

The journal of
**JULES
RENARD**



Edited & Translated by
LOUISE BOGAN & ELIZABETH ROGET

 **Tin House Books**
Portland, Oregon & Brooklyn, New York

Originally published in France under the title *Journal* by Jules Renard

This translation was first published in the United States by George Braziller, Inc., 1964.

Tin House Books edition copyright © 2008, 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information, contact Tin House Books, 2617 NW Thurman St., Portland, OR 97210.

Published by Tin House Books, Portland, Oregon and Brooklyn, New York

Distributed by W. W. Norton and Company.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Renard, Jules, 1864-1910.

[Journal. English]

The Journal of Jules Renard / edited and translated by Louise Bogan and Elizabeth Roget.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-9794198-7-4 (alk. paper)

1. Renard, Jules, 1864-1910--Diaries. 2. Authors, French--19th century--Diaries. 3. Authors, French--20th century--Diaries. I. Bogan, Louise, 1897-1970. II. Roget, Elizabeth. III. Title.

PQ2635.E48Z4613 2008

840.1--dc22

2008019921

ISBN 10: 0-9794198-7-5

Interior design by Laura Shaw Design, Inc. and Diane Chonette

Printed in the USA

www.tinhouse.com

Contents

PREFACE—Louise Bogan	9
BEFORE 1887—Elizabeth Roget	13
1887	17
<i>It astounds us to come upon other egoists, as though we alone had the right to be selfish, and be filled with the eagerness to live.</i>	
1888	21
<i>In order to do certain crazy things, it is necessary to behave like a coachman who has let go of the reins and fallen asleep.</i>	
1889	24
<i>I can't get around this dilemma: I have a horror of troubles, but they whip me up, they make me talented. Peace and well-being, on the contrary, paralyze me. Either be a nobody, or everlastingly plagued.</i>	
1890	36
<i>I'm intelligent, more intelligent than many others. This is obvious, since I can read The Temptation of Saint Anthony without falling asleep. But this intelligence is like water running, unknown, unused, in some region where no one has as yet built a mill. Yes, that is it: I have not yet found my mill. Shall I ever find it?</i>	
1891	42
<i>[André Gide] is clean-shaven, has a cold in the nose and throat, an exaggerated jaw, eyes between two welts. He is in love with Oscar Wilde, whose photograph I perceive on the mantel: a fleshy gentleman, very refined, also clean-shaven, who has recently been discovered.</i>	

1892

49

At the café, [Verlaine] is addressed as "Maitre" and "cher Maitre", but he is worried, and wants to know what they did with his hat. He looks like a drunken god. All that is left of him is our cult. Above clothes in ruins—a yellow tie, an overcoat that must stick to his flesh in several places—a head out of building stone in process of demolition.

1893

58

Whenever I have talked to anyone at too great length, I am like a man who has drunk too much, and, ashamed, doesn't know where to put himself.

1894

66

[Lautrec] often mentions small men, while seeming to say: "And I'm not as small as all that!" He has a room in a "house", is on good terms with all the ladies, who have feelings of a fineness unknown to honest women, and who pose admirably. He also owns a convent, and he goes from the convent to the "house".

1895

77

I desire nothing from the past. I do not count on the future. The present is enough for me. I am a happy man, for I have renounced happiness.

1896

89

Sarah Bernhardt. When she comes down the winding staircase of the hotel, it looks as though she was standing still, while the staircase turns around her.

1897

104

"I have a hundred clippings," I say, "testifying to the success of Plaisir de Rompre." Why do I say a hundred, when I know quite well there are not over seventy?

1898

123

I turn home, my heart filled with anguish because I have watched the sun set and heard the birds sing, and because I shall have had so few days on this earth I love, and there are so many dead before me.

1899

133

I am not content with intermittent life: I must have life at each instant.

- 1900 142
I, I, not an enthusiast? A few notes of music, the sound of flowing water, the wind in the leaves, and my poor heart runs over with tears, with real tears—yes, yes!
- 1901 155
We no longer know what love is. The thing itself is lost, drowned in a verbal deluge. It is impossible to come through to reality, which should be simple and clear.
- 1902 167
As long as thinkers cannot tell me what life and death are, I shall not give a good goddamn for their thoughts.
- 1903 176
You say I am an atheist, because we do not search for God in the same manner; or rather, you believe you have found Him. I congratulate you. I am still searching for Him. I shall search for Him ten, twenty years, if He lends me life.
- 1904 192
How quickly one could lose one's head! Any moment, there is nothing between us and death but the paper hoop of the clown. It should not be too difficult to jump through! We would not reappear, that is all.
- 1905 212
In order to work, you clear away the obligations in your life. No visits, no meals on the outside, no fencing or promenades. You will be able to work, to do fine things—and, on that wide gray sheet that is a day, your mind projects nothing.
- 1906 229
If I were to begin life again, I should want it as it was. I would only open my eyes a little more. I did not see properly, and I did not see everything in that little universe in which I was feeling my way.
- 1907 253
. . . one does not grow old. Where the heart is concerned, the fact is accepted, at least in matters of love. Well, it is the same with the mind. It always remains young. You do not understand life any more at forty than you did at twenty, but you are aware of this fact, and you admit it. To admit it is to remain young.

1908

267

Books have lost their savor. They no longer teach me anything. It is as though one were to suggest to a painter that he copy a painting. O nature! There is only you left.

1909

283

I can no longer walk from one end of the Tuileries to the other. I am obliged to sit down and give two sous to the old women who sell lilies of the valley.

1910

298

I don't understand life at all, but I don't say it is impossible that God may understand it a little.

Index of Proper Names

301

Preface

“Je lis avec ravissement le *Journal* de Jules Renard . . .
Il y a là, par moments, de l'excellent, du parfait; et parfois même, ô
surprise, de l'attendri . . .”

—André Gide, *Journal* (March 1927)

It is difficult to discover, given Jules Renard's steadily augmented reputation in France and elsewhere since his death in 1910, the reasons for the almost total neglect of his work in England and America. His chief fame in English-speaking countries came to be attached to the motion picture, released in the early thirties, based on *Poil de Carotte*, the extraordinary autobiographical *récit* first published in 1894 and later made into a one-act play by Renard in 1900. In France, his early novel, *L'Écornifleur* (1892), is considered one of the great novels of the nineteenth century. His *Journal*, published in definitive form in 1935, was reissued in 1960 in the format of the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*—a series remarkable for its finely-produced editions of French classical literature. Critical praise of a high order has been tendered the author over the years. Albert Thibaudet in 1927 named Renard's *Journal inédit*, along with Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*, as incontestably the two autobiographical masterpieces of the twentieth century.

Renard never in any manner attached himself to that avant-garde which was in process of formation in Paris in all the arts during his lifetime, and this separation from movements which were about to gather to themselves the most striking talents of the new century may

well have kept his reputation apart from the mainstream of influence. Renard wrote plays for the theatres of the boulevards. He became a member of the Académie Goncourt, but was never closely in touch with the experimental or the extreme. Although he knew and liked Toulouse-Lautrec (who was to illustrate his *Histoires naturelles*), he took no interest when Maurice Ravel set parts of this most charming bestiary to music, not even to the extent of attending a first concert presentation.

It is one of Renard's central virtues that his mind and emotions continued to be refreshed by the air of his countryside—especially during the years—when he, like his father before him, became mayor of Chitry.

The keeping of a journal may become a futile and time-wasting occupation for a writer. Temptations toward the inconsequential detail, the vaporous idea and the self-regarding emotion are always present and can become overwhelming. Renard's *Journal*, from its beginning, shows a young writer who is consciously moving away from early mistakes, whose goal is cleanness of style and precision of language. We do not see him as an innovator, but as one who made restitution of certain classically severe effects which the French Romantics in their exuberance, and the Symbolists in their search for the extremes of musicality, had overlooked or ignored. It is possible, in the pages of the *Journal*, to watch Renard training himself, "independent of schools . . . how to reproduce in compressed and resistant [prose] life completely pure and completely simple"—his life and the life of others.

The atmosphere of the period was hardly propitious for this sort of truth-telling, or this sort of style. The great days of Symbolism were over—Mallarmé had died in 1898—and the central figures of the modern revolt in all the arts were still too young to have made their mark. A tired exoticism afflicted academic and "official" art, and poetry (no matter how feeble)—not prose—gave entrance to the *salons*. Renard's early apprenticeship writing reflects this atmosphere. But

by 1890, when he was twenty-six, he had begun to put his youthful affectations and artificialities behind him for good; the *Journal*, from its first pages, abounds in mockery of the false, the half-observed, and the grandiose.

Renard's passion for factual truth and stylistic exactitude, once formed, remained central to his work throughout his career. This pre-occupation never hardened into obsession; one of the great pleasures of reading Renard is the certainty, soon felt by the reader, that nothing is being put down in meanness or malice. The shadow of the small boy who had suffered bitterly because of the obsessions of his parents—his father's mutism, his mother's hypocrisy—always falls across the page. But Renard, in speaking difficult and shocking truths concerning Mme. Lepic (the name given to the mother of *Poil de Carotte* was carried over, in the *Journal*, to denote his own mother), does not hesitate to tell equally shocking truths about her red-headed son. Hard facts concerning family relationships were not usual in end-of-the-century writing. And Renard, in the *Journal*, presents the erotic elements in the son-mother relationship with extraordinary frankness—a frankness he shares with Stendhal (in *Henri Brulard*) before him, and with the Proust who is to come.

Truth about life, in Renard's view, had been distorted by literature. He applied himself to correct that distortion, not by the crass realism of Zola, but by an analysis based on sympathy, warmth, and tenderness. The peasants of his countryside were as important to him as his Parisian colleagues; they were his friends and his neighbors; even the dullest of his servants was not separated from his affection and attention. Animals were his familiars; he visited the Paris zoo regularly with enthusiastic interest, and he knew and felt for the wild and tame creatures of field and barnyard. The *Journal* celebrates the mystery, strangeness and beauty of bird and beast, seen without romantic coloring within their natural scene.

The final impression received from the *Journal* is one of delicacy backed up by power—power of character and power of intellect. Again and again those moments of insight appear which can only

stem from absolute honesty of perception added to complete largeness of spirit. At these moments we understand why Renard's compatriots have not hesitated, some fifty years after his death, to name him among the masters.

The *Journal*, spanning twenty-four years, is a very long book. In its latest edition, the compact volume put out by the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* in 1960, it runs to 1267 pages. In making a selection that would place the writer and his preoccupations before the American reader, we have necessarily had to leave out, not only a large body of "writer's notes," but whole topics—such as Jules Renard's periods of service in the army; his accounts of the many literary banquets for which the period was famous; his espousal of the cause of Dreyfus (for he was an impassioned *dreyfusard*, and backed Zola with enthusiasm and indignation); his near-discipleship of the celebrated Socialist leader, Jean Jaurès; and his adoption—which appears more romantic than practical—of socialism. There are also a number of entries that are too topical to be of interest in this country and this time.

We have tried to establish, by the very things left out, a sort of continuity. In the texts we have chosen, the pleasures are many. There are, always, the single descriptive phrases, usually centered around an image that is at once poetic and piercingly exact; the insights into people and situations; the sketches of "his country" (one wishes he had done the same for Paris); the literary comment. Among the "threads" that run through the years we see the life of the writer as a man of letters, both in what it meant to him personally and in its aspect of worldly success—the *gloire* he always longed for but never quite achieved. We have his family life, especially the strange interrelationships of his parents and himself; we have the Paris friends, the big names—Sarah Bernhardt, Edmond Rostand, Lucien Guitry; and the country people to whom he always returned. As Léon Guichard wrote: "The *Journal* is a mine of inexhaustible riches." We have tried to extract its core.

—LOUISE BOGAN

Before 1887

A bronze bust of Jules Renard stands in the village of Chitry, some one hundred forty miles south of Paris. This was not, however, his birthplace. He was born, in 1864, at Châlons-sur-Mayenne, where his father was in charge of certain construction operations. But the elder Renard's place of origin was Chitry, and he brought his family back to it while his youngest son, on whose life and work the region was to exert so deep an influence, was still in his infancy. M. Renard *père* was shortly elected mayor of the village, apparently for life.

The future writer's childhood was a disaster. He had an older sister, Amélie, and an older brother, Maurice, mentioned at some length in the *Journal*. M. Renard, embittered by the death of a first-born daughter he had deeply loved, paid little attention to his other children. He was taciturn, violently *anticlérical*, rigidly honest. Mme. Renard was a bigot, and a compulsive talker and fibber. Shortly after the birth of her youngest son, her husband ceased speaking to her, and he never spoke to her again. Whether because of this coincidence or for some other reason, she came to vent all her frustration, resentment, and humiliation on this last child. Jules Renard later described his bitter childhood—from which he never entirely recovered—in a number of short pieces that were first published in different periodicals and then collected under the title *Poil de Carotte* ("Carrot-top"—he was a redhead). The bleak boarding school in Nevers to which he and his brother were sent became a haven to him, a place of refuge from his family.

When he was seventeen, his father, at the instance of his school principal, sent him to Paris to study rhetoric at the Lycée Charlemagne and to obtain his *baccalauréat*. He was to become a teacher. By the

time he was nineteen he had given up this idea. His father was sending him a small allowance. For the next few years—interrupted by a year's military service—he lived on that, supplemented rather painfully by odd clerking and tutoring jobs. He ghost-wrote a book on furniture. Meanwhile, he kept on writing short stories, only one of which was published—unpaid—at the time. He frequented literary cafés and certain newspaper milieux. All young men aspiring to a name in letters wrote poetry, and young Renard managed to publish, at his own expense, a collection of fairly banal verse, which he called *Les Roses*.

He was a country boy. His accent was not quite the accent of Paris, and his features were rough-hewn, but he was ambitious, and already wore the top hat and carried the elegant walking stick of the *boulevardier* he was to become. He must have had more than ordinary attractiveness, because, although he was penniless, his amie was a young actress of the Comédie Française, who tirelessly recited his poems in *salons*. (His inevitable break with her became, nine years later, the subject of his first and highly successful play, *Le Plaisir de Rompre*). He was also enthusiastically received in the homes of rich bourgeois reaching out for culture—a situation he later described in his novel *L'Écornifleur*—“The Sponger” (1892).

He was desperately trying to find a stable situation, of almost any nature, and was even considering, much against his inclination, a post of schoolteacher in Algeria, when he met Mlle Marie Morneau. Her antecedents were undistinguished, but she was seventeen, pretty, and, by all accounts—not only Jules Renard's—gifted with a disposition almost Biblical in its selflessness. She, too, must have felt the attractiveness of the young Renard, for she not only married him, but brought him as part of her *dot* a narrow house on the Rue du Rocher, which became their Paris home, and a personal fortune of 300,000 francs.

Jules Renard continued for a while his part-time tutoring and other odd jobs, but he could from now on give himself over to finding his footing as an *homme de lettres*.

He began keeping the *Journal* in 1887, a year before he married. Where events of interest were left out of his entries—and at first the *Journal* was really a writer's notebook—we have indicated them in a note at the beginning of the year in which they occurred.

—ELIZABETH ROGET

1887

It astounds us to come upon other egoists, as though we alone had the right to be selfish, and be filled with eagerness to live.

Jules Renard began his *Journal* this year, at the age of twenty-three.



The heavy sentence—as though weighted with electric fluids—of Baudelaire.

A bird enveloped in mist, as though bringing with it fragments of cloud torn with its beak.

Talent is a question of quantity. Talent does not write one page: it writes three hundred. No novel exists which an ordinary intelligence could not conceive; there is no sentence, no matter how lovely, that a beginner could not construct. What remains is to pick up the pen, to rule the paper, patiently to fill it up. The strong do not hesitate. They settle down, they sweat, they go on to the end. They exhaust the ink, they use up the paper. This is the only difference between men of talent and cowards who will never make a start. In literature, there are only oxen. The biggest ones are the geniuses—the ones who toll eighteen hours a day without tiring. Fame is a constant effort.

AUGUST

Sea foam. The tide seems to burst, like a muffled, distant explosion of which we should be seeing only the smoke.

SEPTEMBER

The true artist will write in, as it were, small leaps, on a hundred subjects that surge unawares into his mind. In this way, nothing is forced. Everything has an unwilling, natural charm. One does not provoke: one waits.

A scrupulous inexactness.

OCTOBER

Haughty, silent faces should not deceive us: these are the timid ones.

I have an almost incessant need of speaking evil of others; but no interest at all in doing evil to them.

It is a fascinating task to disentangle, in a young writer, the influences of the established ones. How hard we work before we help ourselves, quite simply, to our own originality!

How odd is the world of dreams! Thoughts, inner speech crowd and swarm—a little world hastening to live before the awakening that is its end, its particular death.

We often wish we could exchange our natural family for a literary one of our choice, in order that we might call the author of a moving page “brother.”

On waking from a tender dream, we strive to go to sleep again in order to continue it, but we try in vain to seize its outlines as they disappear, like the folds of a beloved woman’s dress, behind a curtain we cannot brush aside.

NOVEMBER

To lie watching one's mind, pen raised, ready to spear the smallest thought that may come out.

It astounds us to come upon other egoists, as though we alone had the right to be selfish, and be filled with eagerness to live.

Fresh, transparent air, in which the light looks washed, as though it had been dipped in clear water and then, like pieces of fine gauze, hung out to dry.

A style that's vertical, glittering, without seams.

Sometimes everything around me seems so diffuse, so tremulous, so little solid, that I imagine this world to be only the mirage of a world to come: its projection. We seem to be still far from the forest; and even though the great trees already cast their shadow over us, we still have a long journey to make before we walk under their branches.

It is in the heart of the city that one writes the most inspired pages about the country.

DECEMBER

Fingers knotty as a chicken's neck.

The chatting of the chairs, lined up before the guests arrive on a reception day.

Work thinks; laziness muses.

She has a very mean way of being kind.

In the goodness of things, the sea-shell is related to the stone.

1888

In order to do certain crazy things, it is necessary to behave like a coachman who has let go of the reins and fallen asleep.

JR marries Marie Morneau (Marinette in the *Journal*). He publishes, at his own expense, *Crime de Village*, a collection of short stories dedicated to his father.



AUGUST

In the woods, after lunch. We sit under a pine, above a rivulet running in the bark of a tree. A few bottles cooling in the water. Twigs dipping into it as though from thirst. The water rushes along, white with a few clear pools, so cold they almost hurt. My fat baby leans over my shoulder to see what I am writing. I kiss her, and it's delicious.

Nothing more boring than Gautier's portraits. The face is delineated feature by feature, with minute, encumbering details. Nothing of all this remains in the mind. Here is an error in this great writer, into which the modern school is careful not to fall. We depict with one precise word which makes an image, and no longer spend our time at microscopic surveys.

One morning, D. came to see me and said: "If you like, we'll buy two deal tables and each get a velvet skull cap, and then we'll start an Institution."

OCTOBER

Received a letter from my father that saddened me. Nothing about *Crime de Village*; not a word. Another vanity I shall have to get rid of.

He made a poem and began it thus: "Muse, tell me nothing! Keep quiet, Muse!"

NOVEMBER

Words are the small change of thought. Certain talkers pay us in ten-sou bits. Others, on the other hand, give out only gold pieces.

A thought written down is dead. It was alive. It lives no longer. It was a flower. Writing it down has made it artificial, that is to say, immutable.

Sometimes conversation dies out like a lamp. You turn up the wick. A few ideas bring out another gleam, but, decidedly, there is no oil left.

The poet should do more than dream: he should observe. I am convinced it is through observation that poetry must renew itself. It demands a transformation analogous to that which has taken place in the novel. Who would believe that an ancient mythology still oppresses us! What point is there to sing that the tree is inhabited by a faun? It is inhabited by itself. The tree lives: it is that fact which must be believed. A plant has a soul. A leaf is not what vain man thinks it is. We often talk of dead leaves, but we don't really believe that they die. What is the point of creating life outside of life? Fauns, you have had your day: the poet now wants to talk to the tree.

In order to do certain crazy things, it is necessary to behave like a coachman who has let go of the reins and fallen asleep.

How many people, after deciding to commit suicide, have been satisfied with tearing up their photograph!

1889

*I can't get around this dilemma: I have a horror of troubles,
but they whip me up, they make me talented. Peace and
well-being, on the contrary, paralyze me. Either be a
nobody, or everlastingly plagued.*

JR's son, Jean-François, is born in Chitry. In November JR and nine others collaborate in founding the literary review, *Mercure de France*, originally named *La Pléiade*, the first issue of which appears December 25. Many of JR's short stories are to be published in this review.



JANUARY—*Chitry*

One thing has always astounded me: the universal admiration of the élite of the world of letters for Heinrich Heine. I must admit I can make nothing of this German who—a big mistake—tried to pose for French. His “Intermezzo” seems to me the work of a beginner attempting to do something poetic.

What must the life of a justice of the peace be like among the peasants, who pull him in all directions with their inexhaustible pig-headedness! They catch him even on the street. But the surest way, it seems, of getting at the truth with one of them is to say: “Will you take an oath on it?” This frightens the man. Awed, he hesitates. For all his slyness, he feels put off. He has a mind to lie, but would like to do it some other way. A Christ on the cross impresses him more than any amount of reasoning.

Once he has come home at night, the peasant possesses hardly more movement than a sloth. He is addicted to darkness, not only out of thrift, but out of preference. It rests his eyes, burnt by the sun. In the center of a circle of shadow, the stove roars through its little door, open like a red mouth.

A peasant must be twice sure of a fact before he will bet on it.

The mother has felt the first pains. The doctor is never called. One seldom has recourse to a midwife. Most often, a village woman presides at the lying-in. She knows herbs, and how to bind up a belly. While she performs, the others watch. It is an occasion for getting together. In order not to disturb the patient, they leave their wooden shoes near the door. Everything goes off well. The mother makes hardly more fuss than a cow.

The cradle must not be bought beforehand: in the first place, it is unlucky. And then, if there is a mishap, what will you do with it? Only the bassinet part comes from the basket-maker. The rockers come from the carpenter. They are made out of pine and properly trued, and he suggests that a strip of leather be attached underneath to muffle the sound. The wicker is painted to keep out the bedbugs. There is discussion over the color. The choice falls upon an "Easter-egg red," easily obtained from onions.

Once the child is born, it is entirely swaddled up, even to the arms, which are bound down. All you see is its head, purple and puffy. Babies have been seen wearing three bonnets.

The grandmother knits near the stove, in list slippers: wooden shoes are always kept at a good distance from the slippers. She sits with crossed legs. Attached to her free-hanging foot, and coming from the rocking cradle, is a string consisting of a piece of real string, the edging off a dress, and a piece of faded braid.

The scholar generalizes, the artist individualizes.

The blackbird, that minuscule crow.

Men of nature, as they are called, do not spend much time talking about nature.

Poets of the decadent school—the *décadents*—are reproached for their obscurity. This is not a valid criticism. What is there to understand in a line of verse? Absolutely nothing. Poetry is not an exercise from the Latin. I love Lamartine, but the music of his verse satisfies me. One does not gain much by peering under the words. There is little enough to find there. And one cannot demand of music that it have meaning, much meaning. Lamartine and the *décadents* agree on this point. They only consider form. The *décadents* make a little more fuss about it, that is all.

It should be forbidden, under penalty of a fine or even imprisonment, for a modern writer to borrow similes from mythology, to talk of harps, of lyres, of muses, of swans. Storks might pass.

The ideal of calm exists in a sitting cat.

FEBRUARY

One can well believe that the eyes of the newborn, those eyes that do not see and into which one finds it difficult to look, contain a little of the abyss from which they come.

A simple man, a man who has the courage to have a legible signature.

MARCH

The mother-in-law.¹

“Yes, maman.”

“In the first place, I am not your mother, and I have no use for your fine manners.”

1 When he reread his *Journal* in 1906, JR added in the margin here: “It was this attitude toward my wife that made me write *Poil de Carotte*.”

She would forget to set a place at table for her daughter-in-law, or would give her a dirty fork, or, when wiping the table, would purposely leave crumbs in front of her. In an extremity, she would heap all the crumbs in front of her. No means of annoyance was too small.

She could be heard saying: "Ever since this stranger has come, nothing goes right any more." And this stranger was the wife of her son. Her rage was further inflamed by the affection the father-in-law showed for the young woman. When she had to pass by her, she would draw herself together, pressing her arms against her sides, and flatten herself against the wall as though afraid of being dirtied. She would heave great sighs, and declare that if grief really killed she'd be dead. She would even spit to express her disgust.

Sometimes she would direct her attacks on the couple as a whole. "Maurice and Amélie, now, *there* are happy people, who get along well. Not like certain others, who only put on a show."

She would stop a village woman in the hallway, next to her daughter-in-law's door, and spin out her troubles. "What do you expect? They are young," the woman would say, while avidly enjoying the gossip. "Ah! they will not always be young!" the mother-in-law would go on. "Youth passes. I, too, used to kiss my husband, but that's all finished. Go on! Death takes us all. Just let me see them in ten years, or even before."

Let's be fair. She had her changes of mood, and they were very touching.

"My dear, my lovely, what can I do for you? Never mind what I say: I am as fond of you as I am of my own daughter. Here, let me fill your basin. Let me do the heavy work. Your hands are too white for that."

Suddenly, her face would turn nasty:

"Am I a maid-of-all-work?"

And, in her bedroom, she would separate the photographs of her children from those of her daughter-in-law, would leave her isolated, abandoned, no doubt sorely vexed.

To read two pages of Taine's *L'Intelligence* and then go and hunt dandelions—there's a dream, and that is my life for the time being. I attend the bedding down of the thrushes, the retiring of the woodcocks, the going to sleep of the woods. All this makes me stupid. Fortunately, two pages of Taine pull me out of the mud, and I am in full fantasy, above the world, furiously pursuing the study of my self, of its decomposition, of our annihilation.

APRIL

All I have read, all I have thought, all my forced paradoxes, my hatred of the conventional, my contempt for the commonplace, do not prevent me from turning soft on the first day of spring, from looking for violets under the hedges, among the turds and the scraps of decayed paper; from playing with the village youngsters, giving close attention to lizards and yellow-robed butterflies, bringing home a little blue flower to my wife. Everlasting contradiction. Continual effort to get beyond stupidity, and inevitable backsliding. Happily!

To have a horror of the bourgeois is bourgeois.

MAY

This morning, seated on a bundle of wood, in full sun, among the long leaves of lilies of the valley, while our eyes searched for their still-closed buds, we talked of nothing but death and what would happen if one of us were to go. The sun blinded us; our whole being was drenched with the desire to live, and we found it charming to talk of this inevitable death while it was still far away. Ah, those we leave behind! Fantec, his hat on his ear like a tough character, slept, smiled, sucked his bottle. A few men, placing the trunks of young oaks on two pitchforks stuck in the ground by their handles, swiftly divested

them of their bark, a bark that was living and full of sap, like a skin, and that then shrank together in a last contraction.

The spider glides on an invisible thread as though it were swimming in the air.

The friendship of a talented man of letters would be a great benefaction. It is a pity that those whose good graces we yearn for are always dead.

Today, Marie Pierry's cow calved. Marie, in tears, said: "I can't watch that. I'm getting out of here."

Then she'd come back. "Oh, the poor dear! The poor dear! There! She is dead! I can see she is dead. She'll never pull out of it!"

The cow lowed and heaved sighs. Lexandre, pulling at the calf's legs, pouted his lips at her: "There, my beauty!" Father Castel pressed: "Pull, children, pull!"

Everyone felt himself to be a mother, and when the cow, having produced her calf and drunk a bottle of sweetened wine, began licking the salt that had been sprinkled over the calf, everyone had tears in his eyes.

AUGUST

It's enough to throw you into despair: to read everything, and remember nothing! Because you do remember nothing. You may strain as much as you like: everything escapes. Here and there a few tatters remain, fragile as those puffs of smoke left over after a train has passed.

You can do what you like: until a certain age—I don't know what—there is no pleasure in talking to a woman you cannot imagine as a mistress.

SEPTEMBER—*Paris*

What do I want? La gloire! One man told me I had something in the belly. Another said I did things better and with less dirt than Maupassant . . . Still another . . . Is that supposed to be fame? No, men are too ugly, and I am as ugly as they. I do not like them; I can't care about what they think. Women, then? There was one, this evening, pretty, with a handsome bust, who said to me: "I read and reread *Crime de Village*." There is fame; I hold it in my hand. But this woman is a fool. She doesn't have an idea in her head. I should enjoy going to bed with her if she were deaf and dumb. If that were fame, there would be nothing left for me to do. And yet, proportions taken into account, that is all it is.

I can't get around this dilemma: I have a horror of troubles, but they whip me up, they make me talented. Peace and well-being, on the contrary, paralyze me. Either be a nobody, or everlastingly plagued. I must make a choice.

I prefer to be plagued. I am stating it.

I'll be properly annoyed when I am taken at my word.

I read novel upon novel, I stuff myself with them, inflate myself with them, I'm full up to my throat with them, in order that I may be disgusted with their commonplaces, their repetitions, their conventions, their systematic methods of procedure; and that I may do otherwise.

OCTOBER

In order to have an interesting head, he would carefully trim his hair every which way, with here and there a straight and protesting tuft to indicate the eccentricity of his thoughts and the boldness of his intentions.

You say, "I am vain," but you are especially vain of saying it.

Nothing is worse than the short stories of Balzac. The form is too small for him. Besides, when he had an *idea*, he made it into a novel.

This evening, memories are using my brain as a tambourine.

Papa has taken to wearing gloves like a young man. It is a vanity that has come to him late in life. If you were to ask him why, he would say that age is freezing the tips of his fingers.

NOVEMBER

We want to found a literary review. "Who will do the commentary?" each of us said. No one wanted to do the commentary. Someone suggested: "Let's take turns doing it."

In the end, it seemed that we all had some items of current comment in our pockets, ready to be delivered for the first issue . . .

Vallette, in his capacity of editor-publisher, embellishes his conversation with expressions such as: estimates, balances, incoming funds, accounts rendered.

Our scorn for money having been proclaimed loud and strong, we shall be enormously set up if the first issue brings in a profit of ten sous.

Last night, the 13th, first meeting of *La Pléiade* at the Café Français. There were some strange-looking characters. I thought we had done with long hair. It seemed as though I had come into a menagerie . . .

. . . [The legal standing of the periodical is discussed] . . . If there should be an attachment . . .

. . . Clearly, they had never owned anything subject to attachment. Still, an uneasiness had risen. The word was paralyzing. Each one saw himself seated on a bench in prison, surrounded by little baskets of food brought by friends.

. . . The danger of an attachment seemed to have been removed.

Valette, editor-in-chief, consulted a scrap of paper:

“First the name. Are we keeping the name of *La Pléiade*?”

I didn’t dare say it, but I found this starry title a little old-fashioned. Why not Scorpio or the Big Dipper? And groups of poets had already used that name—under Ptolemy Philadelphus, under Henry III and under Louis XIII. Nevertheless, the name was adopted.

And the color of the cover?

“Butter yellow.” “Mat white.” “Apple green.” “No! Like a horse I saw—dappled gray chestnut. No! No!”

Valette didn’t quite remember the horse he had seen.

“The color of tobacco with milk poured over it.”

“Shall we make the experiment?”

A bowl of milk was brought, but no one offered his tobacco to be wasted.

We began to go through the series of colors, but couldn’t find the right words. Verlaine should have been there. Without him we tried to make do with gestures, spread fingers, impressionistic attitudes, suspended movements, forefingers stabbing the air.

“And you, Renard?”

“Oh, I don’t care.”

I feigned indifference, but in truth I adore the green of certain magazines after they have been washed by the weather in the kiosques.

“And you, Court?”

“I side with the majority.”

“Everybody is siding with the majority. What is the majority for?”

It was concentrating on mauve. Mauve curtains are so pretty! And then the word rhymes with alcove, and the association of ideas brought a humid gleam to the eye of Aurier: perhaps he knows an elegant great lady.

Valette began again:

“On the back cover we will put (won’t we?) the titles of our published works.”

No one said a word.

“And of works to be published.”

Everyone tried to speak. Aurier: "*Le Vieux*;" Vallette: "*Babylas*" Dumur: "*Albert*." And the list grew longer, full of titles as though it were descended from the Crusades.

"And you, Renard?"

"I have no titles. But, as for copy, I have a lot of that!"

I seemed to imply that they had none. They looked at me sidewise.

"Now about the format," said Vallette. "Perhaps we should have started with that."

"Don't care." "Don't give a damn—"

"Excuse me," said Aurier. "We need air, and margins, wide margins. The text must be able to move about the paper."

"Yes, but that has to be paid for." "Oh!" "I request the format in 18vo so it will fit my bookcase . . ."

. . . "Now let's take a look at the contents. Everybody must contribute to the first issue."

"We'll be like sardines in a can."

The review was cut up into slices.

"I'll take ten. Yes, ten. I'll pay thirty francs for them."

We finally got lined up like passengers in a stage-coach. I was forgiven for not having any poetry to offer, because they were all contributing poetry.

"A frontispiece and tail-pieces, of course."

"Oh, yes, many tail-pieces to keep the poems separate, because they will follow upon each other's heels like customers at a box-office who are afraid they won't get in. And suppose they should become mixed up! . . ."

Vallette will write an article on *La Pléiade*. This approximately will be its gist: there are three reasons for founding a literary review. 1. To make money. We do not wish to make money—

We looked at each other. Who, here, would say that he wished to make money? No one. A happy situation.

"Are we by chance *décadents*?"

"No! Not with Baju. He is a schoolteacher, you know."

"Too bad! The god Verlaine will not seat us on his right hand."

“Do we plan on clarity?”

“Yes, clarity.” “Entire clarity.” “Oh! entire clarity. Let’s not exaggerate. Let’s say *chiaroscuro*.”

“Bring only the top of your baskets,” Vallette said.

Samain, a young man of distinguished aspect, wearing stylish gloves, who so far had said nothing, being entirely taken up with sketching a fat woman’s bottom on the table, remarked:

“And we will give what’s underneath to *Le Figaro*.”

“Don’t knock *Le Figaro*. *Aurier* belongs to it.”

“So does *Randon*.” . . .

Unhappily, the question of monetary contributions came up. Vallette announced that he would put them down as they were called, but in pencil, so they could be erased at the first sign of regret. Renard, 30 francs; Dumur, 20; Vallette, 10; Raynaud, 10; Court, 5. It went on diminishing like a lizard’s tail. I wondered if it would end by someone contributing a button. Justly proud, by virtue of my 30 francs, I promptly conceived a high opinion of myself and of the Universe, and disdainfully neglected to say anything that might crush, under a pile of guarantees, the suspicions as to my solvency that must certainly have been springing up in the hearts of these men.

It was decided that we would meet the first and the last Friday of each month in some café on the decline, “to give it a boost”. It was decided that we would then pay two contributions at a time, because a review should be able to say “I exist”, and that is not as easy as Descartes thought.

The glasses were empty. Three lumps of sugar remained in a saucer. *Aurier* picked them up between his thumb and forefinger and offered them from afar. Heads moved from side to side. He did not insist, but placed them in the pocket of his Prince Albert. “It’s for my rabbits,” he said, parodying a joke by *Taupin*. For tomorrow’s breakfast, most likely.

From eleven o’clock until midnight, in silence, all braced themselves for the final moment. There was good reason: who would pick up the check? *Surmises*, sly and wordless, walked like spiders under

the benches. The thirty-franc capitalist owed himself the gesture, but preferred to remain owing it. One by one, the tarts left, this one alone, that one fiercely hanging onto the arm or the coattails of a man afflicted with the itch. The waiters began to make free with the property of the establishment, sitting on the tables and chairs. The cashier started adding up her till, and we were made painfully aware of the loud clinking of silver coins.

Noticing this, one of us, M. Samain, called a waiter and said:

“How much?”

“All the coffees?”

“No: one.”

“Forty centimes, monsieur.”

He gave him fifty centimes and stood up. Each man for himself and two sons for the waiter. Now there was a *man!*

[Quoted from Rivarol] “His ideas resemble the pile of glass panes in a glazier’s basket: separately clear, opaque when together.”

I am fond of people in the degree to which they furnish me with notes.

DECEMBER

That poignant sensation which makes you take hold of a sentence as though it were a weapon.