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Jean-Jacques Rousseau



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Among the notable books of later times-we may say, without exaggeration, of all timemust be reckoned The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau. It deals with leading personages and transactions of a momentous epoch, when absolutism and feudalism were rallying for their last struggle against the modern spirit, chiefly represented by Voltaire, the Encyclopedists, and Rousseau himself a struggle to which, after many fierce intestine quarrels and sanguinary wars throughout Europe and America, has succeeded the prevalence of those more tolerant and rational principles by which the statesmen of our own day are actuated. On these matters, however, it is not our province to enlarge; nor is it necessary to furnish any detailed account of our author's political, religious, and philosophic axioms and systems, his paradoxes and his errors in logic: these have been so long and so exhaustively disputed over by contending factions that little is left for even the most assiduous gleaner in the field. The inquirer will find, in Mr. John Money's excellent work, the opinions of Rousseau reviewed succinctly and impartially. The 'Contrat Social',

the 'L'atres Ecrites de la Montagne', and other treatises that once aroused fierce controversy, may therefore be left in the repose to which they have long been consigned, so far as the mass of mankind is concerned, though they must always form part of the library of the politician and the historian. One prefers to turn to the man Rousseau as he paints himself in the remarkable work before us. That the task which he undertook in offering to show himself as Persius puts it 'Intus et in cute', to posterity, exceeded his powers, is a trite criticism; like all human enterprises, his purpose was only imperfectly fulfilled; but this circumstance in no way lessens the attractive qualities of his book, not only for the student of history or psychology, but for the intelligent man of the world. Its startling frankness gives it a peculiar interest wanting in most other autobiographies. Many censors have elected to sit in judgment on the failings of this strangely constituted being, and some have pronounced upon him very severe sentences. Let it be said once for all that his faults and mistakes were generally due to causes over which he had but little control, such as a defective education, a too acute sensitiveness, which engendered suspicion of his fellows, irresolution, an overstrained sense of honour and independence, and an obstinate refusal to take advice from those who really wished to befriend him; nor should it be forgotten that he was afflicted during the greater part of his life with an incurable disease

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