



# VOLTAIRE

## Candide, Zadig

*and Selected Stories*

**Translated and with an introduction, by Donald M. Frame**

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women who swept the palace after having enjoyed the favors of a princess more beautiful than the mistresses of the caliph, and at being at the service of all the bourgeois of Bagdad after having ruled over all the genii; but Mesroure did not have the eye that sees the bad side of things.

## Memory's Adventure

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[1775]

THE THINKING HUMAN RACE, that is to say at most the hundred-thousandth part of the human race, had long believed, or at least had often repeated, that we had ideas only through our senses, and that memory is the only instrument by which we can put two ideas and two words together.

That is why Jupiter, representing nature, was in love with Mnemosyne, goddess of memory, from the first moment he saw her; and of this marriage were born the nine Muses, who were the inventors of all the arts.

This dogma, on which all our knowledge is founded, was universally accepted, and even the Nonsober<sup>1</sup> embraced it as soon as it was born, although it was a truth.

Some time later along came an arguer,<sup>2</sup> half geometrician, half chimerical, who argued against the five senses and against memory; and he said to the small numbers of the thinking human race:

"You have been wrong up to now, for your senses are useless; for ideas are inborn in you before any of your senses can act, for you had all the necessary notions when you came into the world; you knew everything without having sensed anything; all your ideas, born with you, were present to your intelligence, named *soul*, without the help of memory. That memory of yours is good for nothing."

The Nonsober condemned this proposition, not because it was ridiculous, but because it was new; however, when later on an Englishman<sup>3</sup> had set himself to prove, and even at length, that there were no innate ideas, that nothing was more necessary than the five senses, that memory helped greatly to

1 Non-sober: anagram of Sorbonne.\*

2 Descartes.

3 Locke.

retain the things received by the five senses, the Nonsober condemned her own sentiments, because they had become those of an Englishman. Consequently she ordered the human race henceforth to believe in innate ideas and no longer to believe in the five senses and the memory. The human race, instead of obeying, laughed at the Nonsober, who flew into such a rage that she tried to have a philosopher burned. For this philosopher had said that it is impossible to have a complete idea of a cheese unless you have seen and eaten one; and the villain even dared put forth the idea that men and women would never have been able to work in tapestry if they had not had needles, and fingers to thread them with.

The Lioloists<sup>4</sup> joined with the Nonsober for the first time in their life; and the Sejanists, mortal enemies of the Lioloists, united with them for a moment. They called to their aid the ancient Dicasterics, who were great philosophers; and all together, before they died, they proscribed memory and the five senses, and the author who had said something good about these six things.

A horse happened to be present at the judgment which these gentlemen pronounced, although he was not of the same species and there were several differences between him and them such as that of height, voice, smoothness of coat, and ears; this horse, I say, who had sense as well as senses, spoke to Pegasus about it one day in my stable; and Pegasus went and told this story to the Muses with his usual vivacity.

The Muses, who for a hundred years had singularly favored the country, long barbarous, where this scene was taking place, were extremely scandalized; they tenderly loved Memory, or Mnemosyne, their mother, to whom these nine daughters are obligated for everything they know. The ingratitude of men irritated them. They did not compose a satire against the ancient Dicasterics, the Lioloists, the Sejanists, and the Nonsober, because satires correct no one, irritate fools, and make them even more wicked. They imagined a way to enlighten them while punishing them. Men had blasphemed memory; the Muses deprived them of this gift of the gods so that they might learn once and for all what it is like to be without its aid.

<sup>4</sup> Anagram of Loyolists: Jesuits. The Sejanists just below are the Jansenists; the Dicasterics, members of the dicastery, the Parlement of Paris.

So it happened in the middle of one fine night that all brains grew heavy, so that the next morning everyone awoke without having the slightest memory of the past. A few Dicasterics, sleeping with their wives, tried, by a remnant of instinct independent of memory, to make advances to them. The wives, since wives only very rarely have an instinct to embrace their husbands, bitterly rejected their disgusting caresses. The husbands grew angry, the wives screamed, and most of the couples came to blows about it.

The gentlemen, finding a square bonnet,<sup>5</sup> used it for certain needs which neither memory nor good sense can relieve. The ladies employed their cosmetic jars for the same uses. The servants, no longer remembering the bargain they had made with their masters, entered their rooms without knowing where they were; but since man is born curious, they opened all the drawers; and since man naturally loves the brilliance of silver and gold without needing memory for that, they took all of it that they found at hand. The masters wanted to cry: "Stop thief!" But since the idea of thief had gone out of their head, the word could not come to their tongue. Each one, having forgotten his own language, articulated formless sounds. It was much worse than at Babel, where each man invented a new language on the spot. The feeling, inborn in the sense of young valets, for pretty women acted so powerfully that these impudent fellows threw themselves recklessly upon the first women or girls they found, whether barmaids or wives of chief justices; and these ladies, no longer remembering the lessons of shame, let them go ahead with complete freedom.

People had to have dinner; no one knew how to go about it any more. No one had been to market either to sell or to buy. The servants had taken the masters' clothes, and the masters those of the servants. Everybody looked at each other with vacant eyes. Those who had the greatest genius for procuring necessities (and they were of the people) found a little to live on; the others lacked everything. The chief presiding judge and the archbishop went about stark naked, and their grooms were some in red robes, the others in dalmatics; everything was confused, everyone was about to perish of misery and hunger, for lack of communication.

After a few days the Muses took pity on this poor race: they are good, although they sometimes make the wicked

<sup>5</sup> The mark of a doctor of the Sorbonne.\*

feel their wrath; so they besought their mother to return to these blasphemers the memory that she had taken from them. Mnemosyne came down into this region of contraries in which she had been so rashly insulted, and spoke to them in these words:

"Imbeciles, I forgive you; but this time remember that without the senses there is no memory, and without memory there is no mind."

The Dicasterics thanked her rather dryly, and decreed that they would address remonstrances to her. The Sejanists put this whole adventure in their gazette; it was noted that they were not yet cured. The Lioloists started up a court intrigue about it. Doctor Coger, quite dumfounded by the adventure and understanding nothing about it, pronounced to his eighth-grade schoolboys this fine axiom: *Non magis musis quam hominibus infensa est ista quae vocatur memoria.*<sup>6</sup>

6 "She who is called Memory is no more inimical to muses than to men." This is a parody of the subject proposed in 1772 by the University of Paris, of which Coger was rector, for the prize in Latin eloquence: "*Non magis Deo quam regibus infensa est ista quae vocatur hodie philosophia.*" Voltaire was convinced that Coger meant *minus* instead of *magis*.