

Emilie Du Châtelet, “Discourse on Happiness” [late 1730s-1748)

It is commonly believed that it is difficult to be happy, and there is much reason for such a belief; but it would be much easier for men to be happy if reflecting on and planning conduct preceded action. One is carried along by circumstances and indulges in hopes that never yield half of what one expects. Finally, one clearly perceives the means to be happy only when age and self-imposed fetters put obstacles in one’s way.

Let us anticipate the reflections that we make too late: those who will read these pages will find what age and the circumstances of their life would provide too slowly. Let us prevent readers from losing a part of the precious short time that all of us have to feel and to think; and from giving their time to caulking their ship, time which they should devote to securing the pleasures that they can enjoy on their voyage.

In order to be happy, one must have freed oneself of prejudices, one must be virtuous, healthy, have tastes and passions, and be susceptible to illusions; for we owe most of our pleasures to illusions, and unhappy is the one who has lost them. Far then, from seeking to

make them disappear by the torch of reason, let us try to thicken the varnish that illusion lays on the majority of objects. It is even more necessary to them than are care and finery to our body.

One must begin by saying to oneself, and by convincing oneself, that we have nothing to do in the world but to obtain for ourselves some agreeable sensations and feelings. The moralists who say to men, curb your passions and master your desires if you want to be happy, do not know the route to happiness. One is only happy because of satisfied tastes and passions; I say tastes because one is not always happy enough to have passions, and lacking passions, one must be content with tastes. It is passions then that one should ask of God, if one dared to ask him for something, and Le Nôtre was quite right to ask the Pope for temptations rather than indulgences.

But, some will object, do not the passions cause more unhappiness than happiness? I do not have the instrument necessary to weigh in general the good and the bad that they have done to men; but one must remark that the unhappy are known because they have need of

others, that they love to tell their misfortunes, that they seek in the telling some remedy and physical relief. **Happy men and women seek nothing and do not notify others of their happiness; the unhappy are interesting, the happy are unknown.**

This is why when two lovers are reconciled, when their jealousy is gone, when the obstacles that separated them have been surmounted, they are no longer proper drama. The play is over for the spectators, and the scene of Rinaldo and Armida would not interest us as much as it does if the spectator did not expect that the love of Rinaldo is the effect of an enchantment that must be dispelled, and that the passion displayed by Armida in this scene will make her unhappiness more interesting. The same motives move our soul at the theater and in the events of life. So one knows more of love by the unhappiness it causes than by the often obscure happiness it produces in men's lives. **But let us suppose for a moment that the passions cause more unhappiness than happiness, I say they are still to be more desired, because they are a necessary condition for the enjoyment of great pleasures. Now, the only point of living is to experience agreeable sensations and feelings; and the stronger the agreeable feelings are, the happier one is. So** it is desirable to be susceptible to the passions, and let me say it again: passions do not come for the asking.

It is for us to make the passions serve our happiness, and that often depends on us. Whoever knows how to make the most of his station

in life and the circumstances in which fortune has placed him so well—that he succeeds in putting his mind and his heart in an untroubled state, that he is susceptible to all the feelings, to all the agreeable sensations his situation carries—is surely an excellent philosopher and should thank nature.

I say his station in life and the circumstances where fortune placed him because I **believe that one of the things that contribute the most to happiness is to content oneself with one's situation and to think of ways to make it happy rather than to change it...**

But in order to have passions, to be able to satisfy them, one must certainly be healthy; this is the first good. Now, this good is not as independent of us as one may think. As we are all born healthy (in general that is) and our bodies made to last a certain time, there is no doubt that if we did not destroy our health by overeating, by late nights, in short, by excesses, we would all live approximately to what one calls full adulthood. I exclude from this the violent deaths that one cannot predict, and with which consequently it is useless to concern oneself.

But some will tell me, if your passion is eating fine foods you will be very unhappy because if you want to be healthy you will have to restrain yourself perpetually. To this I answer that happiness being your goal, in satisfying your passions, nothing must divert you. If the stomachache or the gout that the excesses of the

table give you causes pain more acute than the pleasure you find in satisfying your love of fine food, you calculate badly. **If you value the enjoyment of sensual pleasure at the expense of your happiness, you stray from your goal and your unhappiness is your own fault.**

Do not complain that you like your food so much, as this passion is a source of continual pleasure; but you should know how to make it serve your happiness....This abstemiousness that you impose on yourself will enhance the pleasure when next enjoyed. I do not recommend this to put an end to your desire for fine food, but to prepare you for a more delicious pleasure. As for people who are ill, those who are old and frail and bothered by everything, they have other kinds of happiness. To be warm enough, to digest their chicken well, to use the commode is a true delight for them. Such a happiness, if it is one, is too insipid to bother about attaining. It seems that such people live in a world where happiness, physical enjoyment, and agreeable feelings are out of reach. Those people are to be pitied; but nothing can be done for them.

When one has been persuaded that without health one cannot enjoy any pleasure and any good thing, one finds it easy to make some sacrifices to preserve one's own. I may say that I am a good example of this. I have a very good constitution; but I am not at all robust, and there are some things that would be sure to destroy my health. Such is wine, for example, and all liqueurs; I have forbidden myself these from

early youth, I have an abundance of fire in my nature, I spend all morning drenching myself with liquids. Last, I too often give myself up to the enjoyment of fine food, a taste with which God has endowed me, and I counter these excesses by rigorous diets that I impose on myself at the first sign of discomfort and that have always prevented illnesses for me. These diets do not cost me anything, because at such times I always stay home at mealtimes. And, as nature is wise enough not to make us feel the pangs of hunger when we have glutted ourselves with nourishment, and my delight in food not being excited by the presence of dishes, I do not deny myself anything by not eating, and thus I restore my health without depriving myself of anything.

Another source of happiness is to be free from prejudices; and the decision rests with us to rid ourselves of them. We all have a sufficient share of intelligence to examine things that others want to oblige us to believe; to know, for example, if two and two make four, or five; besides, in this century, there are a great many ways to gain instruction. **I know that there are other prejudices than those of religion, and I believe that it is good to shake them off, though no prejudices influence our happiness and our unhappiness so much as those of religion. Prejudice is an opinion that one has accepted without examination,** because it would be indefensible otherwise. Error can never be a good, and it is surely a great evil in the things on which the conduct of life depends.

Prejudices must not be confused with the thinking or acting “properly.” There is no truth in prejudices, and they can only be useful to malformed souls; for there are corrupted souls just as there are deformed bodies. To those who have fallen out of line, I have nothing to say. Acting properly is a conventional truth, and that is enough to convince all good people never to deviate from proper action. No book teaches the proprieties; nevertheless, no one can in good faith claim not to be aware of them. They vary according to rank in society, age, and circumstances. Whoever wishes for happiness must never deviate from them. Exact conformity to the proprieties is a virtue, and I have said that in order to be happy one must be virtuous. I know that preachers in their pulpits, and Juvenal himself, say that one must love virtue for its own sake, for its own beauty; but one must try to understand the meaning of these words, and if one does, one sees that they come down to this: **one must be virtuous, because one cannot be immoral and happy at the same time.** By virtue I understand all that contributes to the happiness of society, and consequently to ours, since we are members of that society.

I say that one cannot be happy and immoral, and the demonstration of this axiom lies in the depths of the hearts of all men. I put it to them, even to the most villainous, that there is not one of them to whom the reproaches of his conscience—that is to say, of his innermost feeling, the scorn that he feels he deserves and that he experiences, as soon as he is aware of it—there

is not one to whom these are not a kind of torture. By villains I do not mean thieves, assassins, poisoners; they do not belong in the category of those for whom I write. Villains are the false and perfidious, the slanderers, the informers, the ungrateful. In a word, all those who have vices the laws do not curb, but against which custom and society have brought formal judgments. These formal judgments are all the more terrible, as they are always carried out.

I maintain then that there is no one on earth who can feel that he is despised and not feel despair. This public disdain, this turning away of people of good will, is a torture more cruel than all those that the public executioner could inflict, because it lasts much longer, and because hope never accompanies it.

So one must never be immoral if one does not want to be unhappy. But it is not enough for us not to be unhappy; life would not be worth the effort of living if the absence of suffering was our only goal; nothingness would be better; for assuredly, that is the state of least suffering. One must, then, try to be happy. One must be at ease with oneself for the same reason that one must be comfortable in one’s own home. We would hope in vain for enjoyment of this satisfaction if we were not virtuous . . . but it is the ever-vigilant eye of one’s own conscience that one can never deceive.

One is an exacting judge of oneself, and the more one can bear witness to oneself that one has fulfilled one’s duties, done all the good that

one could do, that in short, one is virtuous, the more one tastes this interior satisfaction that one can call the health of the soul. I doubt that there is a more delicious feeling than what one experiences after doing a virtuous action, an action that merits the esteem of honorable men.

To the inner satisfaction caused by virtuous actions can be added the pleasure of enjoying universal esteem, but even though rogues cannot refuse their esteem to integrity, only the esteem of honorable men is truly worthwhile.

Finally, I say that to be happy one must be susceptible to illusion, and this scarcely needs to be proved; but, you will object, I have said that error is always harmful: is illusion not an error? No: although it is true that illusion does not make us see objects entirely as they must be in order for them to give us agreeable feelings, it only adjusts them to our nature. Such are optical illusions: now optics does not deceive us, although it does not allow us to see objects as they are, because it makes us see them in the manner necessary for them to be useful to us. Why do I laugh more than anyone else at the puppets, if not because I allow myself to be more susceptible than anyone else to illusion, and that after a quarter of an hour I believe that it is Punch the puppet who speaks? Would we have a moment of pleasure at the theater if we did not lend ourselves to the illusion that makes us see famous individuals that we know have been dead for a long time, speaking in Alexandrine verse? Truly, what pleasure would one have at any other spectacle where all is illusion

if one was not able to abandon oneself to it? Surely there would be much to lose, and those at the opera who only have the pleasure of the music and the dances have a very meager pleasure, one well below that which this enchanting spectacle viewed as a whole provides. I have cited spectacles, because illusion is easier to perceive there. It is, however, involved in all the pleasures of our life, and provides the polish, the gloss of life. Some will perhaps say that illusion does not depend on us, and that is only too true, up to a point. We cannot give ourselves illusions any more than we can give ourselves tastes, or passions; but we can keep the illusions that we have; we can seek not to destroy them. We can choose not to go behind the set, to see the wheels that make flight, and the other machines of theatrical productions. Such is the artifice that we can use, and that artifice is neither useless nor unproductive.

These are the great machines of happiness, so to speak; but there are yet other, lesser skills that can contribute to our happiness.

The first is to be resolute about what one wants to be and about what one wants to do. This is lacking in almost all men; it is, however, the prerequisite without which there is no happiness at all. Without it, one swims forever in a sea of uncertainties, one destroys in the morning what one made in the evening; life is spent doing stupid things, putting them right, repenting of them.

This feeling of repentance is one of the most useless and most disagreeable that our soul can experience. One of the great secrets is to know how to guard against it. **As no two things in life are alike, it is almost always useless to see one's errors, or at least to pause a long time to consider them and to reproach oneself with them.** In so doing we cover ourselves with confusion in our own eyes for no gain. One must start from where one is, use all one's sagacity to make amends and to find the means to make amends, but there is no point in looking back, and one must always brush from one's mind the memory of one's errors. The ability to benefit from an initial examination, dismiss sad ideas and substitute agreeable ideas, is one of the mainsprings of happiness, and we have this in our power, at least up to a point. I know that a violent passion that makes us unhappy proves that it does not depend entirely on us to banish from our mind the ideas that distress us; but we are not always in such violent situations, all illnesses are not malign fevers, and the trifling misfortunes, those sensations that are disagreeable, though weak, should be avoided. Death, for example, is an idea that always distresses us whether we foresee our own, or think of that of the people we love. So we must avoid with care all that can remind us of this idea. I very much disagree with Montaigne, who congratulated himself on having so accustomed himself to death that he was sure he would see it approach without being afraid. It may be seen by the complacency with which he reports this victory that it was a costly effort for

him. In this the wise Montaigne had miscalculated, because surely it is a folly to poison with this sad and humiliating idea part of the little time we have to live, all this in order to endure more patiently a moment that bodily sufferings always make very bitter, in spite of our philosophy. Moreover, who knows if the weakening of our mind, caused by illness or old age, will allow us to reap the benefit of our reflections; perhaps our efforts will have been all in vain, as so often happens in this life? When the idea of death recurs, let us always have this line of Gresset in mind: "Suffering is a century, and death a moment."

Let us turn the mind away from all disagreeable ideas; they are the source of all metaphysical anxieties, and it is above all those anxieties that it is almost always in our power to avoid.

Wisdom must always have counters in her hand to play with; wise and happy mean the same, at least in my dictionary. One must have passions to be happy; but they must be made to serve our happiness, and there are some that must absolutely be prevented from entering our soul. I am not speaking here of the passions that are vices, like hatred, vengeance, rage; but ambition, for example, is a passion that I believe one must defend one's soul against, if one wants to be happy. This is not because it does not give enjoyment, for I believe that this passion can provide that; it is not because ambition can never be satisfied—that is surely a great good. Rather, it is because ambition, of

all the passions, makes our happiness dependent on others. Now **the less our happiness depends on others the easier it is for us to be happy. Let us not be afraid to reduce our dependence on others too much, our happiness will always depend on others quite enough. If we value independence, the love of study is, of all the passions, the one that contributes most to our happiness.** This love of study holds within it a passion from which a superior soul is never entirely exempt, that of glory. For half the world, glory can only be obtained in this manner, and it is precisely this half whose education made glory inaccessible and made a taste for it impossible....

The love of glory that is the source of so many pleasures of the soul and of so many efforts of all sorts that contribute to the happiness, the instruction, and the perfection of society, is entirely founded on illusion. Nothing is so easy as to make the phantom after which all superior souls run disappear; but there would be much to lose for them and for others! I know there is some substance in the love of glory that one can enjoy in one's lifetime; but there are scarcely any heroes, of whatever kind, who would want to close themselves off entirely from the plaudits of posterity, from which one expects more justice than from one's contemporaries. One does not always acknowledge the enjoyment of the ill-defined desire to be spoken of after one has passed out of existence; but it always stays deep in our heart. Philosophy would have us feel the vanity of it;

but the feeling prevails, and this pleasure is not an illusion; for it proves to us the very real benefit of enjoying our future reputation. If our only source of good feeling were in the present, our pleasures would be even more limited than they are. **We are made happy in the present moment not only by our actual delights but also by our hopes, our reminiscences. The present is enriched by the past and the future.** Would we work for our children, for the greatness of our lineage, if we did not enjoy the future? Whatever we do, self-esteem is always the more or less hidden driving force of our actions; it is the wind that fills the sails, without which the boat would not move at all.

I have said that the love of study is the passion most necessary to our happiness. It is an unailing resource against misfortunes, it is an inexhaustible source of pleasures, and Cicero is right to say: "The pleasures of the senses and those of the heart are, without doubt, above those of study; study is not necessary for happiness: but we may need to feel that we have within us this resource and this support." **One may love study and spend whole years, perhaps one's whole life, without studying. Happy is he who spends it thus: for only more lively pleasures cause one to sacrifice a pleasure that one is sure to find and that can be made lively enough to compensate for the loss of others.**

One of the great secrets of happiness is to moderate one's desires and to love the things already in one's possession. Nature, whose goal is always our happiness (and by nature, I

understand all that is instinctive and without reasoning), nature, I say, only gives us the desires appropriate to our rank and circumstances. We only naturally desire things by degrees and within our purview: an infantry captain wishes to be a colonel, and he is not unhappy not to command the armies, whatever talent he feels he has. It is for our mind and our reflections to strengthen the wise moderation of nature; only fulfilled desires can make us happy. So **one must allow oneself to desire only the things that can be obtained without too much care and effort, and this is a place where we can do much for our own happiness. To love what one possesses, to know how to enjoy it, to savor the advantages of one's situation in life, not to look too much at those who seem happier than we, to apply oneself to perfect one's own happiness and to make the most of it, this is what is rightly termed happiness.** And I believe I define it well in saying that the happiest man is he who least desires to change his rank and circumstances. To enjoy this happiness, one must cure or prevent a sickness of another sort that is entirely opposed to it, but is only too common: restlessness. This state of mind is incompatible with any enjoyment, and, consequently, any kind of happiness. Good philosophy, that is to say, the firm belief that all we have to do in this world is to be happy, is a sure remedy against this sickness of which lively minds—those who are capable of reasoning on first causes and consequences—are almost always exempt....

There is no doubt that physical needs are the source of the pleasures of the senses, and I am convinced that there is more pleasure in a mediocre fortune than in great abundance. A new snuffbox, a new piece of furniture or of china, is a true delight to me; but if I owned thirty snuffboxes, I would be less appreciative of the thirty-first. Our tastes are easily blunted by satiation, and one must give thanks to God for giving us the necessary privations to preserve them. This is what causes a king to be so often bored, and why it is impossible for him to be happy, unless Heaven has given him a soul magnanimous enough to be susceptible to the pleasures of his position, that is to say, the pleasure of making a great number of men happy. Then this position becomes the first above all for the happiness it brings, as it is by its power.

I have said that the more our happiness depends on us, the more assured it is. But the passion that can give us the greatest pleasures and make us happiest, places our happiness entirely in the hands of others, namely, love.

This passion is perhaps the only one that can make us wish to live, and bring us to thank the author of nature, whoever he is, for giving us life.... If this mutual taste, which is a sixth sense, and the most refined, the most delicate, the most precious of all, brings together two souls equally sensitive to happiness, to pleasure, all is said, one need not do anything more to be happy, everything else is inconsequential except for health. All the faculties of one's soul

must be used to enjoy this happiness. One must give up life when one loses that happiness, and acknowledge that to have attained old age is nothing when balanced with a quarter hour of such bliss. It is appropriate that such a happiness should be rare; if it were common, one would choose to be a man rather than a god, at least such as we can conceive of God. The best thing we can do is to persuade ourselves that this happiness is not impossible. However, I do not know if love has ever brought together two people who are so made for each other that they have never known the satiety of delight, nor the cooling of passion caused by a sense of security, nor the indolence and the tedium that arise from the ease and the continuity of a relationship, and whose power of illusion never wanes (for where is illusion more important than in love?); and, last, whose ardor remains the same whether in the enjoyment or in the deprivation of the other's presence, and equally tolerates both unhappiness and pleasure.

The creation of a heart capable of such a love, a soul so tender, and so steadfast appears to exhaust the power of the deity; only one is born in a century. It seems that to produce two such hearts would be beyond the deity's powers, or if he has produced them, and if they could meet, he would be jealous of their pleasures. But **love can make us happy at less cost: a tender and sensitive soul is made happy by the sheer pleasure it finds in loving. I do not mean that unrequited love could make one perfectly happy; but I say that, although our**

ideas of happiness are not entirely satisfied by the love given us, the pleasure we feel in giving ourselves up to our feelings of tenderness can suffice to make us happy. And if this soul still has the good fortune to be susceptible to illusions, it is not impossible that it should not believe itself more loved perhaps than it is in fact. This soul must love so much that it loves for two, and the warmth of its heart supplies what is, in fact, lacking in its happiness. A feeling character, keen and susceptible to the passions, must pay the price of the inconveniences attached to these qualities, and I do not know if I must say they are good or bad; but I believe that however composed one's character, one would still want to have them. A first passion carries a soul tempered in this way so much beyond itself that it is inaccessible to any reflection and to any moderate ideas; this soul can probably look forward to great sorrows; but the greatest inconvenience attached to such sensibility is that someone who loves to this excess cannot possibly be loved, for there is scarcely a man whose amorous inclination does not diminish with the experience of such a passion. That must appear quite strange to him who does not yet know enough about the human heart; but however little one may have reflected about what experience offers us, one will feel that to hold the heart of one's beloved for a long time, hope and fear must always operate on him. Now, a passion, such as I have just depicted, produces an abandon that makes one incapable of any art. Love bursts out on all sides; you are initially adored, it can only be so;

but soon the certainty of being loved, and the tedium of having one's wishes always anticipated, the misfortune of having nothing to fear, dulls one's inclination. Such is the human heart, and no one should think that I speak out of resentment. I have been endowed by God, it is true, with one of these loving and steadfast souls that know neither how to disguise nor how to moderate its passions, that know neither their diminution nor disgust with them, and whose tenacity can resist everything, even the certainty of being no longer loved. But I was happy for ten years because of the love of a man [Voltaire] who had completely seduced my soul; and these ten years I spent tête-à-tête with him without a single moment of distaste or hint of melancholy. When age, illness, as well as perhaps the ease of pleasure made his inclination less, for a long time I did not perceive it; I was loving for two, I spent all my time with him, and my heart, free from suspicion, delighted in the pleasure of loving and in the illusion of believing myself loved. True, I have lost this happy state, and this has cost me many tears. Terrible shocks are needed to break such chains. The wound to my heart bled for a long time; I had grounds to complain, and I have pardoned all. I was fair enough to accept that in the whole world, perhaps only my heart possessed the steadfastness that annihilates the power of time; that if age and illness had not entirely extinguished his desire, it would perhaps still have been for me, and that love would have restored him to me; lastly, that his heart, incapable of love, felt for me the most

tender affection, and caused him to dedicate his life to me. The certainty that a return of his inclination and his passion was impossible—I know well that such a return is not in nature—imperceptibly led my heart to the peaceful feeling of deep affection; and this sentiment, together with the passion for study, made me happy enough.

But can such a tender heart be satisfied by a sentiment as peaceful and as weak as that of close friendship? I do not know if one must hope, or even wish, to cling forever to this sensibility, once one has reached the kind of apathy to which it is so difficult to lead such a soul. Only lively and agreeable feelings make one happy; why then forbid oneself love, the most lively and most agreeable of all? But what one has experienced, the reflections that one has had to make to lead one's heart to this apathy, the very pain that caused one to bring it to this state—all this must make one fear to leave a situation that at least is not unhappy, in order to venture out to meet with the misfortunes which one's age and the loss of one's beauty would make pointless.

Fine reflections, you will say, and very useful ones! You will see whether they are useful or not, if you ever feel inclination for someone who falls in love with you; but I think that it is wrong to believe these reflections useless. The passions, after thirty years of age, no longer carry us off with the same impetuosity. Please believe that one could resist one's inclination, if one was really intent on it, and

was quite certain that giving in to it would make one unhappy. One only gives in because one is not quite convinced of the reliability of the maxims presented here, and still hopes to be happy, and one is right to persuade oneself that this is possible. Why forbid oneself the hope of experiencing happiness, and of the most intense kind? But even if we should not forbid ourselves this hope, we must not deceive ourselves about the means to happiness; experience must at the least teach us to rely on ourselves and to make our passions serve our happiness. One can keep control of oneself up to a point. No doubt complete self-control is out of reach, but a measure of it is not; and I suggest, without fear of being wrong, that there is no passion that one might not overcome once one is fully convinced that it can only lead to unhappiness. What misleads us on this point in our early youth is that we are incapable of reflecting, that we have no experience at all, and imagine that we will recapture the good that we have lost if we run after it long enough; but experience and knowledge of the human heart teaches us that the more we run after it, the more it flees from us. It is a deceptive prospect that disappears when we believe we have reached it. We cannot will, we cannot persuade, ourselves into feelings of attraction for someone, and attraction can hardly ever be rekindled. What is your goal when you give in to the attraction you feel for someone? Is it not in order to be happy because of the pleasure of loving and being loved? So it would be ridiculous to refuse oneself this pleasure for fear of an unhappiness that

perhaps will only be experienced after having known great happiness. Thus, there would be an overall balance, and you must only think of recovering from this malady and of not repenting, in the same way a reasonable person would blush if she did not take her happiness into her own hands, and if she put it entirely in those of another.

The great secret for preventing love from making us unhappy is to try never to appear in the wrong with your lover, never to display eagerness when his love is cooling, and always to be a degree cooler than he. This will not bring him back, but nothing could bring him back; there is nothing for us to do then but to forget someone who ceases to love us. If he still loves you, nothing can revive his love and make it as fiery as it was at first, except the fear of losing you and of being less loved. I know that for the susceptible and sincere, this secret is difficult to put into practice; however, no effort will be too great, all the more so as it is much more necessary for the susceptible and sincere than for others. Nothing degrades as much as the steps one takes to regain a cold or inconstant heart. This demeans us in the eyes of the one we seek to keep, and in those of other men who might take an interest in us. But, and this is even worse, it makes us unhappy and uselessly torments us. So we must follow this maxim with unwavering courage and never surrender to our own heart on this point. We must attempt, before surrendering to our inclination, to become acquainted with the character of the

person to whom we are becoming attached. Reason must be heard when we take counsel with ourselves; not the reason that condemns all types of commitment as contrary to happiness, but that which, in agreeing that one cannot be very happy without loving, wants one to love only in order to be happy, and to conquer an attraction by which it is obvious that one would only suffer unhappiness. But if and when this inclination has prevailed, when, as happens only too often, it has triumphed over reason, one must not pride oneself on a constancy that would be as ridiculous as it would be misplaced. This is a case in point for putting into practice the proverb "The shortest follies are the best"; above all the shortest follies cause the shortest unhappiness. For there are follies that would make us very happy if they lasted all our lives. One should not blush to have been mistaken; one must cure oneself, at whatever cost, and above all avoid the presence of the object that can only excite one and make one lose the fruit of one's reflections. For with men, flirtation survives love. They want to lose neither their conquest nor their victory, and by a thousand coqueries they know how to rekindle a fire imperfectly extinguished and to hold you in a state of uncertainty as ridiculous as it is intolerable. Drastic action must be taken, one must break off once and for all; friendship must be carefully unstitched and love torn up, says M. de Richelieu. Lastly, it is for reason to make our happiness. In childhood, our senses alone attend to this task; in youth, the heart and the mind become involved, with the proviso that

the heart makes all the decisions; but in middle age reason must take part in the decision, it is for reason to make us feel that we must be happy, whatever it costs. Every age has its own pleasures; those of old age are the most difficult to obtain: gambling, studying, if one is still capable of it, the enjoyment of fine foods, respect, those are the mainsprings of old age. No doubt these are only consolations. Thank goodness, it is up to us to choose the time of our death, if it is too slow in coming; but as long as we prefer to endure life, we must open ourselves to pleasure by all the doors leading to our soul; we have no other business.

So let us try to be healthy, to have no prejudices, to have passions, to make them serve our happiness, to replace our passions with inclinations, to cherish our illusions, to be virtuous, never to repent, to keep away sad ideas, and never to allow our heart to sustain a spark of inclination for someone whose inclination for us diminishes and who ceases to love us. We must leave love behind one day, if we do indeed age, and that day must be the one when love ceases to make us happy. Lastly, let us think of fostering a taste for study, a taste which makes our happiness depend only on ourselves. Let us preserve ourselves from ambition, and, above all, let us be certain of what we want to be; let us choose for ourselves our path in life, and let us try to strew that path with flowers.