

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 1796 (*Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, 1782)

First Walk

For about two months since, a complete calm has been re-established in my heart. I had long been a stranger to fear; but I continued to encourage hope; this sentiment sometimes flattered, sometimes frustrated, was a medium, through which a thousand different passions found means to agitate me: an event, as melancholy as it was unforeseen, has at length banished from my heart every beam of hope, and made me consider my worldly destiny as irrevocably fixed; since then, I have resigned myself without reserve, and have regained my tranquillity. When I became acquainted with the extent of the plot formed against me, I totally gave up the idea of regaining, during life, the good opinion of the public; and even was this acquisition possible, the confidence could not be reciprocal, and consequently must be useless. Should mankind return to me it would be vain, I am no longer to be found; they have inspired me with such disgust, that their commerce would not only be insipid, but painful; and I am an hundred times happier in my solitude, than I could possibly be in their company. They have torn from my heart all the sweets of society, which at my age can never spring up again; 'tis too late!—henceforward let them do me good or harm it is perfectly indifferent, my contemporaries can never give me a moment of concern.

[...] Every future occurrence will be immaterial to me; I have in the world neither relative, friend, or brother; I am on the earth, as if I had fallen into some unknown planet; if I contemplate anything around me, it is only distressing, heart rending objects; everything I cast my eyes on, conveys some new subject either of indignation or affliction; I will endeavour, henceforward, to banish from my mind all painful ideas, which unavailingly distress me. Alone for the rest of my life, I must only look for consolation, hope, or peace, in my own breast; and neither ought, or will, henceforward, think of anything but myself. It is in this state, that I return to the continuation of that severe and just examination which I formerly called my Confessions; I consecrate my latter days to the study of myself; and to the preparation of that account, which I must shortly render up of my actions. I resign my thoughts entirely to the pleasure of conversing with my own soul; that being the only consolation that man cannot deprive me of. If by dint of reflection on my internal propensities, I can, attain to putting them in better order, and correcting the evil that remains in me, their meditations will not be utterly useless; and though I am accounted worthless on earth, shall not cast away my latter days. The leisure of my daily walks has frequently been filled with charming contemplations, which I regret having forgot; but will write down those that occur in future; then, every time I read them over, I shall forget my misfortunes, disgraces, and persecutors, on recollecting, and contemplating, the integrity of my own heart.

These sheets will only contain a concise journals of my reveries, treating principally of myself, because a solitary must be very much employed with his own person, but if during my walk other ideas pass through my mind, they shall equally find place. I will relate my thoughts, precisely as they strike me, and with as little connection as the ideas of yesterday have with those of today, since from these will result a clearer knowledge of my temper, with the complexion and tendency of those thoughts and sentiments which are my daily food, in the singular situation I am thrown into, than could otherwise be obtained. These sheets, should, therefore be looked on as an appendix to my Confessions; but I no longer give them that name, since I have more anything to say that suits the appellation my heart is purified by repeated strokes of adversity and I can hardly find, though I search with the utmost care, any remains of reprehensible inclinations. What should I confess then, when all terrestrial affections are erased? I have as little to praise as blame, for henceforward I am nothing among mankind; nor can

I ever be otherwise, possessing no actual relation or real society'; no longer having it in my power to attempt any good, which would not turn to evil, nor to act without injuring either others or myself, thus obstinacy has become my greatest duty, and I maintain it to the utmost of my power. But in this inactive state of body my soul is still alive, producing thoughts and sentiments; its moral and internal faculties, appear to have augmented by the death of every earthly and temporal concern; my body is only an embarrassment, an obstacle, which I already endeavour to disengage myself from.

A situation so singular, certainly deserves to be both examined and described; it is to this examination I consecrate my future days, and in order to accomplish it with success, I should proceed with circumspection and methods but I am incapable of such labour, nay it would even divert me from my purpose, which is to render an account to myself of the successive modifications of my soul. In some measure, I perform the operation on myself, which physicians do on the air, in order to ascertain the daily condition of it; applying (if I may use the expression) the barometer to my soul, not doubting but these experiments, well directed, and constantly repeated, will procure information equally to be depended on; but I do not equally extend my views, content with keeping a register of operations, without seeking to reduce them into a system. I undertake the same enterprise Montaigne did, but for a direct contrary purpose; he wrote his Essays only for others, I my Reveries entirely for myself. If in my more advanced age, and on the verge of dissolution, I remain (according to my present wish) in the same disposition, I shall recollect, on reading these Reveries, the pleasure I experienced on writing them; and thus, recalling past time, shall redouble my existence. Even in spite of mankind, I shall yet enjoy the charms of society, and, when decrepit with age, hold converse with myself, as I now should with a friend younger than I am.

Second Walk

The man of real veracity pursues a direct contrary course: in things perfectly indifferent, he pays little regard to that exactitude which the other class so much pride themselves on; he makes no scruple of amusing a company by feigned relations, from whence no unjust conclusion can be drawn, either for or against any person, dead or living; but every conversation which might unjustly produce good or evil, profit or loss, esteem or disdain for anyone, he considers as a lie, which is never suffered to take possession of his heart, his lips, or his pen. He is of strict veracity, even in opposition to his interest, though he prides himself little on maintaining it in idle conversation. He is of strict veracity, because he never seeks to deceive, but is as firm to the truth that condemns, as to that which honors him, never attempting imposition, either for his own advantage, or to the detriment of his enemies. The difference, then, between the man of real veracity, and he who only puts on the appearance of it, is, that the latter is most rigorously punctual to that truth which costs him nothing, but no further: while the former never adheres so pertinaciously to his veracity as when sacrificing his interest to the love of it.

But it will be said, how can this relaxation, in regard to indifferent concerns, be consistent with that ardent love of truth, which I make the principal distinction of the man of real veracity? Is not this love of truth contaminated in admitting such an alloy? No; it is pure and sincere; it is an emanation from the love of justice, which would scorn to be false, though frequently fictitious. Justice and truth, in his idea, are synonymous terms, which he uses indifferently. The holy truth, which his heart adores, consists not in frivolous expressions, or in indifferent actions, but in rendering everyone what is actually his due, whether it may be imputations favourable or unfavorable, either retributions of honour or shame, praise or disapprobation. He scorns to do his neighbour the slightest wrong, either from ill-will, or for his own emolument; his love of equity prevents the former, nor would his conscience suffer him to appropriate to his own use what belongs to another. He is ever most anxious to preserve the esteem of his own ears, it is the satisfaction he can least bear to part with, and he

would feel a loss on acquiring the approbation of the whole world, at the expense of his own. He will lie, then, sometimes, in things indifferent, without scruple or consciousness of acting wrong; but never to the detriment, or advantage of his neighbour, or of himself. In everything that concerns historical truth, in all that respects the conduct of mankind, justice, social intercourse, or useful knowledge, he will, to the utmost of his abilities, keep both himself and others from error; and beyond this, he cannot conceive the existence of a lie. If the *Temple de Guide* is a useful work, the account of the Greek manuscript is an innocent fiction; if the work has an immoral tendency, it is an unjustifiable falsehood.

Such were the rules my conscience established with regard to truth and lying; but I felt, on examination, that I had followed these rules instinctively, before they were approved by my reason, moral instinct having ever made the application. That criminal lie of which poor Marion became the victim, was followed by inextinguishable remorse, which secured me for the rest of my life, not only from all lies of equal turpitude, but from all those (of whatever kind they might be) that could possibly affect the interest or reputation of another. By this general exclusion I have avoided the necessity of weighing whether the good which might follow a deviation from truth, was greater than the evil; for in thus marking the precise limits of lying, I have equally excluded mischievous or good-natured untruths, and regarding both as culpable, have forbid myself the use of either.

In this particular, as in most others, my disposition has greatly influenced my maxims, or, rather my habits; for I was never governed by rules, having ever followed the guidance of natural impulse. Never did a premeditated lie take possession of my thoughts, never did I lie for my interest, though frequently from shame, to extricate myself from embarrassment, in things utterly indifferent, or, at least, only interesting to myself when having a converse ion to sustain, the tardiness of my ideas rendered my discourse unentertaining, and obliged me to have recourse to fiction, which might furnish something to say. When it was necessary to speak, and amusing truths did not present themselves to my mind, I made use of fiction rather than remain silent; but, in the invention of these fables, I took every possible precaution that they should not be lies; that is to say, that they should neither wound justice, or interfere with that truth we owe to our neighbour, confining those discourses to a kind of fiction indifferent to myself and all mankind. I attempted to substitute moral possibilities in the place of moral facts; to represent the natural affections of the human hearts and draw some useful instruction from them; in one word, to invent moral tales and apologues; but it required more presence of mind, and facility of expression, than ever I possessed, to turn the familiar chat of conversation into useful instruction; its course, being too rapid for my ideas, forced me, generally, to speak before I thought, and by this means to utter ridiculous follies, which my reason, disapproved, and my heart rejected, at the very moment they were passing my lips, but which, continually preceding my judgment, could not be reformed by its censures.

It is, likewise, from this sudden irresistible impulse of constitution, that in circumstances entirely unforeseen, shame and timidity frequently force lies from me, without my will having any part in them, being produced by the necessity of an instant reply. The profound impression of the wrong done to poor Marion, is sufficient to restrain any that might be injurious to others, but not to prevent those which serve to extricate me from embarrassment, when none but myself is concerned, though not less contrary to my conscience and principles, than those which might influence the fate of others.

I call Heaven to witness, that if I could the next instant recall the lie that has excused, and declare the truth that would upbraid me, without doing myself an additional injury by such manifest retraction, I would do it gladly; but the shame of exposing myself thus evidently, forbids this acknowledgment, and I sincerely repent my fault, without having the power to repair it. One example will explain this better than all I can say, and show that I neither lie from interest or self love, still less from any mischievous intention; but merely from embarrassment and false shame, though frequently conscious that the lie is obvious, without even that consideration having power to prevent it.

Sometime ago M. Foulquier persuaded (contrary to my usual custom) to bring my wife, and join with him and M. Benoit in a friend dinner, which was provided for us at Mrs. Voussin's, the tavern-keeper, who was invited to dine with us, as were her two daughters. While we were at table, the eldest of these, who had lately been married, and was now with child [...*] looking in my face, asked me suddenly, whether I ever had any children? I answered with confusion, that I had not that happiness; on which, smiling maliciously, she looked round at the company, in a way that sufficiently expressed her meaning.

[* Some words illegible in the manuscript.]

It is evident this was not the answer I should have wished to make, even had I meant to deceive them, for I plainly saw by the looks of the company that my answer would not change their opinion in this particular. The negative I gave this question was expected; nay it was proposed on purpose to enjoy the satisfaction of making me lie, and I was not so stupid as not to perceive this. Two minutes after, the following answer, which I should have returned, presented itself to my mind. *This is a very strange question from a young woman, to a man who remained a bachelor till his old age.* Had I spoke thus, without lying, or making any avowal, I should have had no cause to blush, since I should have had the laughs on my side, with the satisfaction of having given her a kind of lesson, which might have taught her to be more cautious in questioning me impertinently. But I let this opportunity slip; indeed I seldom say what I ought, usually blundering on the contrary. It is certain, in this instance, that neither my judgment or will, dictated the answer I returned, which was the mechanical effect of my embarrassment. Formerly, I was less sensible of this shame, avowing my faults with more frankness than confusion; because I made no doubt, but the sorrow for them, which I felt so strongly, would be perceived; but the eye of malignity wounds and disconcerts me, as my unhappiness increases I become more fearful, and never did I venture on a lie but from timidity.

I was never more sensible of my natural aversion to falsehood than while writing my Confessions, for then temptations to this vice were strong and frequent, had my disposition inclined that way; but far from having concealed or used dissimulation in any particular I had to charge myself with, by a turn of mind I find it difficult to describe, and which proceeded, perhaps, from my dislike to every species of imitation, I rather found myself inclined to err in a contrary sense, by accusing myself too severely, than by covering my faults with too much indulgence; and my conscience assures me, that one day I shall be judged with more lenity than I have already dealt to myself. Yes, I aver with a noble elevation of soul, that I carried veracity and freedom as far, or I dare believe further, in that work, than ever man did; for feeling that the good outweighed the evil, I was proud to divulge all; accordingly nothing was concealed.

I have never said less than the truth, I have sometimes said more, not in regard to facts, but the feelings they produced; and this kind of falsehood was rather an effect of the delirium of imagination, than an act of my will. I do wrong even to call this falsehood, for none of these additions deserve that name. I wrote my Confessions in my old age, after having been disgusted with the vain pleasures of life, which I had lightly ran over, and which my heartfelt the insufficiency of. I wrote from memory; this frequently failed me, of furnished but imperfect ideas; I was obliged therefore to fill up these chasms by the assistance of imagination, which never contradicted reality. I loved to dwell on the happy moments of my life, and sometimes to embellish them with ornaments, which tender regret for their loss supplied me with. I represented those things which had escaped my memory, as I was persuaded they had been, and perhaps, as they really were; but never different from what I recollected of them. I might give truth some borrowed charms, but never did I put lies in the place of it, in order to palliate my vices or enhance my virtues.

If, sometimes, by an involuntary motion, while painting myself in profile, I have exhibited that side which was least deformed, these concealments have been fully compensated by others more extraordinary, by which I have frequently concealed graces more carefully than dissects. This is a singularity in my disposition which mankind will be very pardonable in disbelieving; but which, however incredible, is no less true. I have often exposed my faults in all their turpitude; but I have seldom related what was praise-worthy with every possible advantage, and I have sometimes suppressed altogether what seemed to give me too much honour, lest, instead of writing my Confessions, I should seem to have been writing my panegyric. I have described my early youth without dwelling on those happy qualities with which my heart was endowed, and even sometimes concealing facts which would have put them beyond doubt. I now recollect two in particular, both which occurred while writing my Confessions, that I omitted them for the above mentioned reason.

Ninth Walk

I quitted the good company, and walked alone through the fair. The variety of objects that presented themselves, amused me for a considerable time: among others, I perceived five or six Savoyard boys round a young girl, who had about a dozen pitiful apples yet remaining in her basket, which she would willingly have parted with, but the Savoyards could not muster above two or three farthings among them all, and these were insufficient to make the desired purchase. This basket was to them the garden of the Hesperides, and the young wench the dragon that guarded this precious fruit. The farce amused me for some time; at length, I concluded it by buying the apples, and distributing them among the boys. I then enjoyed the most pleasing spectacle that can flatter the heart of man, that of seeing joy, united with the innocence of youth, spread itself all around me, for the spectators, in contemplating, shared it; but I who purchased it so cheaply, had the additional pleasure of feeling it was my own work.

In comparing this amusement with that I had just quitted, I felt, with satisfaction, the difference between real inclination and natural pleasures, and those that spring from opulence, which are engendered by derision and disdain; for what amusement should be derived from seeing a number of our fellow-creatures, greedy through poverty, overthrowing, choking, and brutally laming each other, from eagerness to procure some morsels of gingerbread, which had been trampled on, and were covered with dust?

For my part, when I reflect on the kind of voluptuousness I have enjoyed on various occasions, I find it consisted less in sentiments of benevolence than in the pleasure of contemplating happy faces. That sight has, indeed, to me a charm, which, though it penetrates my heart, appears to rise entirely from animal sensation; for if I do not feel the satisfaction I bestow, though fully convinced, of its reality, it does not give me half the pleasure. This is to me even a disinterested enjoyment, which does not depend on the part I take in it; for in public holidays, the pleasure of contemplating a number of happy faces, has ever attracted me. This pleasure has often been frustrated in France, for that nation, who pretend to so much gaiety, show little of it in their sports, Formerly, I often went to the Guinguettes, to see the poorer sort of people dance; but these dances were so awkward, and their behaviour and countenances so dull and melancholy, that I always left them rather wearied than amused; but at Geneva, and in Switzerland, where mirth and laughter do not continually evaporate in malignant tricks, everything breathes contentment and gaiety in their public entertainments. The hideous aspect of poverty is banished, neither does pride show its insolence; but good-will, friendship, and concord dispose all hearts to cheerfulness. Frequently, in the transports of innocent joy, strangers accost, embrace, and invite each other to share the pleasures of the day. In order to enjoy these pleasing sports, it is not necessary I should be actually engaged in them, let me but see, and I am certain to partake of the jollity; and among so many contented faces, I am convinced there would not be found one heart more happy than my own.

Though this is a pleasure arising only from sensation, it has certainly a moral cause, and what is a proof of this, the same objects, instead of delighting, wound me with grief and indignation, when I am convinced that these expressions of satisfaction and pleasure on the faces as the mischievous, are only signs that their malice is accomplished. An appearance of innocent joy is the only kind that delights my heart; cruel, satirical mirth, overwhelms and afflicts it though I am not the object of its malignity. These symptoms, certainly, are not exactly the same, arising from such different principles: yet they are equally the marks of satisfaction, and the perceptible difference cannot be proportionate to the emotions which they excite in me.

Expressions of sorrow and pain affect me even yet more powerfully, to a height which I cannot sustain, without being agitated with emotions more lively than those which occasioned them. Imagination adds to the acuteness of my feelings, and incorporates me with the suffering person, frequently inflicting greater torments than himself endures. A discontented face is another sight I cannot support, particularly if I think the cause bears any reference to myself; I cannot tell how many crown pieces the lowering, ill-natured looks of the foot men who waited, have forced out of my pocket, in those houses to which I formerly had the folly to let myself be dragged, and where the servants always made me pay dearly for the hospitality of their masters. Ever too much affected with sensible objects, especially by those which demonstrate pleasure or dissatisfaction, benevolence or aversion, I suffer myself to be influenced by these exterior expressions, having no resource to escape their influence but flight. A sign, a gesture, a glance of the eye, from an unknown person; is sufficient to destroy my happiness, or calm my sufferings strings. I am only in my own power when alone; at other times, I am the sport of all those who happen to surround me.

Formerly, I lived in the world with pleasure, when I saw nothing but benevolence in every countenance, or, at worst, indifference in those who were unknown to me; but, at present, when my persecutors do not take less pains to make my person generally known, than to hide my disposition, I cannot set my foot in the streets without finding myself surrounded with heart-rending objects. I hasten with my utmost speed into the country, and the instant I perceive the verdure I begin to breathe at ease. Is it astonishing that I am fond of solitude, since I see nothing but animosity on the faces of mankind, while Nature ever wears a smile at my approach?