books. How many volumes were torn up, burned, and thrown out of the window! How many works returned to Mme La Tribu’s shelves with volumes missing! When I had no money to pay her, I gave her my shirts, my ties, my clothes; my weekly pocket-money of three sous was carried to her regularly every Sunday.

There, it may be said, is a case where money became necessary. That is true, but it was at a moment when reading had cut down every activity. Given over entirely to my new craze, I did nothing but read; I gave up stealing. This is another of my characteristic contradictions. When I am in a certain mood a trifle distracts me, changes me, captures me, and becomes a passion. Then I forget everything, and think only of the new subject of interest. My heart throbbed with impatience to turn over the pages of the new book I had in my pocket. I took it out as soon as I was alone, and had no longer a thought of ransacking my master’s private workshop. I cannot even imagine that I should have stolen even if I had had a more expensive craze. Being confined in the moment, it was not in my nature thus to provide for the future. Mme La Tribu gave me credit, the deposit she asked was small, and once I had a book in my pocket I did not give another thought for anything. The money that came to me in the natural way passed in the same way to her; and when she became pressing nothing came more readily to hand than my own clothes. Stealing in advance involved too much foresight; and stealing to pay her wasn’t even a temptation. With what rows and beatings and ill-selected and secret reading, my temper became wild and taciturn. My mind was beginning to be perverted and I lived like an outlaw. But if my taste did not preserve me from dull and tasteless books, my luck saved me from the obscene and
licentious. Not that Mme La Tribu, a most accommodating woman in every way, had any scruples about lending me them. But the air of mystery she assumed in recommending them absolutely compelled me, out of mingled discomfort and disgust, to refuse them. What is more, luck so favoured my modesty in this respect that I was more than thirty before I even glanced at one of those dangerous works which even fashionable ladies find so embarrassing that they can only read them in secret.

In less than a year I exhausted Mme La Tribu's small library, and found myself most distressingly at a loss in my spare time. I was cured of my childish follies and youthful vagaries by my craze for reading, and even by what I read. Poor, ill-chosen and often bad though these books were, they nevertheless kindled my heart to nobler feelings than my condition inspired in me. Revolted by everything within my reach, and feeling that anything which might have attracted me was too far away, I saw nothing that could possibly stir my heart. My senses, which had been roused long ago, demanded delights of which I could not even guess the nature. I was as far from the reality as if I had been entirely lacking in sexuality. My senses were already mature, and I sometimes thought of my past eccentricities, but I could not see beyond them. In this strange situation my restless imagination took a hand which saved me from myself and calmed my growing sensuality. What it did was to nourish itself on situations that had interested me in my reading, recalling them, varying them, combining them, and giving me so great a part in them, that I became one of the characters I imagined, and saw myself always in the pleasantest situations of my own choosing. So, in the end, the fictions I succeeded in building up made me forget my real condition, which so dissatisfied me. My love for imaginary objects and my facility in lending myself to them ended by disillusioning me with everything around me, and determined that love of solitude which I have retained ever since that time. There will be more than one example in what follows of the strange effects of that trait in my character which seems so gloomy and misanthropic. In fact, however, it arises from my too loving heart, from my too tender and affectionate nature, which find no living creatures akin to them, and so are forced to feed upon fictions. I am satisfied for the moment to have indicated the origin and prime cause of an inclination which has modified all my passions, and restrained them by making me use of those very passions to curb themselves. So it is that I have been slow in accomplishment through excess of desire.

Finally I reached the age of sixteen, restless and dissatisfied with myself and everything else, without any taste for my work, racked with desires I did not understand, weeping when I had no cause for tears and sighing I knew not why—tenderly nursing my illusions, in brief, since I saw nothing around me that I valued as much. On Sundays my comrades came to fetch me, after service, to go out and amuse myself with them. I would gladly have avoided them if I could. But once I took part in their games I was keener and more adventurous than any of them. Hard to rouse and hard to restrain: that had been a constant trait in my character. When we went walking outside the city I always ran ahead, and never dreamt of returning unless someone else dreamt of it for me. Twice I was caught, and the gates were shut before I could reach them. You can imagine how I was punished next day. On the second occasion indeed I was promised such a welcome if there were a third that I decided not to run the risk. Nevertheless the dreaded third time came. All my precautions were rendered nugatory by a wretched Captain Minutoli, who always closed the gates on his nights of duty half an hour before the others. I was returning with two comrades. A mile and a half from the city I heard the sound of the tattoo and increased my pace. Then I heard the drum-roll and ran my hardest. I arrived out of breath and bathed in sweat, my heart pounding. I saw from the distance that the soldiers were at their posts. I ran up and shouted breathlessly. It was too late. When I was twenty paces away I saw them raise the first bridge. I trembled as I watched its dreadful horror rising in the air, a sinister and fatal augury of the inevitable fate which from that moment awaited me.

In the first access of my grief I threw myself down on the grass and bit the earth. My companions merely laughed at my misfortune and immediately decided what to do. I made up my mind also, but in another sense. There and then I decided never to return to my master; and next day, as they returned to the city at the hour when the gates were opened, I bade them farewell for ever. I asked them only to inform my cousin Bernard, in secret, of the resolution I had taken, and to tell him where he could meet me for the last time.

Being somewhat estranged from him since I had entered on my apprenticeship I was seeing him less. Nevertheless for some time we had been meeting on Sundays. But, little by little, each of us was altering his habits and we met now more rarely. I believe that his mother had some hand in this change. He was a lad of the upper town; I was a poor apprentice, a mere child of the Saint-Gervais quarter. There was
no longer any equality between us despite our equal birth. It was de-
meaning for him to go about with me. Nevertheless relations had not
been absolutely broken off between us; and, being a good-natured lad,
he often followed his feelings in despite of his mother's instructions.
When he heard of my plan he hurried to me, not in order to dissuade
me or to share in my adventure, but by a few trifling presents to ease
the hardships of my flight. For my own resources could not carry me
very far. Among other things he gave me a small sword, which greatly
took my fancy, and which I carried as far as Turin, where want forced
me to dispose of it and where, as they say, I consumed it. But the more
I have thought over the way he behaved to me at that critical moment,
the more persuaded I am that he was following his mother's instruc-
tions and perhaps his father's as well. For it is impossible that, left to
himself, he would not have made some effort to hold me back, or that
he would not have been tempted to follow me. But instead of restrain-
ing me he encouraged me in my plan; and then, when he saw that I had
quite made up my mind, he left me without many tears. We have
neither written to one another nor seen one another since. It is sad; for
he was an essentially good person, and we were made to be friends.

Before I abandon myself to my fatal destiny, let me turn for a
moment to the prospect that would normally have awaited me had I
fallen into the hands of a better master. Nothing suited my character
better, nor was more likely to make me happy than the calm and
obscure life of a good craftsman, particularly in a superior trade like
that of an engraver at Geneva. The work, which was lucrative enough
to yield a man an easy subsistence but not sufficiently rewarding to
lead to fortune, would have limited my ambition till the end of my
days and have left me honest leisure wherein to cultivate simple tastes.
It would have kept me in my sphere, and offered me no means of
escaping from it. Since my imagination was rich enough to embellish
any state with illusions, and powerful enough to transport me, so to
speak, according to my whim, from one state to another, it mattered
very little to me in what walk of life I actually was. Never mind how
great the distance between my position and the nearest castle in Spain,
I had no difficulty in taking up residence there. It followed, therefore,
that the simplest of situations, the one that demanded the least trouble
and exertion, the one that left the mind most free, was the most suitable
for me; and that was precisely the situation I was then in. I should have
passed a calm and peaceful life in the security of my faith, in my own
country, among my family and friends. That was what my peculiar
character required, a life spent in the uniform pursuit of a trade I had
chosen, and in a society after my own heart. I should have been a good
Christian, a good citizen, a good father, a good friend, a good work-
man, a good man in every way. I should have been happy in my condi-
tion, and should perhaps have been respected. Then, after a life—simple
and obscure, but also mild and uneventful—I should have died peace-
fully in the bosom of my family. Soon, no doubt, I should have been
forgotten, but at least I should have been mourned for as long as I was
remembered.

But instead... what a picture I have to paint! But do not let us
anticipate the miseries of my life. I shall have only too much to say to
my readers on that melancholy subject.