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978-1-107-66545-3 - Entretien avec M. de Saci sur Épictète et Montaigne

Pascal

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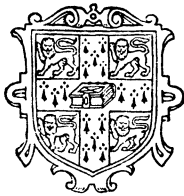
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NOTE

THIS little piece has an importance out of all proportion to its brevity and somewhat dubious origin.*

It appears for the first time in the *Mémoires* (1728) of the Oratorian P. N. Desmolets, who took it from the manuscript *Mémoires de Port Royal* by N. Fontaine, secretary and devoted disciple of M. de Saci. These *Mémoires* were composed between 1696 and 1709, but were not published till 1736—Fontaine died in 1707—and their object was the celebration of the virtues of the Solitaries, and especially of Fontaine's beloved master.

The *Entretien* then is not first-hand Pascal but a recollection of his utterance after a lapse of thirty years, but there can be no question that it is a faithful record, and that it embodies the thoughts and very words of the author of the *Pensées*.

Its importance lies in its exhibition of Pascal's intimate knowledge of Epictetus and Montaigne and most of all of the latter, from

* The text followed in this reprint is that established, after minute examination and collation of the work in print and manuscript (two of

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whom he borrows so freely for his *Apology*,* but most of all in its revelation of his method of reaching a conclusion through a clash of opposites, seeking thereby to establish a mean. Thus in this conversation the Stoic and the Epicurean are confronted, in vigorous contrast, issuing in a reasonable and balanced religion.

The occasion of the *Entretien* was as follows. It would appear that Pascal, on the morrow of the ecstasy, vision or whatever we are to call it, of November 23/24, 1654, went straight to Port Royal and placed himself in the hands of M. Singlin, the Superior of the convent in Paris. Singlin despatched him to Port Royal des Champs where the saintly Isaac Lemaître, known by the anagram of his Christian name as M. de Saci, would look after him.†

the former and five of the latter), by the late M. Bédier. See his article in *Études critiques*, 1903 (Colin). It is the one adopted by Brunschvicg in his latest editions.

* For Pascal's handling of Montaigne the reader is referred to my book *The Secret of Pascal* (Cambridge, 1942), p. 65.

† Note Pascal's passive surrender to 'direction' which in the Memorial he pledged himself to practice.

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M. de Saci's method with his penitents was a model of practical prudence. In order to win an opening to teach them how to love God he took care to suit his conversation to the condition and mood of each one. Fontaine describes it. Pascal's scientific achievement was obviously not of his competence, but the philosophical studies of the convert, although unfamiliar, were such as the director could understand, and so these were to be the subject of their talk. Pascal, invited to speak of his reading in philosophy, says that his chief and most venerated authors are Epicurus and Montaigne. M. de Saci, who has hitherto avoided their acquaintance, begs Pascal to tell him about them. And here we may leave Fontaine to take up the tale.

H. F. S.