

JEAN MASSIEU [Concluded]

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JEAN MASSIEU.

BY LAURENT CLERC.

[*Concluded from page 89.*]

[At the end of the second volume of "the Theory of Signs" by the Abbè Sicard, we find a notice of the infancy of Massieu by Madam Victoria Clo, a French protestant lady of great intelligence and much sensibility, who, in early youth, was married to Mr. Clo, a rich Italian catholic gentleman, resident at Paris. Although they were the children of parents of a different creed, yet they lived very happily together, and as far as I know, never tried to persuade one another to change their religion. Had they, however, ever made the attempt, it is not probable that they would have succeeded, as they each held fast to the faith of their parents through life. They had their dwelling in the neighborhood of the Institution for the deaf and dumb. Of course, they had frequent opportunity to come and see the Abbè Sicard and his pupils; but though they had free access to the school-rooms, they had not much chance of becoming familiar with the method of teaching. Madam Clo, especially, persisted in believing that everything was material in the Abbè Sicard's mode of instruction, and that, consequently, there was no means of making the deaf and dumb acquainted with the rules of grammar, much less with the laws of Syntax, without which it would be absolutely impossible for those unfortunate beings to express their own thoughts, or to comprehend those of others. She wished therefore, to ascertain how the teacher could supply this deficiency; how he surmounted the obstacles which were incessantly opposing the triumph of art over nature; how he succeeded in making his pupils comprehend abstract and strictly intellectual ideas. She was permitted to converse with Massieu, and by interrogating him on the value of words, to discover whether he had an exact notion of their value; whether he perceived their synonyms, if there were any; or whether he found no synonym, when there was none. It was not long before she was fully convinced of the reality of the success

obtained ; and she not only admired the Abbè Sicard, but also determined to make ample amends for her incredulity, by publishing the particulars of the childhood of his pupil Massieu, and the process of his education, together with his answers to her questions and to those of others. I remember many of these answers as I was present at the exhibitions where they were made. There are a great many others which I do not find in Madam Clo's notices, and which, however, are also worth mentioning ; among others, this :

“ Dieu raisonne-t-il ?

Non, répondit Massieu.

Comment, Dieu ne raisonne pas ? dit tout le monde. ?

Non, répète Massieu, et voici pourquoi.

On raisonne pour trouver la vérité ou pour la communiquer ; or Dieu ne raisonne pas pour trouver la vérité, puisqu'il est la vérité même ; il ne raisonne pas pour la communiquer, il l'inspire.”

“ Does God reason ?

No, answered Massieu.

How, God does not reason ? Does not every body say, he does ?

No, repeats Massieu, and I will tell you why.

We reason in order to discover the truth, or to communicate it ; now, God does not reason to find the truth, as he is the truth itself. He does not reason to communicate it, he inspires it.”

In effect, God who is only a Spirit, the eternal source of all spirits, independent of space, of motion and of time, conceives without effort, and does not need reasoning in order to think.

To conclude, the notice of Madam Clo of the infancy of Massieu, is so curious, that I dare say, it will be interesting to many of the readers of the Annals. It was translated from the French in 1820, and published in the “Elementary exercises for the pupils of the New York Institution ;” but the work is so little known, or at least, has been read by so few, that we have thought it worthy of a place on our pages.]

“ WHAT sensible person is not penetrated with the necessity of rendering homage to the paternal inspiration of that pious

philanthropist, who has restored to themselves the innocent victims of an error of nature. The beneficence of the Abbé de l' Epeé should command a sacred acknowledgment from public opinion, as well as from maternal tenderness. The modest attempts of this ecclesiastic, were so many triumphs over the painful efforts of his predecessors. His reason discarded their systems, and his heart created a language for the use of the deaf and dumb.

From that moment the mother believed she had obtained every thing; and pressing to her bosom the infant, from whom as yet, she only heard mournful sighs, she saw in him a messenger from heaven, who could console her in her misfortunes. The public came in crowds to the school of the celebrated instructor. He was applauded with transport; he was listened to with respectful silence, and he received the homage of all hearts, all ages and all sexes. The philosophic world conceived another ambition for the happiness of the deaf and dumb. They blessed the endeavors of that venerable man, whose only end was to initiate these unfortunate children into a knowledge of the secrets of heaven. They thought it useful to unite to this celestial science, that which would reveal to them the secrets of social relation; but time reserved this double prodigy for the successor of the first friend of the deaf and dumb. We do not mean to make a comparison between these two persons, whose zeal and talents have acquired them a permanent glory, and who will be placed in the same rank by the friends of humanity. Can we in fact say to which belongs the palm, when we cannot applaud the one, without cherishing the memory of the other?

Courageous and patient like a good father, the Abbé de l' Epeé goes to seek the deaf-mutes in the midst of that darkness in which we find them plunged. There, surrounded by obstacles, having uncertain chances before him, he extends to them the hand of succor. He is to them the first ray of light which is perceived by them upon the horizon of life. What son could hope from a father a greater mark of love? It is here that the renowned Abbé Sicard comes in his turn to seek the instructor, and render homage to his heroic philanthropy. Let every eye be turned towards him; let every sensible heart

surround him, and whilst we collect with tenderness what he has so wonderfully done, we have to regret the wonders that his zeal might have produced.

The virtuous instructor had not only to combat nature, but likewise his modest and religious fears; and whilst his first success presaged to him greater triumphs, his piety made him doubt the event. He could without pride undertake what he dare not even desire. In vain a new victory calls him; his scruples overcome the movements of his self-love, and limit such glorious work.

The courageous and sensible man whom Providence and the opinion of the public have named his successor, in daring to leap over the limits that a too scrupulous diffidence had too much respected, arrives at the method of enlightening the reason of the deaf-mutes. It is in the soul of his pupils that the Abbé Sicard arrests a paternal regard. It is there that he discovers the first elements of his method. It is not what he knows that he is in a hurry to teach them; as he made them his master in order afterwards to become theirs. Could he be mistaken and alarmed about the impressions which he received, if it was from them he borrowed the first rays of light with which he enlightens them? He identifies himself with their imperfections, and his observing mind never loses sight of them. He is seen constantly to follow them, step by step, in proportion as they advance towards that state of civilization, to which his wisdom gradually conducts them. He already knows their strength of mind, and the progress of which their intelligence is susceptible, when he is enabled without danger, to teach them what renders life dear, embellishes, honors or degrades it, and thus to restore them to society. From this moment deaf-mutes will no longer be strangers among men,* as

* A deaf-mute, born in Germany, and instructed after the method of the Abbé de l'Épée, in the institution founded at Vienna by Joseph II, afterwards entered that of Prague. Having learnt the art of engraving, he left that city to come to Paris, where he arrived in December. Here without acquaintances, and a very imperfect knowledge of his national language, and totally ignorant of the French, he stood in want of an individual with whom he could communicate. He could only find one amongst his brethren of misfortune; he went to the institution at Paris, and addressed himself to Clerc, a pupil of Sicard, and deaf and dumb

their benefactor has made them acquainted with the title which they have to the love of their fellow beings. Touching truth! which it is as sweet to reveal as to believe, and which egotism will not know how to abuse, as soon as the teacher makes his pupils feel all the dignity of man. Then struck with this great and sublime thought, they conceive the whole extent of the duties which society requires, and in which they have just taken their places. From this time, they know what of probity, generosity and industry they owe to it. Until that moment life was to them only a silent voyage, during which they only experienced an internal, secret and continual movement that no visible force can arrest, and whose whole mystery is in the power of an immortal soul. Until then they dragged out an existence without object or aim. The same ignorance, the same immobility described the circle of their long and useless days; a vague, inquiet and melancholy curiosity showed itself in their looks, whose gloom and dullness saddened the mother or the friend upon whom they were directed. But now behold them in contact with all the interests of life; every thing be-

from birth. He was an assistant teacher, like Massieu, to one of the classes of this school; a young man who unites to a strong mind, a fluency and grace in his style. An acquaintance is soon made. The stranger had now found a friend who could comprehend and pity him. His natural language not sufficing to obtain for him succor from other men, he wanted an interpreter who could translate his thoughts into the idioms of society. Young Clerc, who understood and wrote the French language well, offered this unfortunate young man to assist him as interpreter to the ambassador from the court of Vienna, to whom he wished to address himself. This arrangement made the pupil of Sicard inform his master of the steps he was about to take, in a note which we will here transcribe from the original.

“This young deaf-mute, without money and without friends, involved in debt occasioned by want of work, and threatened by his creditors, is going to have recourse to the bounty and generosity of his serene highness, the ambassador of Austria. He desires me to accompany him, not only as a guide, but to aid him in expressing his ideas. I am very happy to be able to assist him, as this is my day of liberty.”

The ambassador was absent; the deplorable situation of the deaf-mute demanded prompt assistance. Young Clerc, full of zeal and humanity, directs his steps to other places; he calls upon several engravers; by writing he makes known the object of his visit, and the talents of his unfortunate companion. He at last succeeds in getting him a place with an engraver, where by means of his daily work, he is enabled to provide for all his wants.

comes animated around them, useful in their imaginations, and active in their hearts; they are attracted in fine by every thing, and by that social physiognomy which awakens such sensations, and produces such ideas as bind and unite individuals and their minds together. They no longer interrogate in vain, and their answers correspond with their judgments, and the lights they have received. Surely we cannot doubt the happy results of an education inspired by their misfortune, when we observe them applying the advantages of their talents and labors, in which society and their families partake so largely.*

A language purely mechanical and made for the memory, would never produce such a miraculous regeneration; one was required which would speak to the human understanding. It will then be easily understood, that it is owing to this new creation of the theory of signs, that the master is able to complete his work, and the deaf and dumb pupil no longer to be a useless being upon the earth!

In order to appreciate the labors of these two benefactors of the deaf and dumb, we must compare their deplorable condition before instruction, with their state of existence after they have acquired an education. It is only by examining them in these two states, that we are enabled to believe in the success of their instruction, and to applaud it with enthusiasm.

It will be easy for our readers to be convinced of this, by some characteristic traits of the infancy of Massieu, that we owe to a man of letters what we have here related, and to which we will be permitted to add what we have ourselves collected concerning this deaf-mute. We can imagine then what loss it would have been for society, as well as for humanity, if this interesting being, who from his cradle, felt the necessity of extending his moral existence; who demanded in vain from the authors of his days, the God which he ought to adore, that worship he ought to render him, and in fine, the lights which nature had interdicted him; if say I, he had been condemned,

* Many deaf-mutes are employed in public offices, and in the printing office of the Institution, from which they receive the fruit of their daily labors for the support of themselves and their aged parents.

by chance, not to meet upon the earth him who could grant his prayers ?

“I had many communications with Massieu, our author tells us in his charming work (*La corbeille de fleurs.*) I was not able to avail myself of speech with him, as he would not have understood me, and I could not avail myself of his gestures, as I would not have comprehended them. It was with the pen that I put my questions, and with it he made his replies.”

“*Demand.* Do you love your father and mother ?

Response. Yes, very much.

D. How can you make them understand you ?

R. By signs.

“I concluded from these first answers, that the sentiment of filial love was no stranger to Massieu. Shortly after this conversation with him, I had a proof that this sentiment was one of those which predominated in his heart. His intelligence had given him an honorable standing in the institution among the deaf-mutes. The convention by a decree had given him an appointment.”

“As soon as M. L’Abbé Sicard had read this flattering decree to his pupil, the latter, transported with joy, expressed this thought by his gestures : *I am at length assured of the means of procuring bread for my aged mother.*”

“The Abbé Sicard wrote to me some time after, as follows :

“The acts of filial love never cost the least effort of his sensible and grateful heart. *To give to his parents is to repay them,* (said he to me one day.) This young man was only occupied with the wants of his mother. All that he receives as a tutor in the institution, he immediately gives to her, and he would have debarred himself the use of any part of it, if I had not called to his recollection that he had wants of his own, and and that he ought to reserve something to satisfy them. The first movement of his heart, when he received either his salary or a gift from persons who were enchanted by the justness and precision of his answers, was to say to me by signs, *this is for my poor mother.*”

“I longed to have more extended details of the infancy of Massieu. I asked him in writing one day, to give me the history of his early years ; he brought me very soon afterwards

the following morceau, which is entirely digested by himself."

"I was born at Semens, canton of St. Macaire, department of Gironde.

"My father died in the month of January, 1791; my mother is still alive.

"In my country we were six deaf-mutes in one paternal family, three boys and three girls.

"I remained at home till the age of thirteen years and nine months, to which time I had never received any instruction; I was in darkness as respects learning.

"I expressed my ideas by manual signs, or by gesture. The signs which served me then to express my ideas to my parents my brothers and sisters, were very different from those of instructed deaf-mutes. Strangers never comprehended us when we expressed our ideas by signs to them, but the neighbors did.

"I saw cattle, horses, asses, hogs, dogs, cats, vegetables, houses, fields and vineyards, and when I had seen all these objects, I remembered them well.

"Before my instruction, when I was a child, I neither knew how to read nor write. I had a desire to read and write. I often saw girls and boys who went to school; I desired to follow them, and I was very jealous of them.

"With tears in my eyes, I asked permission of my father to go to school; I took a book and opened it upside down, which was a mark of my ignorance; I put it under my arm as if to go, but my father refused the permission which I asked, by making to me signs, that I would never be able to learn, because I was a deaf-mute.

"Then I cried very loud. I again took the book to read it, but I neither knew letter, word, phrase, nor period. Full of grief I put my fingers in my ears, and impatiently required my father to cure me.

"He answered me that he had no remedies. Then I became disconsolate; I left my father's house and went to school, without telling my parents: I presented myself to the master, and demanded of him by signs, to teach me to write and to read. He refused me roughly, and pushed me from the school. That made me weep much, but it did not discourage me. I often

thought about writing and reading ; then I was twelve years old ; I attempted all alone to form with a pen, the signs for writing.

“ In my childhood my father had required me to offer up my prayers by signs, evening and morning. I fixed myself upon my knees ; I joined my hands and moved my lips, in imitation of those who speak when they pray to God.

“ Now I know there is a God who is the maker of heaven and of earth. In my infancy I adored the heavens, not God ; I did not see God, I saw the heavens.

“ I neither knew if I had been made, nor if I had made myself. I grew large ; but if I had never known my instructor, Sicard, my mind would never have grown as my body, for my mind was very poor ; in growing up I would have believed that the heaven was God.

“ Then the children of my age would not play with me ; they despised me ; I was like a dog.

“ I amused myself all alone to play with a mallet, a top, or to run upon stilts.

“ I was acquainted with numbers before my instruction ; my fingers had learned me them. I did not know them by figures ; I counted upon my fingers ; and when the number exceeded ten, I made notches upon a stick.

“ In my childhood, my parents sometimes made me guard the sheep, and often those who met me, touched with my situation, gave me some money.

“ One day a gentleman, (M. de Puymorin,) who passed by, took pity on me, and made me go to his house, and gave me food to eat and drink.

“ Having then set out for Bourdeaux, he spoke of me to M. Sicard, who consented to take charge of my education.

“ The gentleman wrote to my father, who showed me the letter, but I could not read it.

“ My parents and my neighbors told me what it contained. They informed me that I was going to Bourdeaux. They thought that I was going to be a cooper. My father informed me that it was to learn to read and write.

“ I set out with him for Bourdeaux. When we had ar-

rived, we made a visit to M. Abbé Sicard, and I found him very thin.

“I began by forming the letters with the fingers ; after many days I knew how to write some words.

“In the space of three months, I knew how to write many words ; in six months I could write some phrases ; in a year I wrote pretty well.

“In a year and some months I wrote better, and could answer some questions put to me.

“I was three years and six months with the Abbé Sicard, when I went with him to Paris.

“In the space of four years I became as a speaking being.

“I would have made greater progress, if a deaf-mute had not inspired me with great fear, which made me very unhappy.

“A deaf-mute, who had a friend a physician, told me that those who never had been sick from their infancy would never live to be old ; but those who had often been so would live to be very old.

“Recollecting then, that I had never been sick since my birth, I had a constant fear that I could not live to be old, and that I should never be thirty-five, forty, forty-five, nor fifty years old.

“My brothers and sisters, who had never been sick from the time of their birth, were dead. My other brothers and sisters who had been sick, were restored.

“From never having been sick, and the belief which followed it that I could not live to be old, I would have studied more ; I would have been very, very knowing as those who speak.

“If I had not known that deaf person, I would not have feared death, and I would always have been happy.”

“It appears astonishing that we can write to Massieu, and reason with him as with a man of the clearest understanding ; but this will not surprise us, when we know that Massieu is, perhaps, one of the profoundest men of the age. The plainness, the precision, the sublimity of some of his answers to questions the most unexpected, the most difficult, and the most abstract, will enable us to judge of the temper of his mind, and the sensibility of his heart.

“ I asked him one day before many persons : My dear Massieu, before your instruction, what did you believe of those who looked at each other, and moved their lips ?

“ I believed, he replied, that they *expressed their ideas*.

“ *D.* Why did you believe that ?

“ *R.* Because I had observed that when persons had spoken to my father concerning me, he threatened to punish me for what I had done.

“ *D.* You believed then, that the movement of the lips were a means of communicating ideas.

“ *R.* Yes.

“ *D.* Why did you not move your lips to communicate your own ideas.

“ *R.* Because I had never sufficiently noticed the lips of those who speak, and when I tried to speak they told me *my noise was bad*. As they told me that my misfortune was in my ears, I took some brandy and put it in my ears, and stopped them up with cotton.

“ *D.* Did you know what it was to hear ?

“ *R.* Yes.

“ *D.* How did you learn that ?

“ *R.* A relation who could hear, and lived in the house, told me that she saw with her ears, a person which she did not see with their eyes, when he came to see my father.

“ Persons who hear, see with their ears during the night, those who walk.

“ *The nocturnal walk* distinguishes persons and their names to those who hear.

“ We see by the style of these answers, that I have been under the necessity of copying and preserving them exactly, to transmit them to the public.”

Nothing, without doubt, is more interesting to know, than the early impressions of a deaf-mute from birth ; but how is this interest augmented, when it has for its object one of these unfortunates, who having arrived to a perfect state of civilization, contributes not only by his talents to the glory of his master, but even to the school, where his intellectual and moral faculties have been developed. Can we not recognize the man who is sensible of his own dignity, in this simple and natural

recital which the pupil of the Abbé Sicard has made himself, of the first sensations and chagrins which he has experienced? His vague reveries while guarding the flock entrusted to him; his tears for an ignorance, the consciousness of which he always carried about him; the inquiet and ambitious desire to overcome the insurmountable barrier which nature had placed between his reason and the lights which it implored, did they not all serve him as an impulse of that secret power which directs a man into an active existence? As for the rest, he appeared to us still more curious when we had taken notice of these particulars, and learned from himself what object presented itself to his view, and what sentiment occupied his mind, during the religious act which paternal piety exacted of him every morning. We knew him sufficiently to foresee the power that imagination ought to have upon his religious belief; which never being willing to interrogate in vain, dares to believe all to consecrate to his will, the enjoyments, the mysteries and the claims, and not fear to bring forth fables when the reality escapes him. It is thus in truth, that (Massieu) born with an ardent mind, and without any point of support in the moral world, this infant deaf-mute, curious to penetrate the secrets of that nature which animates and attracts his eyes under a thousand forms, embraces a chimera in the absence of truth. But we ought rather to pity than to accuse him, since in his error he furnishes us himself, a new proof of innate religion in the heart of man. The following is an abridged conversation which was held with him on this subject.

Of what did you think, we asked him, when your father made you fall upon your knees? Of heaven. With what intention did you make a prayer? In order to make it descend by night upon the earth, to the end that the vegetables which I had planted should grow, and that the sick should be restored to health. Was it these ideas, these words, and these sentiments, which compose your prayer? It was the heart that made it. I did not know at that time, either words or their meaning. What did you experience then in your heart? Joy, when I found that the plants and the fruits grew; pain, when I saw them injured by the hail, and that my parents still continued sick.

At these last words of his answer, Massieu made many signs which expressed his anger and threatening.

Is it thus you menace heaven, we demanded of him with astonishment? Yes. But with what motive? Because I thought I should never be able to reach to attack and destroy it, because it had caused all those disasters, and did not cure my parents. Were you not afraid to irritate, and that it would punish you? I did not then know my good master Sicard, and I was ignorant what heaven was; it was only a year after my education that I feared to be punished by it. Did you give a figure or form to this heaven? My father had shown me a large statue in the church in my country; it represented an old man with a long beard; he held a globe in his hand; I believed that he dwelt beyond the sun. Did you know who made the ox, the horse, &c.? No, but I had much curiosity to see them born; I often hid myself in the ditches to observe heaven descend upon the earth for the growth of beings; I wished very much to see it. What did you think when the Abbé Sicard made you form for the first time, words with the letters? I thought that the words were the images of the objects which I saw around me; I treasured them up in my memory with a living ardor; when I read the word of God, and had written it upon the black-board with a pencil, I looked at it very often for I believed that God caused death, and I feared it very much. What idea had you of it then? I thought that it was the cessation of motion, of sensation, of *eating*, of the tenderness of the skin and of the flesh. Why had you this idea? I had seen a dead body. Did you think you should always live? I believed that there was a celestial earth, and that the body was eternal.

We do not think it necessary to give here any further detail of the conversation with this pupil of the Abbé Sicard; it answers, as we have said, to make known the idea that he now has of the true God; his acknowledgment for that to which he owes so great a benefit, as to render homage himself to the education which has raised the thick veil that deprived him of so many consoling truths. It is without doubt, one of the conquests the most precious of this method, since he had to combat the errors so much cherished, as they arose from the first

inspirations of that innate sentiment of which we have spoken. We ought then, in order to complete this triumph, not to be alarmed at the sentiment which appeared to justify these errors, but to oppose with wisdom, the logic of truth to the seducing illusions of a disordered imagination. This success was reserved for an enlightened and pious instructor.

As many answers of this deaf-mute, so justly celebrated by his discoveries in the language of thought, have made a noise in the world, we will relate here, many which make better known his religious principles, and the justness of his thoughts, by adding what we have often observed, that if the question proposed does not offer a pointed interest, an answer is only obtained the most common, as would be that from an unlettered man; and that if we wish to find him such as his renown presents him, we must interrogate him upon subjects of a certain depth.

A person asked him one day in a public assembly, what difference he made between God and nature? This was his answer.

“God is the first Maker, the Creator of all things. The first beings were all drawn from his divine bosom. He has said to the first, *you shall be second*; his wishes are laws; these laws are nature.”

A woman of our acquaintance said to him one day, that she compared Providence to a good mother.

“The mother, said he, only takes care of her own children, whilst Providence takes care of all beings.”

These are the answers which he gave to the following questions.

What is virtue, God, and eternity?

“Virtue, said he, is the invisible, which holds the reins of the visible.”

“God is the necessary being, the sun of eternity, the clock-maker of nature, the mechanist of the universe, and the soul of the world.”

“Eternity is a day without a yesterday or to-morrow.”

We desired to know what he understood by a sense?

“A sense, said he, is an *idea carrier*.”

Some persons wishing to embarrass him, asked him what is hearing ?

“ It is the auricular sight.”

A few days ago we asked him if he made any distinction between a conqueror and a hero ? Without hesitation he wrote upon the slate as follows :

“ Arms and soldiers make the conqueror. Courage of the heart makes the hero. Julius Cæsar was the hero of the Romans. Napoleon is the hero of Europe.”

At a public exercise of 25th April, 1808, he was asked, what is hope ? and he immediately answered,

“ It is the flower of happiness.”

We will terminate by an answer which, though well known, appears to us to deserve a place in this notice.

His master asked him one day, what is gratitude ? He immediately answered, as if by inspiration,

“ Gratitude is the memory of the heart.”

A grand thought, and which could only come from the heart.

COURSE OF INSTRUCTION.

BY W. W. TURNER.

It was our original intention as the conductors of the “*American Annals*” to avoid all controversies of a personal nature and carefully to exclude attacks upon individuals under whatever pretence they might be made. At the same time we felt ourselves bound to publish the views of others on all matters pertaining to the deaf and dumb, although differing from our own views on the same subjects. By pursuing this course, we hoped to elicit much important truth on the one hand, and on the other to do equal justice to all, and give cause of complaint to none. We supposed we had succeeded in carrying out this original design in a manner satisfactory to all interested, until we received the communication from Dr. Peet of the New York Institution, published in the last number of the *Annals*. Nor have we yet been able to discover in what respect we have deviated from the