

Voltaire (pseudo. François-Marie Arouet)**1694-1778**

The story of Voltaire's life and literary career is among the most remarkable in the history of French literature. In many regards, it is also one of the more challenging and, at times, even perplexing. The vastness and variety of Voltaire's creative output, the proliferation of editions, the often complex and confusing circumstances overseeing the writing and publishing of works that were frequently deemed objectionable, and the seeming contradictions in Voltaire's character and behavior are among the more telling aspects of this story. They represent some of the difficulties researchers have had to contend with and are still trying to resolve. An international group of more than one hundred scholars has already been working for more than thirty years to establish a definitive edition of Voltaire's works, and--with the exception of the correspondence, which was completed by Theodore Besterman--the end is still not in sight.

The first complications concern Voltaire's birth. According to official documents, he was born François-Marie Arouet on 21 November 1694 in Paris, to François Arouet and Marie-Marguerite Daumard. Voltaire himself asserted on several occasions later in life that two of those details were inaccurate. He was actually born, he maintained, on 20 February 1694 and was the illegitimate progeny of his mother's adulterous indiscretion. His real father, he claimed, was a musketeer, officer, author, and *homme d'esprit* (man of wit) named Rochebrune or Roquebrune. A record exists of a certain Rochebrune who had some business dealings with Arouet senior around the time of Voltaire's birth. René Pomeau, director and principal author of a five-volume biography of Voltaire, accepts this version as the more plausible of the two. When he was born, François-Marie was apparently in such a fragile state of health that he was not expected to live. He was entrusted to the care of a nursemaid, as was the habit at that time. In an age when fully one-

half of newborn babies died soon after birth, this procedure was not unusual. Then, as time passed and François-Marie's health improved, a baptism was finally arranged. The entry for 22 November marking the event in the parish's register ended with the customary notation, "born on the preceding day." Whether the officiating priest was aware of the subterfuge is not known. One possibility, supposes Pomeau, is that Voltaire's godfather, François de Castagnères, abbé de Châteauneuf, helped arrange the baptism so that everything would seem proper.

François-Marie was the fifth child of a well-to-do, middle-class family. Only two of the four older siblings survived. Armand, François-Marie's older brother, had been born on 22 March 1685 and his surviving sister, Marguerite-Catherine, on 28 December 1686. With the exception of an evident affection for his sister, Voltaire never manifested a great attachment to his family. His mother died when he was only seven years old. He was never close to his father and openly disliked his brother, who eventually became a rabid Jansenist. One of the more positive influences on François-Marie's childhood was that of the abbé de Châteauneuf, who obviously took a special interest in the child. At age ten, François-Marie began his secondary schooling at the Jesuit Collège Louis-le-Grand. There he formed friendships that lasted a lifetime. He always remembered fondly his years at Louis-le-Grand, where he was given the opportunity to develop his taste for the Greek and Roman classics as well as for French literature.

Having completed his secondary education in 1711 and following the wishes of his father, who was a notary, François-Marie undertook to study law. His interests clearly lay elsewhere. His godfather had introduced him to the urbane and hedonistic society of poets and freethinkers known as the Société du Temple. At age seventeen, François-Marie openly rebelled against his father's wishes and, convinced of his own genius, declared that his firm intention was to be a poet, a man of letters. Wishing to put a stop to what he saw as a life of dissipation and wanting

to remove his son from a milieu that only encouraged this mode of existence, the senior Arouet found François-Marie a position as secretary to the French ambassador to The Hague. François-Marie's subsequent behavior was less than reassuring. Having become involved in a romantic adventure with a girl surnamed Pimpette, he caused a scandal and was sent home. Back in Paris, François-Marie weathered his father's ire and soon found himself stirring up a new kind of scandal, the first in a long series of literary quarrels throughout his life he either initiated or was drawn into. Two years earlier he had entered the annual poetry contest organized by the Académie française (French Academy). In 1714 he was greatly disappointed to learn that the Academy had crowned Laurent Juillard, abbé du Jarry, whose poem, François-Marie was quick to note, was mostly notable for the laughable blunder the author had made when referring to the earth's "frozen and burning poles." Infuriated by the Academy's decision, François-Marie dashed off a satirical poem, *Le Bourbier* (The Swamp), attacking those who had chosen the winning entry.

Following the death of Louis XIV in 1715, the reign of the regent Philippe d'Orléans was characterized by a general loosening of the moral and political restrictions that had marked the era of the Sun King. Arouet soon took advantage of the newly gained freedom of expression and quickly gained a reputation for his satirical talents. This reputation was also the cause of his first encounter with the authorities. Suspected of having written certain poems and epigrams alluding to the regent's incestuous relationship with his daughter, Arouet was sent into exile in 1716 to Sully-sur-Loire. He was allowed to return to Paris the following year, but when new samples of his satirical verses began circulating, he received more-severe punishment. In May 1717 he was put in the Bastille, where he spent the next eleven months. Notoriety soon gave way to fame, however, and not long after his release, Arouet enjoyed his first great literary success. His first tragedy *Oedipe* (Oedipus, published 1719) had its

premiere on 18 November 1718 and became one of the greatest French theatrical successes of the century. When the play came out in print, the author's name was given as Voltaire. While several plausible explanations for the new name have been offered over the years, Voltaire himself never divulged its origin or the motives behind the change. His decision seems to suggest a desire to break with the past and to look forward to a fresh start in life.

While at the Bastille, Voltaire had begun the epic poem *La Ligue ou Henri le Grand* (1723; translated as *La Henriade*, 1732). The work was conceived as an homage to Henri IV, the king who had brought the religious wars to an end and with the Edict of Nantes established toleration in France at the end of the sixteenth century. Unable to obtain the permission to publish the work in 1722, Voltaire tried to have it printed in Holland. Passing through Brussels, Voltaire visited poet Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and read him a poem composed for the benefit of a lady friend who accompanied him on his voyage. It was the *Épître à Uranie* (1770, Letter to Urania), in which Voltaire exposed his unorthodox views on religion. These views were publicized by Rousseau a decade later, after the two had become sworn enemies. *La Henriade* was printed clandestinely in Rouen under the title *La Ligue ou Henri le Grand*. It was the first of approximately sixty editions to appear during Voltaire's lifetime. The work was considered a masterpiece by many, and for years to come Voltaire owed a large part of his literary prestige to this poem, largely forgotten today.

The year 1725 was marked by an event that had a profound effect on Voltaire's intellectual development. Once at the opera and a second time at the Comédie française in the presence of Adrienne Lecouvreur--one of the leading actresses of the time--Voltaire had altercations with Guy-Auguste de Rohan-Chabot, chevalier de Rohan, scion of one of France's most illustrious families. Several versions of the encounter have been given. What they agree on is that young Rohan apparently made light of Voltaire's changing his

name. Never at a loss for words, Voltaire shot back with a stinging retort. A few days later, while having lunch at the house of his friend Maximilien de Béthune, duc de Sully, Voltaire was summoned to the street. As soon as he stepped outside, he found himself set upon by three or four lackeys armed with cudgels. Rohan, who was observing the beating from his carriage, called his men off as soon as he felt satisfied. Mainly wounded in his pride, Voltaire was nevertheless outraged and sought to secure the support of Sully and others for his schemes of retaliation. To his great shock, his entreaties were met with indifference: Sully and his friends apparently found it perfectly normal that a nobleman would have a poet beaten up if he so desired. For Voltaire, who had imagined that his talents made him the equal of the aristocrats in whose homes he was a welcome guest, this reaction was a bitter revelation indeed. The newly gained insight into inequities that were fundamental to French society did not diminish his rage or his resolve to get revenge. When it became obvious to the authorities that Voltaire would not desist and would seek retribution by any means--legal or violent--a lettre de cachet was issued, and he was imprisoned in the Bastille once more. This time, his incarceration lasted a little more than a year, from 17 April 1726 to 1 May 1727. Voltaire was released only on condition he leave France. He departed immediately for England, where he remained for the next three years.

Voltaire's stay in England was both memorable and productive. He learned the language of a country he was beginning to find more and more admirable and met its great men of letters. He was disappointed at not being able to meet Isaac Newton, who was ailing at the time of Voltaire's arrival and died shortly afterward. He did visit Newton's daughter and learned from her the anecdote of the falling apple. Most of what he saw in England delighted him, and he appreciated it all the more because of the striking contrast English mores and politics offered with those of the French. This comparative evaluation of the

two cultures constituted the implicit theme of *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733; French version published as *Lettres philosophiques*, 1734), a work that sums up the lessons of his English experience and that Gustave Lanson has termed "the first bomb thrown against the ancien régime."

On 15 March 1729 Voltaire returned to France. New disappointments and frustrations awaited him there. Lecouvreur died in 1730 and, because she had been an actress, was refused burial in consecrated ground. Voltaire's poem commemorating this event, *La Mort de Mademoiselle Lecouvreur* (The Death of Mademoiselle Lecouvreur), was inspired by a sense of outrage brought on by the Church's intransigence. The comparison with England was inevitable: "What!" he exclaimed, "is it only in England / That mortals dare to think?" He returned to this theme in his English letters.

The following year, with the publication of his first major work of history, *Histoire de Charles XII, Roi de Suède* (1731; translated as *The History of Charles XII. King of Sweden*, 1732), Voltaire acquired his reputation as one of the first modern historians. In order to produce a realistic and accurate account of past events, he relied mainly on textual sources and, when available, on eyewitness accounts. Although he had obtained permission to publish the history of the Swedish king, the books were seized soon after they were printed: Voltaire's account had been judged as potentially offensive to the still living king of Poland. At the same time, Voltaire was made to understand that his book would be tolerated if published clandestinely. Voltaire had the work printed in London and in Rouen later that year. On 13 August 1732 Voltaire enjoyed one of his greatest successes as a playwright with the representation of *Zaïre* (1733). He was acclaimed as the equal of Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine. Voltaire's triumph on the stage was followed by a major debacle in the area of public relations, and he found his reputation considerably diminished. The cause of this setback was the publication of *Le Temple du Goust* (1733; translated as *The Temple of*

Taste, 1734), a literary critique presented in the form of an allegory that recounts the author's imaginary trip to the land of Beauty. The visit to the temple of Good Taste provides Voltaire with the opportunity to distinguish between those admitted to the temple and those left outside--not only in the domain of letters but also in the arts--painting, sculpture, and theater. Voltaire's high-handed manner of passing judgment on writers and artists both living and dead appeared arbitrary, presumptuous, even offensive to many people. Worse, it created an atmosphere that hardly predisposed the authorities to receive his next publication favorably. He tried to tone down the peremptoriness of his judgments and to be more inclusive in the following edition, but the harm had been done and could not easily be repaired.

In the midst of these tribulations, Voltaire also found unexpected happiness. In 1733 he met Gabrielle-Emilie du Châtelet, one of the most remarkable and talented women of the age. Châtelet became his lover and friend for the next sixteen years, thus providing the companionship and support that made these years among the happiest and most productive of his life. Her château at Cirey, in the Lorraine region, also offered Voltaire both an environment that was conducive to creative work and a ready place of refuge for someone with his propensity for offending the authorities. Florent Claude, marquis du Chastellet (Châtelet's husband), was an understanding man in this regard, giving his wife full freedom, so long as she was discreet. The pretense of having Voltaire reside at Cirey simply as an old friend of the family did not fool anyone, but it was sufficient in an age and society that were highly tolerant of such arrangements. The marquis's military career kept him conveniently away from home most of the time, leaving Voltaire and the marquise free to live life as they saw fit. The château thus became a center of constant literary and scientific activity. Châtelet conducted her experiments in physics there, studied mathematics, and translated the works of Newton into French. She received a constant

stream of visitors, hosted dinners and suppers, and took part in the theatrical performances organized by Voltaire.

Cirey proved useful as a refuge almost immediately. Voltaire had already published his *Letters Concerning the English Nation* in London in 1733 before completing and sending to press the French version, *Lettres philosophiques*. When the two editions began circulating in Paris in 1734, Voltaire was away, attending the wedding of his friend Louis-François-Armand de Vignerot du Plessis, duc de Richelieu. *Lettres philosophiques* produced a scandal of major proportions. The publisher, Claude-François Jore, found himself in the Bastille; the Paris parliament condemned the book, to be lacerated and burned by the public executioner; all the copies the police could find were seized; and a lettre de cachet ordering Voltaire's arrest was issued by Germain Louis Chauvelin, garde des sceaux (Minister of Justice). The letters were found shocking for the ideas they included, for their irreverence, and for the implicit comparison between England and France, in which French institutions and culture were obviously found wanting. On the other hand, the letters also provided an outline of the philosophic themes that guided Voltaire's thoughts and actions for decades to come. What Voltaire had found admirable in England was, first, the freedom enjoyed by its inhabitants. It was evident in the multitude of faiths that were tolerated there, and Voltaire was led to an inevitable conclusion: "S'il n'y avait en Angleterre qu'une religion, le despotisme serait à craindre; s'il y en avait deux, elles se couperaient la gorge; mais il y en a trente, et elles vivent en paix heureuses" (If there were only one religion in England, there would be danger of tyranny; if there were two, they would cut each other's throats; but there are thirty, and they live happily together in peace). Voltaire also associated religious freedom with the prosperity of the country. Moreover, he was convinced that the economic well-being of the English was attributable to their enlightened attitude toward useful and productive occupations. Prestige went to those who enriched

their country and not to "un seigneur bien poudré qui sait précisément à quelle heure le roi se lève, à quelle heure il se couche" (a well-powdered lord who knows precisely what time the king gets up in the morning and what time he goes to bed). The English were also progressive in their willingness to adopt the smallpox vaccine and in the consideration they granted their artists and men of letters. For example, Anne Oldfield, one of their great actresses, had her tomb in Westminster Abbey. This fact brought out "la barbare et lâche injustice" (the barbarity and cruel injustice) of the French, who had treated the mortal remains of Lecouvreur like so much garbage.

Eventually, the storm caused by *Lettres philosophiques* subsided, and on 2 March 1735 police commissioner Rene Hérault informed Voltaire that he could return to Paris provided that he would observe a "conduct worthy of a wise man and of a man who has already reached a certain age." A tall order, given the provocative effect Voltaire's writings generally had. The next scandal came unexpectedly the following year, when *Le Mondain* (The Man of the World) was being circulated in Paris. The poem, in which Voltaire defends the taste for luxury and the good life as a way of promoting economic development, was found offensive, even blasphemous, because of a humorous reference to Adam and Eve. He had also become involved in a long series of litigations with his publisher Jore. By going public with his complaints and recriminations, Voltaire only succeeded in bringing further discredit upon himself. In addition, he had begun writing an irreverent epic poem on Joan of Arc for the amusement of a few intimate friends. As often happened with his writings, someone made a copy of the manuscript. As soon as it began circulating, it attracted once more the attention of the police. Even a pure work of science such as the *Elémens de la philosophie de Neuton [sic]* (1738; translated as *The Elements of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy*, 1738) was not given a publishing authorization because of the opposition put up by the Academy of Science. Toward the end of 1739, Voltaire learned

that the parliament had condemned for burning an early version of his *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751; translated as *The Age of Lewis XIV*, 1752), an historic panorama of the preceding century that he had begun shortly after publishing the history of Charles XII. Apparently, the glowing account of the reign of Louis XIV was seen as a way of diminishing, by implicit comparison, that of the Sun King's descendant. Meanwhile, Voltaire's enemies--whose numbers were growing continuously--did their best to ridicule and discredit the author, whose success they envied and hated. Scurrilous rumors were spread, parodies of his plays printed and presented, defamatory pamphlets circulated. Voltaire was not able to shrug off the pettiness and meanness of such attacks and usually responded in kind, thus lowering himself to their level.

On 8 August 1736 Voltaire received an unusual and flattering mark of distinction--an admiring letter from the crown prince of Prussia, Frederick. Thus began a correspondence between the future king and the philosopher--an exchange of letters that continued, with a brief interruption, until the end of Voltaire's life. At first, the letters expressed nothing but mutual admiration. The two illustrious correspondents seemed to be attracted to each other by genuine feelings of respect and admiration. Although their relationship eventually soured, their friendship survived several betrayals and slights of which both were guilty at one time or another. Undeniably, each had something to gain in the bargain. Voltaire must have felt that his image would be enhanced in the eyes of Versailles through his association with one of the most powerful figures in Europe. He eventually offered his services to the French government by asking to be entrusted with ambassadorial or even spying missions to Frederick's court. From Frederick's vantage, Voltaire's friendship lent credibility to the image of philosopher-king he was eager to cultivate. The empress of Russia, Catherine II, later engaged in a similar strategy of public relations by courting Voltaire and Denis Diderot.

To a certain extent, Voltaire's desire to advertise his relationship with the king of Prussia fit into a general tactic of courting favor in high places that he engaged in during this period. At this time Voltaire was seriously considering the possibility of becoming one of the forty "immortals" of the French Academy. In view of his indisputable literary eminence, that an institution founded to promote linguistic purity and literary elegance had not yet admitted to its ranks the most important man of letters of France seems curious. By that time, however, the Academy had become a bastion of orthodox thought, and its function was mainly a decorative one. Paradoxically, its prestige was still considerable, and its vacant seats frequently became the objects of intense campaigns and elaborate machinations devised to ensure a candidate's election. To be admitted, one had to appear acceptable in the eyes of both church and court. Voltaire could not hope to meet this condition easily. His situation did not improve after another of his works caused a commotion. The premiere of *Mahomet* (published 1742) took place on 9 August 1742. Ostensibly, the play presented a critique of religious fanaticism, but behind the Islamic pretense was an attack on religion in general. To counter the negative publicity surrounding his play, Voltaire arrived at an inspired procedure: he decided to dedicate *Mahomet* to the Pope. His reasons were unimpeachable. As he wrote in his letter to the Pope, he was simply "dedicating to the head of the true religion, a work directed against the founder of a false and barbarous sect." To everyone's surprise, Benedict XIV accepted the dedication, thus effectively disarming the opposition of the *dévots* (devout persons). The king indicated that he would not oppose Voltaire's election to the French Academy, which took place on 2 May 1746. Voltaire gave his inaugural address in front of a packed house on 9 May.

Voltaire appeared to be riding a crest of popularity and official goodwill around this time. The previous year he had been invited to prepare a musical entertainment, *La Princesse de Navarre*

(published 1745, *The Princess of Navarre*), to help celebrate the dauphin's wedding at Versailles on 23 February 1745. Voltaire had also been given the title of *gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre du roi* and was named the official royal historiographer. For his first project in this capacity, he chose to celebrate in verse the recent French victory at Fontenoy. Voltaire's evident satisfaction at garnering distinctions that flattered his vanity point to a curious contradiction in his personality. He could be, alternately, both philosophe and courtier. But the contradiction was debilitating to him, as his biographer Lanson has pointed out: "He is not able to give up either the courtier's or the philosopher's soul in him, and while he adopts postures unworthy of a man who thinks, the truths he lets fall are, for a man of the court, either blunders or impertinences." Perhaps this strange contrast in his nature was what prevented Voltaire from ever gaining favor in the eyes of the king and his entourage. Indeed, Louis XV is said to have had an almost instinctive dislike for Voltaire and reportedly manifested a visible unease in the philosophe's presence.

As so often happened, this favorable aura quickly dissipated. Following his reception into the Academy, Voltaire became embroiled in an unseemly dispute with Louis Travenol, who was distributing pamphlets lampooning Voltaire. Then, in October 1747, while he was a guest at the court of Fontainebleau with Châtelet, Voltaire unwittingly caused a new uproar. Addicted to gambling, Châtelet frequently managed to lose considerable sums at the card games that had become a popular aristocratic pastime. One evening, as he watched his mistress's losses mounting, he could not contain himself and warned her, in English, "Don't you see, madam, that you're playing with scoundrels?" The couple realized immediately that the remark had been translated and was being passed around, in whispers. In imminent danger once more, Voltaire had to flee and stay out of sight for a while. He found a refuge at the château of Anne-Bénédicte-Louise de Bourbon-Condé, duchesse du Maine, in Sceaux. There, to pass the time, he entertained his

hostess by reading *Memnon* (1747; translated as *Zadig; or, The Book of Fate: An Oriental History*, 1749), a new work he had recently composed. Although Voltaire had begun writing *contes*--the short stories for which he became famous--early in his career, evidently around this time he perfected a genre that became truly his own. On the other hand, Voltaire would probably have been surprised--especially in light of the utter neglect into which his plays have fallen--had he known that these short stories would be the writings that would establish his literary reputation in the eyes of posterity and be associated most readily with his name.

Zadig, subtitled *la Destinée* (Destiny), is written in the manner of oriental tales that were popular in the eighteenth century. It recounts the trials and tribulations of Zadig, a man who seems to be destined for nothing but happiness and success, considering the moral and physical qualities with which he is endowed. Bitter experience teaches him that life is clearly governed by the aleatory dictates of an imponderable fate, and he realizes that no man--no matter how wise or virtuous--can ever be safe from the stupidity, cruelty, greed, and envy of his fellows. Voltaire's own life often seemed to follow a pattern that illustrated the philosophical insights developed in his *contes*. Following his return to Paris in 1748 and wishing to get back in the good graces of Louis XV, Voltaire composed a poem in honor of Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, marquise de Pompadour, the king's new favorite. The poem greatly offended the queen, and Voltaire was off to the Lorraine once more.

There, Voltaire and Châtelet spent some time as guests at the court of Stanislas Leszczyński in Nancy. The visit had unexpected consequences. While at court, Châtelet met poet Jean-François de Saint-Lambert, fell in love with him, and brought him back to Cirey with her. Voltaire discovered the infidelity one day when he entered Châtelet's room unannounced and came upon the lovers at a most compromising moment. A violent scene ensued, followed by a tearful reconciliation of all

three parties. In the meantime, Châtelet had become pregnant. For the sake of appearances, the marquis du Châtelet was quickly summoned home so he could spend a night with his wife. What had begun as a romantic interlude with farcical developments ended in tragedy. The marquise du Châtelet gave birth to a baby girl on the night of 3 September 1749 and died of complications a few days later.

For Voltaire, the loss was irreparable, although he had not been entirely faithful himself during the time he had been with Châtelet. He had had one brief affair with an actress, which Châtelet forgave and another, more serious one, about which she never found out. A few years earlier, toward the end of 1745 or the beginning of 1746, he had begun a rather passionate liaison--judging from the correspondence between the two lovers--with his niece Marie Louise Denis. She was seventeen years younger, and the relationship proved a lasting one. Nevertheless, his affection for Châtelet had been genuine, and his relationship with her had been such an essential part of his emotional and intellectual existence that he truly felt lost. For a time, he moved aimlessly from place to place, not knowing where to find a home. He finally decided to give in to Frederick's entreaties and, on 18 June 1750, left Paris for Potsdam. Although Voltaire had never been much appreciated at Versailles, his departure for Prussia was viewed as a kind of betrayal. In one sense, the court had good cause for concern. While Voltaire had remained in Paris, he had spent much of his time and energy on petty squabbles and quarrels, obsessively concerned with what others said and thought about him. Once he was in Berlin, he was rid of concerns over surveillance and suspicion surrounding his every step; he was no longer subject to the petty intrigues and persecutions he regularly had to endure in France. He could turn his full attention to his projects, untroubled by the meddling of censors or the police.

Not long after his arrival in Berlin, though, he became involved in a get-rich-quick scheme with a speculator named Abraham Hirsch. Voltaire

ended up discrediting himself once again as well as losing a considerable sum of money. What is worse, he also lost part of Frederick's respect and goodwill. As a result, the friendship they had both cultivated began slowly to erode. Voltaire was not the only one to blame, however. Each seemed to have a knack for irritating the other. Some disparaging but revealing comments that were made by each behind the other's back eventually reached the ears of the one disparaged. Commenting on Voltaire's usefulness to him, Frederick resorted to a rather blunt metaphor: "one squeezes the orange," he was reported to have said, "and one throws away the peel." For his part, Voltaire referred to the obligation he had incurred over the years to read and correct the king's poetry as "doing the king's dirty laundry." Voltaire also irritated Frederick by engaging in a rancorous dispute with Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, an eminent French mathematician, who was also the director of Frederick's Academy in Berlin. Nevertheless, these years were productive in spite of the constant squabbles. Published in Berlin, in December 1751, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* was an historical survey of everything that had made the reign of Louis XIV memorable. The lesson Voltaire wished to impart was that arts and letters had made France great, not its military conquests. The real benefactors of humankind, he suggested, had always been the writers, thinkers, artists, and scientists whose creative work and inventions constituted the reputation of an age for posterity. The history of the previous reign also offered an implicit critique of the reign of Louis XV by suggesting that, in this regard, it had mainly managed to force its most original thinkers and writers into exile. While in Prussia, Voltaire also began his project of a philosophical dictionary, in response to a suggestion made by Frederick at one of his suppers.

The relationship between Frederick and Voltaire eventually became strained to the point that Voltaire became anxious to leave. On 1 June 1753 he was finally given permission to depart--one could not leave Frederick's court without his permission--on condition that he return some

manuscripts belonging to the king. The king apparently was concerned about the satirical uses to which some of his creations might be put by the departing guest. Seeing that Voltaire had not returned his poetry, Frederick dispatched his agents in hot pursuit. They caught up with Voltaire in Frankfurt and placed him under house arrest. In the meantime, the baggage containing the manuscript in question had been sent to another destination. Several weeks passed before matters were settled and Voltaire was allowed to resume his travels. The whole incident was traumatic for Voltaire and demonstrated how vulnerable one could be to the whims of a monarch, whose power and reach extended far beyond the borders of his kingdom.

Paris, by this time, was considered off-limits to Voltaire. His first concern upon arriving in France was therefore to find a place for establishing a permanent residence. He eventually decided to settle in two places--one on each side of the border between France and the Republic of Geneva. At that stage of his life, Voltaire was a fairly rich man. In addition to his literary talents, he evidently possessed a good business acumen. In an age when the material rewards of a writer's career were highly uncertain, Voltaire had managed to accumulate considerable wealth, mainly through investments and money lending. In 1755, he acquired in Geneva a property he renamed Les Délices. His relations with the Genevans were frequently strained. One major source of conflict was Voltaire's love of theater. Indeed, one of the first improvements on his new property was building a new theater. On 31 July 1755, the Geneva Consistory met to declare a formal ban on all forms of theatrical performance. For the moment, Voltaire promised to respect the ordinance, but the issue resurfaced the following year.

In 1755, Voltaire received the visit of Jean Le Rond d'Alembert at Les Délices. At this time, d'Alembert was still co-editing the *Encyclopédie* with Diderot, a project Voltaire had joined enthusiastically three years earlier. Upon his

return to Paris, d'Alembert wrote the article "Genève" for the encyclopedia, an essay that produced an outcry of indignation back in Geneva. D'Alembert's intention had been to praise the pastors of the city for their progressive outlook, especially in comparison to the Catholic clergy. As a result, he appeared to downplay the essentially Christian nature of their religious convictions and practices. In addition, the article advised the Genevans to rethink and overcome the prejudice they had against the theater. This particular passage had the unintended consequence of bringing Rousseau into the fray. Rousseau was convinced that Voltaire had inspired the tenor of d'Alembert's article and came to the defense of his compatriots. The result was Rousseau's *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758; translated as *Politics and the Arts, Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre*, 1960), an impassioned treatise condemning the theater and its promoters, as Besterman puts it, "with all his usual elegance and wrong-headedness." For the time being, Voltaire was not too concerned about Rousseau and his immoderate opinions. He had recently received the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755; translated as *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of the Inequality among Mankind*, 1762), which Rousseau had sent as a token of his respectful admiration for his elder. Voltaire had responded in a playful tone, which suggested that he did not take Rousseau's ideas too seriously. "Il prende envie de marcher à quatre pattes, quand on lit votre ouvrage" (One feels like crawling on all fours when one reads your work), Voltaire wrote, concluding his letter with an invitation to come back to live and enjoy nature in Geneva, "boire avec moi le lait de nos vaches et brouter nos herbes" (to drink with me the milk of our cows and graze on our grasses).

A more serious conflict arose on another issue that both thinkers felt strongly about. The year 1755 was also the year of the earthquake in Lisbon. This natural disaster and the evil it manifested brought up philosophical implications that became a veritable obsession with Voltaire.

His immediate reaction was to express his dismay in the *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* (1756, Poem about the Disaster of Lisbon), in which he questioned the philosophical optimism of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Alexander Pope as well as the notion of a divine benevolence. Rousseau found Voltaire an ingrate who had no right either to complain or to question the decrees of divine Providence. Voltaire, on the other hand, was inclined more and more to take a dim view of optimistic diagnoses of the human condition. In preparing his book on Charles XII and the *Essai sur l'histoire générale et sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations, depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à nos jours* (1756; translated as *The Universal History and State of All Nations from the Time of Charlemain to Lewis XIV*, 1758) he had felt discouraged by the frequent examples of unspeakable barbarism and cruelty that regularly came up in the history of civilizations.

Voltaire's most eloquent response to Rousseau was *Candide, ou l'optimisme* (1759; translated as *Candid; or, All for the Best*, 1759), indisputably the masterpiece among Voltaire's *contes philosophiques* (philosophical tales)--which have come to represent, for the modern reader, Voltaire at his best. The author's presence in his stories is manifested by the wit and wisdom that are their most evident characteristics. The philosophical lessons they offer are all the more effective for not being presented as such. They are dispensed with gusto and humor, and the telling as well as the moral of the story is made light and lively by the irony of the author. At their most basic level, the main characters of these stories are travelers--sometimes from outer space, as in *Le Micromégas* ([1752]; translated as *Micromegas*, 1753), sometimes from distant lands, as in *L'Ingénu* (1767; translated as *L'Ingenu; or, The Sincere Huron*, 1768). Their travels can be motivated by a quest, by a basic wanderlust, by force of circumstance, or by a combination of all three, because Voltaire's heroes are wanderers by nature. Their outlook is marked by restlessness, a feeling of dissatisfaction with their own country and culture, and a desire to see how things might be elsewhere. Since their

curiosity makes them open-minded, they assimilate quite readily the lessons of their peripatetic existence; in other words, these travels are also philosophical. The most important action and developments in these stories take place at the intellectual level. At this level also the reader's complacency and ingrained habits of thought are challenged. Thus, by appealing to the reader's good sense, Voltaire aims to change some accepted ways of considering the human condition. Typically, the hero is an innocent who is the embodiment of good sense and whose vantage point allows readers to discern the scandal of the evils for which humans themselves are responsible. Wars, injustice, and persecutions of all kinds are but the products of ignorance, superstition, and fanaticism--that is, of a blind adherence to unquestioned habits of thought. The natural reason of Voltaire's heroes helps bring out the scandal of barbaric mores hiding behind the facade of civilized refinement. The Huron surnamed *L'Ingénu* notes, "Mes compatriotes d'Amérique ne m'avaient jamais traité avec la barbarie que j'éprouve, ils n'en ont pas d'idée. On les appelle *sauvages*; ce sont des gens de bien grossiers, et les hommes de ce pays-ci sont des coquins raffinés" (My American compatriots would never have treated me with the barbarism I have experienced. They cannot imagine it. They are called *savages*; they are indeed uncouth, but the people in this country are refined scoundrels). If a certain kind of wisdom is attained at the end, it is modest. Once humans accept that they are limited in their capacity to understand the world and to affect events around them, they are ready to live life on its own terms and to accept its simple joys as well as its disappointments. When illusions dissolve, the resolve remains to make the best of every situation by concentrating on the practical and tangible aspects of life. One can then get down to the business of cultivating one's garden.

Voltaire was also applying Candide's principle to his own life at the time he was composing his philosophical tale. In November 1758 he had bought the property of Ferney, as well as a

château near Tournay, both on the French side of the border. The Tournay property brought with it the title of count, and while Voltaire occasionally made light of his newly acquired aristocratic status, he took seriously the responsibilities that befell the "*seigneur de Ferney*" (lord of Ferney). Over the years, he strove to improve not only his own properties but also the lot of the inhabitants of the community. The responsibilities he had assumed gave him the occasion to fight for certain reforms and improvements that were inspired by the enlightened principles of the newly emerging economic philosophy of laissez-faire capitalism. Voltaire sought to reduce certain taxes and eliminate trade barriers that were contributing to keeping the area in a state of underdevelopment and hopeless poverty. He helped develop existing resources and established the relatively new and profitable industry of watchmaking in the village. Among the many writings devoted to the subject of economics, his story of *L'Homme aux quarante écus* (1768; translated as *The Man of Forty Crowns*, 1768) is one of the more entertaining. Voltaire's generosity was also extended to the guests he received at Ferney.

While he could be implacable in his resentments, he was also capable of showing extraordinary care and concern for those he deemed deserving of his help. In 1760 he learned of an impoverished girl who was a descendant of dramatist Pierre Corneille. He welcomed Marie-Françoise Corneille to his home and, together with Marie Louise Denis, took care to educate her and even find a suitable husband for her. Marie-Françoise Corneille's presence also inspired him to undertake an edition of her ancestor's works. The project of editing the French classics had already been on his mind for some time, and he had suggested it to the French Academy. The Academy agreed, and Voltaire completed the task, and the twelve volumes of the *Théâtre de Pierre Corneille, avec des commentaires* (Theater of Pierre Corneille with Commentaries) were published in 1764. The considerable profits from the edition made up Marie-Françoise's dowry.

In addition to being its "seigneur," Voltaire was also becoming the "patriarch of Ferney," the intellectual figure whose influence was beginning to radiate all over Europe. Ferney was becoming a place of pilgrimage for growing numbers of visitors who came to pay homage to Voltaire. His reputation and status as the leading intellectual figure in Europe grew steadily over the next few years, a time when he became fully engaged in his campaign against *l'Infâme* (the Infamous One). He used the term for the first time in a letter to d'Alembert written on 7 or 8 May 1761. Eventually, he closed his letters with "Ecrasez l'infâme" (Wipe out Satan) instead of the customary salutations. The slogan, sometimes abbreviated to *Eclinf*, expressed his resolve to fight evil in all its forms. The main culprits to be combated were superstition and fanaticism and the systems of belief that promoted these scourges.

Up until about the middle of the century, the philosophes seemed generally content to subscribe to rationales for peaceful coexistence with the *dévots* in France. By the end of the 1750s, however, an open conflict between the two factions had broken out. On 6 February 1759, the parliament condemned the *Encyclopédie* to be burned, together with other works, which included Voltaire's poem *La Religion naturelle* (1758, *The Natural Religion*). Voltaire was extremely disturbed by the news he was receiving from Paris and asked d'Alembert to keep him informed of the latest developments in the French capital. Voltaire became convinced that the persecution of progressive thought had become intolerable and had to be countered. His first targets were the Jesuits, his former teachers. A pamphlet titled *Relation de la maladie, de la confession, de la mort et de l'apparition du Jésuite Berthier* (*The Story of Jesuit Berthier's Illness, Confession, Death, and Apparition*) appeared in November 1759. It was a satirical piece aimed at the editor of the influential *Journal de Trévoux*. Soon thereafter, Voltaire had another opportunity to put his satirical talents to use when he learned that philosophy had been attacked in the French

Academy: the moment was critical. D'Alembert, who had resigned from the *Encyclopédie* following the storm caused by his article on Geneva, had become obsessed with a new project--a plan to turn the French Academy into a bastion for philosophy--and was counting on Voltaire for support. The project of a philosophic takeover had barely been put into motion when the philosophes found themselves under attack. The occasion was the reception speech given by Le Franc de Pompignan, delivered before the august assembly on 10 March 1760. The newly elected academician, who appears to have been motivated by hopes of becoming governor of the royal children, presented himself as the defender of church and state. He excoriated the rapidly spreading philosophical spirit that threatened to undermine the foundations of both throne and altar. The discourse included clear allusions to several members of the Academy--including Voltaire and d'Alembert--who stood accused of promoting the supposed subversion. The oration was delivered, however, in a haughty and pompous manner that invited ridicule. A pamphlet titled *Les Quand* (1760) soon began circulating. Each of its paragraphs began with the word "quand" and pointed out one aspect of Pompignan's pretentiousness. The *Quand* were to be followed by the *qui*, the *que*, the *quoi*, the *pour*, the *oui*, the *non*, the *car*, the *ah! ah!*, and a few satirical poems. The abbé André Morellet joined in with the *si* and the *pourquoi*. Pompignan's discomfiture was so complete that he never dared to reappear in the Academy. Though highly successful, the war of the "particules" had been but an entertaining interlude in the campaign to defend philosophy against its enemies.

When Voltaire first heard of the Jean Calas affair, he reacted by dismissing it as yet another instance of religious fanaticism--even though, on this particular occasion, the perpetrators were Huguenots. He changed his mind as soon as he was given a full report on what had transpired in Toulouse and quickly became convinced that a monstrous miscarriage of justice had occurred. What was clear, was that Calas--a Protestant who,

on the basis of flimsy and contradictory evidence, had been found guilty of murdering his son--had been put to death in a manner that testified to the still-prevailing barbarism of a nation that considered itself highly civilized. Having undergone the two prescribed levels of torture before being broken on the wheel, Calas had maintained his innocence until the end. Voltaire concluded that the whole process of judging and condemning Calas had been driven by a religious fanaticism and hatred that had infused the investigation from the beginning. Voltaire took up the task of rehabilitating Calas and his family. To overturn the judgment passed by the parliament of Toulouse, he realized that he needed to inflame public opinion in favor of the victims. Having ascertained all the facts of the case, he proceeded to launch a barrage of pamphlets and letters intended to expose the enormity of the judicial ineptitude and barbarism. The campaign culminated in the publication in 1763 of the *Traité sur la tolérance* (translated as *A Treatise on Religious Toleration*, 1764), a collection of essays in which Voltaire effectively raised the affair to the level of a general concern for universal principles of humanity. Finally, on 4 June 1764, the unanimous vote of an assembly of eighty judges reversed the verdict of the parliament of Toulouse and the king's council ratified the decision. Following this victory, Voltaire became known as "the man of Calas."

The Calas affair was not the last miscarriage of justice of this type. Voltaire also took up the cause of the Sirvens, another family of Protestants who were victims of Catholic zealotry. On 3 January 1762, in the southern village of Saint-Alby, one of the Sirvens's three daughters, who had a history of mental illness, was found drowned at the bottom of a well. Because the daughter had previously indicated a desire to convert to Catholicism, the official investigation soon came to the conclusion--unsupported by any material evidence--that the parents had murdered the girl to avert a conversion. The similarities between the Sirven case and that of Calas proved to be most damaging. They eventually gave rise to a popular

belief that Protestants met in secret to decree the deaths of children about to convert. The sentence, it was rumored, was carried out by specialists known as *estrangladous* (stranglers). More fortunate than the Calases, the Sirvens fled in time to avoid arrest and eventually found refuge in Lausanne. Voltaire met with the father and his two daughters in Ferney in 1765 and quickly became convinced of their innocence. Because of his efforts, the Sirvens were eventually rehabilitated in 1771. Meanwhile, one year after the rehabilitation of Calas, Voltaire had found himself personally implicated in the affair of the chevalier François-Jean de La Barre. The chevalier was one of three young men accused of having vandalized a crucifix in the northern town of Abbeville. On the basis of evidence that was largely immaterial, La Barre was found guilty and condemned to have his tongue cut out and to be beheaded; the body was then to be thrown into a ceremonial fire. The Paris parliament confirmed the sentence, which was duly carried out--though the executioner gave up his attempt to rip out the young man's tongue when the latter resisted. On the other hand, the beheading was apparently carried out so deftly that the crowd applauded. Voltaire's correspondence for this period provides frequent examples of his sense of helpless outrage at the lack of proportion between the crime and the punishment. As he pointed out in a letter written shortly after the execution, the young men who were beheaded had been condemned for not having removed their hats at a procession and for having sung profane songs. He was also scandalized by the attitude of his compatriots, who could proceed so casually "du spectacle de l'échafout et du bûcher à celui de l'opéra cominique" (from the spectacle of the scaffold to that of comic opera). Voltaire had difficulty identifying with a people who could reconcile penchants for cruelty and frivolity. He wrote to Marie de Vichy-Chamrond, marquise Du Deffand, "Votre nation est partagée en deux espèces, l'une de singes oisifs qui se moquent de tout, et l'autre de Tigres qui déchirent" (Your nation is divided in two species, one of idle monkeys that make light of everything, the other of tigers that tear to pieces." The La Barre affair also made Voltaire

fear for his own safety. Among La Barre's belongings, the police had found the *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* (1764; translated as *The Philosophical Dictionary for the Pocket*, 1765), which had been used as evidence for establishing the impiety of the accused and had been burned with La Barre's body. Worried about his own safety, Voltaire sought refuge in Switzerland.

Voltaire's disenchantment with his countrymen was also expressed in his other writings of the period. Thus, the paradox of a society in which a brilliant culture exists side by side with the most primitive barbarism serves as a theme in the *conte La Princesse de Babylone* (1768; translated as *The Princess of Babylon*, 1768). This contrast is exemplified by two kinds of Parisians the princess notices when she arrives in the French capital. The two groups dominating social and cultural life in the city are the "oisifs" and the "occupés"--the idlers and the busybodies. While the idlers are preoccupied with arts and entertainment, the busybodies take care of governing. The contrast between the two groups is reflected in their characters: whereas the cultured ones are polite, pleasant, and quite likable, the others include "une troupe de sombres fanatiques, moitié absurdes, moitié fripons" (a troop of somber fanatics, half-absurd, half-crooked). The ancient barbaric customs this troop watches over ensure the lack of proportion between crimes and their punishment. But this discrepancy causes little concern. When an injustice or an atrocity was committed, the idlers briefly "poussaient des cris perçants, et le lendemain ils n'y pensaient plus, et ne parlaient que de modes nouvelles" (made shrill noises but the next day they no longer thought about it and only spoke of the latest fashions). Voltaire was hoping to imbue these people with higher aspirations.

Voltaire had been involved for some time with a more serious project, the *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif*. While the idea had come from Frederick, the work evolved in terms of Voltaire's own purpose. Accordingly, the *Dictionnaire* was situated within the general context of the struggle

against *l'Infâme*. This struggle represents a crucial episode in Voltaire's life and takes place at a time when the antagonism pitting the philosophes against the *dévots* was at its most intense. Taken as a metaphor for Voltaire's motives in his campaign against persecution and injustice, *l'Infâme* is obviously multifaceted and rather vague in its meaning and implications. While Voltaire himself never took the trouble to define the term, the general thrust of the slogan seems fairly evident: it stood for the evils of religious intolerance that marked certain practices of organized religion and were inspired by Christian dogma. Thus, according to René Pomeau, what Voltaire sought to accomplish, in the course of the six or seven years during which he used the slogan, was nothing less than a religious mutation, which was to be achieved by "une deuxième Réforme, qui pour ainsi dire déchristianiserait le christianisme, en lui substituant un théisme minimal conforme à l'esprit des Lumières" (a second Reformation, which would, so to speak, de-Christianize Christianity, by replacing it with a minimal theism in conformity with the spirit of the Enlightenment). The *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* was to serve as a powerful weapon in this campaign.

Voltaire's approach was eminently scientific; that is why the dictionary scandalized so many: he used the scientific method to dissect the Scriptures. Pierre Bayle had already used this approach to great effect in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697; translated as *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*, 1710), an exemplary work of exegesis Voltaire had always admired and used extensively and one he wanted to surpass in public regard. He hoped to reach the widest audience possible and therefore had originally titled his work *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif*--a dictionary in name only. While the articles appear in alphabetical order, nothing is systematic about their arrangement. The majority of topics treated are biblical or theological in nature and concern issues that Voltaire considered important at the time. His main preoccupations, reflected in the titles of the

articles, were philosophical and ethical, and his purpose twofold. He sought to determine, first, the historical accuracy of the biblical story in question and, second, its ethical value from the standpoint of reason. In the years following the publication of the first edition, the dictionary kept expanding. Between 1764 and 1769 Voltaire prepared four successive new editions. He apparently had found a form of expression that appealed to him. It allowed him to vary his style at will, to pick the issues he deemed most urgent, and to attack repeatedly the most vulnerable aspects of established orthodoxies.

The popularity of the *Dictionnaire*, which was also, to be sure, a succès de scandale, gave an indication of the growing influence of Voltaire's writings. By the end of the 1760s, Ferney had become a center of intellectual activity that radiated its ideas throughout Europe. It continued to attract an endless stream of visitors. As Voltaire noted in a letter to Du Deffand, "J'ai été pendant quatorze ans l'aubergiste de l'Europe, et je me suis lassé de cette profession" (for fourteen years I have been the innkeeper of Europe, and I have grown tired of the profession). Moreover, some visitors turned out to be particularly tiresome. In 1767, Voltaire had befriended Joseph La Harpe, who was then a promising young dramatist. The young man decided to take undue advantage of his access to Voltaire by stealing a manuscript and having it published in Paris. He apparently had been aided and abetted by Voltaire's niece, Marie-Louise Denis, who had come to live in Ferney a few years earlier. The result of La Harpe's indiscretion was Voltaire's decision to send Denis back to Paris and to discourage further visits from admirers.

In the meantime, some admirers in Paris wanted to pay a fitting tribute to their idol. A group of seventeen philosophes came together at the salon of Suzanne Necker and decided that Voltaire should be immortalized in sculpture. A subscription was launched, and sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle was hired for the job. While Voltaire was certainly flattered by this attention,

he was not entirely pleased with the result: Pigalle had decided to render the likeness of the philosophe in the heroic style of Greek antiquity--that is, naked, with a sheet partially draping his emaciated frame. News of yet another homage paid to him arrived in 1773, and Voltaire was touched to learn of a veritable ceremony held in the apartment of the actress Mademoiselle Clairon, where his bust had been crowned with a laurel wreath. These small gestures that flattered his ego were overshadowed by dramatic changes taking place in the political realm. In 1771, the chancellor, René-Nicolas-Charles-Augustin de Maupeou, disbanded the parliaments in France. Voltaire had cause to feel personally gratified by this turn of events because his *Histoire du Parlement de Paris* (History of the Parliament of Paris), published in 1769, had certainly contributed to the growing antiparliament sentiment in France. Voltaire's purpose had been to retrace the bloodstained history of the institution in order to point out a record of decisions made in the name of justice that could only be termed grotesque. Indeed, an instance of an atrocity committed in the name of justice had occurred as recently as the fall of 1770, providing yet another argument in support of the chancellor's course of action. In the town of Arras, a certain Monbailli had been accused of murdering his mother. Not only was there no proof of his guilt, but also the attending circumstances substantiated his claim of innocence. He and his wife were nevertheless found guilty, and Monbailli, still denying his guilt, died on the wheel. Since the wife was pregnant, her execution was put off, thus saving her life. When Voltaire learned of the case, he published a brief account, *La Méprise d'Arras* (1772, The Mistake of Arras), and appealed to Chancellor Maupeou. Charged with the revision of the case, a new court reversed the previous decision.

The day finally arrived when Voltaire could no longer stay away from Paris. As a pretext, he used his latest tragedy, *Irène*, which was about to be performed 31 May 1778 at the Comédie française.

On 5 February 1778 he left Ferney and arrived in Paris five days later. Once in the capital, he was drawn into a whirlwind of activities and celebrations that proved deadly in the end. His house was besieged by throngs of visitors. One of the most memorable visits was that of Benjamin Franklin, who happened to be in Paris at the time. Franklin had brought his grandson with him and asked Voltaire to give his blessing to the little boy. It was a scene worthy of French painter Jean-Baptiste Greuze: the philosophe placed his hand on the boy's head, uttering the words "Dieu et la liberté" (God and liberty). The endless visits were beginning to take their toll, however, and Voltaire's health, which had been fragile throughout his life, began to deteriorate. His longtime physician, Swiss doctor Théodore Tronchin, was gravely concerned and recommended that Voltaire return to Ferney--to no avail. As soon as he began to feel better, Voltaire wanted to take part in the cultural life of the city. His visits to the theater and to the French Academy were marked by displays of enthusiasm and adulation by crowds of admirers. At the French Academy, his visit was made memorable by an unprecedented mark of distinction: the members came to greet him at the entrance of the building. After he left the Academy, his carriage could barely make its way through adoring crowds of Parisians who had assembled along the route to the theater. At the Comédie française, the performance of *Irène* that Voltaire attended turned into an apotheosis of the author. An actor entered Voltaire's loge and placed a crown of laurel on his head to the enthusiasm of the audience. Following the play, the actors proceeded to a coronation of Voltaire's bust on the stage. More visits followed--to the French Academy, to the Masonic lodge, to the theater, and to the Academy of Science. At the French Academy he even initiated a new project, in which he took a leading role. He proposed a new kind of dictionary that would give the etymology and illustrate the various meanings of words with examples taken from the best authors in French literature. This period of renewed energy did not last, and Voltaire's health became critical once more. His symptoms indicate that the

main source of Voltaire's ills was prostate cancer. The end came on 30 May 1778.

Following Voltaire's death, the Church refused to grant permission for a burial in holy ground. Thanks to the intervention of his nephew, the abbé Alexandre Jean Mignot, Voltaire's mortal remains were finally laid to rest in the monastery of Scellières, in Champagne. In July 1791, they were disinterred and transferred in a grand procession to the Panthéon. The sarcophagus containing Voltaire's coffin was displayed on a chariot drawn by a dozen horses, all grayish-white. It bore the inscription, "Il vengea Calas, La Barre, Sirven et Monbailli. Poète, philosophe, historien, il a fait prendre un grand essor à l'esprit humain, et nous a préparés à être libres" (He avenged Calas, La Barre, Sirven, and Monbailli. Poet, philosopher, historian, he gave wings to the human spirit and prepared us to be free).

It was a tribute marking the end of an era Voltaire had dominated intellectually, through his literary and political involvement, his humanitarian activism, his tireless defense and promotion of the ideals constituting the French Enlightenment. Voltaire's influence on posterity appears to be much less significant. Though he is still considered one of the giants of French literature, in light of his enormous literary and epistolary output, relatively little remains that is of vital interest to a twenty-first-century readership. One part of Voltaire's legacy has remained vital and alive, however: it is what could be termed the spirit of Voltaire--to use the title of the classic work by Norman Torrey--that is, his wit, the ironic verve of his commitments, and his sincere dedication to humanity in all of its global extent and variety. "Voltaire est un bon vaccin contre la bêtise" (Voltaire is a good vaccine against stupidity), writes Emmanuel Berl in the introduction to the Pléiade edition of Voltaire's works. That kind of protection is as crucial today as it was in Voltaire's day.

Papers: The principal repositories for Voltaire's manuscripts and letters are the Bibliothèque

nationale and the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris, and the Institut et Musée Voltaire in Geneva.

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