

Rameau's Nephew
and Other Works

Supplement to Bougainville's "Voyage"

Denis Diderot

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idealize the primitive: "Monsieur de Bougainville's book several times portrays the savage man as a being who is generally so stupid that a masterpiece of human industry makes no more impression on him than the great phenomena of nature; he has always seen those phenomena; he has ceased to think about them; he no longer marvels at them; and he lacks the necessary fund of elementary ideas that would lead him to a true estimation of great works of art. . . ." It is obviously, therefore, a serious error—though unfortunately not an infrequent one—to read the *Supplément to Bougainville's "Voyage"* as evidence of Diderot's "primitivism." It should be noted, too, that much of Diderot's idyllic account of life in Tahiti was drawn directly from Bougainville's account, not invented by him, and that none of the sources accessible to him pointed out the less attractive features of Tahitian existence such as the widespread practice of infanticide.

There is a certain irony in the fact that the manuscript of the *Supplément* would not, in all probability, have come down to us if a certain Abbé Bourlet de Vauxcelles, an acquaintance of Julie de L'Espinasse and D'Alembert, had not saved a copy that somehow came into his hands and published it in 1796 after the fall of Robespierre with the object of discrediting Jacobinism as well as the eighteenth-century ideas that had inspired it. In his preface the Abbé accused Diderot, the author of "this precious morsel of philosophy," of having been "the true founder of *sans-culotterie*, the name of which is most appropriate to the thing itself, though it was invented only after the fact." He also took Diderot to task for having "taught men like Chaumette and Hébert how to declaim against the three masters of the human race: the Great Workman, the magistrate, and the priest"—though it is difficult to see how those atheistic agitators of the Revolutionary period could have learned much from a manuscript that was presumably tucked safely away in the Abbé's portfolio until 1796. Diderot had, of course, allowed his manuscript to circulate among close friends—otherwise the Abbé could never have gotten his hands on it—but this audience must have been a very restricted one, and there is no evidence that any of them ever preached atheism during the Revolution.

SUPPLEMENT TO BOUGAINVILLE'S "VOYAGE"

Or, a Dialogue between A and B on the undesirability of attaching moral values to certain physical acts which carry no such implications.

*At quanto meliora monet, pugnantiaque istis,
Dives opis naturae suae: tu si modo recte
Dispensare velis, ac non fugienda petendis
Immiscere; tuo vitio rerumne labores,
Nil referre putas?**

HORACE, *Satires*

Critique of Bougainville's "Voyage"

A. The weather has played a trick on us. When we returned home yesterday evening the sky was like a splendid vault studded with stars. But evidently its promise of fine weather was false.

B. How can you be so sure?

A. The fog is so thick that you can't see the tops of those trees over there.

B. True enough. But the fog only hangs low because the atmosphere near the ground is already filled with moisture.

* How much better it is, and how contrary to certain other precepts, that you, a rich man, should be willing to allot your resources correctly according to their own nature, so as not to mingle desirable things with those that should be avoided! Do you count it as a matter of indifference that you must toil because of your own shortcomings and those of your subject matter?

Perhaps the fog will condense and its moisture fall to the ground.

A. Or, conversely, it may rise higher, past this layer of moist air, into the upper levels where the air is less dense. Up there it may not be saturated, as the chemists say.

B. Nothing for it but to wait and see.

A. And what do you plan to do while we are waiting?

B. I have a book to read.

A. Still Bougainville's account of his voyage?

B. Still at it.

A. I can't make head or tail out of that man. When he was young, he went in for mathematics, which implies a sedentary life. And now, suddenly, he deserts his meditations and takes up the active, difficult, wandering, dissipated life of an explorer.

B. Not at all. A ship, after all, is only a floating house, and the sailor who traverses enormous distances is shut up in a narrow little space in which he can scarcely move about. Look at it this way, and you will see how he can go around the globe on a plank, just as you and I can make a tour of the universe on your floor.

A. And another thing that's very odd—the disparity between the man's character and his exploit. Bougainville has a taste for the amusements of polite society; he loves women, the theater, fine meals. He takes as easily to the social whirl as to the inconstancy of the elements that have buffeted him about so much. He is gay and genial; he is a real Frenchman, ballasted on the port side with a treatise on integral and differential calculus, and to starboard with a voyage around the world.

B. He's only doing what everybody does—after a period of strenuous application he looks for distraction, and vice versa.

A. What's your opinion of the "Voyage"?

B. Well, so far as I can judge after a rather superficial reading, I should say that its chief merits are three: it affords us better knowledge of our old globe and its inhabitants, greater safety on the seas, which he sailed with sounding line in hand, and more correct information for the use of our map

makers. When he undertook his voyage, Bougainville possessed the necessary scientific preparation and he had the requisite personal qualities—a philosophic attitude, courage and veracity; he had a quick eye for taking things in without having to waste time in making his observations; he had caution, patience, and a real desire to see, to learn and to enlighten himself; he knows the sciences of mathematics, mechanics, geometry, astronomy; he has a sufficient acquaintance with natural history.

A. How is his style?

B. Simple and direct, just right for the subject, unpretentious and clear, especially when one is familiar with the way sailors talk.

A. Was it a long voyage?

B. I've marked his course on this globe. Do you see that line of red dots?

A. Which starts at Nantes?

B. Yes, and runs down to the Straits of Magellan, enters the Pacific Ocean, twists among the islands of the great archipelago extending from the Philippines to New Holland, touches Madagascar, the Cape of Good Hope, continues into the Atlantic, follows the coast of Africa, and finally ends up where it began.

A. Did he have a very hard time of it?

B. All sailors take risks, and accept the need to expose themselves to the hazards of air, fire, earth and water. But the worst hardship is that when he finally makes port somewhere after wandering for months between the sea and the sky, between life and death, after being battered by storms, after risking death from shipwreck, disease, hunger and thirst, after having his ship all but torn apart under his feet—when he falls exhausted and destitute at the feet of a brazen monster of a colonial government he is either refused the most urgent relief or made to wait interminably for it—it is very hard!

A. It's a crime and it ought to be punished.

B. It's one of the disasters our explorer failed to take into account.

A. And he shouldn't have had to. I had thought that the

Enlightenment
Ideal

European powers were careful to send out to their overseas possessions only men of upright character and benevolent disposition, humane and sensitive to other people's distress. . . .

wa. B. Oh, yes, you may be sure they worry a lot about that!

A. Have you come across any striking pieces of new information in this book of Bougainville's?

B. A great many.

A. Doesn't he report that wild animals often come right up to a human being, and that birds even fly down and perch on a man's shoulder, wherever they have had no chance to learn the danger of such familiarity?

B. He does, but others have said the same thing before.

A. How does he explain the presence of certain animals on islands that are separated from any continent by stretches of impassable sea? Who could have brought wolves, foxes, dogs, deer or snakes to such places?

B. He doesn't explain it; he only confirms the fact.

A. Well, how do you explain it?

B. Who knows anything about the early history of our planet? How many pieces of land, now isolated, were once pieces of some continent? The general shape of the bodies of water between them is the only clue on which to base some theory of what might have happened.

A. How do you mean?

B. You would have to reason from the shape of the pieces that are missing. Some day we can have a good time working that problem out, if the idea appeals to you. But for the moment, do you see this dot on the map called Lancer's Island? Looking at the position it occupies on the globe, who is there who wouldn't wonder how men came to be there? What means of communication were there between them and the rest of mankind? What will become of them if they go on multiplying on a little spit of land that is less than three miles across?

A. Probably they thin themselves out by eating each other. Perhaps you have there—in the very condition of island life—the origins of a very ancient and very natural form of cannibalism.

B. Or they may limit the growth of population by some superstitious law—perhaps babies are crushed under the feet of a priestess while still in their mothers' wombs.

A. Or perhaps grown men have the edge of a priest's knife put to their throats. Or perhaps some males are castrated. . . .

B. Or some women undergo infibulation, and there you would have the origin of many, many strange customs as cruel as they are necessary, the reasons for which have been lost in the darkness of the past and still torment philosophers. One rule that seems fairly universal is that supernatural and divine institutions seem to grow stronger the longer they remain in effect, and are eventually transformed into national constitutions or civil laws. Similarly, national or civil institutions acquire sanctity and degenerate into supernatural or divine precepts.

A. The worst sort of palingenesis.

B. It is just one more skein woven into the rope with which we are bound hand and foot.

A. Wasn't Bougainville in Paraguay just at the time when the Jesuits were expelled from there?

B. Yes, he was.

A. What does he say about it?

B. Less than he might have said. But he does say enough to make it clear that those cruel sons of Sparta in black robes treated their Indians slaves quite as badly as the ancient Spartans treated their helots. They forced them to work incessantly, grew rich on their sweat, deprived them of all property rights, kept them under the brutalizing influence of superstition, exacted the most profound veneration from them, and strode among them whip in hand, beating them without regard for age or sex. Another century, and it would have been impossible to get rid of them, or else the attempt would have touched off a long war between the monks and the sovereign, whose authority they had little by little been undermining.

A. And what about those Patagonian giants about whom Dr. Maty and La Condamine, the academicians, made such a fuss?

B. They are good fellows who come running up to you and shout "Chaoua!" as they embrace you. They are strong and energetic, but the tallest of them stands no higher than five feet five or six inches—there is nothing gigantic about them except their fatness, the largeness of their heads and the thickness of their limbs. Man is born with a taste for the marvelous, with a tendency to magnify everything he sees, so how should one be able to maintain a just proportion among the things he has seen, especially when one must, as it were, justify the long trip he has made and the trouble he has taken to go to some remote place to look at them?

A. Well, what in general is Bougainville's opinion of savages?

B. Apparently they acquire their cruel ways from the daily necessity of defending themselves against wild animals—at least this may explain what many travelers have observed. Whenever his peace and safety are not disturbed, the savage is innocent and mild. All warfare originates in conflicting claims to the same bit of property. The civilized man has a claim which conflicts with the claim of another civilized man to the possession of a field of which they occupy respectively the two ends, so the field becomes the object of a dispute between them.

A. And the tiger has a claim, which conflicts with that of the savage, to the possession of a forest. This must be the first instance of conflicting claims as well as the most ancient cause of war. . . . Did you happen to see the Tahitian that Bougainville took on board his vessel and brought back to this country?

B. Yes, I saw him. His name was Aotourou. When they first sighted land after leaving Tahiti, he mistook it for the voyagers' native country, whether because they had misrepresented the length of the voyage to him or because, being naturally misled by the smallness of the apparent distance from the seashore where he lived to the point at which the sky seemed to touch the horizon, he had no idea of the actual size of the earth. The Tahitian custom of having all women in common was so firmly ingrained in his mind that he threw himself upon the first European woman who came

near him, and he was getting ready, in all seriousness, to render her one of the courtesies of Tahiti. He soon got bored, though, living among us. Because the Tahitian alphabet has no b, c, d, f, g, q, s, y or z, he was never able to learn to speak our language, which demanded too many strange articulations and new sounds from his inflexible organs of speech. He grew more and more disconsolate from a desire to be back in his own country, and I can understand his feelings. This account of Bougainville of his voyage is the only book that has ever made me hanker after another country than my own. Up to now, I had always thought that a person was never so well off as when at home. Consequently I thought that everyone in the world must feel the same. All this is a natural result of the attraction of the soil, and this is an attraction that is bound up with all the comforts one enjoys at home and is not so sure of finding away from it.

A. What? Don't you find that the average inhabitant of Paris is just as sure that grain grows in the fields of the Roman Campagna as in those of Beauce?

B. Heavens, no! Bougainville finally sent Aotourou back to Tahiti, after having provided for his expenses and made certain that he would arrive safely.

A. Well, friend Aotourou! And weren't you pleased to see your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, your lady loves, your fellow countrymen—and what things you must have had to tell them about us!

B. Precious few things, you may be sure, and they didn't believe a single one of them.

A. Why do you say he had only a few things to tell them?

B. Because he couldn't have taken in very many, and because he wouldn't have been able to find the words in his language to talk about those things he had gained some notion of.

A. And why shouldn't they have believed him?

B. Because when they came to compare their customs with ours they would prefer to think that Aotourou was a liar rather than that we are so crazy.

A. Are you serious?

B. I have no doubt of it. The life of savages is so simple, and our societies are such complicated machines! The Tahitian is close to the origin of the world, while the European is close to its old age. The contrast between them and us is greater than the difference between a newborn baby and a doddering old man. They understand absolutely nothing about our manners or our laws, and they are bound to see in them nothing but shackles disguised in a hundred different ways. Those shackles could only provoke the indignation and scorn of creatures in whom the most profound feeling is a love of liberty.

A. Do you mean to go on and spin out the whole fable about how wonderful life is in Tahiti?

B. It isn't a fable at all. And you would have no doubt about Bougainville's sincerity if you had read the supplement to his account of his voyage.

A. Well, how can one get hold of this supplement?

B. It's right over there, on that table.

A. Will you let me borrow it to read at home?

B. I'd rather not. But if you would like to, we can read it over together.

A. Of course I should like to. Look over there—the fog is starting to settle, and you can see a few patches of blue sky. It seems that it's my fate to be on the wrong side of any argument with you, even when it's over trifles. I must have a very good disposition to be able to forgive you for being so consistently superior!

B. Here, take the manuscript and read it aloud. Skip over the preamble, which doesn't amount to anything, and start with the farewell speech made by one of the island's chiefs to the travelers. That will give you some notion of how eloquent those people can be.

A. But how was Bougainville able to understand this oration if it was spoken in a language he didn't know?

B. You'll find out. The speaker is an old man.

The Old Man's Farewell

He was the father of a numerous family. At the time of the Europeans' arrival, he cast upon them a look that was filled with scorn, though it revealed no surprise, no alarm and no curiosity. They approached him; he turned his back on them and retired into his hut. His thoughts were only too well revealed by his silence and his air of concern, for in the privacy of his thoughts he groaned inwardly over the happy days of his people, now gone forever. At the moment of Bougainville's departure, when all the natives ran swarming onto the beach, tugging at his clothing and throwing their arms around his companions and weeping, the old man stepped forward and solemnly spoke:

"Weep, wretched Tahitians, weep—but rather for the arrival than for the departure of these wicked and grasping men! The day will come when you will know them for what they are. Someday they will return, bearing in one hand that piece of wood you see suspended from this one's belt and in the other the piece of steel that hangs at the side of his companion. They will load you with chains, slit your throats and enslave you to their follies and vices. Someday you will be slaves to them, you will be as corrupt, as vile, as wretched as they are. But I have this consolation—my life is drawing to its close, and I shall not see the calamity that I foretell. Oh Tahitians, Oh my friends! You have the means of warding off a terrible fate, but I would die before I would advise you to make use of it. Let them leave, and let them live."

Then, turning to Bougainville, he went on: "And you, leader of these brigands who obey you, take your vessel swiftly from our shores. We are innocent and happy, and you can only spoil our happiness. We follow the pure instinct of nature, and you have tried to efface her imprint from our hearts. Here all things are for all, and you have preached to us I know not what distinctions between mine and thine.

Our women and girls we possess in common; you have shared this privilege with us, and your coming has awakened in them a frenzy they have never known before. They have become mad in your arms; you have become ferocious in theirs. They have begun to hate one another; you have cut one another's throats for them, and they have come home to us stained with your blood.

"We are free—but see where you have driven into our earth the symbol of our future servitude. You are neither a god nor a devil—by what right, then, do you enslave people? Orou! You who understand the speech of these men, tell every one of us, as you have told me, what they have written on that strip of metal—'This land belongs to us.' This land belongs to you! And why? Because you set foot in it? If some day a Tahitian should land on your shores, and if he should engrave on one of your stones or on the bark of one of your trees: 'This land belongs to the people of Tahiti,' what would you think? You are stronger than we are! And what does that signify? When one of our lads carried off some of the miserable trinkets with which your ship is loaded, what an uproar you made, and what revenge you took! And at that very moment you were plotting, in the depths of your hearts, to steal a whole country! You are not slaves; you would suffer death rather than be enslaved, yet you want to make slaves of us! Do you believe, then, that the Tahitian does not know how to die in defense of his liberty? This Tahitian, whom you want to treat as a chattel, as a dumb animal—this Tahitian is your brother. You are both children of Nature—what right do you have over him that he does not have over you?

"You came; did we attack you? Did we plunder your vessel? Did we seize you and expose you to the arrows of our enemies? Did we force you to work in the fields alongside our beasts of burden? We respected our own image in you. Leave us our own customs, which are wiser and more decent than yours. We have no wish to barter what you call our ignorance for your useless knowledge. We possess already all that is good or necessary for our existence. Do we merit

your scorn because we have not been able to create superfluous wants for ourselves? When we are hungry, we have something to eat; when we are cold, we have clothing to put on. You have been in our huts—what is lacking there, in your opinion? You are welcome to drive yourselves as hard as you please in pursuit of what you call the comforts of life, but allow sensible people to stop when they see they have nothing to gain but imaginary benefits from the continuation of their painful labors. If you persuade us to go beyond the bounds of strict necessity, when shall we come to the end of our labor? When shall we have time for enjoyment? We have reduced our daily and yearly labors to the least possible amount, because to us nothing seemed more desirable than leisure. Go and bestir yourselves in your own country; there you may torment yourselves as much as you like; but leave us in peace, and do not fill our heads with a hankering after your false needs and imaginary virtues. Look at these men—see how healthy, straight and strong they are. See these women—how straight, healthy, fresh and lovely they are. Take this bow in your hands—it is my own—and call one, two, three, four of your comrades to help you try to bend it. I can bend it myself. I work the soil, I climb mountains, I make my way through the dense forest, and I can run four leagues on the plain in less than an hour. Your young comrades have been hard put to it to keep up with me, and yet I have passed my ninetieth year. . . .

"Woe to this island! Woe to all the Tahitians now living, and to all those yet to be born, woe from the day of your arrival! We used to know but one disease—the one to which all men, all animals and all plants are subject—old age. But you have brought us a new one: you have infected our blood. We shall perhaps be compelled to exterminate with our own hands some of our young girls, some of our women, some of our children, those who have lain with your women, those who have lain with your men. Our fields will be spattered with the foul blood that has passed from your veins into ours. Or else our children, condemned to die, will nourish and perpetuate the evil disease that you have given their

fathers and mothers, transmitting it forever to their descendants. Wretched men! You will bear the guilt either of the ravages that will follow your baneful caresses, or of the murders we must commit to arrest the progress of the poison! You speak of crime! Can you conceive of a greater crime than the one you have committed? How do they punish, in your country, the man who has killed his neighbor? Death by the headsman's ax! How do you punish the man who has poisoned his neighbor? Burning at the stake! Compare the second crime with your own, and then tell us, you poisoner of whole nations, what tortures you deserve!

"But a little while ago, the young Tahitian girl blissfully abandoned herself to the embraces of a Tahitian youth and awaited impatiently the day when her mother, authorized to do so by her having reached the age of puberty, would remove her veil and uncover her breasts. She was proud of her ability to excite men's desires, to attract the amorous looks of strangers, of her own relatives, of her own brothers. In our presence, without shame, in the center of a throng of innocent Tahitians who danced and played the flute, she accepted the caresses of the young man whom her young heart and the secret promptings of her senses had marked out for her. The notion of crime and the fear of disease have come among us only with your coming. Now our enjoyments, formerly so sweet, are attended with guilt and terror. That man in black, who stands near to you and listens to me, has spoken to our young men, and I know not what he has said to our young girls, but our youths are hesitant and our girls blush. Creep away into the dark forest, if you wish, with the perverse companion of your pleasures, but allow the good, simple Tahitians to reproduce themselves without shame under the open sky and in broad daylight.

"What more noble or more wholesome feelings could you put in the place of the ones we have nurtured in them and by which they live? When they think the time has come to enrich the nation and the family with a new citizen, they glorify the occasion. They eat in order to live and grow; they grow in order that they may multiply, and in that they see

neither vice nor shame. Listen to the consequences of your crimes. Scarcely had you shown yourselves among our people than they became thieves. Scarcely had you set foot upon our soil than it began to reek of blood. You killed the Tahitian who ran to greet you, crying 'Taïo—friend!' And why did you kill him? Because he was tempted by the glitter of your little serpent's eggs. He gave you his fruit; he offered you his wife and daughter; he gave you his hut to live in—and you killed him for taking a handful of those little glass beads without asking your permission. And the others? At the sound of your murderous weapons they fled to the hills. But you should know that had it not been for me they would soon have come down again to destroy you. Oh, why did I appease their anger? Why did I calm their fury? Why do I still restrain them, even at this moment? I do not know, for you surely have no claim to pity. Your own soul is hard and will never feel any.

"You and your men have gone where you pleased, wandered over the whole island; you have been respected; you have enjoyed everything: no barrier nor refusal has been placed in your path. You have been invited into our homes; you have sat down at our tables; our people have spread before you the abundance of our land. If you wanted one of our young women, her mother presented her to you all naked, unless she was one of those who are not yet old enough to have the privilege of showing their faces and breasts. Thus you have enjoyed possession of these tender sacrificial victims to the duty of hospitality. For the girl and for you we have strewn the ground with leaves and flowers, the musicians have put their instruments in tune; nothing has troubled the sweetness nor interfered with the freedom of her caresses and yours. We chanted the hymn, the one that urges you to be a man, that urges our child to be a woman, a compliant and voluptuous woman. We danced around your couch. Yet you had hardly left this girl's embrace, having experienced in her arms the sweetest intoxication, than you killed her brother, her friend, or perhaps her father.

"And you have done worse still—look yonder at that enclosure, bristling with arrows, with weapons that heretofore have threatened only our foes—see them now turned against our own children. Look now upon the unhappy companions of your pleasures! See their sorrow! See the distress of their fathers and the despair of their mothers! That is where they are condemned to die at our hands or from the disease you gave them. So leave this place, unless your cruel eyes delight in the spectacle of death! Go! And may the guilty sea, that spared your lives when you came here, now absolve itself and avenge our wrongs by swallowing you up on your homeward way! And you, Tahitians, go back to your huts, go indoors, all of you, so that these unworthy strangers, as they depart, may hear nothing but the growling of the waves and may see nothing but the white spray dashing in fury on a desert coast!"

He finished speaking, and in an instant the throng of natives disappeared. A vast silence reigned over the whole extent of the island, and nothing was to be heard but the dry whistling of the wind and the dull pounding of the waves along the whole length of the coast. It was as though the winds and waters had heard the old man's voice and obeyed him.

B. Well, what do you think of that?

A. The oration strikes me as forceful enough, but in the midst of so much that is unmistakably abrupt and savage I seem to detect a few European ideas and turns of phrase.

B. You must remember that it is a translation from Tahitian into Spanish and from Spanish into French. The previous night, the old man made a visit to Orou, the one to whom he appealed while speaking, in whose family the knowledge of Spanish had been preserved for several generations. Orou wrote down the old man's harangue in Spanish, and Bougainville had a copy of it in his hand while the old man was speaking.

A. Now I understand only too well why Bougainville suppressed this fragment. But I see there is more, and I have more than a mild curiosity to know what's in the rest.

B. Quite possibly you will find the next part less interesting.

A. Never mind.

B. It is a conversation between the ship's chaplain and a native of the island.

A. Orou?

B. The very same. When Bougainville's ship hove in sight of Tahiti, a great swarm of hollowed-out tree trunks put out from the shore. In an instant his vessel was surrounded by them. In whatever direction he turned his eyes he saw demonstrations of surprise and good will. The natives threw food to the sailors, welcomed them with outstretched arms, clambered up the ship's ropes and clung to its sides. They filled the captain's gig, shouting back and forth between ship and shore. More natives came running down to the beach. As soon as the Europeans had set foot on land, dozens of pairs of friendly arms were thrown around the members of the expedition, who were passed about from group to group and finally led off, each to the hut of a different family. The men kept on embracing their guests around the waist, while the women stroked and patted their hands and cheeks. Imagine what it must have been like to have been there! As a witness of this hospitable scene, at least in thought, tell me what you think of the human race.

A. It's very fine.

B. But I was almost forgetting to tell you about a most peculiar thing. The friendly and generous spectacle I have described was suddenly marred by the cries of a man calling for help. It was the servant of one of Bougainville's officers. Several Tahitian lads had laid hold of him, stretched him out flat on the ground, removed his clothes, and were getting ready to render him the customary politeness of the country.

A. What! Do you mean that those simple people, those good decent savages . . . ?

B. You're jumping to false conclusions. The servant was a woman disguised as a man. Her sex had been kept secret from the crew during the whole voyage, but the Tahitians recognized it at the first glance. She was born in Burgundy and her family name was Barré; she was neither beautiful nor ugly, and twenty-six years old. She had never undressed outside her hammock. She had suddenly got the urge to travel, and her first idea was to circumnavigate the globe. She showed courage and good sense at all times.

A. Those frail constitutions sometimes contain strong characters.

*Conversation Between
the Chaplain and Orou*

B. When the members of Bougainville's expedition were shared out among the native families, the ship's chaplain fell to the lot of Orou. The Tahitian and the chaplain were men of about the same age, that is, about thirty-five years old. At that time, Orou's family consisted of his wife and three daughters, who were called Asto, Palli and Thia. The women undressed their guest, washed his face, hands and feet, and put before him a wholesome though frugal meal. When he was about to go to bed, Orou, who had stepped outside with his family, reappeared and presented to him his wife and three girls—all naked as Eve—and said to him:

"You are young and healthy and you have just had a good supper. He who sleeps alone, sleeps badly; at night a man needs a woman at his side. Here is my wife and here are my daughters. Choose whichever one pleases you most, but if you would like to do me a favor, you will give your preference to my youngest girl, who has not yet had any children."

The mother said: "Poor girl! I don't hold it against her. It's no fault of hers."

The chaplain replied that his religion, his holy orders, his moral standards and his sense of decency all prevented him from accepting Orou's invitation.

Orou answered: "I don't know what this thing is that you call 'religion,' but I can only have a low opinion of it because it forbids you to partake of an innocent pleasure to which Nature, the sovereign mistress of us all, invites everybody. It seems to prevent you from bringing one of your fellow creatures into the world, from doing a favor asked of you by a father, a mother and their children, from repaying the kindness of a host, and from enriching a nation by giving it an additional citizen. I don't know what it is that you call 'holy orders,' but your chief duty is to be a man and to show gratitude. I am not asking you to take my moral standards back with you to your own country, but Orou, your host and your friend, begs you merely to lend yourself to the morality of Tahiti. Is our moral code a better or a worse one than your own? This is an easy question to answer. Does the country you were born in have more people than it can support? If it does, then your morals are neither better nor worse than ours. Or can it feed more people than it now has? Then our morals are better than yours. As for the sense of propriety that leads you to object to my proposal, that I understand, and I freely admit that I am in the wrong. I ask your pardon. I cannot ask you to do anything that might harm your health; if you are too tired, you should by all means go to sleep at once. But I hope that you will not persist in disappointing us. Look at the distress you have caused to appear on the faces of these four women—they are afraid you have noticed some defect in them that arouses your distaste. But even if that were so, would it not be possible for you to do a good deed and have the pleasure of honoring one of my daughters in the sight of her sisters and friends? Come, be generous!"

THE CHAPLAIN. "You don't understand—it's not that. They are all four of them equally beautiful. But there is my religion! My holy orders!"

OROU. "They are mine and I offer them to you; they are all of age and they give themselves to you. However clear a conscience may be demanded of you by this thing, 'religion,' or by those 'holy orders' of yours, you need have no scruples about accepting these women. I am making no abuse of

my paternal authority, and you may be sure that I recognize and respect the rights of individuals to their own persons."

At this point in his account, the truthful chaplain has to admit that up to that moment Providence had never exposed him to such strong temptation. He was young, he was excited, he was in torment. He turned his eyes away from the four lovely suppliants, then let his gaze wander back to them again. He lifted his hands and his countenance to Heaven. Thia, the youngest of the three girls, threw her arms around his knees and said to him: "Stranger, do not disappoint my father and mother. Do not disappoint me! Honor me in this hut and among my own family! Raise me to the dignity enjoyed by my sisters, for they make fun of me. Asto, my eldest sister, already has three children; Palli, the second oldest of us, has two; and Thia has none! Stranger, good stranger, do not reject me! Make me a mother! Give me a child whom I can some day lead by the hand as he walks at my side, to be seen by all Tahiti—a little one to nurse at my breast nine months from now, a child of whom I can be proud, and who will be part of my dowry when I go from my father's hut into that of another. Perhaps I shall be more fortunate with you than I have been with our Tahitian young men. If you will only grant me this favor, I will never forget you; I will bless you all my life; I will write your name on my arm and on that of my child; we will always pronounce it with joy; and when you leave this shore, my prayers will go with you across the seas all the way to your own country."

The poor chaplain records that she pressed his hands, that she fastened her eyes on his with the most expressive and touching gaze, that she wept, that her father, mother and sisters went out, leaving him alone with her, and that despite his repetition of "But there is my religion and my holy orders," he awoke the next morning to find the young girl lying at his side. She overwhelmed him with more caresses, and when her father, mother and sisters came in, she called upon them to add their gratitude to hers.

Asto and Palli, who had left the room briefly, soon returned bearing native food, drink and fruits. They embraced their

sister and wished her good fortune. They all ate breakfast together; then, when Orou was left alone with the chaplain, he said to him:

"I see that my daughter is pleased with you, and I thank you. But would you be good enough to tell me the meaning of this word, 'religion,' which you have spoken so frequently and so mournfully?"

After considering for a moment what to say, the chaplain replied:

"Who made your hut and all the furnishings in it?"

OROU. I did.

THE CHAPLAIN. Well, we believe that this world and everything in it is the work of a maker.

OROU. Then he must have hands and feet, and a head.

THE CHAPLAIN. No.

OROU. Where is his dwelling place?

THE CHAPLAIN. Everywhere.

OROU. In this place too?

THE CHAPLAIN. In this place too.

OROU. But we have never seen him.

THE CHAPLAIN. He cannot be seen.

OROU. He sounds to me like a father that doesn't care very much for his children. He must be an old man, because he must be at least as old as the things he made.

THE CHAPLAIN. No, he never grows old. He spoke to our ancestors and gave them laws; he prescribed to them the way in which he wishes to be honored; he ordained that certain actions are good and others he forbade them to do as being evil.

OROU. I see. And one of these evil actions which he has forbidden is that of a man who goes to bed with a woman or girl. But in that case, why did he make two sexes?

THE CHAPLAIN. In order that they might come together—but only when certain conditions are satisfied and only after certain initial ceremonies have been performed. By virtue of these ceremonies one man belongs to one woman and only to her; one woman belongs to one man and only to him.

OROU. For their whole lives?

THE CHAPLAIN. For their whole lives.

OROU. So that if it should happen that a woman should go to bed with some man who was not her husband, or some man should go to bed with a woman that was not his wife . . . but that could never happen because the workman would know what was going on, and since he doesn't like that sort of thing, he wouldn't let it occur.

THE CHAPLAIN. No. He lets them do as they will, and they sin against the law of God (for that is the name by which we call the great workman) and against the law of the country; they commit a crime.

OROU. I should be sorry to give offense by anything I might say, but if you don't mind, I'll tell you what I think.

THE CHAPLAIN. Go ahead.

OROU. I find these strange precepts contrary to nature, and contrary to reason. I think they are admirably calculated to increase the number of crimes and to give endless annoyance to the old workman—who made everything without hands, head or tools, who is everywhere but can be seen nowhere, who exists today and tomorrow but grows not a day older, who gives commands and is not obeyed, who can prevent what he dislikes but fails to do so. His commands are contrary to nature because they assume that a thinking being, one that has feelings and a sense of freedom, can be the property of another being like himself. On what could such a right of ownership be founded? Do you not see that in your country you have confused things that have no feelings, thoughts, desires or wills—things one takes or leaves, keeps or sells, without them suffering or complaining—with things that can neither be bought nor sold, which have freedom, volition, and desires of their own, which have the ability to give or to withhold themselves for a moment or forever, which suffer and complain? These latter things can never be treated like a trader's stock of goods unless one forgets what their true character is and does violence to nature. Furthermore, your laws seem to me to be contrary to the general order of things. For in truth is there anything so senseless as a precept that forbids us to heed the changing impulses that are inherent in our being, or com-

mands that require a degree of constancy which is not possible, that violate the liberty of both male and female by chaining them perpetually to one another? Is there anything more unreasonable than this perfect fidelity that would restrict us, for the enjoyment of pleasures so capricious, to a single partner—than an oath of immutability taken by two individuals made of flesh and blood under a sky that is not the same for a moment, in a cavern that threatens to collapse upon them, at the foot of a cliff that is crumbling into dust, under a tree that is withering, on a bench of stone that is being worn away? Take my word for it, you have reduced human beings to a worse condition than that of the animals. I don't know what your great workman is, but I am very happy that he never spoke to our forefathers, and I hope that he never speaks to our children, for if he does, he may tell them the same foolishness, and they may be foolish enough to believe it. Yesterday, as we were having supper, you told us all about your "magistrates" and "priests." I do not know who these characters are whom you call Magistrates and Priests and who have the authority to govern your conduct—but tell me, are they really masters of good and evil? Can they transform justice into injustice and contrariwise? Is it within their power to attach the name of "good" to harmful actions or the name of "evil" to harmless or useful deeds? One can hardly think so because in that case there would no longer be any difference between true and false, between good and bad, between beautiful and ugly—only such differences as it pleased your great workman, your magistrates or your priests to define as such. You would then have to change your ideas and behavior from one moment to the next. One day you would be told, on behalf of one of your three masters: "Kill," and in all good conscience you would be obliged to kill. Another day they might say: "Steal," and you would be bound to steal. Or: "Do not eat of this fruit," and you would not dare to eat of it; "I forbid you to eat this vegetable or this meat," and you would be careful never to touch them. There is not a single good thing they could not forbid you to enjoy, and no wickedness they could not order you to commit. And where would you be if your three masters, dis-

agreeing among themselves, took it into their heads to permit, enjoin and forbid you to do the same thing, as I am sure must occasionally happen? Then, in order to please your priest, you would have to get yourself into hot water with the magistrate; to satisfy the magistrate, you would have to risk the displeasure of the great workman; and to make yourself agreeable to the great workman, you would have to fly in the face of your own nature. And do you know what will finally happen? You will come to despise all three, and you will be neither man, nor citizens nor pious believer; you will be nothing at all; you will be at odds with all the authorities, at odds with yourself, malicious, disturbed by your own conscience, persecuted by your witless masters, and miserable, as you were yesterday evening when I offered you my wife and daughters and you could only wail: "What about my religion? What about my holy orders?" Would you like to know what is good and what is bad in all times and places? Pay close attention to the nature of things and actions, to your relations with your fellow creatures, to the effect of your behavior on your own well-being and on the general welfare. You are mad if you believe that there is anything in the universe, high or low, that can add or subtract from the laws of nature. Her eternal will is that good shall be chosen rather than evil, and the general welfare rather than the individual's well-being. You may decree the opposite, but you will not be obeyed. By threats, punishment and guilt, you can make more wretches and rascals, make more depraved consciences and more corrupted characters. People will no longer know what they ought or ought not to do. They will feel guilty when they are doing nothing wrong and proud of themselves in the midst of crime; they will have lost the North Star that should guide their course. Give me an honest answer—in spite of the express commands of your three legislators, do the young men in your country never go to bed with a young woman without having received permission?

THE CHAPLAIN. I would be lying if I said they never do.

OROU. And the women, once they have sworn an oath to belong to only one husband, do they never give themselves to another man?

THE CHAPLAIN. Nothing happens more often.

OROU. And are your legislators severe in handing out punishment to such disobedient people, or are they not? If they are, then they are wild animals who make war against nature; if they are not severe, they are fools who risk bringing their authority into contempt by issuing futile prohibitions.

THE CHAPLAIN. The guilty ones, if they escape the rigor of the laws, are punished by public opinion.

OROU. That's like saying that justice is done by means of the whole nation's lack of common sense, and that public folly is the substitute for law.

THE CHAPLAIN. A girl who has lost her honor cannot find a husband.

OROU. Lost her honor! And for what cause?

THE CHAPLAIN. An unfaithful woman is more or less despised.

OROU. Despised! Why should that be?

THE CHAPLAIN. And the young man is called a cowardly seducer.

OROU. Coward? Seducer? Why that?

THE CHAPLAIN. The father and mother and their dishonored child are desolate. An erring husband is called a libertine; a husband who has been betrayed shares the shame of his wife.

OROU. What monstrous foolishness you're talking! And still you must be holding something back, because when people take it upon themselves to rearrange all ideas of justice and propriety to suit their own whims, to apply or remove the names of things in a completely arbitrary manner, to associate the ideas of good and evil with certain actions or to dissociate them for no reason save caprice—then of course people will blame each other, accuse each other, suspect each other, tyrannize, become jealous and envious, deceive and wound one another, conceal, dissimulate, and spy on one another, catch each other out, quarrel and tell lies. Girls will deceive their parents, husbands their wives and wives their husbands. Unmarried girls—yes, I am sure of it—unmarried girls will suffocate their babies; suspicious fathers will neglect or show contempt for their own rightful children; mothers will abandon their infants and leave them to the mercy of fate. Crime

and debauchery will appear in every imaginable shape and form. I see all that as plainly as if I had lived among you. These things are so because they must be so, and your society, whose well-ordered ways your chief boasts to you about, can't be anything but a swarm of hypocrites who secretly trample the laws under foot, or a multitude of wretched beings who serve as instruments for inflicting willing torture upon themselves; or imbeciles in whom prejudice has utterly silenced the voice of nature, or ill-fashioned creatures in whom nature cannot claim her rights.

THE CHAPLAIN. That is a close likeness. But do you never marry?

OROU. Oh yes, we marry.

THE CHAPLAIN. Well, how does it work?

OROU. It consists only of an agreement to occupy the same hut and to sleep in the same bed for so long as both partners find the arrangement good.

THE CHAPLAIN. And when they find it bad?

OROU. Then they separate.

THE CHAPLAIN. But what becomes of the children?

OROU. Oh Stranger! That last question of yours finally reveals to me the last depths of your country's wretchedness. Let me tell you, my friend, that the birth of a child is always a happy event, and its death is an occasion for weeping and sorrow. A child is a precious thing because it will grow up to be a man or a woman. Therefore we take infinitely better care of our children than of our plants and animals. The birth of a child is the occasion for public celebration and a source of joy for its entire family. For the hut it means an increase in wealth, while for the nation it signifies additional strength. It means another pair of hands and arms for Tahiti—we see in the newborn baby a future farmer, fisherman, hunter, soldier, husband or father. When a woman goes from her husband's hut back to that of her family, she takes with her all the children she had brought with her as her dowry; those born during the marriage are divided equally between the two spouses, and care is taken to give each an equal number of boys and girls whenever possible.

THE CHAPLAIN. But children are a burden for many years before they are old enough to make themselves useful.

OROU. We set aside for them and for the support of the aged one part in six of all our harvests; wherever the child goes, this support follows him. And so, you see, the larger the family a Tahitian has, the richer he is.

THE CHAPLAIN. One part in six!

OROU. Yes. It's a dependable method for encouraging the growth of population, for promoting respect for our old people and for safeguarding the welfare of our children.

THE CHAPLAIN. And does it ever happen that a couple who have separated decide to live together again?

OROU. Oh, yes. It happens fairly often. Also, the shortest time any marriage can last is one month.

THE CHAPLAIN. Assuming, of course, that the wife is not with child, for in that case, wouldn't the marriage have to last at least nine months?

OROU. Not at all. The child keeps the name of its mother's husband at the time it was conceived, and its paternity, like its means of support, follows it wherever it goes.

THE CHAPLAIN. You spoke about the children that a wife brings to her husband as dowry.

OROU. To be sure. Take my eldest daughter, who has three children. They are able to walk, they are healthy and attractive, and they promise to be strong when they are grown up. If she should take it into her head to get married, she would take them along, for they belong to her, and her husband would be extremely happy to have them in his hut. He would think all the better of his wife if she were carrying still a fourth child at the time of her wedding.

THE CHAPLAIN. *His* child?

OROU. His or another's. The more children our young women have had, the more desirable they are as wives. The stronger and lustier our young men are, the richer they become. Therefore, careful as we are to protect our young girls from male advances, and our young boys from intercourse with women, before they reach sexual maturity, once they have passed the age of puberty we exhort them all the more strongly

to have as many children as possible. You probably haven't fully realized what an important service you will have rendered my daughter Thia if you have succeeded in getting her with child. Her mother will no longer plague her every month by saying, "But Thia, what is the matter with you? You never get pregnant, and here you are nineteen years old. You should have had at least a couple of babies by this time, and you have none. Who is going to look after you in your old age if you throw away your youth in this way? Thia, I begin to think there is something wrong with you, some defect that puts men off. Find out what it is, my child, and correct it if you can. At your age, I was already three times a mother!"

THE CHAPLAIN. What precautions do you take to safeguard your boys and girls before they reach maturity?

OROU. That's the main object of our children's education within the family circle, and it's the most important point in our code of public morality. Our boys, until the age of twenty-two, that is for two to three years after they reach maturity, must wear a long tunic that covers their bodies completely, and they must wear a little chain around their loins. Before they reach nubile age, our girls would not dare to go out without white veils. The two misdeeds of taking off one's chain or of raising one's veil are rarely met with because we teach our children at a very early age what harmful results will ensue. But when the proper time comes—when the male has attained his full strength, when the principal indication of virility lasts for a sufficient time, and when we are confirmed in our judgment by the quality and by the frequent emission of the seminal fluid—and when the young girl seems wilted and suffers from boredom, when she seems mature enough to feel passion, to inspire it and to satisfy it—then the father unfastens his son's chain and cuts the nail on the middle finger of the boy's right hand. The mother removes her daughter's veil. The young man can now ask a woman for her favors or be asked by her to grant his. The girl may walk about freely in public places with her face and breast uncovered; she may accept or reject men's caresses. All we do is to point out in advance to the boy certain girls and to the girl certain boys that they might

well choose as partners. The day when a boy or girl is emancipated is a gala holiday. In the case of a girl, the young men assemble the night before around her hut and the air is filled all night long with singing and the sound of musical instruments. When the sun has risen, she is led by her father and mother into an enclosure where dancing is going on and where games of wrestling, running and jumping are in progress. A naked man is paraded in front of her, allowing her to examine his body from all aspects and in all sorts of attitudes. For a young man's initiation, the young girls do the honors of the occasion by letting him look at the nude female body unadorned and unconcealed. The remainder of the ceremony is enacted on a bed of leaves, just as you saw it on your arrival here. At sunset the girl returns to her parents' hut or else moves to the hut of the young man she has chosen and remains there as long as she pleases.

THE CHAPLAIN. But is this celebration a marriage ceremony or is it not?

OROU. Well, as you have said . . .

A. What do I see written there in the margin?

B. It is a note in which the good chaplain says that the parents' advice on how to choose wives and husbands was full of common sense and contained many acute and useful observations, but that he could not bring himself to quote the catechism itself because it would have seemed intolerably licentious to corrupt, superstitious people like us. He adds, nevertheless, that he was sorry to have left out certain details that would have shown, in the first place, what vast progress a nation can make in some important matter without the assistance of physics and anatomy, if it busies itself continually with it, and in the second place, the different ideals of beauty that prevail in a country where one judges forms in the light of momentary pleasures, as contrasted with a nation where they are appreciated for their usefulness over a longer period of time. To be considered beautiful in the former country a woman must have a high color, a wide forehead, a small mouth, large eyes, finely modeled features, a narrow waist, and small hands and feet. . . . With the Tahitians, however, scarcely

one of these things is of any account. The woman who attracts the most admirers and the most lovers is the one who seems most likely to bear many children (like the wife of Cardinal d'Ossat) and whose children seem likely to be active, intelligent, brave, healthy and strong. The Athenian Venus has next to nothing in common with the Venus of Tahiti—the former is a flirtatious Venus, the latter a fertile Venus. A woman of Tahiti said scornfully one day to a woman of her acquaintance: "You are beautiful enough, but the children you bear are ugly; I am ugly, but my children are beautiful, so the men prefer me."

Following this note by the chaplain, Orou continues:

OROU. What a happy moment it is for a young girl and her parents when it is discovered that she is with child! She jumps up and runs about, she throws her arms around her father's and mother's necks. She tells them the wonderful news amidst outcries of mutual joy. "Mother! Father! kiss me! I am pregnant!" "Is it really true?" "Really and truly!" "And who got you with child?" "Such-and-such a one."

THE CHAPLAIN. How can she know who the father of her child is?

OROU. How could she not know? With us the same rule that applies to marriage applies also to love affairs—each lasts at least from one moon to the next.

THE CHAPLAIN. And is the rule strictly observed?

OROU. You can judge for yourself. First, the interval between two moons isn't long, but when it appears that two men have well-founded claims to be the father of a child, it no longer belongs to the mother.

THE CHAPLAIN. To whom does it belong?

OROU. To whichever of the two men the mother chooses to give it. This is the only right she has, and since a child is an object of both interest and value, you can understand that among us loose women are rare and that our young men keep away from them.

THE CHAPLAIN. Then you do have a few licentious women? That makes me feel better.

OROU. Yes, we have some, and more than one kind—but that is another subject. When one of our girls gets pregnant, she is

twice as pleased with herself if the child's father is a handsome, well-built, brave, intelligent, industrious young man, because she has reason to hope that the child will inherit its father's good qualities. The only thing a girl would be ashamed of would be a bad choice. You have no idea how much store we set by good health, beauty, strength, industry and courage; you have no notion what a tendency there is, even without our having to pay any particular attention to it, for good physical inheritance to be passed on from generation to generation among us. You are a person who has traveled in all sorts of countries—tell me if you have seen anywhere else so many handsome men and beautiful women as in Tahiti. Look at me. What do you think of me? Well, there are ten thousand men on this island who are taller than I am and just as strong; but there is none braver, and for that reason mothers very often point me out to their girls as a good father for their children.

THE CHAPLAIN. And out of all these children you have sired outside your own hut, how many fall to your share?

OROU. Every fourth, be it a boy or a girl. You see, we have developed a kind of circulation of men, women and children—that is, of able-bodied workers of all ages and occupations—which is much more important than trade in foodstuffs (which are only the products of human labor) in your country.

THE CHAPLAIN. I can easily believe it. What is the significance of those black veils that I have seen a few persons wearing?

OROU. They indicate barrenness, either congenital or that which comes with advanced age. Any woman who lays aside such a veil and mingles with men is considered dissolute, and so is any man who raises such a veil and has commerce with a barren woman.

THE CHAPLAIN. And the gray veils?

OROU. That shows that the woman is having her monthly period. Failure to wear this veil when it should be worn also stigmatizes a woman as dissolute if she has relations with men during that time, and likewise the man who has relations with her.

THE CHAPLAIN. Do you punish this libertinism?

OROU. Only with public disapproval.

THE CHAPLAIN. May a father sleep with his daughter, a mother with her son, a brother with his sister, a husband with someone else's wife?

OROU. Why not?

THE CHAPLAIN. Well! To say nothing of the fornication, what of the incest, the adultery?

OROU. What do you mean by those words, *fornication*, *incest*, and *adultery*?

THE CHAPLAIN. They are crimes, horrible crimes for which people are burned at the stake in my country.

OROU. Well, whether they burn or don't burn in your country is nothing to me. But you cannot condemn the morals of Europe for not being those of Tahiti, nor our morals for not being those of Europe. You need a more dependable rule of judgment than that. And what shall it be? Do you know a better one than general welfare and individual utility? Well, now, tell me in what way your crime of *incest* is contrary to the two aims of our conduct; if you think that everything is settled once and for all because a law has been promulgated, a derogatory word invented, and a punishment established. Why don't you tell me what you mean by *incest*.

THE CHAPLAIN. Why, *incest* . . .

OROU. Yes, incest . . . ? Has it been a long time since your great workman without hands, head or tools made the world?

THE CHAPLAIN. No.

OROU. Did he make the whole human race at one time?

THE CHAPLAIN. No, he made only one man and one woman.

OROU. Had they children?

THE CHAPLAIN. Of course.

OROU. Let's suppose that these two original parents had no sons—only daughters—and that the mother was the first to die. Or that they had only sons and that the wife lost her husband.

THE CHAPLAIN. You embarrass me. But in spite of anything you may say, incest is a horrible crime, so let's talk about something else.

OROU. That's all very well for you to say. But as for me, I won't speak another word until you tell me why incest is such a horrible crime.

THE CHAPLAIN. All right, I'll grant you that perhaps incest does not offend nature, but isn't it objection enough that it threatens the political order? What would happen to the security of the chief of state, and what would become of a nation's tranquillity, if millions of people should come to be under the thumbs of fifty or so fathers of families?

OROU. That would be the lesser of two evils: There would be no single great society but fifty or so little ones, more happiness and one crime the less.

THE CHAPLAIN. I should think, though, that even here, it must not be very common for a son to sleep with his mother.

OROU. No, not unless he has a great deal of respect for her, or a degree of tenderness that makes him forget the disparity in their ages and prefer a woman of forty to a girl of nineteen.

THE CHAPLAIN. What about intercourse between fathers and daughters?

OROU. Hardly more frequent, unless the girl is ugly and little sought after. If her father has a great deal of affection for her, he helps her in getting ready her dowry of children.

THE CHAPLAIN. What you say suggests to me that in Tahiti the women on whom nature has not smiled have a rather hard time of it.

OROU. What you say only shows that you haven't a high opinion of the generosity of our young men.

THE CHAPLAIN. As for unions between brothers and sisters, I imagine they are very common.

OROU. Yes, and very strongly approved of.

THE CHAPLAIN. According to you, the same passion that gives rise to so many evils and crimes in our countries is completely innocent here.

OROU. Stranger, you have poor judgment and a faulty memory. Poor judgment, because whenever something is forbidden, it is inevitable that people should be tempted to do that thing, and do it. Faulty memory, because you have already forgotten what I told you. We do have dissolute old women who sneak out at night without their black veils and offer themselves to men, even though nothing can come of it. If they are recognized or surprised, the punishment is either

exile to the northern tip of the island or slavery. There are precocious girls who lift their white veils without their parents' knowledge—for them we have a locked room in the hut. There are young boys who take off their chain before the time established by nature and our laws—in that case the parents get a strong reprimand. There are women who find the nine months of pregnancy a long time; women and girls who are careless about wearing their gray veils—but as a matter of fact we attach little importance to all these lapses. You would find it hard to believe how much our morals have been improved on these points by the fact that we have come to identify in our minds the idea of public and private wealth with the idea of increasing the population.

THE CHAPLAIN. But don't disturbances ever arise when two men have a passion for the same woman, or when two girls desire the same man?

OROU. I haven't seen as many as four instances. The choice of the woman or man settles the matter. If a man should commit any act of violence, that would be a serious misdemeanor, but even then no one would take any notice unless the injured party were to make a public complaint, and it is almost unheard of for a girl or woman to do so. The only thing I have noticed is that our women are a little less considerate of homely men than our young men are of ill-favored women; but no one is worried with this state of affairs.

THE CHAPLAIN. So far as I can see, jealousy is practically unknown here in Tahiti. But tenderness between husband and wife, and maternal love, which are strong, beautiful emotions—if they exist here at all, they must be fairly lukewarm.

OROU. We have put in their place another impulse, which is more universal, powerful and lasting—self-interest. Examine your conscience in all candor, put aside the hypocritical parade of virtue which is always on the lips of your companions, though not in their hearts, and tell me, if there is anywhere on the face of the earth a man who, if he were not held back by shame, would not prefer to lose his child—a husband who would not prefer to lose his wife—rather than

lose his fortune and all the amenities of life? You may be sure that if ever a man can be led to care as much about his fellow men as he does about his own bed, his own health, his leisure, his house, his harvests or his fields, he can be depended upon to do his utmost to look out for the well-being of other people. Then you will see him shedding tears over the bed of a sick child or taking care of a mother when she is ill. Then you will find fruitful women, nubile girls and handsome young men highly regarded. Then you will find a great deal of attention paid to the education of the young, because the nation grows stronger with their growth, and suffers a material loss if their well-being is impaired.

THE CHAPLAIN. I am afraid there is some reason in what this savage says. The poor peasant of our European lands wears out his wife in order to spare his horse, lets his child die without help, and calls the veterinary to look after his ox.

OROU. I didn't quite hear what you were just saying. But when you get back to your own country where everything is so well managed, try to teach them how well our method works. Then they will begin to realize how precious a newborn baby is and how important it is to increase the population. Shall I tell you a secret? But take care that you don't let it out. When you came, we let you do what you liked with our women and girls. You were astonished and your gratitude made us laugh. You thanked us, even though we were levying the heaviest of all taxes on you and your companions. We asked no money of you; we didn't loot your ship; we didn't give a hang for any of your stores of food—but our women and girls came to draw the blood out of your veins. When you go away, you will leave with us a brood of children. Do you think we could have extracted a more valuable tribute from you than this tax collected from your own bodies and from your own substance? If you would care to try and estimate its value, imagine that you have yet to sail along two hundred leagues of coastline, and that every twenty miles they collect the same tribute from you! We have vast areas of land yet to be put under the plow; we need workers, and we have tried to get you to give them to us.

We have epidemics from time to time, and these losses must be made up; we have sought your aid to fill up the gaps in our population. We have external enemies to deal with, and for this we need soldiers, so we have allowed you to give them to us. We have a surplus of women and girls over men, and we have enlisted your services to help us out. Among these women and girls there are some with whom our men have thus far been unable to beget any children, and these were the ones we first assigned to receive your embraces. A neighboring nation holds us in vassalage, and we have to pay an annual tribute to them in men; you and your friends have helped us to pay off this debt, and in five or six years we shall send them your sons if they turn out to be inferior in some way to our own. Although we are stronger and healthier than you, we have observed that you have the edge on us when it comes to intelligence. So we immediately marked out some of our most beautiful women and girls to collect the seed of a race superior to ours. This is an experiment we have tried, and that we hope will succeed. We have taken from you and your fellows the only thing we could get from you. Just because we are savages, don't think we are incapable of calculating where our best advantage lies. Go wherever you will, and you will always find a man as shrewd as you are. He will give you what he has no use for, and he will always ask for something he has need of. If he offers to trade you a piece of gold for a scrap of iron, that is because he doesn't care a hang for gold, and desires iron. By the way, why is it that you are not dressed like the others? What is the significance of the long robe that covers you from head to foot, and what is that pointed bag that you let hang over your shoulders and sometimes draw up around your ears?

THE CHAPLAIN. The reason I dress as I do is that I am a member of a society of men who are called monks in my country. The most sacred of their vows is never to have intercourse with any woman and never to beget any children.

OROU. Then what kind of work do you do?

THE CHAPLAIN. None.

OROU. And your magistrates allow that sort of idleness—the worst of all?

THE CHAPLAIN. They more than allow it: they honor it and make others do the same.

OROU. My first thought was that nature, or some accident, or some cruel form of sorcery, had deprived you of the ability to reproduce your kind, and that out of pity they had let you go on living instead of killing you. But my daughter tells me that you are a man as robust as any Tahitian and that she has high hopes of getting good results from your repeated caresses. Well, at last I know why you kept mumbling yesterday evening, "But there's my religion, my holy orders!" Could you explain to me why it is that your magistrates show you such favor and treat you with so much respect?

THE CHAPLAIN. I don't know.

OROU. Still, you must know why it was that, although you are a man, you have condemned yourself of your own free will to be one no longer?

THE CHAPLAIN. That's hard to explain, and it would take too long.

OROU. Are monks faithful to their vows of sterility?

THE CHAPLAIN. No.

OROU. I was sure of it. Do you also have female monks?

THE CHAPLAIN. Yes.

OROU. As well behaved as the male monks?

THE CHAPLAIN. They are kept more strictly in seclusion, they dry up from unhappiness and die of boredom.

OROU. So nature is avenged for the injury done to her! Ugh! What a country! If everything is managed the way you say, you are more barbarous than we are.

The good chaplain tells us that he spent the rest of the day wandering about the island, visiting a number of huts, and that in the evening, after supper, the father and mother begged him to go to bed with Palli, the second eldest daughter. She offered herself in the same undress as Thia's, and he tells us that several times during the night he cried out, "My religion! My holy orders!" The third night he suffered the same guilty torments in the arms of Asto, the eldest, and the fourth night, not to be unfair, he devoted to his hostess.

A. Before you go on with his remarks, I have a favor to ask

of you, which is to remind me of what happened in New England.*

↓ B. This is the story. A prostitute, Miss Polly Baker, upon becoming pregnant for the fifth time, was brought before the high court of Connecticut, near Boston. The law condemns all women of loose life who become mothers when they are unable to pay a fine. Miss Polly, on coming up before her judges for a hearing, delivered herself of the following speech:

"Allow me, gentlemen, to address you briefly. I am a girl who is both wretched and poor and I lack the means to pay lawyers for my defense. But I shall not detain you long. I do not flatter myself that in handing down your sentence upon me you will deviate from the law. What I dare to hope is that you will deign to petition the government on my behalf and relieve me of the fine. This is the fifth time, gentlemen, that I appear before you for the same cause. Twice I have paid heavy fines, twice I have suffered the shame of punishment in public because I was unable to pay. This may be in conformity with the law—I do not argue the point. But there may sometimes be unjust laws which should be abrogated. There may be some that are too severe, and the legislative power should suspend the sentences rendered. I say that the law which condemns me is at once unjust in itself and too severe upon me.

"I have never offended anybody in the place where I live and I defy my enemies—if I have any—to prove that I have ever done the slightest injury to man, woman, or child. Allow me to forget for a moment that the law exists, in which case I cannot imagine what my crime may be. I have, at the peril of my life, brought five handsome children into the world; I have nourished them at my breast, I have reared them by my toil,

* The story that follows has of course no basis in fact. It has been shown to be an invention of Benjamin Franklin's and is reprinted in the 1905 edition of his *Writings* (vol. I, 172 and II, 463–67). In Franklin's day it was reproduced in two British periodicals and translated, with some variations, by both Diderot and the Abbé Raynal. It does not occur in any of the printed versions of Diderot's *Supplément* before that edited in 1935 by Gilbert Chinard, who supplied these bibliographical details. The wording here given is not Franklin's but a translation of Diderot's French, which departs in important ways from the original.

and I would have done even more for them had I not had to pay the fines that deprived me of the means.

"Is it a crime to increase the number of His Majesty's subjects in a new country which is short of inhabitants? I took away no woman's husband; I seduced no young man; never have I been accused of any evil deed. If any man can complain of me, it can only be the minister who has been deprived of the fee paid him for marriages. But even that is not my fault. I appeal to you, gentlemen, and ask whether you do not think me sensible enough to prefer the honorable status of wife to the shameful condition in which I have lived hitherto.

"I have always wanted, and still want, to get married, and I make bold to say that I would give as strong evidence of the good conduct, industry, and economy, which befit a woman, as I have so far given of fertility. I defy anybody to say that I have refused to enter that state. The first and only offer of it that was made me, I accepted while still a virgin. I was simple enough to entrust my honor to a man who had none. He gave me my first child and left me. That man is one known to you all; he is actually a judge like yourselves and sits on the same bench. I had hoped that he would appear today in court and that he would have enlisted your interest and pity in my favor, that is, in favor of a poor wretch whom he has made such.

"I should have been incapable of exposing him and making him blush for what passed between us. Am I then wrong to complain of the injustice of the law? The first cause of my error, my seducer, is raised to power and honors by the same government which punishes my distress with whips and infamy. I shall be told that I have transgressed the precepts of religion. If I have offended God, leave Him the task of punishing me. You have already excommunicated me from His church: is that not enough? Why add to the torments of Hell which you think are awaiting me in the next world the pain of a fine and a whipping in this one?

"Forgive these remarks, gentlemen. I am no theologian, but I find it hard to believe that it is a great crime to have brought into the world some handsome children to whom

God has given a soul and who adore Him. If you make laws to change the nature of human actions, make some against bachelors, whose numbers grow larger every day. They seduce and bring dishonor into family life, deceive young girls like me and then compel them to live in the shameful state in which I find myself, in the midst of a society that rejects and despises them. It is they who break the public peace; theirs are the crimes that deserve reprobation far greater than mine."

This strange speech had the effect hoped for by Miss Baker. The judges remitted the fine and the punishment that replaces it. Her seducer, informed of what had occurred, felt remorse for his behavior and sought to make amends. Two days later he married Miss Baker and made an honest woman of her whom five years earlier he had made a prostitute.

A. And all this is no invention of yours?

B. No.

A. I am very glad to hear it.

B. I am not sure whether the Abbé Raynal does not also report the facts in his *History of Trade in the Two Indies*.

A. An excellent work and so different in tone from his previous ones that the Abbé has been suspected of having pressed other hands into service.

B. That is unfair to him.

A. Malicious gossip, rather.* People will pluck at the laurel leaves that bind a great man's brow and the plucking goes so far that he is left without a single leaf.

B. But time gathers them up again and restores the crown.

A. Yes, but the man is dead then. He has suffered from his contemporaries' buffetings, and he is insensible to his rehabilitation by posterity.

Continuation of the Dialogue

A. I like this courteous chaplain.

B. And I have formed a high opinion of the manners and customs of Tahiti, and of Orou's speeches.

* This is a handsome compliment of Diderot's, who had himself been one of Raynal's collaborators in that large work.

A. Yes, even though they are cast somewhat in a European mold.

B. I suppose they are. But now, to continue, the good chaplain complains that his visit to Tahiti was too short. He says that it is very difficult to form a just estimate of the customs of a people that is wise enough to stop when it has attained a golden mean, happy enough to inhabit a part of the world where the fertility of the soil guarantees a long and languid life, industrious enough to provide for the most pressing needs, and indolent enough so that their innocence, repose and felicity are not endangered by a too rapid advance of knowledge. They have no laws and hold no opinions that would stigmatize as evil something that is not by its nature evil. Their plowing and their harvesting are done in common. Their sense of property is very limited. The passion of love, reduced to simple physical appetites, produces none of the disturbances that we connect with it. The whole island lives like one large family, in which each hut is like a single apartment in one of our big houses. The chaplain ends by assuring us that he will never forget the Tahitians, and confesses that he was tempted to throw his vestments into the ship and spend the rest of his days with them. And he fears that he will have more than one occasion to be sorry he didn't.

A. But despite this eulogy, what practical conclusions can you draw from the strange morals and picturesque customs of an uncivilized people?

B. As I see it, human progress began when certain physical causes—for example, the necessity of winning a livelihood from stony soil—brought man's cunning into play. This first push was enough to carry him forward some distance beyond his original goal. When once the aim of satisfying his elementary needs was achieved, he was swept on into the boundless ocean of imagination, with no means of returning. May the happy Tahitians stop where they are now! I see that except in that remote corner of the earth, there has never been any morality and that perhaps in no other part of the world will there ever be any.

A. What do you mean by morality?

B. I mean a general obedience to, and a conduct arising from, the laws, whether they be good or bad. If the laws are good, morals are good; if the laws are bad, morals are bad. If the laws, good or bad, are not observed, the worst possible condition for a society, there are no morals. Now what chance is there of getting people to observe the laws when the laws are contradictory? Read the history of centuries and nations, ancient and modern, and you will find that there are three codes of law under which men have lived—the code of nature, the civil code, and the laws of religion. They have been obliged to violate each of these codes in turn because they have never been in harmony. The result has been that nowhere do we find anyone (as Orou suspected in speaking of our own country) who can be called at once a man, a citizen, and a believer.

A. From which you conclude that if morality were to be based on the eternal, universal relations of men with one another, the religious law would perhaps become superfluous, and the civil law should become nothing more than an explicit statement of the laws of nature.

B. Exactly; otherwise the penalty will be that we shall increase the numbers of the wicked instead of multiplying the good.

A. Or else, if it is considered necessary to preserve all three sets of laws, civil and religious law should be strictly patterned on the law of nature, which we carry with us, graven on our hearts, wherever we go, and which will always be the strongest.

B. What you say is not wholly true. When we are born we bring nothing into the world with us except a constitution similar to that of other human beings—the same needs, an impulsion toward the same pleasures, a common dislike for the same pains: that is what makes man what he is, and the code of morality appropriate to men should rest on no other foundations than these.

A. Yes, but it's not easy to work out in detail.

B. Nothing could be more difficult. Indeed, I believe that the most backward nation in the world, the Tahitians, who have simply held fast to the law of nature, are nearer to having a good code of law than is any civilized nation.

A. For the reason that it would be easier for them to get rid of some of their rustic ways than for us to turn the clock back and reform our abuses.

B. Especially those connected with the relations between men and women.

A. You may be right. But let's begin at the beginning. Let us put nature resolutely to the question and see, without prejudice, what answers she will give on this question.

B. A good idea.

A. Is marriage part of the natural order?

B. If, by marriage, you mean the preference the female has for one male over all others, or that a male has for one female as over against other females—in other words, a mutual preference, leading to the formation of a more or less durable union that perpetuates the species by reproducing individuals—if you mean no more than that, then yes, marriage is part of the natural order.

A. I think so, and for the same reason, because the preference you speak of can be observed not only among human beings but also in various other animal species. You have only to think of the large number of stallions that go chasing after the same mare in our pastures every spring. Only one of them finally gets himself accepted as her mate. But how about courtship?

B. If, by courtship, you mean the vast and varied assortment of expedients, both subtle and forceful, that passion inspires in both male and female when one of them is trying to obtain that preference which leads to the sweetest, most important and most universal of enjoyments—then yes, courtship is part of the natural order.

A. I think so too. Witness the whole variety of small attentions the male renders the female in order to please her, and the countless ways females of all species have of stirring up the passion and attracting the preference of the male. But what about flirtation?

B. That is nothing but deception, for it consists of simulating a passion that one doesn't feel at all and promising favors that one has no intention of conferring. The male flirt is mak-

ing sport of the female, and vice versa. It's a perfidious game that often ends in the most deplorable fiasco imaginable; a ridiculous sort of jumping through the hoop, in the course of which both the deceiver and the deceived are punished alike by the waste of the most precious part of their lives.

A. So you would say that flirtation is not a part of nature?

B. I wouldn't say that.

A. What about constancy in love?

B. Nothing I could say on that subject would equal what Orou told the chaplain; it is a vain delusion that two children may have at the age when they know nothing about themselves, or when they are blinded by a moment of ecstasy to the transitory character of everything in nature.

A. And that rare phenomenon, marital fidelity?

B. In our part of the world it is the punishment for stubbornness which an honest man and an honest woman must suffer. In Tahiti it is a will-o'-the-wisp.

A. And jealousy?

B. It's the passion of a starved, miserly creature who is afraid of being deprived. In man it is an unjust attitude produced by our false moral standards and the extension of property rights to a free, conscious, thinking being that has a will of its own.

A. Then, according to you, jealousy has no place in nature?

B. I didn't say that. Nature includes both vices and virtues along with everything else.

A. A jealous man is gloomy.

B. For the same reason that tyrants are gloomy—they know what they are up to.

A. And modesty?

B. Now you're asking me to give a course on the principles of love-making. A man does not want to be disturbed or distracted while he is taking his pleasure. The delights of love are followed by a condition of lassitude that would put a man at the mercy of his enemy if the latter attacked him at such a moment. Apart from this there is nothing natural in modesty—all the rest is social convention. The chaplain himself, in a third fragment that I haven't yet read to you, notes that the

Tahitians are not embarrassed by certain involuntary actions that the nearness of a woman excites in them; and the women and girls are never flustered—though they are sometimes stirred—by the sight of such things. As soon as a woman came to belong to a certain man, and as soon as another man's furtive enjoyment of that girl's favors came to be considered robbery, then the words *modesty*, *demureness*, and *propriety* were born, along with a whole retinue of imaginary vices. In a word, people tried to build up between the sexes a barrier that would hinder them from tempting one another to violate the laws imposed upon them—but these barriers often produce the contrary effect, since they serve to heat up the imagination, and provoke desires. I have sometimes thought of all the trees planted around our kings' palaces—the sight of a bodice that both reveals and conceals a woman's breasts suggests the same idea—and in both instances I seem to detect a secret wish to escape into the forest, a suppressed impulse to recapture the freedom of our old habitat. The Tahitians would say, "Why do you hide your body? What are you ashamed of? Is it wrong to yield to the noblest urges of one's nature? Man, show yourself frankly if you are well-liked. Woman, if this man is attractive to you welcome his advances with the same frankness."

A. Don't get angry. Though we may begin by acting like civilized people, it is seldom that we don't wind up acting like the Tahitians.

B. Yes, but the preliminaries required by convention waste half the lifetime of a man of genius.

A. True enough, but what's the harm in it? It merely slows down by that much the pernicious impetuosity of the human spirit against which you were inveighing not so long ago. Someone once asked one of our most eminent living philosophers why it is that men court women and not the other way around, to which he replied that it is logical, when you want something, to ask someone who is always in a position to give it.

B. That explanation has always struck me as more ingenious than correct. Nature—indecently, if you like—impels both sexes toward each other with equal force, and in the dreary wild

state of nature, which one may imagine, although it probably doesn't exist anywhere . . .

A. Not even in Tahiti?

B. No . . . the gap which divides a man from a woman would be crossed first by the more amorously inclined of the two. If one of them hesitates or runs away or pursues or avoids the other or attacks him or puts up a defense against him, the reason is simply that passion, which flares up more abruptly in the one than in the other, does not impel them with equal force. Hence it happens that sexual desire is aroused, consummated and extinguished on one side while it is scarcely developed on the other, and both are disappointed. This is a realistic account of what might happen between two young people who were perfectly free and innocent of sophistication. But after women have learned through experience and education what more or less painful consequences can follow a blissful interlude, their hearts tremble at a man's approach. The man's heart is far from trembling; he is urged on by his senses and he obeys. The woman's senses cry out for gratification, but she is afraid to listen to them. It's up to the man to find ways of putting her fears to rest, to sweep her off her feet and overwhelm her with ecstasy. Men have kept all of their natural desire for women, whereas, as a geometrician might say, the natural attraction that women feel toward men is directly proportional to the passion they feel and inversely proportional to their fears. This ratio is complicated by a multitude of elements which reflect the usages of our society, and these elements work together to augment the timidity of one sex and the length of time the other sex spends in pursuit. It is a kind of problem in tactics, as when the means of defense and the power of the offense have kept exactly abreast. We have consecrated the woman's resistance, we attach blame to the man's violence—violence that would be only a slight injury in Tahiti, but becomes a crime in our cities.

A. But how did it come about that an act so solemn in its purpose, an act to which nature invites us by so powerful a summons—how did it come about that this act, the greatest, the sweetest and the most innocent of pleasures, has become the chief source of our depravity and bad conduct?

B. Orou explained it ten times over to the chaplain. Listen once more to what he said, and try to remember it:

It is owing to the tyranny of men, who have converted the possession of a woman into a right of property.

It is owing to the development of morality and custom, which have burdened the conjugal state with too many conditions.

It is owing to our civil laws, which have subjected the institution of marriage to endless formalities.

It is owing to our form of society, in which the disparity of rank and of wealth has given rise to notions of propriety and impropriety.

It is owing to a strange contradiction that is found in all existing societies—the birth of a child, although it is always considered an increase in the national wealth, is usually even more certain to mean more abject poverty for the family into which it is born.

It is owing to our rulers' political philosophy which teaches them to subordinate everything to their own interests and their own security.

It is owing to religious institutions, because their teachings have attached the labels "vice" and "virtue" to actions that are completely independent of morality.

How far we have departed from nature and happiness! Yet nature's sovereignty cannot be destroyed; it will persist in spite of all the obstacles raised in its way. Men may write as much as they like on tablets of bronze—to borrow the saying of Marcus Aurelius—that it is criminal to rub two intestines together voluptuously—the human heart will only be torn between the threats contained in the inscription and the violence of its own impulses. But the untamed heart will not cease to cry out against its oppressors, and in the course of a lifetime the terrible inscription will be ignored a hundred times by the average person. You may engrave on marble: Thou shalt not eat of the ixion nor of the wild vulture; thou shalt have carnal knowledge of no woman save only thy wife; thou shalt not take thy sister in marriage—but you must not forget to increase the severity of the penalties in proportion as your prohibitions become more arbitrary. Indeed, you may make

them as ferocious as you please; still you will never be able to root out my natural impulses.

A. How concise the legal codes of nations would be if they only conformed strictly to the law of nature! How many errors and vices would be spared to man!

B. Shall I outline for you the historical origin of nearly all our unhappiness? It is simply this: Once upon a time there was a natural man; then an artificial man was built up inside him. Since then a civil war has been raging continuously within his breast. Sometimes the natural man proves stronger; at other times he is laid low by the artificial, moral man. But whichever gains the upper hand, the poor freak is racked and torn, tortured, stretched on the wheel, continually suffering, continually wretched, whether because he is out of his senses with some misplaced passion for glory or because imaginary shame curbs and bows him down. But in spite of all this, there are occasions when man recovers his original simplicity under the pressure of extreme necessity.

A. Poverty and sickness are two great exorcists.

B. Yes, you've put your finger on it. What, in fact, becomes of all our conventional virtues under such circumstances? A man in dire need is without scruples, and grave illness makes a woman forget her modesty.

A. So I have noticed.

B. And there's another thing that has probably not escaped you—the gradual reappearance of the moral, artificial man follows step by step during one's progress from illness to convalescence and from convalescence to full recovery. The internal warfare breaks out again as soon as the illness is cured, although the invader is almost always at a temporary disadvantage.

A. That's very true. I have had occasion to learn from my own experience that during a period of convalescence the natural man seems to manifest a vigor that is downright damaging to the artificial, moral man. But tell me, in a word, is it better to civilize man or allow him to follow his instincts?

B. Must I be frank?

A. Certainly.

B. If you want to become a tyrant, civilize him; poison him as best you can with a system of morality that is contrary to nature. Devise all sorts of hobbles for him, contrive a thousand obstacles for him to trip over, saddle him with phantoms which terrify him, stir up an eternal conflict inside him, and arrange things so that the natural man will always have the artificial, moral man's foot upon his neck. Do you want men to be happy and free? Then keep your nose out of his affairs—then he will be drawn toward enlightenment and depravity, depending on all sorts of unforeseeable circumstances. But as for our celebrated lawgivers, who have cast us in our present rigid and awkward mold, you may be sure that they have acted to serve their interests and not ours. I call to witness all our political, civil and religious institutions—examine them thoroughly: unless I am very much mistaken, you will see how, through the ages, the human race has been broken to the halter that a handful of rascals were itching to slip over its head. Watch out for the fellow who talks about putting things in order! Putting things in order always means getting other people under your control. The Calabrians are just about the only ones who have refused to be taken in by the flattery of lawgivers.

A. You are an admirer of the state of anarchy in Calabria?

B. I am only appealing to experience, and I'll wager that their barbarous society is less vicious than our "polite society." You hear a great deal about their spectacular crimes, but how many of our everyday rascalities do you suppose it would take to even up the score? I look upon uncivilized people as a number of separate, isolated springs. Naturally these springs occasionally slip loose and snap against each other, and then one or two of them may get broken. In order to prevent this, some sublime genius endowed with profound wisdom fitted all the little springs together into a complicated machine called society. All the springs are wound up in such a way that they are always pushing against each other, and more get broken in a single day in the state of civilization than would have in a whole year if they had been left in their natural anarchy. What a mess! What wreckage! And what wholesale destruction

of little springs when two, three or four of these gigantic machines happen to run smack into each other!

A. So you would prefer to live in the raw, wild state of nature?

B. In truth, it's a difficult choice to make. Still, I have heard that on more than one occasion city people have set to plundering each other and then taken to the woods to live, and I've never heard that any forest dwellers ever put on proper clothes and went to live in the city.

A. I have often thought that for every individual the sum total of good and bad was different, but that for any species of animals there was a definite aggregate of happiness and unhappiness that was not subject to change. So perhaps, for all our striving, we do ourselves as much harm as good. Perhaps we have only tormented ourselves in order to make both sides of the equation a little larger without disturbing in the least the eternally necessary balance between its two sides. On the other hand, it isn't to be doubted that the average civilized man lives longer than the average uncivilized native.

B. Well, but what conclusion can you draw from that, seeing that the length of time a machine lasts is no true measure of the stresses and strains that are put on it?

A. I see that you are inclined, on the whole, to believe that men become more wicked and unhappy the more civilized they become.

B. Without going through the list of all the countries in the world, I can only assure you that you won't find the human condition perfectly happy anywhere but in Tahiti. And in only one little spot on the map of Europe will you find it even tolerable—there a set of haughty rulers, anxious about their own safety, have found ways and means of reducing man to what you would have to call a state of bestiality.

A. Are you talking about Venice?

B. Possibly. At least you won't deny that there's no place where enlightenment has made so little headway, where there is less artificial morality, or where there are fewer imaginary vices and virtues.

A. I didn't expect you to sing the praises of the Venetian Republic.

B. No, I'm not singing its praises. I am only pointing out to you one of the ways slavery can be compensated for, a way that all visitors to Venice have noticed and commented on.

A. A poor compensation!

B. Perhaps so. The Greeks proscribed the man who added one string to Mercury's lyre.

A. And that prohibition in itself is the most biting satire on their early lawgivers. They should have cut the first string instead of adding a new one.

B. You see what I'm driving at. Wherever there is a lyre you may be sure it has strings. Wherever natural appetites are brought under regulation you can be sure there will be loose women.

A. Just like La Reymer.

B. And abominable men.

A. Just like Gardeil.

B. And people who get into trouble through no fault of their own.

A. Like Tanié, Mademoiselle de la Chaux, the Chevalier Desroches and Madame de La Carlière.* There's no doubt that in Tahiti you would search in vain for a parallel to the depravity of the first two or to the misfortunes of the last three. So what should we do—go back to the state of nature or obey the laws?

B. We should speak out against foolish laws until they get reformed, and meanwhile we should obey them as they are. Anyone who takes it upon himself, on his private authority, to break a bad law, thereby authorizes everyone else to break the good ones. There is less harm to be suffered in being mad among madmen than in being sane all by oneself. We should say to ourselves—and shout incessantly too—that shame, dishonor and penalties have been erroneously attached to actions that are in themselves perfectly harmless. But let us not do

* All the persons referred to are characters in Diderot's short story, "Ceci n'est pas un conte."

those things, because shame, dishonor and penalties are the greatest evils of all. Let us follow the good chaplain's example—be monks in France and savages in Tahiti.

A. Put on the costume of the country you visit, but keep the suit of clothes you will need to go home in.

B. But especially, be scrupulously honorable and truthful in our dealings with those frail creatures who can only gratify our desires by putting in jeopardy the most precious advantages of society.

... Well, what has become of that thick fog?

A. It seems to have settled.

B. So when we've had our dinner, we'll have a choice between staying inside and going for a stroll?

A. I suppose that will depend more on the ladies' inclination than ours.

B. The women again! You can't take a step in any direction without running straight into them.

A. What do you say, shall we read them the chaplain's account of his talk with Orou?

B. What do you suppose they would say if we did?

A. I haven't the faintest notion.

B. Well, what would they think of it?

A. Probably the opposite of what they would say.

4

PREFACE

Soon after returning from the country to Paris in October 1770, Diderot showed *The Two Friends from Bourbonne* to Grimm and made a few revisions suggested by the latter. The story then appeared, with a witty but misleading introduction by Grimm—which most subsequent editors have followed too literally in their discussions of the genesis of the piece—in the *Correspondance Littéraire* of December 15, 1770.

Diderot continued to take an interest in the piece, asking for the return of his manuscript early in 1771, and again later in the year, so he could correct, among other things, an inconsistency that was perhaps pointed out to him by the Neapolitan economist and diplomat, Abbé Galiani. At this stage the text still lacked any mention of the Sicilian bandit Testalunga or of the actor Caillot, and Galiani may have contributed one or both of these bits as well.

As with *Rameau's Nephew* and *Jacques le fataliste*, the first printed version of *The Two Friends from Bourbonne* was in German translation. It appeared in 1772, together with another short piece of Diderot's (*A Conversation between a Father and His Children*) as part of the *Moralische Erzählungen und Idyllen von Diderot und S. Gessner*, at Zurich. Gessner was a Swiss artist and writer with whom Diderot was friendly, and it was hoped by both men that the inclusion of two works by a more eminent writer would increase the sale of Gessner's book. Early in 1773 a French translation of Gessner's stories, accompanied by the original French text of Diderot's,