Theophylaste Renaudot (1586-1653)

General Collection of Discourses of the Virtuosi of France, Upon Questions of all Sorts of Philosophy and other Natural Knowledg.

Two Volumes — London, 1664 & 1665
Selected, Transcribed & Edited, by Dr Robert A. Hatch©

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Théophraste Renaudot (1586-1653) had two sons involved with publishing: Eusèbe Renaudot (1613-1679) and Isaac Renaudot (d. 1680); English translation included George Havers (? - ?) and John Davies (1625-1693)


Théophylaste Renaudot (1586-1653), a physician, came to Paris from Loudun in 1612 as protégée of Cardinal Richelieu. In 1631 he established the first French newspaper, the Gazette (later Gazette de France). Both Louis XIII and Richelieu, realizing the power of the press on public opinion, contributed to the Gazette, finally granting Renaudot a virtual news monopoly. Renaudot founded a society whose purpose was to give a weekly lecture on any subject other than theology and politics. Applying chemistry to medicine and opposing scholasticism, he angered the faculty of Medicine at the University of Paris. The “Bureau d’adresse” was founded in 1630 to register addresses and assist the poor in finding housing and work. The Faculty of Medicine finally brought Renaudot to trial and prompted the closing of the Bureau.
A General Collection
OF DISCOURSES
OF THE
Virtuosi of France,
Upon Questions of all Sorts of PHILOSOPHY,
AND OTHER Natural Knowledg.

Made in the Assembly of the Beaux Esprits at Paris, by the most Ingenious Persons of that Nation.

Render’d into English by G. HAVERS, Gent.

LONDON,
Printed for Thomas Dring and John Starkey, and are to be sold at their Shops, at the George in Fleet-Street neer Clifford’s-Inn, and the Miter between the Middle-Temple-Gate and Temple-Bar. 1664.
To the Honourable
ANCHITELL GRAY, Esq;

If it be compliance with Custom that induces me to a Dedication of the ensuing Discourse, 'tis obedience to Reason that moves me to inscribe them to your Honourable Name. They are the ingenious Productions of the most accomplish'd Gentlemen of our Neighbour-Nation, and so could not be more fitly presented then to One of our Own, who to the advantages of a most Illustrious Descent, hath conjoin'd whatever is particularly excellent in Many. That celebrated Aphorism of Plato, which pronounceth Felicity to that State wherein either the Philosophers are of chief dignity, or those of chief dignity are Philosophers, holds no less true in the Commonwealth of Learning then in Political Governments. Arts and Sciences, when cultivated by Persons of quality, not only derive lustre from the rank of their Professors, but acquire enlargement of Territory by their Conduct: Heroick souls disdaining the enslaving formalities practis'd hitherto by the Sovereigns of the Schools, and by the restauration of Freedom, laying open the way to Conquest. I shall not undertake to determine whether the restitution of Philosophical Liberty began first by the French, or by some great Personages of our own, particularly the renowned [4] Lord Bacon (from whom 'tis said, not improbably, their Des-Cartes took the grounds of his new Theory) but 'tis certain that his way of Experiment, as now prosecuted by sundry English Gentlemen, affords more probabilities of glorious and profitable Fruits, then the attempts of any other Age or Nation whatsoever. But as it would be a fault in me to insist upon Comparisons, so it will be an injury in such as shall think you, Sir, any way concern'd in these Discourse, either upon the account of their Matter or Translation. 'Tis true, they are extreamly well fitted both for Instruction and Pleasure, they handle weighty Questions with great facility; and what would be a load in the ordinary modes of Writing thereupon, is here as fully and substantially deliver'd, and yet with exceeding Elegancy and perspicuity; but however commendable in themselves, 'twere criminal to think that you need them; but, on the contrary, I well understood that the Book needed you; and therefore I must humbly beg your pardon, if I have herein been too forward for its Interest by this Dedication, as also for my own in taking upon me so publicly the quality of,

Sir,
Your most humble and obedient
Servant,

G. Havers.
The Publisher of the Ensuing Conferences,

Thinks it his Duty to advertise the Ingenious Readers, I. That they are the Productions of an Assembly of the Choicest Wits in France, whose design it was to rescue the Liberal Sciences from the bondage of Scholastical Obscurities, and to render Things intelligible without obliging the studious to the unpleasing and perpetual Task of first surmounting the difficulties of Exotick Words. To which purpose they judg’d fit to establish this as a principal Law of their Discourse, That onely the French Language should be us’d therein, in order to cultivate and improve the same; and this, in imitation of the Greeks and Romans, whose writings are abundant evidences of the same Practice. II. That amongst the Arguments for the several Opinions upon each Question, it was thought fit to wave the alledging of Authorities, except upon some very special occasion. It being observ’d, that the heaping Testimonies together serves commonly for Ostentation rather then Strength; and, (to omit the consideration of Brevity) if any man speaks Reason, it ought to suffice without anothers Authority to recommend it. Besides, that Nothing hath been found more prejudicial to the Improvement of Philosophy, then the attributing too much to the Magisterial Sayings of an Author of Great Name. In which regard likewise, these Virtuosi have acted with no less Prudence then Modesty, in leaving the Determination of each Question to the judgment of the Reader, who is made the Arbiter of the Dispute, and may, in the grateful Variety of Opinions, freely give his suffrage to That which shall seem to him founded upon the most convincing Reasons; or else having them all before him, establish a better of his own. III. That theses Gentlemen, leaving the way of arguing by Mode and Figure to Colleges, have chosen to propose their sense in the freest and most natural form of Speech, as being most suitable to Conferences, and less subject either [5] to the captious fallacies, or pedantical janglings and heats, resulting from Disputes by Syllogism. To avoid which also the better, care was taken that every one might have this Perswasion, That he was no-wise interested to maintain his Sentence upon any Point; but being once produc’d, it was as a thing expos’d to the company, and no more accounted any mans Property, then Truth it self, and common subject of all their Inquiries. IV. That, as to the Promiscuous Variety of the Questions discuss’d in each Conference, and the immethodical series of them all, it be not excuse enough that the Discoursers were French Gentlemen, and besides willing in civility to gratifie one another by leaving the choice of Subjects free, the Reader is desir’d to believe, that there wanted not
particular occasions for every one, though they appear not upon the paper. Besides, that it seemed most expedient not to be confin’d to the Laws of Method, since the Complyance therewith in comprizing the Sciences in Systems and Bodies, (as they call them) would have requir’d the intermixture of many Questions less considerable and delightful; and indeed is found by Judicious Men to have been a great Obstacle to the Improvement of Philosophy. V. Lastly, The Publisher craves Pardon of the Readers that he hath forborn to divulge the Names of the Persons of Honour, who held these Conferences weekly on Mondays at Paris, it being the principal condition which the knowledge of the Authors commonly prepossesses; and Others, out of desire secretly to discover what Sentiment the publick would have of theirs (like the Knights Errant of old, who fought under borrow’d Arms) leaving their Names to be conjectur’d by such as found any thing in them for which to desire it: but All, through a Modesty as commendable in respect of themselves, as injurious to the Publick.

EUSEBIUS RENAUDOT, Counsellor and
Physitian in Ordinary to the King of France, Doctor
Regent of the Faculty of Physick at Paris