THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LA METTRIE AND PERTINENT MATERIALS.

BY ERNST BERGMANN.1

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.

THE April Monist contains a discussion on the mechanistic principle and publishes in this connection an exposition of La Mettrie's contention that man is a machine. At the same time the Open Court Publishing Company has brought out an edition of La Mettrie's book L'homme machine in both French and English, the English translation being, strange to say, the first that ever appeared of this remarkable book.2

Dr. Ernst Bergmann, of Leipsic, has recently published a meritorious book3 setting forth among other things the several phases of La Mettrie's discussion with his great antagonist Haller, known to his contemporaries better than to the present generation as both a poet and a prominent professor of physiology. His fame has waned, his verses are no longer read and his scientific accomplishments are placed in the background by the great strides which physiology has made since his day. Many know him only in the lines which Goethe dedicated to him in criticism of his pious agnosticism. Haller had the conviction that the core of everything was ultimately unknowable, and he expressed it in these words:

"Nature's within from mortal mind
Must ever lie concealed.
Thrice blessed e'en he to whom she has
Her outer shell revealed."—Tr. by P.C.

1 The translations of the chapters from Dr. Bergmann's book and of the additional matter from the French edition of La Mettrie have been made by Lydia G. Robinson.


3 Die Satiren des Herrn Maschine. Leipsic, Ernst Wiegandt, 1913.
To which Goethe replied:

"Nature's within from mortal mind,
Philistine, sayest thou,
Must ever lie concealed?
To me, my friend, and to my kind
Repeat this not. We trow
Where'er we are that we
Within must always be.

"Thrice blest e'en he to whom she has
Her outer shell revealed!
This saying sixty years I heard
Repeated o'er and o'er,
And in my soul I cursed the word,
Though secretly I swore.
Some thousand thousand times or more
Unto myself I witness bore:
Gladly gives Nature all her store,
She knows not kernel, knows not shell,
For she is all in one. But thou
Examine thou thine own self well
If thou art kernel or art shell."

—Tr. by P. C.

Goethe's criticism of Haller was mild in comparison to the onslaught of his radical enemy La Mettrie, who fought this pious pedant of Swiss birth with a weapon which the German professor could not handle, namely, the trenchant sarcasm of French wit. In the spirit of irony La Mettrie dedicated his book to Haller, as if Haller had been the originator of these materialistic principles, and the poor good Haller, not catching the full import of the satire, was very indignant at this misrepresentation of his views.

We here collect material which will be supplementary to the new edition of *Man a Machine*, consisting (1) of the preface written by the publisher of the first French edition which proves that according to his idea the publication of such an irreligious book was very hazardous; (2) La Mettrie's dedication of *L'homme machine* to Haller which does not appear in the new edition and has probably been omitted by the translator because it seemed unintelligible without historical explanation (which is here furnished by extracts from Dr. Bergmann's book *Die Satiren des Herrn Maschine*); (3) Dr. Bergmann's dedication of his book addressed to the spirit of La Mettrie in a style worthy of La Mettrie himself; (4) an article of Dr. Bergmann on "La Mettrie and his Mechanistic Theory," followed by (5) his account of the beginning of the La Mettrie-Haller controversy, and of (6) "La Mettrie's Personality." For reasons
of convenience so as to introduce the reader gradually into the complication of La Mettrie's satirical controversy with Haller we reverse the order and shall begin with Bergmann's essays and follow these with the preface of the Dutch publisher of La Mettrie's French edition, and the satirical dedication to Haller.

BERGMANN'S DEDICATION TO LA METTRIE'S SPIRIT.

My dear Mr. La Mettrie:

As you see, I have carefully collected and brought together into a booklet the mischievous little satires with which you made yourself troublesome to my countrymen now a century and a half ago. Do not let this fact too greatly startle you. The librarians of your own time, it is true, dropped these little volumes into the waste basket from their finger tips. This is why they are so rare. But to-day we are not living in the age of Louis XV. To-day we understand better how to appreciate things of this sort, and—we have a science of history. And if the results of this science do not always serve tangible purposes, it nevertheless affords us great pleasure to make unusual heads, such as you were, sir, stand out in high sculptured relief from the mediocrity of their contemporaries, and to take this opportunity to observe from our own height the many complicated paths up which you were then obliged to toil so painfully.

You have, my worthy Mr. Machine—for you yourself say this is your *nomen et omen*—treated our good German Leibnitzians with but little respect because they were not willing to waken quickly enough from their dogmatic noon-day nap. You aroused Messrs. Haller, Hollmann, Tralles, and all the rest of those *savantissimi et pedantissimi professores* rather roughly with your grotesque machine theory, and then all at once while they were still rubbing their eyes in amazement you served them with that *Antisceneca* in which it seems to me you were not so much engaged in discovering the truth as in having your own fun. To be sure the fright did not harm the worthy gentlemen in the least. They fell asleep again after you, sir. I am sorry to say, had left us so early, and they rested on the soft pillows of the three rational sciences for quite a while until a greater came who interrupted their sleep forever. But the affair has turned out quite badly for you, sir. History has outlawed your name and we are compelled to make the painful discovery that with all your brilliant gifts you have injured more than you have served the good cause of intellectual progress and civilization. Whoever lays his hands on the loftiest possessions of humanity which he regards as hollow, from him we
demand the peaceful objectivity of our Kant or the holy gravity of a Spinoza.

Meanwhile—time has overcome these antagonisms, and justice has been meted out to you, sir. And as the great king suffered it smilingly when you cast aside your periwig in his presence, and—you know you did!—unbuttoned your vest a little after dinner, because in other respects you were a good fellow and a jolly companion, so we too for the sake of your wit and your many lusty jokes and repartees will pardon you for introducing yourself into our literature in so unceremonious a fashion. Farewell, and may you mend your ways.

The Author.

Leipsic, October 21, 1912.

LA METTRIE AND HIS MECHANISTIC THEORY.

"None e'er comprehended
How soul and body wedded are and blended."
Faust II, Act II, Scene II.

It took one hundred years before the slowly stepping human race could catch up with the far-advanced genius of Spinoza. One hundred years have passed ere that lesser exile of the eighteenth century, the notorious author of L'homme machine, celebrated his resurrection before the face of history.

How nervously the metaphysicians of the academy stirred in their seats when on January 19, 1752, M. Darget read aloud to them the eulogy from the hand of the master ("de main de maître") in which the ill-famed atheist and materialist De la Mettrie was granted by the royal hand a pure heart and an obliging disposition! What loud applause came from all the benches one hundred years later when on the same spot Du Bois-Reymond applied to the bold much-slandered pioneer of civilization in the darkness of pre-Kantian dogmatism, the verse of Heine:

"Beat the drum and fear thee not,
Drum the people from their sleep,
Drum reveille in strength of youth,
Drumming, drumming march along!"^4

Truth can wait; it is unchanging.

Up to the sixties of the nineteenth century it was customary either entirely to pass by this most original of all the materialists

^4La.mettrie. An address delivered in the open meeting of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences held in memory of Frederick II, on January 28, 1875. Berlin, 1875. 23 pages.
in the history of philosophy and literature or to prejudice the originality of his teaching in a way quite contrary to truth by asserting that La Mettrie followed in the train of Diderot, 5 or to slander his name in the most insulting way together with the whole eighteenth century.

Among other writings, the histories of Hettner 6 in Germany and of Villemains 7 in France were characteristic of this last mode of procedure. Then in 1866 came the great deliverance ("Rettung") of Friedrich Albert Lange in his Geschichte des Materialismus, 8 the inspiring address of Du Bois-Reymond in the Berlin Academy (1872), the monographs of Jules Assézat, 9 Néree Quépat,10 and Picavet 11 in France, Poritzky 12 in Germany, the new edition of L’homme machine by Ritter, 13 etc. With what impartiality of judgment we of the 20th century are now able finally to judge the former scapegoat of materialism is shown by Max Brahn’s sensible introduction to his translation of L’homme machine. 14

To-day we know that La Mettrie is the earliest advocate of a whole series of thoroughly modern views in the realms of medicine, natural science, and philosophy. To select a few details, we remember his humane opinion that the criminal like the mentally diseased should first be put into the hands of the physician; 15 then too the doctrine of the localization of brain functions which he was the first to bring forward in an exact form; 16 and finally the circumstance that La Mettrie has anticipated in great detail Lange’s vasomotor theory of feeling as Rolf Lagerborg of Helsingfors 17 has pointed out, etc.

5 Thus still in 1896 in the fourth edition of a well-known history of philosophy, Diderot became converted to materialism in 1754. La Mettrie died in 1751. His main philosophical work appeared one year before Diderot’s Pensées philosophiques, 1745.

6 "La Mettrie is a bold libertine who sees in materialism only the justification of his profligacy." Even the fifth edition of 1894 is not just to La Mettrie.


13 Der Mensch eine Maschine. Leipsic, 1875.


15 Vigorously emphasized by Brahn on page 18.

16 To which Poritzsky refers on page 103.

17 In Das Gefühlsproblem, Leipsic, 1905, pp. 38 and 134 ff.
As a practising physician and a voluminous writer on medical subjects (1737 to 1745) the pupil and enthusiastic adorer of Boerhaave, the great reformer of medical science, disclosed a many-sided activity in fundamental studies and observations; as philosopher (1745 to 1751) in a consistent evolution of Boerhaave’s ideas including Cartesian and Spinozistic elements in anticipation of Didérot, Condillac, etc., he attained his peculiarly materialistic, mechanistic, and deterministic standpoint.

Averse to all systematic philosophizing and all rationalism he chose the experimental sciences, anatomy, physiology and pathology, in the very spirit of Boerhaave, to be his guide in the solution of the anthropological problem which formed the center of his philosophical reflections. As an anti-spiritualist, which he was most fond of calling himself, he contended with the same inconsiderate severity against those powerful temporizing and harmonizing attempts to explain the mutual relations between body and soul as well as against Cartesian dualism and the theory of innate ideas, in order to found his monism in the very spirit of Locke’s sensualism, “No sense, no ideas!”

Accordingly, in the important tenth chapter of his first work on “The Natural History of the Soul” (1745) he rejects rational psychology and the theory it advanced, without reference to experience, of one simple soul-substance whose existence can be thought of as independent of the body. Numerous anatomical and physiological experiments convinced him that psychical phenomena are directly dependent on the organic processes of the body, and that the soul is nothing but the aggregate of the functions of the nervous system in the living animal body and consequently ceases to exist with the annihilation of this body. Immortality and freedom of will are phantoms. God is the whole of nature (Spinoza!). Man is like a machine, just as the animal is (Descartes!); yes, man is nothing but a highly developed animal, a statement which at that time called forth a storm of opposition.

In his second and far more impassioned work L’homme machine (1748), La Mettrie, following Descartes’s thought to its consistent conclusion, developed his paradoxical machine theory. The two most interesting errors of La Mettrie are the following: he is firmly convinced that the breeding of a gifted animal up to man is only a question of education, and vice versa that a man growing up in a complete wilderness without any education would sink at once back to the level of an animal; that the orang-outang like the deaf mute

18 Petit homme, p. 35.
needs only instruction to be able to speak, a statement which especially called forth the jibes of his contemporaries.

La Mettrie without reservation could not deny that it would not be possible some day to construct an artificial human machine in a purely mechanical fashion by the combination of numerous springs and spirals, which would move like the first automaton of Vaucanson at that time exciting much comment at Paris, yes perhaps would even be able to speak and perform all of man's customary acts. These views were based on ancient Utopias of Arnobius then being revived in Condillac's idea of a statue gradually coming to life. We who have seen the course of history can scarcely put ourselves back to-day into the indistinct hopes of that period of civilization. But in these very Utopias do we not hear the mystical tinkle of the Homunculus vial which once intoxicated a century of Fausts?

"Insane, at first, appears a great intent;  
We yet shall laugh at chance in generation;  
A brain like this, for genuine thinking meant,  
Will henceforth be a thinker's sure creation."

—Tr. of Bayard Taylor.

To us the personality of La Mettrie is still a book with seven seals. To be sure we have long known that behind the apparently immoral author of the Antiseneca and the Art de jouir lay hidden the exact opposite of a licentious and dissipated character, that this dissolute Frenchman who had trailed for decades through the history of literature as a profligate and glutton was in reality an unusually industrious and laborious man who in the short period of a decade and a half published a very presentable list of writings. The Marquis D'Argens, one of La Mettrie's most bitter antagonists, declared of his own accord that in the intervals of his foolishness La Mettrie possessed "plusieurs vertus civiles," 19 and Frederick the Great, certainly not without reason, was far more closely attached to him than to any other member of his Round Table. Lange's defence is well known: "He neither sent his children to the orphan asylum like Rousseau, nor deceived two girls like Swift; he was never convicted of bribery like Baco nor was he ever suspected of forging documents as was Voltaire." 20

But these facts do not suffice to solve the enigma in La Mettrie's character. We do not know why he set himself in sharpest contradiction to the whole world often on the flimsiest pretexts and ran

19 Ocellus Lucanus, Berlin, 1762, p. 248.
20 Geschichte des Materialismus, 1st ed., p. 182.
the risk of the Bastille for the sake of a repartee. Above all we do not know why he played such an ugly trick on the good Haller. Precisely this quarrel with Haller is the point where most people give him up. Even Lange, his powerful advocate, characterizes him here as “mischievous and low in the choice of his methods” (p. 166). According to Du Bois-Reymond also, this incident brought him little honor, more than that, it shows him from his worst side.21

Nevertheless Brahn seems to be right in regarding the entire quarrel more from the esthetic than the moral point of view, and in seeing in La Mettrie’s procedure not so much a malicious intention as an overweening pleasure in mockery and satire.

In La Mettrie’s behaviour towards Haller we see nothing that should serve as a model or is worthy of imitation, and we do not hesitate a moment to condemn his mode of procedure from the ethical point of view. But in the form in which this satyr play has issued from the ever swelling womb of history, it is as interesting and edifying a picture of the civilization of the eighteenth century as the pen of the historian of philosophy could produce, illustrating as it does the historically memorable contest between two world-conceptions and lines of thought (the rationalistic and empiricistic), and characterizing very aptly the representatives of two directly opposed types of men (spiritualist and materialist).

How delightful it would be if the worthy Göttingen professor would don his coat and register his protest before the civilized world! With him we are filled with indignation, but we laugh with his opponent. Our moral sympathies belong to Haller but our esthetic sympathies to La Mettrie.

It is now some time since Du Bois-Reymond declared in 1875 that a new fundamental treatment of the subject was hardly likely to contribute any new facts of consequence about La Mettrie. Today we bring forward such new facts of consequence. When Brahn declares that it is worth while to enter more extensively into the controversy because it has been made more familiar to us in all its phases through Ludwig Hirzel’s work Albrecht von Haller’s Gedichte,22 we can not agree with him. Hirzel is acquainted with the first and last (fourth) phase of the controversy counting on the basis of our own classification. Moreover his exposition is scarcely objective. The French expositions, as they have been presented (but

22 Frauenfeld, 1882. Hirzel’s discussion is on pp. 253-262.
very tersely) by Jules Assézat,?3 more extensively by Néréé Quépat in the above mentioned monograph?4 and by the eminent Desnoires-terres in his large work on Voltaire,?5 are on the whole very defective, and this is the more surprising since all these investigators ascribe great weight to this remarkable literary quarrel so abounding in characteristic circumstances.26 We must also criticize Po-ritzky in spite of the rich material gathered together with such remarkable industry which he brings forward in his voluminous work on La Mettrie.27 He permits himself to be misled into foolishly carrying on a polemic against the illuminating exposition of the well-informed Johann Georg Zimmermann,28 and consequently gropes in the dark.

HOW THE CONTROVERSY STARTED.

Insurmountable contradictions in the thought and feeling of Haller and La Mettrie soon lent the resonance of personality to what was in the beginning an insignificant conflict. On the one hand the devout, austere, somewhat pedantic German professor, on the other the former army surgeon, of earnest endeavor but lacking in discipline and reared in the atmosphere of French corruption; on the one hand the spiritualistic Leibnitzian who in his famous poem "On the Origin of Evil"29 gave the arguments of theodicy in poetical form, on the other hand the confident empiricist and materialist who adhered strictly to natural science. Haller believed in a personal God, freedom of the will and immortality; La Mettrie was a pantheist, a determinist and a monist. The circumstance that both were prominent physicians and belonged to the same school does not diminish the frictional surface, but on the contrary furnishes precisely the external occasion for the quarrel. But of decisive importance is the fact that the poet of "The Alps," this primitive, wholesome and natural Swiss who anticipated Rous-

23 Haller's letters in complaint of La Mettrie have been reprinted by Assézat. Paris, 1865. Pp. 161 to 173.
24 Pp. 22-23.
26 According to Desnoires-terres, IV, 39, the contest is "one of those episodes which indeed troubled this distracted brain (of La Mettrie) more than any other consideration or any other occurrence had ever affected it."
29 Hirzel, pp. 118-142. Georg Bondi can not convince us in his superficial dissertation on "The Relations of Haller's Philosophical Poems to the Philosophy of His Time," Leipsic, 1891, that Haller was not a Leibnitzian.
seau's ideals of civilization, had no receptivity for the excessive refinement of La Mettrie's French wit of the Swift school which could find expression only in irony. You ought to read that absolutely uncomprehending critique of La Mettrie's brilliant satire on the charlatanry of the medical profession! Haller has no sense of humor. He takes satire at its face value, no matter how thickly laid on. La Mettrie was not so far off when he had his dedication of Man a Machine to Haller reprinted in the first complete edition of his works "cum bona venia celeberrimi, savantissimi, pedantissimi professoris, whom the advanced age of fifty years can not free from childish prejudices."31

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The facts leading up to this dedication are for the most part well known, although there is still a good deal which deserves to be placed in a clearer light.

In 1745 Haller joined the editorial staff of the Göttingen Gelehrten Zeitungen and assumed entire charge in April, 1747.32 Among the new publications of medical literature, a French translation of the Institutiones medicae of the famous Boerhaave (1668-1738) must have aroused his particular attention some time previously. This translation, which appeared in 1743 under the title "De la Mettrie, Les institutiones de medicine de Boerhaave avec un commentaire," made use of the notes which Haller had added to his own commentary on Boerhaave's text in such a wholesale fashion that Haller felt obliged to enter a protest in his review.33 Rather unceremoniously, but by no means with any malicious purpose (in the preface Haller is mentioned as his source), La Mettrie reports a physician's experiences as if they were his own, whereas they are in reality those of Haller which he translated literally, rendering Haller's preliminary vidi into a j'ai vu. His behavior was the more inexcusable, thought Haller, as he incidentally gave specific credit to Haller for one of his notes, in order (as Haller thought) to give the impression that the rest were his own literary property.

In the same year (1745) appeared La Mettrie's first important work, "The Natural History of the Soul." Here too La Mettrie was alleged to have again given out the mental labor of another (Haller) for his own. In his criticism34 Haller arranged a formal

31 Œuvres philosophiques, Berlin, 1751, p. 53.
32 Hirzel, p. 247.
list of plagiarisms, confronting La Mettrie's text with his own, page by page. He speaks of the "evil intention" of the anonymous author whom he rightly recognizes as "the de la M. who disappeared from France." The word "theft" escapes him. The truth is that La Mettrie drew inspiration from Haller's commentary as from Boerhaave's *Institutiones* only in a very general way. The leading ideas are his own property. But Haller is indignant at the "culpable injustice" that the statements of the righteous Haller following the strictly spiritualistic Boerhaave should be summoned by La Mettrie as star witnesses for the grossest materialism.

There is no doubt but La Mettrie had before him this second much more cutting criticism of the end of June, 1747, when, while still living in Holland, he finished *Man a Machine* (according to our calculation probably in August, 1747) and, providing it with a polite dedication to Haller, let it loose upon the world in an anonymous character. L'homme machine, although to be sure it bears 1748 upon its title page as the year of publication, was reviewed by Haller on December 28, 1747. Even as early as November 19, 1747, Frederick the Great was aware of the persecutions which the book caused its author in Holland. In short, La Mettrie's dedication is the direct answer to Haller's attacks, than which all other attempts to ascribe motives to La Mettrie's mode of procedure have missed their mark.

This is shown clearly enough by the ironical style with which in his dedication—and this, by the way, deserves to be called a little rhetorical masterpiece—La Mettrie intentionally plagiarizes one of Haller's poems. Through a Swiss who happened to be studying in Leyden at the time, La Mettrie, who was not very well versed in German, received a French translation of Haller's poem, "Vergnügen an den Wissenschaften," and with an unmistakable intention worked the contents of this poem into his dedication, an artistic

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85 The alleged original editions of *L'homme machine* extant in German libraries are all reprints of a later date (in spite of the date 1748) and all contain 109 pages. The true original has only 108 pages and probably not more than six or eight copies have been preserved. One of these is in the possession of the present writer [and a second in that of the editor].

86 Du Bois-Reymond (page 25) is mistaken in doubting the accuracy of these dates. They agree exactly. The year 1748 is an advance dating which was customary even at that time.

87 Even Zimmermann (as Lessing later in another case) did not discover the satirical purpose of the plagiarist and simply mentions the fact with scornful satisfaction (p. 226). Hirzel too believes this is another thievery (p. 154).

88 The same as Haller's ode "To Gessner." Hirzel, pp. 190 ff.
stroke which he took pleasure in utilizing in his controversy against Haller.

The dedication, by the way, contains nothing injurious. Haller is praised in most extreme terms, even if with too great irony, as the "two-fold son of Apollo," and spiritual enjoyments are enthusiastically praised at the cost of sensual pleasures. Happy the man who can enjoy the pleasures of study! They are more enduring than sensual delights. All this is just like Haller's own writings. La Mettrie characterizes himself as the pupil and friend of the Göttingen professor, whom in fact he never saw. He even pretends—the satirical purpose could not be more distinctly evident—that the orthodox Haller who had taken Boerhaave under his protection against the charge of materialism, was the spiritual father of Man a Machine.

LA METTRIE'S PERSONALITY.

Contemporary opinion differs widely with respect to La Mettrie's character. Hate and fanaticism have ever been a troubled spring from which to draw history. Little credence can be given to Voltaire's vile abuses and likewise the spiteful obituary of the Marquis D'Argens offers scarcely any points of departure which can be used in a characterization. It avails us little when we hear that the vain marquis was airing his spite for the neglect he suffered in such expressions as ignorant, insensé, fou, frénétique, énergumène, etc.29 But even the fine public eulogy of Frederick, the only friend La Mettrie possessed, must be reviewed with discretion. "Nature had made La Mettrie an orator and a philosopher; but a yet more precious gift which he received from her was a pure soul (âme pure) and an obliging heart. All those who are not imposed upon by the pious insults of the theologians mourn in La Mettrie a good man (honnête-homme) and a wise physician."30

In personal letters Frederick gives his opinion with less regard for effect: "He was a happy-go-lucky good-natured devil, and an excellent physician. If one didn't read his books one could be very well satisfied with him."31 This agrees pretty closely with the well-meaning characterization sketched out by La Mettrie's countryman and patron Maupertuis in his letter to Haller. "You are mistaken," writes he,32 "if you think that there is as much malice in

29 Ocellus Lucanus, pp. 238-245.
31 To the Countess of Bayreuth, November 21, 1751.
32 Page 53.
his writings as there seems to be. This is a paradox to all who are not personally acquainted with him. I knew his frenzy for writing, his dangerous power of imagination. I heaped accusations upon him; he was touched and swore to leave religion and ethics out of the question in the future, but still could not keep his promise. He wrote his books without any set purpose. He wrote against every one and yet would have done a service to his bitterest enemy. He found excuses for the most abandoned customs and possessed almost all the civic virtues (presque toutes les virtus sociables). In short, he deceived the world in an entirely different way from that in which it is usually deceived." Maupertuis expressed his judgment though not very successfully in the following couplet:

"A kindly heart, but muddled brains, you see,  
In German means, a fool was La Mettrie."

[Ein gutes Herz, verwirrte Phantasie,  
Das heisst auf Deutsch, ein Narr war La Mettrie.]

Hence a happy-go-lucky good-natured devil, a sort of philosophical court fool who occasionally takes up the pen! Is that really to be the quintessence of this man? Let us ask the man himself. No one else can answer the question why he chose irony and satire in which to speak of his age. In his last work the Petit homme, written a few weeks before his unhappy end, he himself puts the key into our hands (pp. 32-34).

"Since I have always," he writes, "valued the courageous author who battles against the prejudices of the public with open vizor, you will wonder, sir, that I should have chosen the language of irony which dominates all my writings. It is my way to lash the ocean in order that I may ride upon it the more safely. If behind my veil I laugh excessively, run back and forth so busily, make so many detours in order finally to get around again to the same point from which the (criticized) author started out, I do this only because I find myself in the position of a seaman for whom the favorable season has not yet arrived. The season is always favorable, as you know, only for the opposite port. To the man who dares to steer to the harbor of reason and truth, almost all winds are so contrary that one could not bring into play enough cunning and skill were we not living in this climate where a philosopher reigns. In other regions one can hardly take two steps in entire security unless he understands how to steer a middle course, an art without which the ship is either utterly wrecked in the storm, or those who steer

43 The words, "dans ces climats gouvernés par un Sage," are made prominent by spaced type.
it soon become the prey of the holy corsairs in clerical vestments whom the stupid public still respects."

What a bitter reproach for his own time! A recollection of his childhood is revived in this comparison—of his home, the Brittany port of St. Malo surrounded by the roaring sea where the storms of the Atlantic Ocean regularly destroyed anew each successive season the painstaking labor of the bold seamen. "I was not born under a lucky star, and must be ready any moment to fall a sacrifice to the fanaticism of wretched pietists (à la fureur des dévots méprisés). No God would save me from shipwreck."44

How they hounded him through all lands, those holy corsairs in clerical vestments! The smoke of the Pensées philosophiques had not yet cleared away when on July 9, 1746, the executioner of Paris prepared a similar fate for La Mettrie’s writings. La Mettrie was deprived of his post as army surgeon. An atheist can not heal French guardsmen. Already the Bastille stood open for him, and what sinister comparisons it furnishes in his works!

He fled to the Calvinistic Netherlands where two centuries previously William of Orange had spoken the resounding words: "Faith is free. The prince does not rule the conscience of his subjects." But now—it is Frederick who wrote this sentence: "Calvinists, Catholics and Lutherans forgot for the time that consubstantiation, free will, mass for the dead, and the infallibility of the pope divided them, and all united to persecute the philosopher."45

He barely escaped the storm. A Leyden book dealer came to his assistance. "They start away on foot at night without shelter, without provisions, without any other equipment than La Mettrie’s indomitable cheerfulness."46 In the midst of his deepest distress, he received the call of the king. "I would like to have with me the La Mettrie of whom you told me," Frederick wrote to Maupertuis.47 "He is the victim of priests and blockheads. Here he will be able to write in peace. I have a feeling of sympathy for the persecuted philosopher." Royal words indeed!

This seaman knows the sea and its dangers. "Since life is nothing but the sport of nature, we must know how to laugh in the tempest." Thus reads the conclusion of Le petit homme. They are La Mettrie’s last words. He wrote them in the arrogance of life born upward on the wave of good fortune.

44 Le Petit Homme, p. 35.
45 Frederick the Great in his Eulogy. [See The Open Court, Dec. 1910.]
46 Freron, Lettres sur quelque écrits de ce temps. Nancy, 1753, X, 106.
Spinoza had disciples and followers and saw his ideas take root. He had friends who helped him to bear the contempt of his age; La Mettrie had no one but Frederick. Neither in his native land, nor in Holland extolled as the Capua of free spirits, nor even in the home of Leibnitz and Wolff, did he ever have an apostle or even adherents, and for this he was not alone to blame. Never had a time rejected and opposed new ideas with such absolute unanimity as that murky pre-Kantian epoch opposed this bold pioneer of civilization and his theories, no small part of which to-day have long since become the scientific common property of all educated people. Among all the voices of the contemporary press which we have had the opportunity to hear, there is not one that betrays a spark of understanding.

A feeling of bitterness must arise in every unprejudiced observer when confronted with this wall of stupidity against which every sensible thought falls to pieces in ridiculous impotence. We can understand how a man who began by desiring only the best finally comes to renounce certain ideals which we value highly and hauls only the scourge of a lacerating satire whistling over the heads of his contemporaries.

For the man who steers for the harbor of truth and reason the season is nearly always unfavorable. The climes of a Frederick are of rare occurrence in history. La Mettrie was fortunate enough to find one and to escape shipwreck. Do you now understand why I laugh so excessively behind my veil? Do you now understand why I have become a writer of satires and deceive the world in a different way from that in which it is used to being deceived?

La Mettrie died at the age of forty-two years in the fulness of his strength. His literary activity in the realm of philosophy covered scarcely six years. No descent can be perceived in his activity, but a constant ascent. Deus nobis haec otia fecit! These words of Virgil were written by the exile shortly before his death in grateful reference to Frederick, on the title-page of the first collection of his philosophical writings.

Had he not been obliged to exchange so soon the hospitality of the great king for Pluto's Bastille, what would not this restless, active spirit, this industrious worker, this bold battler in the ranks of civilization—if not always exactly unobjectionable in the choice of his methods—have performed for humanity! How much riper fruits might not a discreet and refined old age have thrown into his lap! How far might he not have spread his branches in the shadow of the royal oak! And how many sleepers would he not have
awakened from their celebrated dogmatic slumber, this drummer of the dawn!

"Beat the drum and fear thee not! Drum the people from their sleep, Drum reveille in strength of youth, Drumming, drumming, march along!"

APPENDIX.

Publisher's Preface to the First Edition of La Mettrie's L'homme Machine.

It may cause some surprise that I have ventured to put my name to so daring a book as the present. I would certainly not have done so had I not believed religion to be safely sheltered from all possible attempts to overthrow it; and if I could have persuaded myself that some other publisher would not have done most gladly what I would have refused to do from conscientious principles. I know it is the part of prudence not to give occasion to lead astray the feeble-minded. But while duly considering them I perceived at the first reading that there would be nothing to fear for them. Why need we be so careful and on the alert to suppress arguments against the ideas of divinity and religion? Can they not serve to make people believe that they are being deluded? As soon as they begin to doubt, goodbye conviction and consequently religion! By what means and with what hope of success can we ever confound the irreligious if we seem to fear them? How can they be reclaimed if, while forbidding them to make use of their reason, we content ourselves with inveighing against their practices on general principles without informing ourselves as to whether these deserve the same censure as their mode of thought?

Such conduct would but decide the case in favor of the skeptics. They would make fun of a religion which we in our ignorance would try to keep from conciliating with philosophy; they would shout victory in their intrenchments which our mode of combat would cause them to consider invincible. If religion is not triumphant it is the fault of the unskilful authors who defend it. Let good men but take up the pen, let them but show that they are well armed, and theology will carry the day with a high hand over a rival that will prove weak enough. I compare atheists to those giants who would fain scale the heavens; they will always meet the same fate.

These are the things I have thought it necessary to place at the beginning of this little booklet in order to forestall any uneasiness which might arise. It does not become me to refute what I
publish nor even to express my feeling with regard to the arguments that may be found in this work. The well-informed will easily see that these arguments offer no difficulties but those which present themselves whenever the attempt is made to explain the connection between soul and body. If the consequences which the author deduces from them are dangerous it should be remembered that they are only a hypothesis for a working foundation. Is it therefore the more necessary to destroy them? Nevertheless, if I may assume what I do not in the least believe, then even if these consequences should prove difficult to overthrow, there would only be the greater opportunity to shine. "To conquer without danger is to triumph without glory."

The author, who is entirely unknown to me, sent me his work from Berlin with the one stipulation that I should send six copies to the address of M. le Marquis d'Argens. Surely he could take no better means to preserve his incognito for I am persuaded that even this address is nothing but a jest.

*La Mettrie's Dedication to Haller.*

(Here translated for the first time in English.)

This is not in any sense a dedication. You are far above all praise which I could render you, and I know of nothing so useless or so vapid as an academic discourse. Nor is it an exposition of the new method I have followed in reviving a hackneyed and worn-out theme. You may find in it at least this merit, and for the rest you will judge whether your disciple and friend has attained his end.

The pleasure I have had in preparing this work is what I wish to speak about. It is myself and not my book which I address to you that you may enlighten me upon the nature of the sublime pleasure of study. That is the subject of this dissertation. I would not be the first writer to take a theme requiring no imagination when he had nothing to say to redeem the barrenness of his own. Tell me, then, O twofold child of Apollo, illustrious Swiss, modern Fracastor, who know at the same time how to sound the depths of nature, to measure her, what is more, to sympathize with her, and what is still more, to express her—erudite physician, still greater poet, tell me by what seductions study can transform hours into moments, and what is the nature of these intellectual pleasures so widely different from the pleasures of the crowd. But the perusal of your charming poems has entered too deeply into my heart for me not to try to tell what they have inspired within me. Man con-
sidered from this point of view, is not in the least irrelevant to my theme.

Sensual pleasure, however desirable and cherished it may be, whatever praises have been rendered it by the pen of a young French physician, evidently as appreciative as it is delicate, has but one single gratification and this is its grave. If perfect pleasure does not permanently destroy it, at least it takes a certain time to revive it. How different are the resources of intellectual pleasures! The nearer one comes to truth, the more charming he finds it. Not only does its gratification increase the desire, but here we enjoy as soon as we seek to enjoy. The enjoyment is long and yet swifter than lightning travels.

Should we be surprised that the pleasure of the mind is as much better than that of sense, as the mind is superior to the body? Is not the mind the leader of the senses and so to speak the meeting place of all sensations? Do they not all, like as many rays of light, meet at that one center which produces them? Then let us not seek further by what invincible magic a heart inflamed by the love of truth finds itself all at once transported as it were into a world more beautiful where it tastes pleasures fit for the gods. Of all the attractions of nature the most powerful, at least for me as for you dear Haller, is that of philosophy. What greater glory than to be conducted to her temple by reason and wisdom! What conquest more flattering than the submission of all the spirits!

Let us enumerate all the objects of those pleasures which are unknown to commonplace souls. What great beauty and how wide a scope do they possess! Time, space, infinity, the earth, the sea, the firmament, all the elements, all the sciences, all the arts, everything enters into this kind of pleasure. Too confined within the limits of this world, it imagines a million more. All nature is its sustenance and imagination its victory. Let us enter into some detail. At one time it is poetry or painting: at another, it is music or architecture, singing, dancing, etc., which give to connoisseurs a taste of these ravishing pleasures. Look at Madame Delbar (wife of Piron) in a box at the opera. Pale and flushed in turn she keeps time with Rebel,48 is touched with Iphigenia and raves with Roland. All the impressions of the orchestra are shown upon her face as on a canvas. Her eyes become tender, fatigued, they laugh or are armed with a warrior’s courage. People take her for a fool, but she is far from it unless it be folly to experience pleasure. She is merely affected by a thousand beauties which escape me.

48 Leader of the orchestra.
Voltaire can not refuse the need of tears to his Mérope because he feels the value both of the work and of the actress. You have read his writings, and unfortunately for him he is not in a position to read yours. In whose hands, in whose memory are they not? And what heart is so hardened as not to be moved by them. How would it be possible not to spread abroad their flavor? He speaks of them with enthusiasm.

When a great painter (as I have recently seen with pleasure when reading a preface of Richardson) speaks of painting, what praise does he not bestow upon it! He adores his art, and places it above everything else; he almost doubts whether a man can be happy unless he is a painter, so enchanted is he with his profession.

Who has not felt the same enthusiasm as Scaliger or Malebranche in reading certain fine passages from the Greek, English or French tragic poets, or certain philosophical works? Madame Dacier never counted on what her husband promised her, and yet she found a hundredfold more. If one experiences a kind of enthusiasm in translating and developing the thoughts of another, how much more if he himself is a thinker? What is this procreation, this birth of ideas produced by the love of nature and the search for truth? How depict that act of the will or of memory by which the soul is in some way reproduced when one idea follows in the track of another similar one, so that from their resemblance, and as it were from their union, a third is produced? Therefore marvel at the creations of nature. Such is their uniformity that almost all of them are accomplished in the same manner.

When the pleasures of sense are ill controlled they lose their keenness and are no longer pleasures. The pleasures of the mind are like them to a certain extent. They must be interrupted in order that they may be stimulated. In fine, study has its ecstacies as well as love. If I may be allowed to say so, there is a catalepsy or immobility of mind which is so delightfully intoxicated by the object which claims its attention and enraptures it that it seems detached by abstraction from its own body and from all that surrounds it in order to throw itself entirely into the subject it is pursuing. It feels nothing because it feels so much. So great is the pleasure one enjoys both in seeking and in finding truth! Judge of the power of its charms by the ecstacy of Archimedes. You remember it cost him his life.

Let other men throw themselves into the crowd that they may avoid knowing themselves, or rather may hate themselves; the wise man flees from the wide world and seeks solitude. Why is he not
happy except with himself or with his kind? Because his soul is a
faithful mirror; to see himself mirrored in it satisfies his proper
self-love. The virtuous man has nothing to fear from acquaintance
with himself unless it be the agreeable danger of falling in love with
himself.

As to the eyes of a man who would look down upon the earth
from the height of the skies, all the greatness of other men would
vanish, the most superb palaces would be changed into cabins, and
the largest armies would resemble hills of ants fighting over a grain
with ridiculous zeal, so matters appear to a wise man like yourself.
He smiles at the vain activities of men when their number em-
barrasses the earth and they struggle for a nothing, with which it is
certain that none of them would be content.

How grandly Pope starts out in his Essay on Man! How petty
seem great men and kings beside him! O you, less my teacher than
my friend, who have received from nature the same power of genius
as he, which you have abused—you ingrate who do not deserve to
excel in the sciences—you have taught me to laugh like this great
poet, or rather to groan at the playthings and trinkets which engage
the serious attention of monarchs. To you I owe all my happiness.
No, the conquest of the entire world does not afford the pleasure
that a philosopher enjoys in his study surrounded by dumb friends
who yet tell him all he desires to learn. That God will not deprive
me of the necessaries of life and health is all that I ask of him. With
good health my heart without repugnance would love life. With
the necessities of life my mind contented would always cultivate wis-
dom.

Yes, study is a pleasure for every age, for every clime, for
every season, and for every moment. To whom has not Cicero
given the longing to enjoy this delightful experience? It is a diver-
sion in youth whose fiery passions it moderates; in order to enjoy
it aright I have sometimes been obliged to yield to love. Love
causes a wise man no fear. He knows how to combine everything
and to make one thing of greater value by means of another. The
clouds which obscure his understanding do not make him idle, they
only point out to him the remedy that will scatter them. Truly the
sun does not scatter more quickly the clouds in the sky.

In old age, the age of ice, when a man is no longer in a position
to give or to receive other pleasures, what a great resource he has in
reading and in meditation! What a pleasure to see a work come
into being and take form day by day under one's eyes and by his
hands which will delight future centuries and even his contempo-
raries! One day a man whose vanity was beginning to feel the pleasure of being an author said to me, "I would like to spend my life in passing between my home and the printers." Was he wrong? And when one gains applause, could a tender mother be any more happy in having brought into the world an attractive child?

Why vaunt so highly the pleasures of study? Who does not know that it is a possession which brings in its train neither dissatisfaction nor the uneasiness caused by other possessions, an inexhaustible treasure, the surest antidote for cruel ennui, which accompanies us and travels with us and in short follows us everywhere? Happy the man who has broken the fetters of all his prejudices. He alone will taste this pleasure in all its purity; he alone will enjoy that sweet tranquillity of spirit, that perfect contentment of a strong soul free from ambition, and this is the father of happiness if it is not happiness itself.

Let us stop a moment to strew flowers on the path of those great men whom like you Minerva has crowned with an immortal garland. Here Flora invites you with Linnaeus to climb by new paths the icy summit of the Alps, to admire under another snowpeaked mountain a garden planted by the hands of nature, a garden which was formerly the heritage of the celebrated Swedish professor. Thence you descend into the prairies whose flowers await his coming to range themselves in an order which they seem hitherto to have disdained. There I see Maupertuis, the honor of the French nation, which another land has better deserved to enjoy. He leaves the table of a friend who is the greatest of kings. Where is he going? To the council board of nature where Newton awaits him.

What can I say of the chemist, of the geometer, of the physicist, of the anatomist, etc.? The latter experiences almost as much pleasure in examining a dead man as did the one who gave him life.

But all of this yields place to the great art of healing. The physician is the only philosopher to whom his country is indebted, as has been said long before me. Like the brothers of Helen, he appears in the storms of life. What magic, what enchantment! The very sight of him calms the blood, brings peace to a troubled soul and revives tender hope in the heart of wretched mortals. He foretells life and death as the astronomer predicts an eclipse. Each has the torch which illuminates him. But if the mind has had the pleasure of discovering the rules which guide it, what a triumph
this delightful experience gives you every day, what a triumph when the result has justified its rashness.

Therefore the greatest usefulness of the sciences lies in their cultivation. This in itself is a very real and lasting joy. Happy the man who has the taste for study, happier the one who succeeds by its means in freeing his spirit from illusions and his heart from vanity—a desirable end to which you were led at a tender age by the hand of wisdom, whereas so many pedants after half a century of night watches and of labor, more bowed under the burden of prejudices than under that of time, seem to have learned everything except to think. That knowledge is indeed rare especially among the learned, and yet it ought to be at least the fruit of all the rest. It is to this knowledge alone that I have applied myself since childhood. Judge, sir, whether I have succeeded, and may this homage of my friendship be forever cherished by your own.