

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Budget – Greve editor  
April 3, 1886

### Some Maxims Of Joubert

It was said of Thomas Gold Appleton, the well-known Boston bel-esprit, that not only was he always charming himself, but he had the happy trait of bringing to light other charming but hitherto unknown people. This is also a pleasant characteristic of the writings of Mr. Matthew Arnold. Not only is everything that Mr. Arnold writes worth reading and thinking over, however much one may disagree with him, but he has the true literary spirit which seeks out a good fellow and introduces him to all others of his kind. When, a month ago, I heard my old companion Vauvenarges whom even my slightest acquaintance had taught me to admire, introduced into this club with so much delicacy and taste, I felt that Joubert should not be forgotten. Very little has been known to English readers of Joubert. His name has been but rarely seen by most readers, and Matthew Arnold was the first to give him at all a wide circle of acquaintance. Whoever wishes to become acquainted with a highly cultivated intellect ripened by reflection will not fail to read this essay of Mr. Arnold's in which both the critic and the subject of criticism appear at their best.

Joubert was born in 1754 and when quite a young man he took up his abode in Paris where he soon collected about himself a circle of congenial spirits, among whom were Diderot, d'Alambert, Marmontel, and Châteaubriand. His life has very few incidents that would give the biographer any opportunity. He lived the life of the student, surrounded by his friends, his books. His nephew says of him, that he “forgot nothing, nothing at least that he read. The mere sight of a book, a glance at its binding or title sufficed to awaken all his memories, and to renew his first impression. Between him and his books there was a constant intercourse, a sort of intellectual current that was rarely interrupted. In his reading he let nothing escaped him, treasuring what was excellent and remembering resentfully what was harmful. He was very scrupulous in the choice of the volumes to be admitted to his sanctum; careful to surround himself with friendly authors only, and avoiding the intrusion of such as he believed to be injurious.”

Joubert died in 1824, and in 1838 Châteaubriand edited, for private circulation, a small volume of *pensées* which were selected from more than 200 small M.S. books in which Joubert had written down the thoughts of a lifetime. Since 1838, several editions have appeared. In English, however, with the exception of Mr. Arnold's paper, no collection has appeared except that of Mr. Attwell from whose little volume I select a few of the maxims without comment.

When my friends are one-eyed, I look at their side face  
He who has imagination without learning, has wings and no feet.  
Few men are worthy of being made heads of families, and few families are equal to having a head.

One ought not to choose for a wife a woman whom one would not choose for a friend were she a man.

One can with dignity be wife and widow but once.

A reason is often good, not because it is conclusive, but because it is dramatic; because it has the stamp of him who urges it, and is drawn from his own resources. For there are arguments ex homine as well as ad hominem.

What can one possibly introduce into a mind that is full, and full of itself?

Truth takes the stamp of the soul it enters. It is rigorous and rough in arid souls, but tempers and softens itself in loving natures.

Those who never retract their own opinions love themselves more than they love truth.

It is even easier to be mistaken about truth than the beautiful.

In those governments which obey a numerical superiority it is a static or arithmetical dignity, a gross or quantitative ponderance, that judges human affairs.

Contempt for private wrongs was one of the features of ancient morals.

We live in an age in which superfluous ideas abound, and essential ideas are lacking.

To the liberal ideas of the age must be opposed the moral ideas of all ages.

The great draw-back in new books is that they prevent our reading older ones.

Children have more need of models than of critics.

All good verses are like *impromptus* made at leisure.

Poetry is to be found nowhere unless we carry with us.

A temperate style is alone classical.

Real depth is the result of concentrated ideas.  
Genius begins great works; labor alone finishes them.  
Young writers give their minds much exercise but little food.  
A good literary judgment is a faculty that attains its full growth very slowly.

I conclude my quotations with this one, a truthful description of the author.

I have given my flowers and my fruit. I am no more than an echoing trunk, but whoever sits under my shade and gives ear to me grows in wisdom.

Charles Theodore Greve