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R. L. Græme Ritchie

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

DESCRIPTIVE VOCABULARY

A student 'doing a French Prose' is not just 'making it up'. He is drawing on a store of remembered fact. Where does his French vocabulary come from? In the main, from reading. It is a stock of accumulated lore, a mass of observations made, often unconsciously, in the course of his reading in French.

The bulk was acquired without conscious effort. The strangest thing about language-learning is that it is just when our attention is riveted on the subject-matter and not on the form, that we learn new phrases most readily. This applies as much to speaking French as to reading it. To take an extreme case, a pronouncement made by a French dentist at a moment when one feels intense interest in *what* he is saying and none whatever in *how* he says it, is afterwards found to have passed mysteriously into one's active vocabulary. The phrases, the exact words used have been learned, unconsciously, unintentionally, but once and for all. In like manner, the passages in a French book which teach us most French are those which, at the time of reading, so completely absorbed us that we stopped not to think of the words, or even to think whether we were reading French or English. But in any form of reading, some French always sinks in. It finds its way to the store of unconsciously remembered fact, from which it comes forth during an exercise in Composition, often much to the owner's surprise.

The surest, most natural, way to increase vocabulary is by reading. That is '*la manière douce*'. But there is also '*la manière forte*', which consists in applying to the acquisition of vocabulary whatever means come to hand, such as learning off lists of words and phrases and making a sustained effort to discover and fill up blanks. Such methods are only supplementary, but they are not to be despised. In

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particular it is always worth while to re-read well-written passages and to note—and enter in a phrase-book—material likely to be useful for the special purpose of Composition, including of course Free Composition, and consequently also useful for the general purpose of learning French. And what is that material? It consists chiefly of words and phrases which make up any French writer's stock-in-trade. Theoretically there is no limit to the number of French words and phrases required for Composition. But in practice there are limits, laid down by the nature of the exercise. English passages used in class, or set in examinations, fall into a few recognized types, 'Descriptive', 'Portraits', 'Narrative', etc. Vocabulary which is very technical or out-of-the-way is unlikely to bulk largely in an academic exercise intended to afford practice in the general use of French, or in a public examination meant for candidates whose French reading has not been identical.

Thus most of the two hundred passages of this book were originally selected, whether by ourselves or by others, for examination purposes. Going through them and noting and classifying the French vocabulary they required, we found certain words and phrases continually recurring. They turned out to be in the main what might be termed 'descriptive', though they are by no means confined to descriptions of scenery or the like, but occur in passages of every type. To facilitate the acquisition of active vocabulary, they are given here, arranged according to subject, and in the passages reference is made to these paragraphs. The remainder proved to be more abstract and came more naturally under the heading of 'Grammar and Syntax' or 'Style'. They are therefore incorporated in Chapters III and IV.

§ 1. *Orientation*:

S'orienter is to get an idea of the lie of the land, to find one's bearings; hence 'bewildered' may be *désorienté*. A land-mark is *un point de repère*.

NORTH, NORTHERN, etc.: *Septentrional, méridional*, etc., suggest the geographical text-book; 'on the north road' = *sur la route du*

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nord; 'in all the northern countries' = *dans tous les pays* du nord; 'the western sky' (also the setting sun) = *le couchant*; 'the campaign on the western front' = *la campagne sur le front ouest*; 'the eastern sky' = *le côté est du ciel*; 'bounding it on the west' = *le bornant à l'ouest*. N.B. *le vent d'est* and *d'ouest*, but *le vent du nord*, *du sud*.

RIGHT: 'Turn to the right' = *Tournez à droite*; 'to keep to the right' = *tenir sa droite*; 'on the right' = *à droite*; 'on one's right' = *à sa droite* (He had *on the right* = *Il avait à sa droite*); 'at right angles to' = *à angle droit avec*.

ROUND: 'Round about', 'all round' = *tout autour*; 'all the country around' = *tout le pays d'alentour*; 'for several miles round' = *à plusieurs milles à la ronde*; 'a widening circle' = *un cercle grandissant*.

SIDE: 'Seen from this side' = *Vu de ce côté*; 'on the side of' (in the direction of) = *du côté de*; 'on the north side' = *du côté du nord*; 'on every side' = *de tous les côtés*; 'on both sides' = *des deux côtés*; but: 'on three sides' = *sur trois côtés*; 'from side to side' = *d'un côté à l'autre*; 'sideways' = *de côté*. 'The path runs (lies) by the side of a river several yards wide' = *Le sentier longe une rivière, large de quelques mètres*.

§ 2. *Distance*:

FAR; FAR AWAY: 'Far in the pale North-East' = *Loin dans le pâle Nord-Est*; 'far to the West' = *au loin vers le couchant*; 'far from land' = *loin de la terre*; 'far beyond the crest' = *bien au delà de la crête*; 'a village far in the country' = *situé dans une lointaine campagne*. 'The mountains farthest away' = *Les montagnes les plus éloignées*.

Loin is an adverb and consequently invariable; *lointain* is the adjective = 'distant', and therefore agrees. The presence of 'far' and 'away' and 'distant' in the same sentence causes in French an awkward repetition avoidable only by some alteration in the wording: 'the distant Jura, like a pale mist, very far away' = *à une très grande distance, le Jura, semblable à une pâle brume lointaine*.

'Away one could see...' = *Là-bas (Plus loin) on distinguait...*
'The plain stretched away to the South... mile after mile' = *La plaine s'étendait au loin (à perte de vue) vers le Sud... pendant de*

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longues lieues; 'situated five miles away' = *situé à huit kilomètres de là (à huit kilomètres de distance)*; 'a short distance away' = *non loin de là (d'ici)*.

§ 3. *Landscape*:

(a) 'In the foreground' = *au premier plan*; 'in the middle distance' = *au second plan*; 'in the background' = *à l'arrière-plan* (or *au fond*). 'The scene which presents itself to the traveller (which he sees)' = *Le paysage qui s'offre aux yeux du voyageur (qui s'offre à ses regards: qu'il aperçoit, découvre, discerne, distingue)*; 'when he comes within sight of X' = *lorsqu'il arrive en vue de X*, 'is pleasant' = *riant* (gentle, *doux, aimable*; lovely, *merveilleux, ravissant, d'une grande beauté*; wild, *sauvage, tourmenté*). 'The moon gives him a view of the ruins' = *La lune lui permet de voir la ruine*. 'The prospect around is lovely' = *Le pays d'alentour présente un ravissant coup d'œil*. 'It is a scene of incredible beauty' = *un spectacle d'une beauté incroyable*.

(b) 'The coast is (not now) in sight' = *La côte (n')est (plus) visible; (ne) se distingue (plus)*. 'The clouds shut out the sky' = *Les nuages dérobent le ciel à la vue*; 'some object is almost lost in sea and sky' = *se confond (se perd) dans la mer et le ciel*; 'merges into a confused horizon' = *se fond en un horizon confus*; or 'stands out (black) against' = *se détache (en noir) sur*; *se découpe sur l'horizon*; or 'is clearly marked' = *nettement marqué (dessiné)*, 'indistinct' = *confus, vague*; or 'has dim outlines' = *contours estompés*, or 'is shadowy in outline' = *aux contours sombres*. Note also 'to harmonize with' = *s'harmoniser avec*.

§ 4. *Hills and Valleys*:

Rocks: 'Jagged rocks overhanging a ravine' = *des rochers déchiquetés (dentalés) surplombant un ravin*; 'overhung with bushes' = *surplombé de buissons*; 'beneath the rocks' = *au pied des rochers*; 'in the nooks below' = *dans les recoins d'en bas, en dessous dans les coins*; 'seen from below' = *vu d'en bas*. Note 'rocky' = *stony, pebbly, rocailleux*.

SLOPES: 'The other side of the valley' = *le versant opposé*; 'on the steep sides of the hills' = *sur les flancs escarpés des montagnes*; *un village posé (perché, juché) au flanc d'une colline*; 'the hills opposite' = *les montagnes d'en face*; cp. 'the house over the way' = *la maison d'en face*; 'All down the sides of the rocks' = *Du haut*

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en bas *des rochers*; 'slope'=*pente* (f.); 'sloping meadows', 'hill-pastures'=*prairies en pente*; 'wooded slopes'=*coteaux boisés*; 'a hill' (on a road), 'gradient'=*une côte*; 'Do not overtake on the top of a hill'=*Ne dépassez pas en haut d'une côte*, au sommet *d'une côte*; 'half-way down (up)'=*à mi-côte*; 'The meadows fell away into the depths of the valley'=*Les prairies allaient s'enfoncer jusque dans les profondeurs de la vallée*. 'Along ground of an undulating and varied form'=*Suivant les plis et les accidents du terrain*.

STEEP: 'The ground rose (descended) sharply (gently)'=*La terre (Le terrain) s'élevait en pente raide (brusque, rapide), en pente douce*; 'in places almost precipitous', 'sheer'=*par endroits presque à plomb (à pic)*; 'a precipitous gorge'=*une gorge escarpée*.

§ 5. Woods and Trees:

TREES: 'A noble tree'=*un bel arbre, arbre majestueux*; 'century-old'=*séculaire, centenaire*; 'stunted'=*rabougri*; 'twisted' (by the wind)=*tordu, tourmenté*; 'tree trunks'=*des troncs d'arbre*; 'blossom'=*fleurs*; 'in blossom'=*en fleur(s)*; 'withered leaves'=*feuilles flétries, mortes, d'automne*.

'To grow' usually=*pousser*; a verb has often to be supplied: 'the palms on the islets'=*les palmiers qui poussent sur les îlots*; 'the tall (low) trees that grow along the shore'=*les grands (petits) arbres qui bordent le rivage*.

WOODS: 'A clump'=*un massif*; 'fir-clump'=*un groupe de sapins*; 'grove'=*un bosquet, bocage*; 'sacred grove'=*bois sacré*; 'a knot of palm-trees'=*un bouquet de palmiers*; 'a tangle of ashes'=*un enchevêtrement (fouillis, labyrinthe) de frênes; des frênes enchevêtrés*; 'among the beeches'=*parmi les hêtres, dans les bois de hêtres, dans les hêtraies*; 'a glade', 'clearing'=*une clairière*.

'Woodland'=*sylvestre, perdu dans les bois, au fond des bois*; often just *bois*; 'woodland valleys'=*vallées boisées*) (treeless = *déboisé*. 'The woods' often = *la forêt*.

§ 6. Fields, Grass:

FIELDS: 'Gate' (in a field)=*une barrière*; 'gate (ornamental, iron) of a park', etc., also a railing=*une grille*; 'flocks and herds'=*troupeaux* (m.) *de gros et menu bétail*; *gros bétail*=cattle (including horses, asses, mules); *menu bétail*=smaller livestock;

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'a farmer's cattle' = *ses bêtes*; 'a sheep' = *un mouton*; *une brebis* properly = a ewe; sheep (*pl.*), generally = *moutons*; 'the bleat of a lamb' = *le bêlement d'un agneau*; 'to bellow' = *beugler*; 'lowing' = *le mugissement*.

GRASS: 'There is scanty grass' = *Une herbe rare y pousse*; '(smooth) grass' = *le gazon*; 'blade' = *un brin d'herbe*; 'scented' = *embaumé*; 'giving off scent' = *odoriférant*; 'the bright grass' = *l'herbe vive (fraîche)*; 'soft' = *tendre*. 'The ground was covered with verdure' = *couvert (tapissé) de verdure*. 'The grass was jewelled with glow-worms' = *émaillée de vers luisants*; 'strewn' = *parsemée (de violettes)*. 'The flowers among the grass' = *émaillant le gazon*; (cp. *les prairies émaillées de fleurs*). 'The rank grass' = *Les hautes herbes*; *Les herbes luxuriantes*.

§ 7. Water:

TO FLOW = 'overflow' = *déborder*; 'to flow into the sea' = *se jeter dans la mer*; 'The river of life flows backward' = *remonte vers sa source*. 'The tide flowed gently over the fine sand' = *La marée montait doucement sur le sable fin*.

RIPPLING: *ondoyant, étincelant*; *Le vent ridait la surface*; 'the gentle rippling of the tide' = *la douce ondulation de la marée*; 'stretched away in leagues of rippling lustre' = *s'étendaient au loin pendant des lieues en ondulations étincelantes*; 'a soft murmuring ripple' = *un clapotis doux comme un murmure*; 'the chilly water lapping (rippling) against the shore' = *le clapotis de l'eau glacée sur le rivage*.

STREAM: *ruisseau (le babil, le doux murmure du ruisseau), un cours d'eau, un affluent*; '(mountain) stream' = *un torrent*; 'current' = *le courant*; 'out in the deep current' = *au plus profond du courant*; 'a thin (narrow) stream of water', 'trickle' = *un mince filet d'eau*; 'upstream', 'farther up', 'down' = *en amont, en aval*; 'above the lock' = *en amont de l'écluse*; 'curves', 'bends' = *coudes (m.), sinuosités (f.)*.

WAVES: 'The waves (*les vagues, les lames (f.)*, etc.; see p. 30, § 18) dashed against the coast' = *venaient* (see p. 16, § 18, TO BREAK), *se briser sur la côte*; 'foam-flecked' = *marbrées d'écume*. 'The water leaped' = *L'eau jaillit, Les flots bondissaient*. 'The wreaths (The curl) of a wave' = *les volutes (f.) d'une lame*. 'Mingled spray and rain' = *Embrun(s) mêlé(s) de pluie*; 'a mist of spray' = *une poussière d'embruns*.

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§ 8. *The Sea, Nautical Expressions:*

'At sea' = out at sea = *en mer*; 'on the open sea' = *en pleine mer*; (= as regards the sea, *sur mer*; cp. *sur terre et sur mer* = on land and sea); 'put out to the open (sea)' = *pousser au large*; 'off Saint Malo' = *au large de Saint-Malo*.

'To go on board' = *embarquer*; 'All aboard!' = *Embarquez!* *S'embarquer* is less technical, more figurative: *s'embarquer dans un train, dans une nouvelle guerre, dans une dissertation sur...* To land is *débarquer*.

'On the ship' = *sur le navire, à bord*; 'on deck' = *sur le pont*; 'to the fore' = *à l'avant du navire*; 'to drift' = *s'en aller à la dérive*; 'to furl a sail' = *amener une voile*; 'to sail towards' = *cingler vers*; 'He was going in a boat from X to Y' = *Il allait en bateau, etc.*

§ 9. *Air and Sky:*

AIR: 'The clear air' = *l'air pur*; 'clearness' = *la netteté*; 'a dark and misty air' = *l'atmosphère opaque et brumeuse*; 'the dark vapours' = *les sombres vapeurs*. 'Mist crept along the water below' = *Le brouillard rampait, là-bas, au long des eaux*. 'Fog falls upon the town' = *s'abat sur*.

CLOUDS: 'Clouds gather' = *s'amoncellent*; 'hang over' = *planent sur*; 'pile up' = *s'amoncellent*; 'roll over one another' = *s'enroulent les uns sur les autres*; 'open out' = *s'écartent*. 'On a cloudless day' = *sous un ciel sans nuages*. 'The moon riding clear of the cloud-rack' = *se dégageant des nuages en fuite (chassés par le vent)*.

SKY: 'The broad sky' = *Le vaste ciel*. 'The mountains were silhouetted against the bright sky' = *se silhouettaient sur le fond lumineux du ciel*; 'skies' (technical, artist's term) = *les ciels*; 'the vault (dome, canopy) of heaven' = *la voûte du ciel*; 'the floor (the courts) of heaven' = *les parvis du ciel*.

STREAK: *un trait, une traînée, une bande*: e.g. *l'horizon rayé d'un long trait rouge: les traînées violettes qui barraient l'horizon; une bande de lumière verte*.

§ 10. *Seasons, Weather:*

SEASONS: 'It was winter' = *C'était l'hiver*. 'In spring' = *Au printemps*; 'late-coming springs' = *des printemps tardifs*; 'in summer and winter' = *été comme hiver*; 'the pale spring foliage' = *le pâle*

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feuillage printanier; 'their *winter (autumn)* colouring' = *leurs teintes hivernales* (d'automne). 'Soon it will be May' = *Bientôt nous serons en mai*; 'The weather is exceptional for the time of year' = *Le temps est exceptionnel pour la saison*. 'Season' (vaguely) = *époque* (f.).

WEATHER: 'One stormy (sultry) day' = *un jour d'orage*.

Note *par*: 'In calm weather' = *par temps calme*; *par un beau dimanche d'été*; 'this cool pleasant afternoon' = *par cette fraîche et agréable après-midi*; 'to lie awake on such nights' = *veiller par de telles nuits*.

COLD: 'Coldness' (coolness) = *fraîcheur*; 'cool' = *frais*. 'In the frosty air' = *Dans l'air glacé*. 'The (period of) frost' = *le gel*; 'thaw' = *le dégel*; 'hoar-frost' = *le frimas*; *poet.* = *les frimas, la gelée blanche*; 'the ground, sprinkled with snow' = *le sol, saupoudré de neige*.

RAIN: 'Rainy weather with bright intervals' = *temps pluvieux avec éclaircies*. 'In rain or sun' = *sous la pluie ou au (grand) soleil*. 'The rain was now steady' = *Il pleuvait sans discontinuer*; 'the showers of spring' = *les giboulées (ondées) printanières*.

WIND: 'There was no wind to stir the branches' = *Nulle brise ne venait* (see also p. 16, § 18, To BREAK) *les remuer*. 'The wind was very rough' = *Le vent soufflait avec violence*. 'Gusts swept over the island' = *Des rafales passaient sur l'île*.

§ 11. *Daylight, Moonlight, Stars*:

DAYLIGHT: 'The dawn came (stole) through the trees' = *Le jour (L'aurore) filtrait à travers les arbres*; 'at sunrise' = *au lever du soleil*; 'As the light grows' = *A mesure que la lumière croît*; 'The sun came out' = *se montra, parut*; 'beat down on me' = *dardait ses rayons sur moi*; 'came slanting down the slopes' = *lançait ses rayons obliques sur les pentes*; 'where the sun (sunlight, sunshine) fell on the trees' = *aux endroits où le soleil frappait les arbres*; 'the sun was rising higher' = *s'élevait* (*se levait* = was rising; 'in the bright sunshine' = *au grand soleil*; 'to sun oneself' = *prendre le soleil*; 'at sundown' = *au coucher du soleil*; *fig.* 'to live in the daylight' = *vivre au grand jour (à la clarté du jour)*.

MOONLIGHT: *La clarté de la lune*. 'The moon shone brightly' = *La lune brillait d'un vif éclat*; 'now shone out' = *brillait maintenant de tout son éclat*; 'The moon, pale...' = *la lune, blafarde (blême)*;

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'The moonlight fills the open sky'=*Le clair de lune emplit le vaste ciel*; 'The moonlight fell on the dark water'=*La lune tombait (en plein) sur la surface de l'eau sombre*; 'Waving in the moonlight'=*Ondulant au clair de lune*.

STARS: 'The stars had not yet come'=*n'avaient pas encore paru*; 'were out'=*étaient allumées (brillaient)*. 'The stars shone out above, brighter than...'=*apparaissaient en haut, plus éclatantes que...* 'To sleep under the stars (out of doors)'=*coucher (dormir) à la belle étoile*.

§ 12. *Light and Shadow*:

LIGHT: 'There was light enough to see the road'=*Il faisait assez clair pour voir la route*; 'brilliant in the sun'=*éclatant au soleil, éblouissant*; 'burning'=*ardent, flamboyant*; 'ruddy light'=*une lumière rouge, un rougeolement*; 'glowing' (red)=*rutilant*; 'a glimmer'=*une lueur (incertaine)*; 'to flicker'=*vaciller*. Very gradual change is expressed by *allait* + participle, e.g. *de moment en moment allait pâlisant*.

'A sheaf of (fire)light'=*une gerbe*; 'to set the world aflame'=*mettre le feu au monde*; 'their flaming villages'=*leurs villages en flammes*; 'the fiery sky', 'sky on fire'=*le ciel embrasé (enflammé)*.

SHADOW: 'Shadowy'=*plein (rempli) d'ombre; vague*. 'A patch of shade'=*une tache d'ombre*; 'grateful' (shade)=*agréable*; 'in the shade of an ancient oak'=*à l'ombre d'un vieux chêne*; 'in the shadow of the forests'=*dans la pénombre des forêts*; 'to darken the landscape'=*assombrir (attrister) le paysage*; 'darkness'=*les ténèbres* (f.), less poetically, *l'obscurité* (f.); 'It was night'=*Night came*=*Il fit nuit*. 'It was now full night'=*Il faisait nuit noire*.

§ 13. *Colours*:

(a) French tends to differentiate colours more exactly than English: 'colour' often=*une teinte (se teinter), une nuance*. The simple term, *vert, rouge*, etc., may seem too crude or too monosyllabic: hence, green=very generally *verdâtre* or *verdoyant*, sometimes *émeraude*; 'threw out a radiance of gold and green'=*rayonnaient d'or et d'émeraude*; 'a red cloud'=*un nuage vermeil* [red hair is *des cheveux roux*]; 'the sea assumed a certain peacock blue shade'=*prenait une certaine nuance bleu paon*; 'the hills lay blue on the horizon'=*bleuissaient à l'horizon*; 'in soft blue shadows'=*en douces ombres bleutées*.

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(b) Contrasts which in French might seem violent can be advantageously toned down: 'red and gold' = *rose et or*; 'yellow and red' = *or et rouge*; 'black' = *sombre*. N.B. Purple = *mauve* or *violet*, except in *la pourpre romaine*; crimson or scarlet often = *pourpre*; 'clouds tinged with crimson' = *colorés de pourpre*; *écarlate* is usually a noun, *endosser l'écarlate* (of a Cardinal), *des nuages d'écarlate*, occasionally an adjective, *des rubans écarlates*, *elle devint écarlate*.

(c) Compounds are common. They do not agree with the noun: *une eau vert pâle*; grey-green is *gris-vert* or *d'un gris vert*, but odd compounds like 'green-blue' are better separated (*bleu et vert*). Note *bleu sombre*, more prosaically *bleu foncé*, as opposed to *bleu clair*, light blue; 'dark (bright) green woods' = *des bois d'un vert sombre (vif)*; 'of a bright (staring) colour' = *aux couleurs voyantes (criardes)*; 'light-coloured' = *de couleur claire*; 'snow-white' = *blanc comme neige*, *d'une blancheur de neige*; 'a layer of dazzling white' = *un tapis éblouissant de blancheur* (*d'un blanc éblouissant*); 'clouds of pearl and snow' = *de nacre et de neige*. 'The colour of the clouds faded till it was no more than a pink blush' = *se dégradait jusqu'à n'être qu'une lueur rose*.

§ 14. Sound, Voice:

SOUND: 'To drown' = *dominer, faire taire, imposer silence à*; 'loud above all this tumult' = *dominant tout ce tumulte (vacarme)*; 'an unaccustomed sound' = *un bruit insolite*; 'a faint sound' = *un faible bruit*; 'sound (distant) as of the Ocean' = *la rumeur*; (of waves) 'roar', 'booming' = *grondement*; 'of cannon' (or church bell) = *la voix*; 'reverberate' = *se répercuter*; 'to ring' (of a bell) = *sonner, tinter*; (of a brook) *gazouiller, murmurer; le glouglou*; 'rustle' (of leaves) = *bruissement*, verb *bruire*; 'A sound broke in on the silence' = *vint rompre le silence*; 'quiet' = *tranquille, paisible*.

VOICE: 'In a low voice' = *à voix basse*; 'a little hoarsely' = *d'une voix un peu rauque*; 'said a few kind words to him' = *lui adressa quelques mots aimables*; 'say a few words' = *prononcer quelques paroles*; 'deliver a speech' = *prononcer un discours*; 'he whispered in my ear that...' = *il me dit (chuchota) à l'oreille que...*; 'to shriek' = *pousser des cris perçants*.