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H. Ashton

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Selections from
LA BRUYÈRE


by

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Preface

THERE are many editions of La Bruyère annotated for French students, some so recent and so complete that there would appear to be little need for another.

The very completeness of such editions is, however, somewhat discouraging to the English-speaking student. Moreover his interests are not the same as those of his French comrades and he must therefore approach the study of La Bruyère by a different route. In his maturer years he may appreciate the literary critic and the moralist, but at the outset his only point of contact will be with the social historian.

This choice of Characters has been dictated by the needs of such students. I should have liked to give complete chapters but the exigencies of space made this impossible. Instead of omitting chapters, that contain some material on the life of the times, in an effort to include in their entirety others, part of which is of psychological interest only, I have culled from the whole work the paragraphs that give information about the society of the XVIIth century. Religious and literary topics have generally been omitted, but La Bruyère's comments on hypocrisy have been included as they throw light on Molière's *Tartuffe*.

The notes on vocabulary and syntax have been reduced progressively as the student becomes accustomed to reading a XVIIth-century text. If he follows up the paths indicated he will find himself engrossed in the complete and more scholarly editions of La Bruyère. His reading of the classical authors will also take on a new meaning.

He will soon discover that there are few new social problems and that much of what La Bruyère observed in his day may be noted in our contemporary society in a form that is only slightly modified. The close inter-relation of literature and life and the need of knowledge of the one if the other is

to be understood, will come home to him with redoubled force.

It is the business of the teacher to prevent the separation of literature and life in the minds of students, to keep the class-room window ever open on the world, and this little book is offered as a contribution to his task.

The text is that of the Servois edition but with some slight modifications. I have not kept the verb form *-oit* and have occasionally modified other spellings—*ramener* for *remener*, *cuiller* for *cueillère*—where the older form would confuse without serving any useful purpose. The text is not consistent in its use of *jusqu'à* and *jusques à*, and the latter form has been maintained where it occurs. If a paragraph is included at all it is given complete, except in one case—the rather long *Ménalque* paragraph—where an omission is marked. In one or two cases a later variant has been preferred, because it is clearer than the original version.

I have frequently consulted the editions of my predecessors and particularly the most recent, prepared with such scholarly care by my friend and former tutor M. René Radouant. M. Cayrou's excellent glossary has again proved of great service and, with the permission of Messrs Longmans, Green & Co., I have used many passages quoted in *A Preface to Molière*.

H. A.

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Introduction

1. The Author

OUR first glimpse of the La Bruyère family reveals a prosperous bourgeois, established in Paris. Good Catholics, though of an independent spirit, they took an active part in the *Ligue* and, when Henry IV was victorious, thought it prudent to remove to Brussels. Although they sold what they could, before leaving the country, a large part of their possessions was confiscated.

Guillaume, grandfather of the author of the *Caractères*, fell heir to a much diminished fortune and did little to increase it. He had a mania—fairly widespread in the XVIIth century—for litigation. He enjoyed his law cases and became so completely absorbed in his hobby that he neglected his wife. She was afraid that her three children would soon find themselves penniless, so she contributed one more law case to her husband's collection—an application for a *séparation de biens*.

La Bruyère's father, Louis, had a large family and a very small fortune. There must have been times when financial worries were justified in the household. Established at first near the Hôtel de Ville where Louis de La Bruyère's duties called him, the family later joined forces with a bachelor brother Jean II.

Stories of his grandfather may have given La Bruyère the material for his observations on the mania for litigation. In the person of his uncle he had in his own home an excellent example of the *partisan*—of the unprincipled financier and the miser. While his father made every sacrifice to ensure to his children a good education, to bring them up as men of the world and to give them a chance to make their way, his uncle, who never married, made hard bargains, fished in troubled financial waters, amassed a fortune, bought a sinecure at Court and acquired with it a title. La Bruyère

saw early in life that the path of rectitude sometimes leads through worry and self-sacrifice to debt and obscurity, while the tortuous path of selfishness and clever dishonesty may end in fortune and rank. Neither path has changed appreciably since his day.

Jean III de La Bruyère, author of the *Caractères*, was sent to school in Paris. His masters, the Pères de l'Oratoire, were ardent Catholics but with a certain independence of character that attracted to them, in preference to their rivals the Jesuits, people like the La Bruyères who had fought for their faith. The Oratoriens were great Greek scholars and La Bruyère received an excellent training in this language.

We know little more about his early education. When he left school he studied law in Paris and, like Molière, took his degree at Orleans. He appears to have practised as a lawyer in Paris but this period of his life is particularly obscure.

When his father died the family was by no means rich but the death of his uncle made it possible for Jean to surround himself with the luxuries he evidently appreciated. He at once abandoned the profession of lawyer and purchased the post of Trésorier Général des Finances at Caen.

The annual revenue of this post was 2400 livres and this would have been doubled had he resided at Caen and performed his duties. He had no intention, however, of becoming a provincial, waited five months before going to Caen to take the oath, and appears to have been quite annoyed by an enforced stay of about three weeks. The people he met did not give him a very high opinion of the Normans—perhaps his caustic wit was a little too Parisian for their understanding. He left Caen as soon as possible and refused thenceforth to carry out any of his duties in spite of their protests.

As the family reduced its expenditures and La Bruyère himself began to live very modestly indeed, there must have been financial losses during the next few years but he continued to go his way as observer and perhaps already as chronicler of the doings of his fellow-men. His wide reading

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was probably done during these years but for a long period all documents are completely lacking.

In 1684, recommended by Bossuet, he entered the service of the Condé family as history tutor to the Duke of Bourbon at 1500 livres a year. A student of the *Caractères* naturally seeks for the motive. He who wrote “La liberté n’est pas oisiveté: c’est un usage libre du temps, c’est le choix du travail et de l’exercice. Être libre, en un mot, n’est pas ne rien faire, c’est être seul arbitre de ce qu’on fait ou de ce qu’on ne fait point. Quel bien en ce sens que la liberté!” entered the service of a family that made quite evident to all its subordinates how great was the gulf between a Condé and them.

If La Bruyère’s desire was, even late in life, to have a career and to rise to power he was to be bitterly disappointed. If he was forced into the position because of poverty he deserves our sympathy, for the pupil, his father and grandfather must have been almost equally unbearable.

When in due course his pupil married, La Bruyère was given a sinecure in the Condé household and the title of *Gentilhomme de M. le duc*. With an apartment in the Hôtel de Condé in Paris, another at Versailles, the use of a cottage in the country and practically unlimited leisure he was well situated to complete his observation of society and to put the finishing touches to his book.

The first edition of *Les Caractères* appeared in 1688 and was sold out in a fortnight. Additions were made in subsequent editions until the year of his death (1696).

He had been elected to the Académie Française after two unsuccessful attempts, but his speech on the occasion of his reception was too contentious to please his colleagues. His chief pleasure during the last years of his life was conversation with a few carefully chosen friends.

As La Bruyère was a moralist we are naturally interested in his own character and this we have to reconstruct from the opinions expressed in his book and from a few contemporary judgments.

Proud and sensitive, he seems to have been particularly

annoyed by the insolent happiness of *parvenus* and by the haughty ignorance of the great nobles. He differs from Alceste in his desire to please. “C’est un fort bon homme,” says Boileau, “à qui il ne manquerait rien, si la nature l’avait fait aussi agréable qu’il a l’envie de l’être.” Unfortunately nature had not been kind to him. He was not handsome, nor graceful. Though of a cheerful disposition he could not be playful or amusing, and when he tried to be so he lacked restraint and made himself ridiculous. His efforts to please, his obsession not to be regarded as a pedant, called down upon him the mockery of the people at the Hôtel de Condé.

His alleged democratic principles are little more than the sensitive man’s sympathy with the poor, who, like himself, suffer from the selfishness and callousness of the nobles. It is not so much that he loves the humble as that he hates the rich and powerful. He is not a misanthrope, because he recognizes the claims of society, sees clearly that concessions must be made, tries his very best to please, and to improve his own social status. He endeavours to act like a gentleman, and while he is a shrewd observer of the weaknesses of women he appreciates their qualities.

Aware of the abuses of the financial system and loud in his denunciation of them he purchased a post in the Department of Finance and let the burden of his duties fall upon his colleagues. Independent and well-informed as to the shortcomings of the King and of the Princes, he indulged in fulsome flattery of them. He despised the courtiers—and paid court, was convinced of the necessity of meriting all one receives—yet lived for many years as a parasite in the Condé household. In short he was a man with defects as well as qualities, and we prefer him thus. Had he been more consistent we should have admired him more but have loved him less.

He had a heart as well as a mind, could feel as well as observe, and there are passages in *Les Caractères* that cannot be read without emotion because they were evidently written under the stress of acute feeling. This man who

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suffered in society and who yet persisted in remaining a member of it, who saw the weaknesses of his fellow-men yet advised us to be tolerant, who hated bores while accepting his share of responsibility for their existence, is a man after our own heart and women even will forgive him his criticism for two paragraphs in the Chapter devoted to them:

Un beau visage est le plus beau de tous les spectacles et l'harmonie la plus douce est le son de la voix de celle que l'on aime.

Une belle femme qui a les qualités d'un honnête homme est ce qu'il y a au monde d'un commerce plus délicieux: l'on trouve en elle tout le mérite des deux sexes.

La Bruyère was ambitious, convinced of his own capacity for employment by the state, but either too proud or too timid to make his way in the world. One cannot read *Les Caractères* without noting a tinge of envy of those who, with fewer qualifications, rise to eminence. La Bruyère consoles himself with the reflection that they have stooped to things that he could not do, but there still remains the thought that in many cases luck alone was the maker of their careers. It is all the more to his credit that, sensitive, proud, timid, striving to please and finally disappointed, he kept so well his mental balance and did not allow bitterness to warp his judgment.

While there is nothing in his work of the turgid oratory of Rousseau, there is none of the sneer of Voltaire. He has the idealism of his times with occasional flashes of inspiration that make him contemporary with us.

In a period of hypocrisy he was deeply religious and while his faith may seem to us a narrow one and in some respects intolerant it was at least sincere. A religion that influences conduct was to him the only possible one and he scorned equally those who made their religious observances merely a source of aesthetic pleasure and those who professed piety with ulterior and frequently very worldly motives.

Handicapped by the sincerity of his beliefs, by his honesty and frankness, by his bourgeois birth and lack of social ease, he still succeeded in becoming and in remaining a typical *honnête homme*. And he did not avoid pitfalls because there

were none in his way but because he observed better than his fellows and kept deliberately to the narrow road. These, and other qualities, made it possible for him to produce the work that made him famous. His fear of being “a mute inglorious Milton” was not justified and, while no great post was his reward in life, posterity has generously compensated him for the disappointment of his career. The *financiers* are forgotten, the name La Bruyère remains, and could he know this he would be well satisfied.

2. La Bruyère and the society of his time

La Bruyère is frequently accused of representing individuals of his own day while Molière goes deeper and portrays people of all times.

This is only a partial truth, for much of his work reads as if it had been written yesterday while other pages have only to be divested of a few picturesque XVIIth-century details to stand forth as contemporary pictures.

We are not interested, however, for the moment, in the universal truth of his studies but in that very local colour that is cast up against him as a reproach. Attention has been drawn so frequently to the universality of classical French writers, to their impersonal attitude towards life that an important fact has been almost totally obscured.

Seventeenth-century writers were keenly interested in their contemporaries—not merely as excuses for the depicting of man in general but as living individuals. If we ever hope to understand their work we must know the society which they studied and for the members of which they were writing; and La Bruyère helps us to acquire this knowledge.

De la Société et de la Conversation depicts a highly organized society with social intercourse as a fine art. A lack of a sense of measure, the monopolizing of conversation, pedantry, absent-mindedness, news-mongering, affectation, all the evils that La Bruyère lashes in his pictures of individuals are such in his opinion because they hinder instead of helping ordinary

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social intercourse. His own attitude is quite plain—simplicity, naturalness, common sense. All this is very bourgeois but it is the basis of the classical French school, although the fact that the literature of the day deals largely with Kings, Queens, Emperors, Empresses, Princesses, and nobles generally has frequently led to an opposite and erroneous conclusion. Corneille and Molière are bourgeois as are Mme de Sévigné, Mme de La Fayette, Boileau, La Fontaine, and above all the King's wife Mme de Maintenon. It was extremely bourgeois at the time to write books, to love one's husband, to dote on one's daughter, to be interested in the education of girls, to take life seriously and to insist upon the avoiding of extremes. The Countess de La Fayette who wrote about Kings and Queens portrayed a wife so true to her husband that she went to him for advice and guidance and expressed her fear of loving another man. Could anything be more bourgeois?

In *Des Biens de Fortune* he observes the rise of the bourgeois to riches and rank, the first stages of money as a power in society. He is perturbed by the changes he chronicles but it is quite evident that had fortune smiled on him he would not have turned his back on her.

The town (*De la Ville*) apes the Court, and the satire becomes more biting as it is turned against the latter (*De la Cour*), more aggressive still when it attacks *Les Grands*.

The author is not free from personal bitterness but this does not spoil the truth of his picture. There is no lack of contemporary evidence on all the vices, on all the weaknesses, he criticizes.

It is useless to present La Bruyère as a revolutionary, as a forerunner of the *philosophes*. At no moment did he foresee the possibility of any form of government other than the Monarchy and he really believed that Louis XIV was a great King because he acted so magnificently the part.

But La Bruyère is uneasy. He feels vaguely that all is not well, he sees abuses, feels the lack of liberty, notes the hypocrisy that such a tyranny naturally engenders but sees

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no way out of it all to that state in which “Les hommes composent ensemble une même famille.” This, of course, is very stupid of him. Have we then seen the way out? Is it in the Republic of France, of the United States, the Soviets of Russia, the Dictatorship of Italy, the limited Monarchy of the British Empire that liberty and equality exist or are we not still groping our way toward them nearly three hundred years after La Bruyère’s time? One thing he did see clearly and that was the rise of a new governing power—money. It is still governing.

In *De la Mode* and *De quelques Usages* the moralist is at work, yet it is here that he brings his greatest contribution to the social history of the times. The decline of the nobles and the efforts of the bourgeois to improve their status are nowhere more evident.

In the wide sweep of La Bruyère’s observation we have every class from the King to the wretched peasant, townspeople and courtiers, Parisians and provincials, lawyers, merchants, doctors, the problems of society and of the family, the church, charlatans, superstition, cruelty, dress, manners, morals. The picture shows the most brilliant society in Europe, meditates on war and mentions the powder and patches of the ladies, speaks of travel, of the study of languages, and of the bagginess of trousers, makes a plea for tolerance and for the claims of nations other than our own and describes the man who eats noisily and who picks his teeth with a fork.

The picture he leaves in our mind is a very vivid one but most unfair and the student should remember this as he puts down *Les Caractères*. Perhaps, after all, the majority of XVIIth-century people were like its author and the thousands who bought and read the numerous editions of his book.

La Bruyère was a satirist and so is more concerned with what is wrong in society than with the humdrum virtues of his fellow-men. He does not approve of the abuses he sees around him and his criticisms sold so well that the general public was evidently on the side of the critic. If the majority

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of the people who were actually under fire agreed that these things were wrong—the oppressed poor did not buy such books of course—it follows that the evils were somewhat exceptional and that society as a whole was perhaps not altogether unsound.

It should be remembered also that La Bruyère was writing during the decline of the brilliant period. Then, as now, there were moral weaklings, then, as now, there were crying injustices. Vices of all kinds existed in those days and, while we have since added to their variety, few, if any, of them have become extinct. There has been progress in many ways since then—particularly in the administration of justice and in the decline of wanton cruelty. We should ask ourselves however not: “How much better are we?” but rather whether we are progressing more rapidly over a period of years, than was the case in the days of Louis XIV.

The chief factor in judging a period is not so much what it did as what it tried to do, not so much its acts as its ideals. From this test the period emerges with almost undimmed glory. The very existence of *Les Caractères* and its contemporary popularity prove that there was an ideal.

3. The Portrait

Mes affaires m’obligeaient de demeurer encore à Champigny (wrote Mademoiselle in her *Mémoires* (1657). Madame la princesse de Tarente et mademoiselle de la Trémoille y vinrent deux ou trois fois...Elles me montrèrent leurs portraits qu’elles avaient fait faire en Hollande. Je n’en avais jamais vu; je trouvai cette manière d’écrire fort galante et je fis le mien.

The writing of portraits became a fashionable occupation that lasted for two years—quite a long time for a fad of this kind. Mademoiselle joined in rather late for it was Mlle de Scudéry who inaugurated the movement by inserting in her novels portraits of well-known people in Paris. When a new instalment of one of her works appeared the recognition of these portraits seems to have been one of its chief attractions,

to judge from the following letter from Mme de la Fayette to Ménage:

Je suis fort offensée que vous ne m'ayez point mandé que vous étiez dans *Clélie*. Vous avez voulu voir, sans doute, si je vous reconnaîtrais. Hé bien, Monsieur, je vous ai reconnu au premier trait et je trouve votre peinture fort ressemblante. J'ai reconnu aussi Mme du Plessis, Mr de Maulevrier et le Port-Royal—du reste je n'y connais qui que ce soit. La princesse d'Erice n'est pas dépeinte tout à fait comme je voudrais. Mandez-moi, je vous prie, qui est Méricène. Assurément, il n'y a rien de plus spirituel que ce livre-là. Pour moi je ne cesse de l'admirer.

Mademoiselle's portraits—written for the most part by her friends—were collected by her secretary Segrais and printed in book form in 1659.

It is generally stated that this new literary *genre* reached its highest point in 1688 when La Bruyère published his *Caractères*. This is a truth that requires a little modification if the nature of La Bruyère's work is to be understood.

As the early portraits appeared in a work of fiction and described characters that had little or no share in the plot of the novel it was essential that they should be sufficiently detailed to permit the recognition by the reader of the person portrayed. This was not done, however, by giving a detailed physical portrait. While a physical description is generally given at the beginning, it is extremely short, and not sufficiently picturesque to make recognition possible. This is assured by the detailed analysis of character that follows. It will be remembered that Mme de La Fayette, while she devotes an entire volume to a psychological study of the Princess of Cleves and succeeds in making her completely known to the reader, contents herself with the statement that she was sixteen years old, of good physique, pretty and blonde. It never occurs to her that we wish to know more than that about the personal appearance of her heroine.

Nor is it the sole intention of the portraitist to represent the person clearly even by the character analysis. An element as important as the description is the wit of the writer. Instead of presenting a picture of a friend he inter-

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venes with comments, *pointes*, and satire. The result is an essay, not a portrait, and we find ourselves frequently as interested in the writer as in the subject of the dissertation.

Obviously in the case of a person in a novel, who must be recognized, of an unnamed friend who must be guessed at once by the ladies of a *salon*, the writer has only a limited field for showing his or her own cleverness.

La Bruyère had more liberty, for in his case all we have to recognize is a *type* not an individual. He changes therefore the nature of the portrait and brings to it an infinite variety. As is pointed out in the notes to this edition, he sometimes gives his entire character by means of physical details and actions. Untrammelled by the need of presenting an individual who must be identified, he is able to develop the satirical element and has more freedom in introducing his own reflections, in preparing the element of surprise and even in using terms that would have been regarded as in doubtful taste if they had been applied to an individual.

Sometimes, it is true, the name chosen by La Bruyère scarcely hides the real name of the original but it frequently happens that he makes it an indication of the character or an additional thrust in the satire. Thus Terrat and Herbelot are scarcely disguised by *Téramène* and *Hermagoras*. The man who spent his time in litigation is *Antagoras*. *Iphis*, a woman's name, adds to the satire of the fashionable fop. The valet who rises to fortune is *Sosie*. *Sannions*, *Crispins*, *Sylvain*, are obviously chosen for their associations. A worldly bishop is *Théophile*; *Arfure* seems to hint at *fur* a thief. *Zélie* the bigot perhaps suggests excessive zeal. *Téléphon* is arrogant in tone and can be heard afar off. *Périandre*, *Tryphon*, *Chrysippe*, *Chrysanthe*, and many others are evidently intended to have their etymological meaning.

The *Caractères* are not all portraits. There were very few in the first edition—a translation of Theophrastus to which La Bruyère added some *maxims*. The success was so great, and was due so obviously to the portraits that subsequent editions contained more and more of them. The *maxim* was

much more artificial and the effort to produce a striking statement by twisting and turning what was at the beginning little more than a platitude frequently led to a finished product, sparkling with wit, striking in the unexpectedness of the thought, but considerably farther from the truth than was the original platitude. La Bruyère's maxims often resemble portraits and generally are presented more for their truth than for the skill of their expression—though, of course, the latter is by no means neglected.

4. *Les Caractères*. Sources—Style—Influence

Sensitive persons observe more closely than others the conduct of the people they meet because they envy the ease and self-possession of some and suffer when others make themselves ridiculous. They have the unfortunate habit of putting themselves in the place of persons who are absurd and of feeling for them the shame that such people do not as a rule experience for their own shortcomings.

Such acute observers rarely shine in society but, pen in hand, they can express with great shrewdness the criticism that would have died on their lips at the first show of resentment or even of pain on the face of their victims. Whenever the habit is formed both observation and expression become more and more acute and it should be remembered that *Les Caractères* were not written hurriedly but were the result of many years of patient effort.

Individuals of course contributed many of the portraits though it is not always easy to accept without question the name supplied by the keys. It may happen also that two or three similar persons go to make one *caractère*, for example Dangeau and Langlée.

Anecdotes also are grist for La Bruyère's mill (Arrias who talked to the Ambassador) and reading sometimes set the spark that produced maxims or portraits. When once the note-taking habit had been formed it was possible to

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construct types from accumulated observation not of any one person but of many.

The main source of La Bruyère's pictures would appear to be sermons and particularly those of Bourdaloue. It was a practice to include portraits in church oratory and, of course, the criticism of social sins required some description of the sinners. La Bruyère seems to have retained many of these pictures first presented in church and to have elaborated on them. Many of his maxims are little more than terse statements of more highly developed criticisms made by Bourdaloue. One would expect some similarity between the criticisms of the preachers and those of the lay observer but the agreement is so frequent and so complete that La Bruyère evidently found the sermons of his day a fruitful source of inspiration.

It may be that the style he adopted was due to some extent to this source. Listening to the description of the evils of the day couched in the flowing oratory of the church he probably recast the thought in more striking language and noted how much more effective it became.

Critics assure us that in La Bruyère we miss the harmony and serenity of classical style. It is equally true that when reading Bossuet or Bourdaloue we miss the homely comparisons, the daring metaphors and the concise irony of La Bruyère.

We must remind ourselves—so accustomed are we nowadays to tricks of style and to crude expressions—that in their day the characters were regarded as ultra-modern. Many of the expressions that appear picturesque and amusing to us caused the contemporary purist to curl his lip and marvel at the lack of taste of the writer. Again and again the word that appears expressive but that has not yet won its place in the written language appears—blushing in italics—in the pages of the *Caractères*.

And it is not carelessness that leaves these words in the text but a deliberate intention to use the word that has young life in preference to the one that is dying of respectable senility. There is little carelessness in La Bruyère. The

variety of composition, the careful construction of the paragraph, the obvious delight in leading up to a surprise all prove with what care the writing was done. Even the involved sentences that we sometimes find are more often the result of over-elaboration than of an uncorrected *premier jet*.

While by early training and later reading he is of the classical school, a comparison of the prose of Mme de La Fayette (by no means conservative) and that of La Bruyère will make more clear how extremely modern was his style.

It would have been impossible to present the *Caractères* with the oratorical rhythm of XVIIth-century prose and to avoid monotony. The unexpected break, the bringing into relief of a word or a phrase were essential; the colour and the wit could alone save such a work from being wearisome. Mme de La Fayette is never rhetorical, La Bruyère frequently is; but the former never *sees*, the latter always does. One would expect a novelist to give pictures, to be concrete, a moralist to indulge in rhetoric, to be abstract. Yet it is Mme de La Fayette who neglects to describe her heroine and who only occasionally gives details of dress. It is La Bruyère who supplies the physical details, the dress and the gestures of his characters and he describes without adjectives by a careful choice of verbs, by the use of the exact and of the fitting word. While Mme de La Fayette seeks the noble expression or the colourless one La Bruyère daringly supplies the bourgeois even the popular word and prefers the image, the characteristic detail that make a picture.

Sometimes, though rarely, he is so carried away by the joy of describing that he actually diminishes the value of his moral teaching, as for example in his character of the tulip-grower—while at other times he merely adds details that do not in any way contribute to it.

His method is, however, not that of the modern realist for he never forgets that he is expected to be a wit. He strives to present his thought in an unusual way, to catch his reader off his guard. The student has only to analyse a few of the characters to discover how frequent is this

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element of surprise. Knowing how easily a work of this kind could become platitudinous he exhausted every resource of the language to ensure variety.

La Bruyère's influence—apart from changes in French style—was happier in England than in France. In his own country the *genre* had reached its highest point and must needs decline during the XVIIIth century, arrested for a moment by the clear correct prose of Vauvenargues, to reach its lowest level in the *Petit La Bruyère* of Mme de Genlis.

In England the lusty predecessors of La Bruyère had been followed by bloodless imitators until, in the XVIIIth century, Steele and Addison had to supersede the burlesque style and to bring that measure and reason so characteristic of the French classics. While their contemporary, Budgell, retranslated Theophrastus, they certainly read La Bruyère and it is to this study, as well as to their direct observation of the life around them, that we owe Sir Roger de Coverley and Will Honeycomb. It is generally admitted however that La Bruyère was not equalled in prose though we rightly take pride in our verse portraits.



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To these should be added the material in the Servois edition and the studies by Prévost-Paradol, Sainte-Beuve, Taine, Brunetière, Faguet, Lanson, etc. An interesting contrast between La Bruyère's methods and those of his English contemporaries and predecessors is provided by the excellent *Book of Characters* compiled by R. Aldington, London (Routledge), 1925.

III. Vocabulary and Syntax

The Servois edition has an *Introduction Grammaticale* and *Lexique*. The most recent Grammar and Lexicon is to be found in M. Radouant's edition (see Section I above).

Cayrou, *Le Fr. Cl.*, and Haase, *La Syn. fr.* (see List of Works Quoted, p. 163) are of great service.