

Francois, Duc De La Rochefoucauld
Selections from *Moral Maxims*

Francois, Duc De La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680) was a French noble born in Paris. He entered the military and fought with distinction, gaining prominence at court. Later, he sided with a faction of nobles trying to overthrow the ruling power, known as the Fronde (rebellion), and took part in a siege of Paris. After the nobles' defeat, he retired to his country estate, but he was able to regain both his wealth and prominence under the absolutist rule of Louis XIV. He became a well-known man of letters in the salon society of Paris and is remembered today primarily for the *Maxims* (1665), a series of short, aphoristic comments on life and society. Translation by J. Willis Bund and J. Hain Friswell (1871).

Some emendations have been made by the editor.

6. Passion often renders the cleverest man a fool, and sometimes the most foolish man clever.
10. In the human heart there is a perpetual generation of passions; the ruin of one is almost always the foundation of another.
19. We all have sufficient strength to endure the misfortunes of others.
26. We can look at neither the sun nor death without blinking.
31. If we had no faults we should not take so much pleasure in noting those of others.
43. A man often believes himself a leader when he is led; while trying to reach one goal, his heart insensibly drags him towards another.
49. We are never so happy or so unhappy as we suppose.
64. Truth does less good in the world than its counterfeits do evil.
76. True love is like real ghosts; while every person speaks of it, few persons have seen it.
78. In the majority of men, the love of justice is simply the fear of suffering injustice.
83. What men call friendship is merely a partnership with a collection of reciprocal interests and an exchange of favors; it is but a trade in which self-love always expects to gain something.
102. The head is always the dupe of the heart.
105. A man who uses reason by accident is not a rational being. A man is only rational who understands it, distinguishes it, and tests it.
119. We become so accustomed to disguising ourselves to others that, at last, we become disguised to ourselves.

139. One of the reasons that we find so few persons rational and agreeable in conversation is that there is hardly a person who does not think more of what he wants to say than he does to what is being said. The clever and polite are content with only seeming attentive; we perceive in their mind and eyes that they are wandering from what is said and desire to return to what they want to say. Instead of considering that the worst way to persuade or please others is to try thus strongly to please ourselves, we should learn that to listen well and to answer well are some of the greatest charms we can have in conversation.

146. Generally, we only praise others in order to be praised ourselves.

155. Some people with great abilities only disgust us, while others please us even with their faults.

168. However deceitful hope may be, she carries us on pleasantly to the end of life.

201. He who thinks he can do without the world greatly deceives himself, but he who thinks that the world can do without him deceives himself yet more.

211. There are people who are like popular songs, praised only for a time.

218. Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue.

249. There is no less eloquence in the voice, in the eyes, and in the tone of a speaker than in his choice of words.

256. In all professions we play a part and appear what we wish to be; thus the world is composed of actors.

259. The pleasure of love is in loving; we are happier in the passion we feel than in the passion we inspire.

304. We may forgive those who bore us; we cannot forgive those whom we bore.

326. Ridicule dishonors more than dishonor itself.

327. We admit to small faults to persuade others that we have no great ones.

347. We hardly find any persons of good sense, except for those who agree with us.

375. Ordinary minds commonly condemn what is beyond their grasp.

391. Fortune appears most blind to those she has never favored.

422. Our passions cause us to commit mistakes, but only love makes us foolish.

442. We make virtues of the vices we do not want to correct.

445. Weakness is more hostile to virtue than vice.

458. Our enemies' opinions of us are nearer the truth than our opinion of ourselves.

475. The desire to be pitied or admired is often the most important reason we confide in others.

496. Quarrels would not last long if the fault was only on one side.

Topics for Writing and Discussion

1. Take any one of La Rochefoucauld's Maxims, treat it as a thesis statement, and write a short essay expanding it with description, example, analysis—any of the modes of development that seem appropriate.
2. Using one of the Maxims as a model, create your own maxim and then expand it into a short essay.