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*LORD'S LECTURES*

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**BEACON LIGHTS OF HISTORY.**

**BY JOHN LORD, LL.D.**

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD ROMAN WORLD," "MODERN EUROPE," ETC., ETC.

# VOLUME XIII.

## GREAT WRITERS.

DR LORD'S UNCOMPLETED PLAN,  
SUPPLEMENTED WITH ESSAYS BY  
EMERSON, MACAULAY, HEDGE, AND MERCER ADAM.

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### PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

This being the last possible volume in the series of "Beacon Lights of History" from the pen of Dr. Lord, its readers will be interested to know that it contains all the lectures that he had completed (although not all that he had projected) for his review of certain of the chief Men of Letters. Lectures on other topics were found among his papers, but none that would perfectly fit into this scheme; and it was thought best not to attempt any collection of his material which he himself had not deemed worthy or appropriate for use in this series, which embodies the best of his life's work,--all of his books and his lectures that he wished to have preserved. For instance, "The Old Roman World," enlarged in scope and rewritten, is included in the volumes on "Old Pagan Civilizations," "Ancient Achievements," and "Imperial Antiquity;" much of his "Modern Europe" reappears in "Great Rulers," "Modern European Statesmen," and "European National Leaders," etc.

The consideration of "Great Writers" was reserved by Dr. Lord for his final task,--a task interrupted by death and left unfinished. In order to round out and complete this volume, recourse has been had to some other masters in literary art, whose productions are added to Dr. Lord's final writings.

In the present volume, therefore, are included the paper on "Shakspeare" by Emerson, reprinted from his "Representative Men" by permission of Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., the authorized publishers of Emerson's works; the famous essay on "Milton" by Macaulay; the principal portion--biographical and generally critical--of the article on "Goethe," from "Hours with the German Classics," by the late Dr. Frederic H. Hedge, by permission of Messrs. Little, Brown & Co., the publishers of that work; and a chapter on "Tennyson: the Spirit of Modern Poetry," by G. Mercer Adam.

A certain advantage may accrue to the reader in finding these masters side by side for comparison and for gauging Dr. Lord's unique life-work by recognized standards, keeping well in view the purpose no less than the perfection of these literary performances, all of

which, like those of Dr. Lord, were aimed at setting forth the services of *selected forces* in the world's life.

NEW YORK, September 15, 1902.

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## BEACON LIGHTS OF HISTORY.

### JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU.

1712-1778.

SOCIALISM AND EDUCATION.

Two great political writers in the eighteenth century, of antagonistic views, but both original and earnest, have materially affected the whole science of government, and even of social life, from their day to ours, and in their influence really belong to the nineteenth century. One was the apostle of radicalism; the other of conservatism. The one, more than any other single man, stimulated, though unwittingly, the French Revolution; the other opposed that mad outburst with equal eloquence, and caused in Europe a reaction from revolutionary principles. While one is far better known to-day than the other, to the thoughtful both are exponents and representatives of conflicting political and social questions which agitate this age.

These men were Jean Jacques Rousseau and Edmund Burke,--one Swiss, and the other English. Burke I have already treated of in a former volume. His name is no longer a power, but his influence endures in all the grand reforms of which he was a part, and for which his generation in England is praised; while his writings remain a treasure-house of political and moral wisdom, sure to be drawn upon during every public discussion of governmental principles. Rousseau, although a writer of a hundred years ago, seems to me a fit

representative of political, social, and educational ideas in the present day, because his theories are still potent, and even in this scientific age more widely diffused than ever before. Not without reason, it is true, for he embodied certain germinant ideas in a fascinating literary style; but it is hard to understand how so weak a man could have exercised such far-reaching influence.

Himself a genuine and passionate lover of Nature; recognizing in his principles of conduct no duties that could conflict with personal inclinations; born in democratic and freedom-loving Switzerland, and early imbued through his reading of German and English writers with ideas of liberty,--which in those conservative lands were wholesome,--he distilled these ideas into charming literary creations that were eagerly read by the restless minds of France and wrought in them political frenzy. The reforms he projected grew out of his theories of the "rights" of man, without reference to the duties that limit those rights; and his appeal for their support to men's passions and selfish instincts and to a sentimental philosophy, in an age of irreligion and immorality, aroused a political tempest which he little contemplated.

In an age so infidel and brilliant as that which preceded the French Revolution, the writings of Rousseau had a peculiar charm, and produced a great effect even on men who despised his character and ignored his mission. He engendered the Robespierres and Condorcets of the Revolution,--those sentimental murderers, who under the guise of philosophy attacked the fundamental principles of justice and destroyed the very rights which they invoked.

Jean Jacques Rousseau was born at Geneva in the year 1712, when Voltaire was first rising into notice. He belonged to the plebeian ranks, being the son of a watchmaker; was sickly, miserable, and morbid from a child; was poorly educated, but a great devourer of novels (which his father--sentimental as he--read with him), poetry, and gushing biographies; although a little later he became, with impartial facility, equally delighted with the sturdy Plutarch. His nature was passionate and inconstant, his sensibilities morbidly acute, and his imagination lively. He hated all rules, precedents, and authority. He was lazy, listless, deceitful, and had a great craving for novelties and excitement,--as he himself says, "feeling everything and knowing nothing." At an early age, without money or friends, he ran away from the engraver to whom he had been apprenticed, and after various adventures was first kindly received by a Catholic priest in Savoy; then by a generous and erring woman of wealth lately converted to Catholicism; and again by the priests of a Catholic Seminary in Sardinia, under whose tuition, and in order to advance his personal fortunes, he abjured the religion in which he had been brought up, and professed Catholicism. This, however, cost him no conscientious scruples, for his religious training had been of the slimmest, and principles he had none.

We next see Rousseau as a footman in the service of an Italian Countess, where he was mean enough to accuse a servant girl of a theft he had himself committed, thereby causing her ruin. Again, employed as a footman in the service of another noble family, his extraordinary talents were detected, and he was made secretary. But all this kindness he returned with insolence, and again became a wanderer. In his isolation he sought the protection of the Swiss

lady who had before befriended him, Madame de Warens. He began as her secretary, and ended in becoming her lover. In her house he saw society and learned music.

A fit of caprice induced Rousseau to throw up this situation, and he then taught music in Chambéry for a living, studied hard, read Voltaire, Descartes, Locke, Hobbes, Leibnitz, and Puffendorf, and evinced an uncommon vivacity and talent for conversation, which made him a favorite in social circles. His chief labor, however, for five years was in inventing a system of musical notation, which led him to Lyons, and then, in 1741, to Paris.

He was now twenty-nine years old,--a visionary man, full of schemes, with crude opinions and unbounded self-conceit, but poor and unknown,--a true adventurer, with many agreeable qualities, irregular habits, and not very scrupulous morals. Favored by letters of introduction to ladies of distinction,--for he was a favorite with ladies, who liked his enthusiasm, freshness, elegant talk, and grand sentiments,--he succeeded in getting his system of musical notation examined, although not accepted, by the French Academy, and secured an appointment as secretary in the suite of the Ambassador to Venice.

In this city Rousseau remained but a short time, being disgusted with what he called "official insolence," which did not properly recognize native genius. He returned to Paris as poor as when he left it, and lived in a cheap restaurant. There he made the acquaintance of his Thérèse, a healthy, amiable woman, but low, illiterate, unappreciative, and coarse, the author of many of his subsequent miseries. She lived with him till he died,--at first as his mistress and housekeeper, although later in life he married her. She was the mother of his five children, every one of whom he sent to a foundling hospital, justifying his inhumanity by those sophistries and paradoxes with which his writings abound,--even in one of his letters appealing for pity because he "had never known the sweetness of a father's embrace." With extraordinary self-conceit, too, he looked upon himself, all the while, in his numerous illicit loves, as a paragon of virtue, being apparently without any moral sense or perception of moral distinctions.

It was not till Rousseau was thirty-nine years of age that he attracted public attention by his writings, although earlier known in literary circles,--especially in that infidel Parisian *coterie*, where Diderot, Grimm, D'Holbach, D'Alembert, David Hume, the Marquis de Mirabeau, Helvetius, and other wits shined, in which circle no genius was acknowledged and no profundity of thought was deemed possible unless allied with those pagan ideas which Saint Augustine had exploded and Pascal had ridiculed. Even while living among these people, Rousseau had all the while a kind of sentimental religiosity which revolted at their ribald scoffing, although he never protested.

He had written some fugitive pieces of music, and had attempted and failed in several slight operettas, composing both music and words; but the work which made Rousseau famous was his essay on a subject propounded in 1749 by the Academy of Dijon: "Has the Progress of Science and the Arts Contributed to Corrupt or to Purify Morals?" This was a strange subject for a literary institution to propound, but one which exactly fitted the genius of

Rousseau. The boldness of his paradox--for he maintained the evil effects of science and art--and the brilliancy of his style secured readers, although the essay was crude in argument and false in logic. In his "Confessions" he himself condemns it as the weakest of all his works, although "full of force and fire;" and he adds: "With whatever talent a man may be born, the art of writing is not easily learned." It has been said that Rousseau got the idea of taking the "off side" of this question from his literary friend Diderot, and that his unexpected success with it was the secret of his life-long career of opposition to all established institutions. This is interesting, but not very authentic.

The next year, his irregular activity having been again stimulated by learning that his essay had gained the premium at Dijon, and by the fact of its great vogue as a published pamphlet, another performance fairly raised Rousseau to the pinnacle of fashion; and this was an opera which he composed, "Le Devin du Village" (The Village Sorcerer), which was performed at Fontainebleau before the Court, and received with unexampled enthusiasm. His profession, so far as he had any, was that of a copyist of music, and his musical taste and facile talents had at last brought him an uncritical recognition.

But Rousseau soon abandoned music for literature. In 1753 he wrote another essay for the Academy of Dijon, on the "Origin of the Inequality of Man," full of still more startling paradoxes than his first, in which he attempted to show, with great felicity of language, the superiority of savage life over civilization.

At the age of forty-two Rousseau revisited Protestant Geneva, abjured in its turn the Catholic faith, and was offered the post of librarian of the city. But he could not live out of the atmosphere of Paris; nor did he wish to remain under the shadow of Voltaire, living in his villa near the City Gate of Geneva, who had but little admiration for Rousseau, and whose superior social position excited the latter's envy. Yet he professed to hate Paris with its conventionalities and fashions, and sought a quiet retreat where he could more leisurely pursue his studies and enjoy Nature, which he really loved. This was provided for him by an enthusiastic friend,--Madame d'Épinay,--in the beautiful valley of Montmorenci, and called "The Hermitage," situated in the grounds of her Château de la Chevrette. Here he lived with his wife and mother-in-law, he himself enjoying the hospitalities of the Château besides,--society of a most cultivated kind, also woods, lawns, parks, gardens,--all for nothing; the luxuries of civilization, the glories of Nature, and the delights of friendship combined. It was an earthly paradise, given him by enthusiastic admirers of his genius and conversation.

In this retreat, one of the most favored which a poor author ever had, Rousseau, ever craving some outlet for his passionate sentiments, created an ideal object of love. He wrote imaginary letters, dwelling with equal rapture on those he wrote and those he fancied he received in return, and which he read to his lady friends, after his rambles in the forests and parks, during their reunions at the supper-table. Thus was born the "Nouvelle Héloïse,"--a novel of immense fame, in which the characters are invested with every earthly attraction, living in voluptuous peace, yet giving vent to those passions which consume the unsatisfied soul. It was the forerunner of "Corinne," "The Sorrows of Werther," "Thaddeus of Warsaw,"

and all those sentimental romances which amused our grandfathers and grandmothers, but which increased the prejudice of religious people against novels. It was not until Sir Walter Scott arose with his wholesome manliness that the embargo against novels was removed.

The life which Rousseau lived at the Hermitage--reveries in the forest, luxurious dinners, and sentimental friendships--led to a passionate love-affair with the Comtesse d'Houdetot, a sister-in-law of his patroness Madame d'Épinay,--a woman not only married, but who had another lover besides. The result, of course, was miserable,--jealousies, piques, humiliations, misunderstandings, and the sundering of the ties of friendship, which led to the necessity of another retreat: a real home the wretched man never had. This was furnished, still in the vicinity of Montmorenci, by another aristocratic friend, the Maréchal de Luxembourg, the fiscal agent of the Prince de Condé. And nothing to me is stranger than that this wandering, morbid, irritable man, without birth or fortune, the father of the wildest revolutionary and democratic doctrines, and always hated both by the Court and the Church, should have found his friends and warmest admirers and patrons in the highest circles of social life. It can be explained only by the singular fascination of his eloquence, and by the extreme stolidity of his worshippers in appreciating his doctrines, and the state of society to which his principles logically led.

In this second retreat Rousseau had the *entrée* to the palace of the Duke of Luxembourg, where he read to the friends assembled at its banquets his new production, "Émile,"--a singular treatise on education, not so faulty as his previous works, but still false in many of its principles, especially in regard to religion. This book contained an admirable and powerful impulse away from artificiality and towards naturalness in education, which has exerted an immense influence for good; we shall revert to it later.

A few months before the publication of "Émile," Rousseau had issued "The Social Contract," the most revolutionary of all his works, subversive of all precedents in politics, government, and the organization of society, while also confounding Christianity with ecclesiasticism and attacking its influence in the social order. All his works obtained a wide fame before publication by reason of his habit of reading them to enthusiastic and influential friends who made them known.

"The Social Contract," however, dangerous as it was, did not when published arouse so much opposition as "Émile." The latter book, as we now see, contained much that was admirable; but its freedom and looseness in religious discussion called down the wrath of the clergy, excited the alarm of the government, and finally compelled the author to fly for his life to Switzerland.

Rousseau is now regarded as an enemy to Christian doctrine, even as he was a foe to the existing institutions of society. In Geneva his books are publicly burned. Henceforth his life is embittered by constant persecution. He flies from canton to canton in the freest country in Europe, obnoxious not only for his opinions but for his habits of life. He affectedly adopts the Armenian dress, with its big fur bonnet and long girdled caftan, among the Swiss

peasantry. He is as full of personal eccentricities as he is of intellectual crotchets. He becomes a sort of literary vagabond, with every man's hand against him. He now writes a series of essays, called "Letters from the Mountain," full of bitterness and anti-Christian sentiments. So incensed by these writings are the country people among whom he dwells that he is again forced to fly.

David Hume, regarding him as a mild, affectionate, and persecuted man, gives Rousseau a shelter in England. The wretched man retires to Derbyshire, and there writes his "Confessions,"--the most interesting and most dangerous of his books, showing a diseased and irritable mind, and most sophisticated views on the immutable principles of both morality and religion. A victim of mistrust and jealousy, he quarrels with Hume, who learns to despise his character, while pitying the sensitive sufferings of one whom he calls "a man born without a skin."

Rousseau returns to France at the age of fifty-five. After various wanderings he is permitted to settle in Paris, where he lives with great frugality in a single room, poorly furnished,--supporting himself by again copying music, sought still in high society, yet shy, reserved, forlorn, bitter; occasionally making new friends, who are attracted by the infantine simplicity of his manners and apparent amiability, but losing them almost as soon as made by his petty jealousies and irritability, being "equally indignant at neglect and intolerant of attention."

Rousseau's declining health and the fear of his friends that he was on the borders of insanity led to his last retreat, offered by a munificent friend, at Ermenonville, near Paris, where he died at sixty-six years of age, in 1778, as some think from poison administered by his own hand. The revolutionary National Assembly of France in 1790 bestowed a pension of fifteen hundred francs on his worthless widow, who had married a stable-boy soon after the death of her husband.

Such was the checkered life of Rousseau. As to his character, Lord Brougham says that "never was so much genius before united with so much weakness." The leading spring of his life was egotism. He never felt himself wrong, and the sophistries he used to justify his immoralities are both ludicrous and pitiable. His treatment of Madame de Warens, his first benefactor, was heartless, while the abandonment of his children was infamous. He twice changed his religion without convictions, for the advancement of his fortunes. He pretended to be poor when he was independent in his circumstances. He supposed himself to be without vanity, while he was notoriously the most conceited man in France. He quarrelled with all his friends. He made war on society itself. He declared himself a believer in Christianity, but denied all revelation, all miracles, all inspiration, all supernaturalism, and everything he could not reconcile with his reason. His bitterest enemies were the atheists themselves, who regarded him as a hypocrite, since he professed to believe in what he undermined. The hostility of the Church was excited against him, not because he directly assailed Christianity, but because he denied all its declarations and sapped its authority.

Rousseau was, however, a sentimentalist rather than a rationalist, an artist rather than a

philosopher. He was not a learned man, but a bold thinker. He would root out all distinctions in society, because they could not be reconciled with his sense of justice. He preached a gospel of human rights, based not on Christianity but on instinct. He was full of impracticable theories. He would have no war, no suffering, no hardship, no bondage, no fear, and even no labor, since these were evils, and, according to his notions of moral government, unnecessary. But in all his grand theories he ignored the settled laws of Providence,--even those of that "Nature" he so fervently worshipped,--all that is decreed concerning man or woman, all that is stern and real in existence; and while he uttered such sophistries, he excited discontent with the inevitable condition of man, he loosened family ties, he relaxed wholesome restraints, he infused an intense hatred of all conditions subject to necessary toil.

The life of this embittered philanthropist was as great a contradiction as were his writings. This benevolent man sends his own children to a foundling hospital. This independent man lives for years on the bounty of an erring woman, whom at last he exposes and deserts. This high-minded idealizer of friendship quarrels with every man who seeks to extricate him from the consequences of his own imprudence. This affectionate lover refuses a seat at his table to the woman with whom he lives and who is the mother of his children. This proud republican accepts a pension from King George III., and lives in the houses of aristocratic admirers without payment. This religious teacher rarely goes to church, or respects the outward observances of the Christianity he affects. This moral theorizer, on his own confession, steals and lies and cheats. This modest innocent corrupts almost every woman who listens to his eloquence. This lofty thinker consumes his time in frivolity and senseless quarrels. This patriot makes war on the institutions of his country and even of civilized life. This humble man turns his back on every one who will not do him reverence.

Such was this precursor of revolutions, this agitator, this hypocrite, this egotist, this lying prophet,--a man admired and despised, brilliant but indefinite, original but not true, acute but not wise; logical, but reasoning on false premises; advancing some great truths, but spoiling their legitimate effect by sophistries and falsehoods.

Why, then, discuss the ideas and influence of so despicable a creature? Because, sophisticated as they were, those ideas contained truths of tremendous germinant power; because in the rank soil of his times they produced a vast crop of bitter, poisonous fruit, while in the more open, better aerated soil of this century they have borne and have yet to bear a fruitage of universal benefit. God's ways seem mysterious; it is for men patiently to study, understand, and utilize them.

Let us turn to the more definite consideration of the writings which have given this author so brilliant a fame. I omit any review of his operas and his system of musical notation, as not bearing on the opinions of society.

The first work, as I have said, which brought Rousseau into notice was the treatise for the Academy of Dijon, as to whether the arts and sciences have contributed to corrupt or to purify morals. Rousseau followed the bent of his genius, in maintaining that they have done



more harm than good; and he was so fresh and original and brilliant that he gained the prize. This little work contains the germ of all his subsequent theories, especially that in which he magnifies the state of nature over civilization,--an amazing paradox, which, however, appealed to society when men were wearied with the very pleasures for which they lived.

Rousseau's cant about the virtues engendered by ignorance, idleness, and barbarism is repulsive to every sound mind, Civilization may present greater temptations than a state of nature, but these are inseparable from any growth, and can be overcome by the valourous mind. Who but a madman would sweep away civilization with its factitious and remediable evils for barbarism with its untutored impulses and animal life? Here Rousseau makes war upon society, upon all that is glorious in the advance of intellect and the growth of morality,--upon the reason and aspirations of mankind. Can inexperience be a better guide than experience, when it encounters crime and folly? Yet, on the other hand, a plea for greater simplicity of life, a larger study of Nature, and a freer enjoyment of its refreshing contrasts to the hot-house life of cities, is one of the most reasonable and healthful impulses of our own day.

What can be more absurd, although bold and striking, than Rousseau's essay on the "Origin of Human Inequalities"! In this he pushes out the doctrine of personal liberty to its utmost logical sequence, so as to do away with government itself, and with all regulation for the common good. We do not quarrel with his abstract propositions in respect to political equality; but his deductions strike a blow at civilization, since he maintains that inequalities of human condition are the source of all political and social evils, while Christianity, confirmed by common-sense, teaches that the source of social evils is in the selfish nature of man rather than in his outward condition. And further, if it were possible to destroy the inequalities of life, they would soon again return, even with the most boundless liberty. Here common-sense is sacrificed to a captivating theory, and all the experiences of the world are ignored.

This shows the folly of projecting any abstract theory, however true, to its remote and logical sequence. In the attempt we are almost certain to be landed in absurdity, so complicated are the relations of life, especially in governmental and political science. What doctrine of civil or political economy would be applicable in all ages and all countries and all conditions? Like the ascertained laws of science, or the great and accepted truths of the Bible, political axioms are to be considered in their relation with other truths equally accepted, or men are soon brought into a labyrinth of difficulties, and the strongest intellect is perplexed.

And especially will this be the case when a theory under consideration is not a truth but an assumption. That was the trouble with Rousseau. His theories, disdainful of experience, however logically treated, became in their remotest sequence and application insulting to the human understanding, because they were often not only assumptions, but assumptions of what was not true, although very specious and flattering to certain classes.

Rousseau confounded the great truth of the justice of moral and political equality with the absurd and unnatural demand for social and material equality. The great modern cry for equal

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