

OBERMANN

VOLUME I



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OBERMANN

SELECTIONS FROM
LETTERS TO A FRIEND

BY

ETIENNE PIVERT DE SENANCOUR

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*Chosen and translated with an Introductory
Essay and Notes by JESSIE PEABODY
FROTHINGHAM, Translator of the
Journal of Maurice de Guérin*

VOLUME ONE



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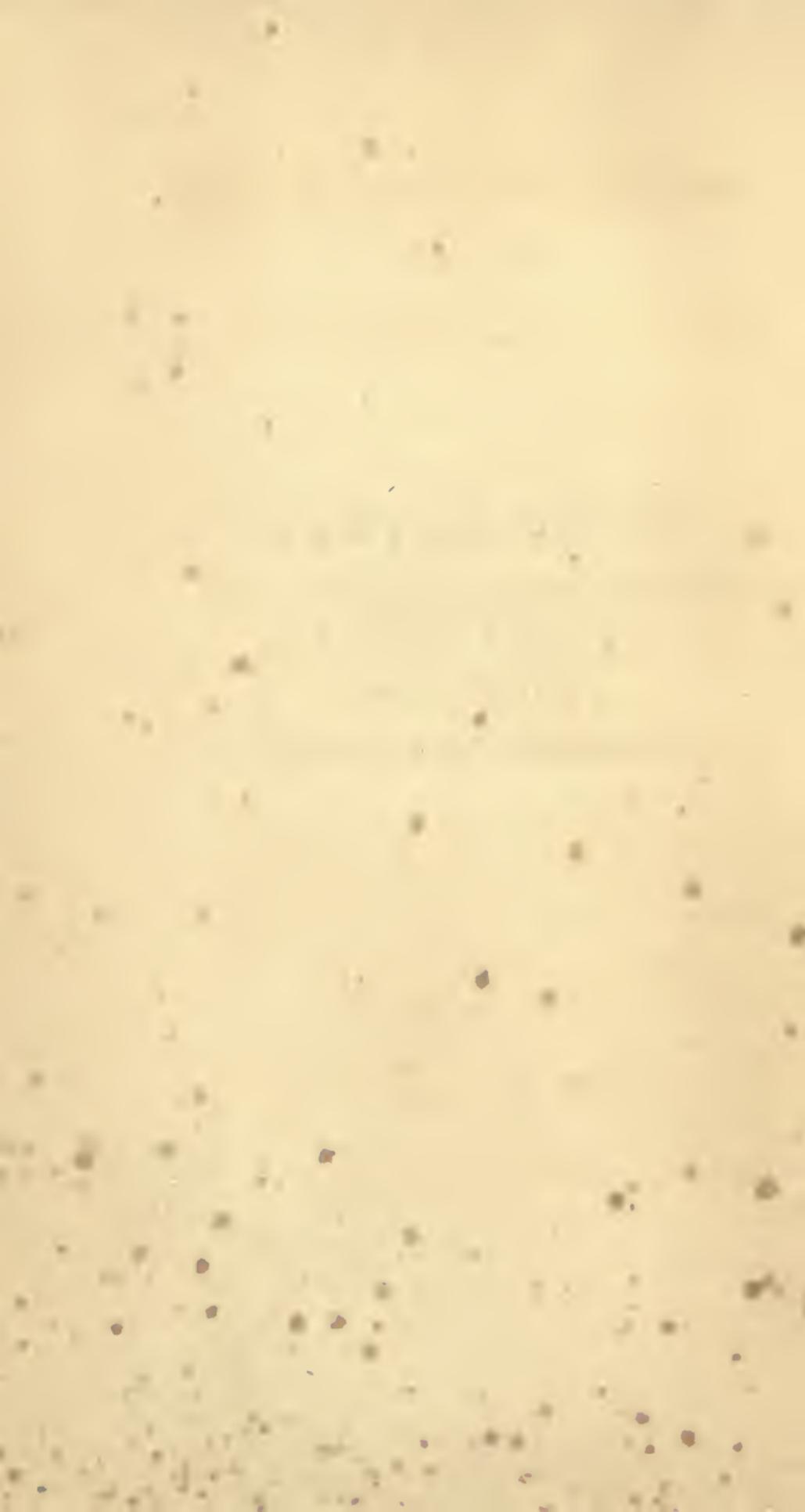
1901

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TO MY MOTHER

Whose unfailing encouragement and
criticism have been my help
and inspiration

I DEDICATE THESE VOLUMES



FROM
STANZAS IN MEMORY OF
THE AUTHOR OF
OBERMANN

A FEVER in these pages burns
Beneath the calm they feign ;
A wounded human spirit turns
Here, on its bed of pain.

Yes, though the virgin mountain-air
Fresh through these pages blows ;
Though to these leaves the glaciers
 spare
The soul of their mute snows ;

Though here a mountain-murmur
 swells
Of many a dark-boughed pine ;

Though, as you read, you hear the bells
Of the high-pasturing kine —

Yet, through the hum of torrent lone,
And brooding mountain-bee,
There sobs I know not what ground-
tone
Of human agony.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

P R E F A C E

IN offering to the public for the first time a translation of OBERMANN,¹ an explanation is scarcely needed; for although Senancour has for a hundred years remained comparatively unknown, his writings must appeal to every lover of nature as much as, or perhaps in some ways even more than, the works of Amiel and Maurice de Guérin, whose precursor he was, and both of whom have already been presented to British and American readers. But while the charm of OBERMANN lies chiefly in its subtle and strong delineation of material nature, it is not this alone that challenges attention. As a monody on human experience it may well attract many who are interested in the problem of life.

In making selections from OBERMANN

it has been my aim to lay stress upon these two sides, as well as to emphasize Senancour's aversion to the established order of things, an aversion from which sprang a large part of his inward discontent. This has obliged me to include many passages of an introspective character, thus over-accentuating, perhaps, the author's tendency to self-analysis; but these passages usually form the prelude to meditations on life and nature too valuable to be omitted. Although in France the admirers of Senancour dwell at length upon the importance of his philosophy, for us his chief claim to recognition must rest on his deep understanding of the human heart, his constant groping after truth, his realization of what there is of sad and inscrutable in life, and his love of the beautiful and the sublime in nature. These qualities of the poet, which give him whatever right he may have to greatness, have received the larger share of attention. As a logician he is not equally strong; I have therefore left untranslated

many long arguments and deductions which in style fall below his highest level, and detract from rather than add to the beauty and harmony of the rest.

To translate OBERMANN has been an interesting, though not an easy work. M. Jules Levallois, the most ardent modern exponent of the poet-philosopher, and for years a close student of his works, himself acknowledges that it is difficult to understand Senancour; for his meaning is often subtly hidden, suggested rather than expressed. His extreme literary reserve, which made him shun the favor of the multitude, led him, perhaps, to veil his thought, and leave it half-untold, as it were, but clothed in a wealth of imagery.

It has also been difficult at times to reconcile an attempt to preserve to a certain degree the original style and rhythm, with a desire to use English literary form. In some places I have allowed myself considerable freedom where the composition of the sentences seemed intricate and involved, at

times I have translated the meaning rather than the words, and in other places I have adhered to an almost literal rendering. My hope is that the remarkable beauty and power of Senancour's expression may not have been entirely lost in the translation.

J. P. F.

INTRODUCTION

IN November, 1849, Matthew Arnold, then a young man of twenty-seven, almost at the beginning of his literary career, wrote some stanzas in memory of the author of *Obermann*, an obscure French poet, whose name and writings had, until then, been scarcely known outside of France, and who had died almost unnoticed three years before. These were followed, many years after, by other stanzas, *Obermann Once More*. It is through these two poems by Matthew Arnold that the author of *Obermann*, Etienne Pivert de Senancour, has been chiefly known to the reading public of England and America. But while his name has in this way become familiar to

many, his writings have never attained celebrity; and, even in his own country, he is not famous. The prose poem, *Obermann*, has been read by a few who have been attracted by its rare poetic quality and interpretative power, but it has not received general recognition, nor been awarded by the public its just rank as a work of marked talent.

There are good reasons why the author of *Obermann* should have remained without fame beyond a narrow circle of admirers, as we shall see by a study of his character. His own description of this isolation, which oppressed him, even though he sought it, is filled with a sense of pain. On the 12th of October, in Letter XXII, he writes from Fontainebleau: —

“I am alone. . . . I am here in the world, a wanderer, solitary in the midst of a people for whom I care nothing; like a man, deaf for many years, whose eager eyes gaze upon the crowd of silent

beings who move and pass before him. He sees everything, but everything is withheld from him; he suffers the silence of all things in the midst of the noise of the world; . . . he is apart from the entirety of beings; . . . in vain do all things exist around him; he lives alone, he is isolated in the midst of the living world.”

Although the author of *Obermann* separated himself by choice from the life of his times, and, while the turmoil of events swept past him, stood apart as a solitary figure, deaf to their noise and seemingly unconscious of their object, yet he must take his place as a member — the most isolated, it is true — of the sentimental democratic movement which had its rise in the second half of the eighteenth century. By right of talent, through affinity of sentiment and feeling, he belonged to that romantic school of France which was the successor of classicism and in-

tellectual atheism, and numbered in its ranks a Rousseau, a Bernardin de St. Pierre, a Chateaubriand, a Madame de Staël, whose names sounded like clarion notes through the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. But even the gentler lights among the pantheists of French literature, Vigny, Maurice de Guérin, Lamartine, Musset, Amiel, received wider recognition than the solitary dreamer who has, nevertheless, written pages more beautiful, perhaps, in their simplicity, charm, grandeur even, than have many of his better known contemporaries or successors.

These pages, which formed the repository of the intimate personal reveries of a nature delicately responsive to every impression and emotion, and which contained a depth of feeling and experience not appreciated by the many, were, however, we are told by Sainte-Beuve, cherished by a small band of

admirers, — Sautelet, Bastide, Ampère, Stapfer, Nodier, — young and ardent spirits, who looked up to their author with reverence as to a master, and by a group of men of letters which counted such names as Rabbe, Ballanche, Pierre Leroux, and Boisjolin the editor of the second edition of *Obermann*. More than this, Sainte-Beuve himself, George Sand, and in recent years Jules Levallois, attracted by his rare gifts and his singular charm, have done for him in France what Matthew Arnold has done in England, and Alvar Tornüdd in Finland: they have made him a name to the many and more than a name to the few who appreciate beauty of style and the poet's power to interpret nature.

Several of the writers of the romantic school possessed to a remarkable degree this gift of rendering nature. Chateaubriand possessed it, though often in a studied form; Maurice de Guérin had it in all its naturalness and

grace ; Senancour had it with a simplicity, grandeur, and eloquence which have seldom been surpassed. He has given us pictures of singular beauty, both as a landscapist and as a poet ; for he not only paints nature in her outward semblance, but he leads us into close companionship with what is hidden and intimate in her life. This is why *Obermann* has outlived obscurity. Although Senancour made no use of metrical form, he held more of the poetic gift of understanding and appreciating nature, and of interpreting her with subtle sympathy, than did many poets who wrote in verse. And in this feeling for nature he was perhaps less akin to Lamartine, the chief singer of French romanticism, than to Wordsworth and others among the English poets.

It may appear singular that the only countries where the works of Senancour have been widely appreciated are

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the lands of the far north, Finland, Sweden, and Norway. But his strong sympathy with all that was primitively sublime and titanic in nature and in man, which inspired him to write in *Obermann*, "It is to the lands of the north that belong the heroism born of enthusiasm, and the titanic dreams bred of sublime melancholy," must have formed a powerful attraction for a people whose early literature represented types of primeval man and nature.

Obermann, written during 1801 to 1803, and first published in 1804, is a book of disconnected impressions and meditations, in the form of letters to a friend, containing the reveries of a recluse on life and nature. But although *Obermann* is an internal autobiography of Senancour, we must guard against taking too literally its external details, for the author purposely altered facts and dates in order to mislead the reader.

Etienne Pivert de Senancour was born

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in Paris in 1770, the year of the birth of Wordsworth. His father, who belonged to a noble and a comparatively rich family of Lorraine, and who held the office of comptroller of the revenues under Louis XVI, was a man of inflexible will, and of small sympathy with youth or with what goes to make youth gay. Young Senancour's childhood was not happy; he had little companionship, and no pleasures. A profoundly melancholy temperament, given him by nature, developed by all the conditions of his home life, made him prematurely sombre and discontented; ill health and his father's sternness increased a self-repression, apathy, and awkwardness which were the result partly of physical immaturity and partly of mental precocity. Romantic from childhood, thirsting for joy with an intensity rarely seen in one so young, receiving back from life only disillusion and unsatisfied longings, he soon

became acquainted with suffering, and could say with reason that he had never been young. Born without the power, but with the fierce desire for happiness, his "joy in everything" was withered before it bloomed. The few allusions in *Obermann* to those early years show how greatly they influenced his after life. But among these memories of his youth, one ray of content pierces now and then the general gloom, — his love for his mother, and her sympathy with him. Later, after death had separated him from her, he pictures, with unwonted tenderness, the walks they took together in the woods of Fontainebleau, when he was a schoolboy spending his vacations with his parents in the country. He was only fifteen at that time, but showed even then his love for all things beautiful in nature, his longing for solitude, his premature seriousness, his changeful moods, his ardent, sensitive, restless temperament which gave

him no peace. At Paris, on the 27th of June, in Letter XI, this recollection comes to him as an inspiration : —

“ The first time I went to the forest I was not alone. . . . I plunged into the densest part of the woods, and when I reached a clearing, shut in on all sides, where nothing could be seen but stretches of sand and of juniper-trees, there came to me a sense of peace, of liberty, of savage joy, the sway of nature first felt in careless youth. . . . Often I was in the forest before the rising of the sun. I climbed the hills still deep in shadow ; I was all wet from the dew-covered underbrush ; and when the sun shone out I still longed for that mystic light, precursor of the dawn. I loved the deep gullies, the dark valleys, the dense woods ; I loved the hills covered with heather ; I loved the fallen boulders and the rugged rocks, and, still better, I loved the moving sands, their barren wastes untrodden by the foot of man,

but furrowed here and there by the restless tracks of the roe or the fleeing hare. . . . It was then that I noticed the birch, a lonely tree which even in those days filled me with sadness, and which, since that time, I have never seen without a sense of pleasure. I love the birch; I love that smooth, white, curling bark; that wild trunk; those drooping branches; the flutter of the leaves, and all that abandonment, simplicity of nature, attitude of the desert."

Here, then, at Fontainebleau, came the first awakening of his feeling for nature, — a feeling which had perhaps already been unconsciously stirred at Ermenonville, a small village in the Valois, where Rousseau had died a few years before, in 1778. Young Senancour, who had early shown his love of study, and, when only seven years old, had devoured with feverish ardor every book of travel that fell into his hands, had been sent to school at Ermenon-

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ville, and lived with the curé of the parish. There, as an impressionable boy, he must have stood by the tomb of Rousseau; must have wandered in the castle grounds where Rousseau had lived before his death; have listened to the "rustling leaves of the birches;" have seen "the quiet waters, the cascade among the rocks, . . . and the green that stretches beyond like a prairie, above which rise wooded slopes," as Gérard de Nerval, in *Sylvie*, pictures it to us in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

At fifteen Senancour entered the Collège de la Marche, at Paris, where he followed the four years' course diligently, not brilliantly, but successfully, and graduated with honor. In those four years, his mind, already open to philosophic doubt, was definitely led into channels which destroyed whatever religious belief may have been feebly lodged there by his mother's teaching.

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He left college an atheist. It had been the intention of the elder Senancour that his son should enter the priesthood, and being a man of imperious will, unaccustomed to remonstrance or opposition, he immediately made arrangements for Etienne to take a two years' preparatory course at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice.

By nature without depth of Christian religious feeling, by temperament fiercely opposed to rules and institutions, by education steeped in the philosophic thought of the day, the young student of Malebranche and Helvétius rose in revolt against a step which "essentially shocked his nature." In August, 1789, with the help of his mother, he left Paris, and buried himself in the solitudes of the Swiss Alps: there, in the region of perpetual ice, the primitive man in him strove to wrest from primitive nature the key to life.

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At this period, when we see in him so much to “essentially shock” our natures, — his atheism, his antagonism to Christianity, his bitterness against institutions, — he has at least the merit of austere sincerity and of scrupulous morality. With a nature so sincere and so strongly opposed to a religious vocation, he could not bring himself to enter the priesthood solely for the sake of earning a living, or to play the hypocrite in order to satisfy an exacting parent.

“I could not sacrifice my manhood,” he protests, “in order to become a man of affairs.”

And in another place, in the same letter, he says: —

“It is not enough to look upon a profession as honest for the simple reason that one can earn an income of thirty or forty thousand francs without theft.”

Sincerity he regarded as one of the

natural, simple virtues. The grander virtues he had also known; he writes:—

“I have known the enthusiasm of the great virtues. . . . My stoical strength braved misfortunes as well as passions; and I felt sure that I should be the happiest of men if I were the most virtuous.”

This stoicism was merely a phase; it went hand in hand with an atheism and a fatalism which were also nothing more than phases; they were not destined to endure long, but they produced his first work, *Rêveries sur la Nature Primitive de l'Homme*, written during the early years of his exile in Switzerland, and published in 1799, when he had returned secretly to Paris. During those ten years France had passed through her great crisis; but the distant rumblings of the Revolution which had shaken his country to her foundations, and had reëchoed throughout Europe, seem to have left Senan-

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cour unmoved. Buried in his mountain solitudes, surrounded by the silence of the snows, absorbed in the contemplation of natural forces, he remained apparently unconscious of the movement of the gigantic social forces around him. He represents passivity in an age of intense moral and social activity, the sage among soldiers, the dreamer of ideas for which the rest of the world were fighting, the believer in a new system which was even then overturning society, and which fifty years later was to produce men of his stamp.

But the Revolution which he ignored did not pass him by unnoticed, as he might have wished. His noble ancestry and his abrupt departure from Paris immediately before the outbreak of the Revolution were sufficient reasons to lay him open to suspicion, and for him to be classed as an "émigré;" thus his voluntary retirement was turned into a forced exile. Obligated for politi-

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cal reasons to make Switzerland his home, we find him, not long after his arrival, living in the house of a patrician family in the canton of Fribourg. A daughter of the house, unhappy in her home, and in her engagement to a man for whom she had no attachment, became interested in Senancour; they saw each other constantly, even began to write a romance together; she confided her troubles to him, and at last broke her engagement. Young Senancour, sensitive, scrupulous, believing himself to be morally, though unintentionally, bound to the young girl, married her in 1790, at the age of twenty. The marriage was not a happy one; but he remained a devoted husband until his wife's early death. He had been in love once, some years before, — a transient fancy, as he then thought, but one that had for a moment opened before him visions of happiness which might have been his, and that returned

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to him, in later years, with almost overwhelming force in the hour of his great moral crisis.

In Letter XI, from Paris, he writes:—

“ It was in March ; I was at Lu—. There were violets at the foot of the thickets, and lilacs in a little meadow, springlike and peaceful, open to the southern sun. The house stood high above. A terraced garden hid the windows from sight. Below the meadow, steep and rugged rocks formed wall upon wall ; at the foot, a wide torrent, and beyond, other ledges covered with fields, with hedges, and with firs ! Across all this stretched the ancient walls of the city ; an owl had made his home among the ruined towers. In the evening, the moon shone, distant horns gave answering calls ; and the voice that I shall never hear again ! ”

These dreams had passed, and in their place had come misfortunes in a long and overwhelming train. The

loss of his fortune through the French Revolution, and of his wife's inheritance through the Swiss Revolution, a painful nervous trouble which deprived him throughout his life of the natural use of his arms, the long and mortal illness of his wife, the death of his father and of his much-loved mother, separation from his son and from his friends, — all these formed the setting of a grief, stifling and sombre, that found frequent expression in the book which was the *Journal Intime* of Senancour's inward experience.

In a life so grave, so full of disillusion, Senancour turned for support to nature, — to a nature calm, broad, majestic, that brought him moments of content, almost of happiness. His sensitive organization responded like an echo to every impression from the natural world, yet his enjoyment of nature had in it as much of an intellectual as of an emotional quality. His style at-

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tracts us, not so much from the sound of the words as from the musical flow of the phrase and the exquisitely harmonious turn of the sentence, the falling cadence at the close, with here and there a sudden break in the rhythm. No one who reads *Obermann* can fail to find rare delight in the charm of its cadences, in the remarkable power of language which it shows, and in the magic faculty of the artist to see the elements that constitute a picture.

On the 19th of July, in Letter IV, Senancour writes from Thiel of a night spent on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel:—

“In the evening, before the rising of the moon, I walked beside the green waters of the Thièle. Feeling inclined to dream, and finding the air so soft that I could pass the whole night in the open, I followed the road to Saint-Blaise. At the small village of Marin, I turned aside to the lake at the south,

and descended a steep bank to the shore, where the waves came to die on the sands. The air was calm, not a sail could be seen on the lake. All were at rest, some in the forgetfulness of toil, others in the oblivion of sorrow. The moon rose; I lingered long. Toward morning she spread over the earth and the waters the ineffable melancholy of her last rays. Nature appears immeasurably grand when, lost in reverie, one hears the rippling of the waves upon the solitary shore, in the calm of a night still resplendent and illumined by the setting moon.

“Ineffable sensibility, charm and torment of our fruitless years, profound realization of a nature everywhere overwhelming and everywhere inscrutable, all-absorbing passion, deepened wisdom, rapturous self-abandonment, — all that a human soul can experience of deep desire and world-weariness, — I felt it all, I lived it all on that memorable

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night. I have taken a fatal step towards the age of decay ; I have consumed ten years of my life. Happy the simple man whose heart is always young !”

This passage has been quoted before ; it cannot be quoted too often. There is a sentence in one of Emerson’s *Letters to a Friend* that reminds one of it ; he has been reading the Vedas “ in the sleep of the great heats,” and writes : —

“ If I trust myself in the woods or in a boat upon the pond, nature makes a Brahmin of me presently — eternal necessity, eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken silence, this is her creed. Peace, she saith to me, and purity and absolute abandonment.”

Less lyrical than Maurice de Guérin, Senancour was more of a Titan in power and daring ; he was an epic poet of landscape. Nature in her bolder moods appealed to him most strongly ; it was not her smiles, her graceful fan-

cies, her waywardness, her exuberance, that moved him, as they did the lighter, more "elusive" temperament of Maurice de Guérin; it was the rugged in her, the mysterious, the vast; he loved to grapple with the strength, the difficulties of a wild and savage region. And in this he showed an intellectual rather than a sensuous quality, a quality which it is interesting to trace, even in the words used to express the elements in nature that aroused his sympathy. Maurice de Guérin was attracted by the evanescence and grace of nature; Senancour by her "permanence" and "austerity." This austerity and permanence are especially insisted upon in one of the most striking of the *Obermann* letters, — the letter in which he tells of a day spent on the Dent du Midi.

On the 3d of September, in Letter VII, he writes from Saint-Maurice: —

"I have been to the region of per-

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petual ice, on the *Dent du Midi*. Before the sun shone upon the valley I had already reached the bluff overlooking the town, and was crossing the partly cultivated stretch of ground which covers it. I went on by a steep ascent, through dense forests of fir-trees, leveled in many places by winters long since passed away: fruitful decay, vast and confused mass of a vegetation that had died and had regerminated from the wrecks of its former life. At eight o'clock I had reached the bare summit which crowns the ascent, and which forms the first salient step in that wondrous pile whose highest peak still rose so far beyond me. Then I dismissed my guide, and put my own powers to the test. I wanted that no hireling should intrude upon this Alpine liberty, that no man of the plains should come to weaken the austerity of these savage regions. . . . I stood fixed and exultant as I watched the rapid disappearance

of the only man whom I was likely to see among these mighty precipices. . . .

“I cannot give you a true impression of this new world, nor express the permanence of the mountains in the language of the plains.”

The whole of that day he spent among the chasms, the granite rocks, and the snows of the Alps, taken possession of by the inexpressible permanence of life in those silent regions, which seemed to have in them less of change than of immutability.

We can see the landscapes which Senancour paints; they are bold, vivid, and full of atmosphere. And we can feel the mysterious hidden life which he feels so profoundly, which becomes a passion with him, subdues him, absorbs him, until he has grown to be a part of it. The great Pan claims him. We must not, however, mistake Senancour. He loves nature, but to him man is the highest part of nature; only, man

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troubles him by departing from primitive standards, and nature does not. "It is true I love only nature," he writes, "but men are still the part of nature that I love the best."

It is not social man, as he existed at the close of the eighteenth century, that fills this high place in Senancour's affections. He pictures to himself a primitive life, simple, austere, uniform; a state of human relationships in which friendship such as the ancients knew it — the friendship of Cicero and Atticus, of Lælius and Africanus — holds a conspicuous place. By nature strong in the affections, this bond of two minds and souls, united in thought, feeling, and belief, the "absolute running of two souls into one," as Emerson expresses it, has for him a deep attraction. He realizes what Emerson emphasizes with greater force when he writes that "the sweet sincerity of joy and peace, which I draw from this alliance with

my brother's soul, is the nut itself whereof all nature and all thought is but the husk and shell." And so Senancour writes: "Peace itself is a sad blessing when there is no hope of sharing it."

Believing firmly in the inborn goodness of humanity, he feels that the dictates of one's own nature are safe guides to be followed in life, "convinced," he declares, "that nothing that is natural to me is either dangerous or to be condemned." Yet these impulses which he acknowledges as wise leaders are never to be other than moderate, for, he says, "dejection follows every immoderate impulse." And the goodness which he broadly ascribes to all human nature is far from being of a commonplace order, to judge from his own definition: "True goodness requires wide conceptions, a great soul, and restrained passions." Himself a man of restrained passions, he willingly believes that all

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men are originally made virtuous, and he insists upon the melancholy degeneration of man as he has been made by the "caprices of this ephemeral world."

This forms the keynote of his aversion for the world, and the reason for his appeal to nature when, overwhelmed with despair at "the hopeless tangle of our age," and with a full sense of his own impotence, he seeks solace in the strength of the stars and the peace of the solitary hills. For nature "holds less of what we seek, but . . . we are surer of finding the things that she contains." And thus, he believes, the tie is often stronger between man and the "friend of man" than between man and man; for "passion goes in quest of man, but reason is sometimes obliged to forsake him for things that are less good and less fatal." Alone, battling with the "obstacles and the dangers of rugged nature, far from the artificial trammels and the ingenious oppression of men,"

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he feels his whole being broaden. In Letter VII, from Saint-Maurice, he gives a vivid description of one of his first communings with the "friend of man," after he has fled from a world which oppressed him, and against which he had neither the courage nor the power to struggle : —

"On those desert peaks, where the sky is measureless, and the air is more stable, and time less fleeting, and life more permanent, — there, all nature gives eloquent expression to a vaster order, a more visible harmony, an eternal whole. There, man is reinstated in his changeful but indestructible form; he breathes a free air far from social emanations; . . . he lives a life of reality in the midst of sublime unity."

In this very year Wordsworth was writing : —

"To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man."

We can now, I think, understand in a measure why Senancour has remained obscure. He shunned the world, and the world neglected him ; he could not make his way with a public whom he ignored and disliked. Shrinking from contact with men, craving neither applause nor popularity, despising every means of obtaining celebrity that savored of intrigue or expedient, he marked out for himself a rigid line of sincerity and truth.

“If it is not sufficient,” he writes, “to say things that are true, and to strive to express them in persuasive language, I shall not have success.”

And in harmony with this ideal of literary simplicity and directness was the feeling he had that an author should not strive to receive “approbation during his lifetime.” The only success he honored and desired was the austere success of the future which assigns a work “to its right place.” Surely this

was not the temperament from which springs the desire to court notoriety or the power to win it.

Another reason for Senancour's failure to reach general appreciation is perhaps his unevenness. Like Wordsworth, he falls, at times, far below his level; not that he is ever weak, but in his tendency to repetition he becomes tiresome. Although in his later work he shows more unity and a clearer sense of proportion, in *Obermann* he is wanting in what is necessary to the creation of a complete work of art, the power to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential. It is this power which makes Chateaubriand's *René* a finished painting, and the lack of this power which makes *Obermann* a portfolio of sketches as exquisite as Turner's water-colors, intermingled with minute studies of unimportant details.

Obermann has been compared to *René*. Both books describe the same

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order of psychologic experience; they are both the expression of thwarted lives, of unsatisfied cravings. But there exists this difference between them: *René* represents passionate struggle, and later, victory; *Obermann*, despairing acceptance, and later, resignation. With *René*, nature is secondary to moral power; his expression is strong, brilliant, vigorous. With *Obermann*, nature is the spring of all beauty and perfection, she is mystic, vast, inscrutable; his expression has something of the sensitive, the hidden charm which he has caught from the inner life of nature.

We know that Senancour became familiar with the works of his great contemporary, Chateaubriand, and that in 1816 he published a critical study of the *Génie du Christianisme*, in which he exposed with merciless candor and logic the insincerity of Chateaubriand's religious position. But at the time that Senancour wrote *Obermann*, while

he had read *Atala*, as he himself tells us, *René* and the *Génie du Christianisme* were still unknown to him. Whatever similarity existed between *Obermann* and *René* was therefore due to the spirit that animated the whole literary movement of the time, to the romantic tendency of which they were the simultaneous expression.

Another parallel that suggests itself is with Amiel; but here, too, there is a marked difference. Senancour's rendering of nature, which makes him worthy of being classed among the poets, is on a far higher plane of beauty than that of Amiel, while he is greatly Amiel's inferior in strength of intellect, culture, and mental training. It is Amiel's keenness and justness as a critic of life and things, of men and books, that give him his claim to distinction. Senancour is a poet and moralist, Amiel a critic and speculative philosopher. The difference in their style is equally

marked : Amiel is at his best where he is incisive, critical, epigrammatic, full of verve, cutting to the root of his subject like fine steel ; Senancour, where he is poetical and meditative. The philosophy of Amiel is on a far more intricate scale and takes a more prominent place in his *Journal* than does that of Senancour in *Obermann* ; but the idea of the indefinite, miscalled the infinite, appeals equally to both, though in different ways. Amiel is fascinated by it, — his individual life is absorbed, evaporated, lost, in the universal nothing ; while Senancour, alone, as an individual, stands face to face with an immutable and inscrutable eternity, which terrifies and overwhelms him, but which he desires to comprehend through an etherealized intelligence. The common ground on which they meet is their desire to be in unison with the life of nature, their mystical pantheism, and their morbid melancholia which

leads them into pessimism,—all of these traits being an inheritance from their great progenitor, Rousseau. It was the malady of the century,—“melancholy, languor, lassitude, discouragement,” as we find in Amiel’s *Journal*,—lack of will power, the capacity to suffer, a minute psychologic analysis, the turning of life into a dream without production, that formed the basis of their affinity.

We must, in fact, go back to the ideas that formed the spring of the Revolutionary movement and changed the conditions of modern society, to find the common meeting-ground of all the romanticists. Unswerving belief in human nature, desire for the simplification of life and dislike of the complicated social conditions of the old order, passionate love of the natural world, full return to nature as the ideal of life, glorification of savage man,—these ideas, formulated by Rousseau,

were the inspiration of Chateaubriand, Senancour, and Amiel. Rousseau, as the father of the movement, became the chief influence in the work of his successors: he set the type for their beliefs; he opened the path through which all were to walk, — some as leaders, like Chateaubriand, others as recluses, like Senancour; his spirit pervaded not only France, but Europe; from him proceeded *Childe Harold*, *Werther*, and *René*, as well as *Obermann*.

The poet with whom Senancour has most of kinship in mood, in feeling, in charm of expression, is Matthew Arnold. That Obermann exerted a strong influence over Matthew Arnold's early years is clear from several references in both of the Obermann poems. "We feel thy spell!" the English poet cries, and that spell draws him to solitude, to sad reverie, to companionship with the eremite, the "master of my wandering youth," the name he gives, many years

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later, to Obermann. But stronger still than this inclination is the opposite impulsion, the necessity which is upon him to go out into the strife of men, — an unseen driving power which he calls fate, but which we might call conscience. And so he cries: —

“I go, fate drives me; but I leave
Half of my life with you.”

Yet with him he carries into the world that thing which

“has been lent

To youth and age in common discontent,”

and the

“infinite desire

For all that might have been,”

and

“The eternal note of sadness.”

It is the poet in Matthew Arnold that claims “fellowship of mood” and sympathy with the poet in Senancour. This may explain why Matthew Arnold has not given of him one of his delightful critical portraits. The affinity is too

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close, the influence too subtle, to be brought within the limits of analysis. But beyond this personal affinity of mood, Matthew Arnold reveres Obermann as a sage and seer. Every one will recall those verses, in the first Obermann poem, beginning: —

“Yet, of the spirits who have reigned
In this our troubled day,
I know but two, who have attained,
Save thee, to see their way.”

These two spirits are Wordsworth and Goethe.

Twenty years later he returns to “Obermann once more,” and in a vision is charged by the ancient sage to carry to the world the message of that hope for which Senancour had so passionately longed. Obermann, addressing the younger poet, urges him to tell, —

“Hope to a world new-made!
Help it to fill that deep desire,
The want which crazed our brain,
Consumed our soul with thirst like fire,
Immedicable pain.”

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Matthew Arnold here constitutes himself the disciple and exponent of Obermann, the interpreter of his aspirations, and the complement, as it were, of his unfulfilled and disappointed life.

The fellowship of Matthew Arnold with Obermann is seen in several of his poems, in *The Grande Chartreuse*, *The Youth of Nature*, *The Youth of Man*, and markedly in *Self-Dependence*.

Indirectly it is also apparent in many modes of thought and feeling. In both poets there is a ground tone of melancholy underlying the passionate craving for tranquillity and joy, which leaves them forever reaching out toward a goal that can never be attained. Together with this is the sense of the futility of human effort, and a blind reliance on fate. Both are stoical in their austerity, and both are transcendental in their tendencies. In both we find a deep discontent with "the thousand discords," and the "vain turmoil" of

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the world ; a desire to be in sympathy and union with the inner life of the universe ; to

“Yearn to the greatness of Nature ;”

and the final appeal to nature, whose glory and greatness and calm are alone enduring, while all else is subject to change, — a nature who can say of men in Matthew Arnold's words : —

“They are dust, they are changed, they are gone!
I remain.”

And how like Senancour is the spirit of these lines : —

“For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.”

But this resemblance, strong as it is in many ways, belongs more to their moods, their ethical attitude toward life, the peculiar temper of their minds, than to character, or intellect, or creative power. As a result of this affinity

of sentiment is a certain similarity in rhythm, the outward but elusive expression of the inner feeling. In both writers we find the same note of sadness in the cadence, the same grace and charm of diction, the same dying fall at the end of the sentence, like the ebb and flow of the waves on the shore. Especially is this evident in *The Youth of Man*, *The Youth of Nature*, parts of *Tristram and Iseult*, and *Dover Beach*. There exists this difference between them: in Senancour the expression is spontaneous and natural; in Matthew Arnold it is finished, and the result of art and study.

Senancour's inward changes during the twenty-five years that followed the appearance of his first work, the *Rêveries*, were great; they formed a gradual and continuous growth, from despair to resignation, from restlessness to calm, from doubt to belief, from materialism through pantheism to theism.

Throughout *Obermann* we see traces of a passionate longing for more than nature could give him, something higher than nature. On the 17th of August, in Letter XVIII, from Fontainebleau, he writes : —

“ I am filled with an unrest that will never leave me ; it is a craving I do not comprehend, which overrules me, absorbs me, lifts me above the things that perish. . . . You are mistaken, and I too was once mistaken ; it is not the desire for love. A great distance lies between the void that fills my heart and the love that I have so deeply desired ; but the infinite stretches between what I am and what I crave to be. Love is vast, but it is not the infinite. I do not desire enjoyment ; I long for hope, I crave knowledge ! . . . I desire a good, a dream, a hope, that shall be ever before me, beyond me, greater even than my expectation, greater than what passes away.”

At the time he wrote these words, he had no belief in the immortality of the soul, no hope beyond this world. Later, this belief and this hope were to come to him ; but even then he had glimpses of the future peace, as when he writes, in Letter XIX, on the 18th of August : —

“There are moments when I am filled with hope and a sense of liberty ; time and things pass before me with majestic harmony, and I feel happy. . . . Happy ! I ? And yet I am, and happy to overflowing, like one who reawakens from the terrors of a dream to a life of peace and liberty. . . . But the moment passes ; a cloud drifts across the sun and shuts out its inspiring light ; the birds are hushed ; the growing darkness drives away both my dream and my joy.”

The time was to come when this life of “peace and liberty” would no longer be seen by snatches, between the drifting clouds, but would fill him with the

serenity he so ardently craved. Perhaps he little dreamed that his prayer, framed as a question, was to be answered in his life with the same beauty that he pictured it in words. In Letter XXIII, dated on the 18th of October from Fontainebleau, we find this passage : —

“Will it also be given unto man to know the long peace of autumn after the unrest of the strength of his years, even as the fire, after its haste to be consumed, lingers before it is quenched ?

“Long before the equinox, the leaves had fallen in quantities, yet the forest still holds much of its verdure and all of its beauty. More than forty days ago everything looked as though it would end before its time, and now all things are enduring beyond their allotted days ; receiving, at the very door of destruction, a lengthened life, which lingers on the threshold of its decay with abundant grace or security, and seems to borrow, as it weakens with gentle loitering, both

from the repose of approaching death and from the charm of departing life.”

This we may take as a picture of his own old age. Not that his material surroundings had in any way improved; the change was internal, and was the fulfillment of his own words: “The true life of man is within himself; what he absorbs from the outside world is merely accidental and subordinate.” The fruit of this change came to maturity in his last important work, *Libres Méditations*, written fifteen years after *Obermann*. In the writer of the *Méditations* we see a man who has profoundly suffered, and whose spirit has been softened, chastened, harmonized. His last word to the world is the calm, majestic expression of one who has realized the existence of a distant truth, and has succeeded in lessening the space which separated him from it. It is the answer to the restless questionings, the doubt of *Obermann*. Even in *Obermann* he had begun to feel

that nature was not the beginning and the end of all things. On a day in August, in Letter XVI, he writes from Fontainebleau : —

“ What noble sentiments ! What memories ! What quiet majesty in a night, soft, calm, luminous ! What grandeur ! But the soul is overwhelmed with doubt. It sees that the feelings aroused by sentient things lead it into error ; that truth exists, but in the far distance.”

In the *Méditations* the pursuit of this distant truth has led him to belief in a God, in a future life, in a governing power in the universe ; nature is the proof of divine wisdom ; the world we live in, and the world to which we are pressing forward, are the results of divine justice. The *Méditations* is a work of distinct ethical value ; its writer a moralist of the type of Marcus Aurelius. The classic dignity and repose of its style, its full and measured numbers,

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like the solemn harmonies of church music, are the perfect outward expression of elevation of thought, a poised nature, a spirit of peace and consolation. We are lifted above the strife of the world to a region of moral grandeur. The poet is lost in the seer.

This change, although so fundamental, is not a mark of inconsistency. The youth of nineteen who ran away from home to avoid acting a part is still the man of maturity who wrote the *Méditations*; genuineness, simplicity, and the love of truth form the basis of his nature.

Senancour lived twenty-seven years after writing the *Méditations*, and the spirit of calm continued to grow upon him; yet his external life can scarcely have held more of happiness in his old age than it had in his youth. He had left Switzerland many years before, soon after the completion of *Obermann*, and had returned to Paris, where, poor and

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almost in want, he lived a secluded life, with his daughter as his only companion, in a house near the Place de la Bastille, on the Rue de la Cerisaie, a street of interesting historic memories connected with Charles VI and Francis I. There, a recluse in the midst of the world, he composed his *Méditations*, and there, obliged to live by his pen, the only way open to him, he wrote for the periodicals and journals of Paris, edited encyclopædias, prepared historical summaries, and spent years in the drudgery of the literary profession. In 1846, four years before the death of Wordsworth, at the age of seventy-six, he died at St. Cloud, a lonely old man.

O B E R M A N N

LETTERS

TO A

FRIEND

LETTER I

Geneva, July 8th, 1st year.²

NOT more than ten days have
* N * passed since I wrote to you
* * * * * from Lyons. I did not men-
* * * * * tion any new project; I had
none; and now I have left everything
behind, I am in a strange land. . . .

Even at this moment I am at a loss
to judge of a resolution which has swept
away all former plans,³ which carries
me abruptly into new surroundings,
which destines me for things I had not
anticipated, the developments and con-
sequences of which I cannot even fore-

see. . . . A narrow and timorous prudence in those on whom fate made me dependent, wasted my early years, and has fettered my entire life. Wisdom treads between diffidence and temerity ; the path is difficult. We must follow her in ways that she can see ; but in ways unknown, instinct is our only guide. Though instinct may be more dangerous than prudence, it accomplishes greater things. It is our ruin, or our salvation ; its temerity becomes at times our only refuge, and its mission may be to redress the wrongs that prudence has wrought.

The yoke must either have weighed me down irrevocably or have been shaken off without heed ; the alternative seemed inevitable. You well know what a wretched chain was being forged. I was to do what it was impossible for me to do well. I was to fill a position for its emoluments, use the faculties of my being for what essen-

tially shocked its nature. Was it my duty to yield in momentary compliance, to deceive a parent into thinking that I was undertaking for my entire life what I should have begun merely with the longing that it might end, and thus live in a false position, in a state of continual antipathy? May he recognize my powerlessness to satisfy him, may he forgive me! May he come to feel . . . that a profession cannot be looked upon as honest, simply because one can earn an income of thirty or forty thousand francs without theft; and that I could not sacrifice my manhood, in order to become a man of affairs.

I do not seek to persuade you, I recall facts; you are the judge. A friend must judge without too great leniency, as you have said. . . .

I searched my heart; I passed rapidly in review all my surroundings. From men, I strove to learn whether they felt as I did; from things, whether they

were in accord with my inclinations ; and I saw that I was out of harmony with society, that my needs were not in touch with its handiwork. I checked myself with terror, feeling that I was on the verge of giving up my life to intolerable weariness, to a loathing without aim and without end. To my heart I offered in succession all things sought by men in the various professions which they elect. I even strove to adorn, through the magic of the imagination, those complex aims which they hold up to their passions, and the chimeric end to which they devote their years. I attempted it, but in vain. Why is the earth thus disenchanted to my eyes ? It is not satiety that I feel ; on all sides I find a void.

On that day when, for the first time, I felt the nothingness which surrounds me, on that day which changed the course of my life, had the pages of my destiny lain in my hands to be forever

opened or closed, with what indifference would I have renounced the empty succession of hours, so long yet so fleeting, which such bitterness has sullied, and which no true joy can console! You know that it is my misfortune not to have the capacity to be young; the long weariness of my early life has apparently destroyed the seductions of youth. Its blooming exterior does not deceive me; my half-closed eyes are never dazzled; too steady, they are not taken by surprise.

That day of irresolution was at least a day of light; it made me see things within, which before had not been clear. Plunged in the deepest perplexity of my life, I had for the first time a full consciousness of my being. Pursued even to the melancholy calm of my usual apathy, forced to be something, I was at last myself; and in these emotions, hitherto unfelt, I found an energy, at first constrained and painful,

but the fullness of which grew to be a repose that was new to me. Out of this condition, so unexpected and so full of peace, my determining thought took shape; and I saw, as I believed, the reason for what we observe every day, that the actual differences in the lot of man are not the principal cause of his happiness or his misery.

The true life of man is within himself; what he absorbs from the outside world is merely accidental and subordinate. Things influence him far more through the situation in which they find him than through their own nature. Were he to be continually moulded by them throughout the whole course of his life, he might become their creature. But in this ever-moving sequence, he alone subsists, though altered, while external objects related to him are wholly changed; thus, each of their impressions upon him depends far more, for his happi-

ness or his misery, upon the condition in which they find him, than upon the sensation they produce or the accidental change in him they cause. Thus, in each separate moment of his life, to be what he ought to be, is of the highest importance to man.



As soon as man reflects, as soon as he is not carried away by his first impulse, and by the unconscious laws of instinct, all morality becomes, in a sense, a matter of calculation, and prudence lies in the estimate of the more or the less.



Independent of the world, and in the silence of the passions, we can study ourselves. I shall choose a retreat in the calm of those heights which even in childhood left an impression on my mind.



LETTER II

Lausanne, July 9th, 1st year.

YOU have not seen this land, neither can you picture it to yourself; the imagination is powerless to draw, in their true lines, the grand effects of nature. Had I felt less deeply the grandeur and harmony of the scene as a whole, had not the purity of the atmosphere added a quality beyond the power of words to express, were I different from what I am. I should strive to picture to you these snow-clad and resplendent heights; these valleys flooded with mist; the steep, black cliffs of Savoy; the hills of La Vaux and the Jorat, too verdant, perhaps, but crowned by the Alps of Gruyères and Ormont; and the wide waters of Lake Lemman, the sweep of its waves, and its measured peace. Perhaps the secret

emotions of my heart added to the magic of these scenes ; perhaps no man, at sight of them, has felt all that I have felt. . . .

I should be loath to believe that a man whose heart has been wounded by familiarity with sorrow, has not, by his very suffering, been given the power to enjoy delights unknown to the happy—joys that are broader and more lasting than theirs, and of a nature to sustain old age itself. As for myself, I realized at that moment, when nothing was wanting but another heart to feel as I felt, that a single hour of one's life may be worth a whole year of existence, that everything is relative within us and without us, and that our troubles come chiefly from our being out of place in the social order. . . .

I was under the pines of the Jorat ; the evening was beautiful, the woods silent, the air calm, the sunset misty, but cloudless. Everything seemed sta-

tionary, illumined, motionless ; then, suddenly, as I raised my eyes, long fixed upon the moss where I was sitting, there came to me an impressive illusion, which the mood of reverie that I was in helped to prolong. The steep slope that reached down to the lake was hidden by the knoll on which I sat ; and the surface of the lake, seeming to rise as it receded into distance, lifted the opposite shore into the air. The Alps of Savoy were half veiled by the mist, and all were blended and merged into the same shades. The light of the sunset and the haze of the air in the depths of the Valais uplifted the mountains and divided them from the earth, by making their lower slopes invisible ; and their colossal bodies, without form, without color, sombre and snowy, illumined yet shadowy, had the appearance of a mass of storm clouds suspended in space : there was no earth save that which held me above the void, alone in immensity.

That moment was worthy of the first day in a new life. . . .

LETTER III

Cully,⁴ July 11th, 1st year.

THE storm has passed, the evening is beautiful. My windows open on the lake; the white spray of the waves is tossed, now and again, into my room; it has even bathed the roof. The wind blows from the southwest, and it is at this point that the waves sweep to their full height and strength. This movement and these measured sounds give to the soul a powerful impetus. Were it my lot to go beyond the bounds of ordinary life, were it given me to truly live, yet were I weighed down with discouragement, I should wish to stand alone for a little while on the shores of a wave-tossed lake; I believe there would then be

no deeds so great but that I could accomplish them. . . .

I write you even as I should talk, as one talks to one's self. At times there is nothing to say, yet one still feels the need of talking; that is often the moment when one rambles on with the greatest ease. The only kind of walk that gives real pleasure is when we wander without aim, solely for the love of walking, looking for something, we know not what; when the air is still, the sky gray, and we are free from care, indifferent to time, and plunge at random through the gullies and into the woods of an unknown region; when we talk of mushrooms, of roes, of the red leaves as they begin to fall; when I say to you: "This is a spot like the one where my father lingered, ten years ago, to play at quoits with me, and where he left his hanger, which, the next day, could not be found;" when you say to me: "The place where we

have just crossed the stream would have delighted my father. During the last days of his life he was frequently driven a long distance from the city to a dense wood, where there were rocks and water; then he left the carriage, and sometimes alone, sometimes with me, he sat on one of the rocks; we read together the *Vies des Pères du désert*.⁵ He would say to me: 'If in my youth I had entered a monastery, in answer to the call of God, I should not have suffered all the affliction that has fallen to my lot in the world, I should not to-day be so infirm and so broken; but I should have had no son, and, in dying, I should leave nothing upon the earth.' " . . . And now he is no longer here! They are not here! . . .

When we used to lose ourselves in the woods of the Forez, we wandered freely and at random. A strange solemnity would hover over the memories of a time long since passed away,

which seemed to come back to us in the depths and the majesty of the woods. How it enlarges the soul to meet with things beautiful, yet unforeseen ! Those things which are the province of the soul ought not, I think, to be fore-known and ordered ; let us leave it to the mind to study by rule, and to bring symmetry into its work. But the heart does not work, and if you call upon it to produce, it will produce nothing ; cultivation makes it sterile.

LETTER IV

Thiel, July 19th, 1st year.

MY window was open at night. Towards four o'clock I was awakened by the splendor of the dawn, and the scent of the new-mown hay, cut in the fresh night air, by the light of the moon. I looked for an ordinary view ; I was given a moment of won-

der. The waters, which had already risen by the melting of the Jura snows, were kept at their full by the rains of the summer solstice. The plain between the lake⁶ and the Thièle⁷ was flooded in parts; the highest levels formed lonely pastures, rising out of the midst of the fields of water ruffled by the fresh winds of the morning. The waves of the lake were driven afar by the wind, over the half-submerged shore. At that moment some cows and goats, and the goatherd playing a wild melody on his horn, passed over a dry strip of land between the flooded plain and the Thièle. A few stones, thrown here and there into the deepest places, supported and lengthened out this natural causeway; the pasture, to which these docile creatures were on their way, was out of sight; and to watch their slow and uncertain gait, it seemed as though they would step into the lake and be lost. The

heights of Anet, and the deep forests of the Jolimont, rose out of the heart of the waters, like a wild and uninhabited island. The hilly chain of the Vuilly bordered the lake on the horizon. Towards the south, it stretched its length behind the slopes of Montmirail; and beyond all, sixty leagues of a century's ice gave to the whole country that inimitable majesty by which nature with her boldest strokes makes earth sublime. . . .

In the evening, before the rising of the moon, I walked beside the green waters of the Thièle. Feeling inclined to dream, and finding the air so soft that I could pass the whole night in the open, I followed the road to Saint-Blaise. At the small village of Marin, I turned aside to the lake at the south, and descended a steep bank to the shore, where the waves came to die on the sands. The air was calm, not a sail could be seen on the lake. All were

at rest, some in the forgetfulness of toil, others in the oblivion of sorrow. The moon rose; I lingered long. Towards morning she spread over the earth and the waters the ineffable melancholy of her last rays. Nature appears immeasurably grand when, lost in reverie, one hears the rippling of the waves upon the solitary shore, in the calm of a night still resplendent and illumined by the setting moon.

Ineffable sensibility, charm and torment of our fruitless years, profound realization of a nature everywhere overwhelming and everywhere inscrutable, all-absorbing passion, deepened wisdom, rapturous self-abandonment, — all that a human soul can experience of deep desire and world-weariness, — I felt it all, I lived it all on that memorable night. I have taken a fatal step towards the age of decay; I have consumed ten years of my life. Happy the simple man whose heart is always young!

There, in the peace of the night, I questioned my uncertain destiny, my restless heart, and that incomprehensible nature which, containing all things, seems yet not to hold the object of my desires. What am I, then? I asked myself. What melancholy mixture of all-embracing affection and of indifference towards every aim of actual life?

Always seeking what I shall never find, an alien in the midst of nature, out of place among men, empty affections will alone be my lot; and whether I live unto myself, or whether I live unto men, I shall suffer either oppression from without or restraint from within—nothing but the perpetual torment of a life forever repressed and forever miserable. . . .

It is true I love only nature; but for this very reason, while I love myself, I do not love myself exclusively, and other men are still the part of nature that I love the best. I feel a compel-

ling power which binds me to every loving influence; my heart, full of itself, of humanity, and of the primitive harmony of beings, has never known any personal or contentious passion. I love myself, but as a part of nature, in the order of things which she ordains, in companionship with men whom she chooses, whom she has made, and in harmony with the totality of things. Nothing of what exists, has, in truth, won the fullness of my love, and a void beyond utterance forever fills my troubled soul. But all that I love might exist, the whole earth might be according to my heart, without a single change in nature, or in man himself, excepting the ephemeral accidents of the social order. . . .

I love existing things; I love them as they are. I neither desire, nor seek, nor imagine anything outside of nature. My thoughts, so far from wandering towards strange or complex aims, so far

from being attracted to remote or unusual things, and I, so far from being indifferent to what is around me, to what nature daily produces, or aspiring to what is denied me, to things foreign and unfamiliar, to improbable circumstances, and to a romantic destiny, — I desire, I ask of nature and of man, I claim for the whole span of my life, only those things which belong inevitably to nature, which all men must possess, which alone can employ our days and fill our hearts, and which form the groundwork of life.

While I do not crave what is complex and uncommon, neither do I long for what is novel, varied, or profuse. What has once pleased me, will always please me; what has before satisfied me, will satisfy me always.⁸ A day like unto the day that once was happy, is still a happy day for me. . . .

The love of power or of riches is almost as foreign to my nature as envy,

hatred, or revenge. Nothing should alienate me from other men. I am the rival of none; I can no more envy than hate them; I should refuse what impassions them, I should decline to triumph over them, and I do not even desire to surpass them in virtue. I rely upon my natural goodness. Happy in that I need make no effort not to do wrong, I shall not torment myself without cause; and provided I am an honest man, I shall not pretend to be virtuous.

Virtue is a high merit, but I rejoice in that it is not indispensable to me, and I leave it to other men; the only rivalry that might have existed between us, is thus destroyed. Their virtues are as ambitious as their passions; they display them with ostentation, and what they strive for is, above all, priority. I am not, nor shall I ever be, their competitor, even on this point. What do I lose by the concession of this superior-

ity? In what they call virtues, the only ones that are useful are natural, in a man constituted as I am, and as I would willingly believe all men originally are; the others, complex, austere, arrogant, and imposing, do not take their spring directly from man's nature. This is why I consider them either false or empty, and am not anxious to obtain credit for them, — a credit which is in any case rather uncertain. . . .

Whatever happens, I must remain always the same, and always myself; not precisely what I am in the midst of ways antagonistic to my nature, but what I feel myself to be, what I desire to be, what I am in that internal life, which is the only refuge of my sorrowful affections.

I shall examine myself, I shall study myself, I shall sound this heart, which is naturally true and loving, but which much weariness may have already discouraged. I shall decide what I am, or

rather what I ought to be ; and having once established this type, I shall strive to preserve it throughout my life, convinced that whatever is natural to me is neither dangerous nor to be condemned, firm in the belief that one is never right unless following one's own nature,⁹ and fully determined to repress nothing in myself, excepting what would tend to alter my original estate.

I have known the enthusiasm of the sterner virtues ; in my proud error, I thought to replace all the motive powers of social life by this other, equally illusive, motive power. My stoic strength braved misfortune, as well as passions, and I was convinced that I should be the happiest of men if I were the most virtuous. The illusion lasted, in its full force, for about a month ; a single incident swept it away. Then it was that all the bitterness of a colorless and fleeting life came to fill my soul, after it had renounced the last

spell that had beguiled it. Since then I have made no further pretence of employing my life ; I seek only to fill it. I exact, not that it shall be virtuous, but that it shall never be culpable.

And how can one aspire even to this, how attain it? Where can one find days that are easy, simple, employed, uniform? How escape misfortune? This is the limit of my desire. But what a destiny, when sorrows endure, and pleasures vanish! Perchance some days of peace will be granted to me; but never again enchantment, never intoxication, never a moment of pure joy; never! and I am not yet twenty-one! and I was born sensitive, ardent! and I have never tasted the joys of fruition! and after death . . . Nothing more in life, nothing in nature. . . . I have not wept; the fountain of my tears is dry. . . .

You who know me, who understand me, but who, happier and wiser than I,

submit without impatience to the customs of life, — you realize, in this our doomèd separation, the nature of those desires which in me can never be satisfied. One thing consoles me ; you are mine ; this feeling will never pass away. . . . You are the staff on which I love to lean amid the restlessness that leads me astray, to which I love to return after I have tried all things, and have found myself alone in the world. Could we live together, were we sufficient unto each other, I should cease my wanderings, I should know rest, I should accomplish something upon the earth, and my life would begin. But I must wait, seek, press onward to the unknown ; and, ignorant of my goal, I must fly from the present, even as though the future held for me some hope.

LETTER V

Saint-Maurice,¹⁰ August 18th, 1st year.

AT last I have made up my mind;
I shall pass the winter here. . . .

I slept at Villeneuve,¹¹ a melancholy spot in such a beautiful country. Before the heat of the day, I wandered over the wooded slopes of Saint-Tryphon, and through the unbroken stretch of orchards which cover the valley as far as Bex. I walked between the Alps, which, on each side, rose in two high mountain-chains; surrounded by their snows, I took my way along a level road in the heart of a fruitful country, which, in times past, seems to have lain almost entirely under water.

The valley of the Rhone, from Martigny to the lake, is almost shut in by rocky ledges, covered with forests and with clearings, which form the first steps of the *Dent de Morcles* and the *Dent*

du Midi, and are divided only by the bed of the river.¹² Towards the north, these ledges are wooded, here and there, with chestnut-trees, and near the summit with fir-trees. In this wild region is my dwelling, at the foot of the *Dent du Midi*, one of the most beautiful of the Alpine peaks. . . .

At sight of these gorges, fertile and inhabited, yet still wild, I turned aside from the road to Italy, which at this point takes a bend towards the town of Bex, and pressing on towards the bridge of the Rhone, I wandered through paths and across fields undreamed of by our painters. The bridge,¹³ the castle, and the sweep of the Rhone, are grouped, at this point, into a view of singular picturesqueness. As for the town,¹⁴ its only remarkable feature is its simplicity. The site is somewhat melancholy, but of a sadness that I love. The mountains are beautiful, the valley level; the rocks touch the town and seem to

cover it; the muffled rumbling of the Rhone gives a note of melancholy to this land, which lies separated, as it were, from the world, hollowed out and shut in on all sides. Peopled and cultivated, it yet seems at moments touched by the curse — or the beauty — of the austerity of the deserts, when black clouds overshadow its sweep down the mountain sides, darken the gloomy firs, throng together, are piled mass upon mass, and then, like a sombre dome, hang motionless above; or when, on a cloudless day, the sun's burning rays concentrate upon it, make the unseen vapors seethe, cause all things that draw breath beneath the arid sky to throb with a tormenting heat, and turn this all too beautiful solitude into a grievous waste. . . .

I allowed myself to be allured into staying near Saint-Maurice. . . . I wandered at random through the neighborhood, and looked at the most attractive

sites, in search of a chance dwelling. The water, the depth of the shade, the solitude of the moors, filled me with delight. . . . I had followed the windings of field and forest, had crossed swift streams, when I came upon a lonely house on the edge of the woods, standing among the most solitary clearings. A moderately good dwelling, a wooden barn, a vegetable garden bordered by a wide stream, two springs of pure water, a few rocks, the sound of the torrents, the land sloping on every side, hawthorn hedges, an abundant vegetation, a broad field stretching out beneath the scattered beeches and chestnut-trees, even to the foot of the mountain-firs, — this is Charrières. . . .

I want to enjoy Charrières before the winter. I want to be there for the chestnut harvest, and I am determined not to lose the quiet autumn in its midst.

In twenty days I shall take posses-

sion of the house, the chestnut grove, and a part of the meadows and orchards. To the farmer I leave the rest of the pastures and fruit, the vegetable garden, the hemp field, and especially the arable ground.

The stream winds through my part of the domain. I have the poorest land, but the deepest shades and the most secluded nooks. The moss prevents the harvesting of the hay ; the close-growing chestnut-trees give little fruit ; there is no view over the long stretch of the Rhone valley ; everything is wild and neglected ; there is even a narrow space between the rocks which has been left untouched, and where the trees, leveled by the wind and crumbling with age, hold the ooze, and form a kind of dike ; alders and hazel-trees have taken root, and made of it an impenetrable maze. But the stream filters through this mass, and flows, sparkling with foam, into a natural pool wondrously limpid. From

there it makes its way between the rocks; its hurried waves flow over the moss; and far below, it slackens its course, leaves the shadows, and passes in front of the house, spanned by a bridge of fir planks.

Wolves, driven down by the depth of the snows, come, it is said, in winter time, in search of bones and fragments of the food which even in pastoral valleys is a necessity to man. The fear of these animals has long kept this dwelling uninhabited. But such a fear is not what would alarm me. Would that man might leave me free in this lair of the wolves!

LETTER VI

Saint-Maurice, August 26th, 1st year.

DO you believe that a man who has fulfilled his time without having loved has truly entered into the

mysteries of life, that his heart is known to him, and that the fullness of his existence has been revealed to him? To me it seems as though he had halted half way, and had seen only from afar what the world might have held for him. . . .

LETTER VII

Saint-Maurice, September 3d, 1st year.

I HAVE been to the region of perpetual ice, on the *Dent du Midi*. Before the sun shone upon the valley I had already reached the bluff overlooking the town, and was crossing the partly cultivated stretch of ground which covers it. I went on by a steep ascent, through dense forests of fir-trees, leveled in many places by winters long since passed away: fruitful decay, vast and confused mass of a vegetation that had died and had regermi-

nated from the remains of its former life. At eight o'clock I had reached the bare summit which crowns the ascent, and which forms the first salient step in that wondrous pile whose highest peak still rose so far beyond me. Then I dismissed my guide, and put my own powers to the test. I wanted that no hireling should intrude upon this Alpine liberty, that no man of the plains should come to weaken the austerity of these savage regions. I felt my whole being broaden, as it was left alone among the obstacles and the dangers of a rugged nature, far from the artificial trammels and the ingenious oppression of men.

I stood fixed and exultant as I watched the rapid disappearance of the only man whom I was likely to see among these mighty precipices. On the ground I left watch, money, everything that I had about me, and almost all my clothing, . . . and holding be-

tween my teeth the branch I had cut to help me in the descent, I started to crawl along the ridge of rocks which connects this minor peak with the principal mass. Several times I dragged myself between two bottomless chasms. And in this way I reached the granite peaks.

My guide had told me that I could climb no higher, and for some time I was brought to a standstill. But at last, by descending a short distance, I found an easier way, and, climbing with the audacity of a mountaineer, I reached a hollow filled with frozen and crusted snow, which had lain unmelted by the summer suns. Still I mounted higher ; but on reaching the foot of the highest peak of the *Dent*, I found I could not climb to its summit, for its steep sides were scarcely out of the perpendicular, and it seemed to rise five hundred feet above me.

I had crossed few fields of snow, yet

my unprotected eyes, wearied by its brilliancy, and parched by the glare of the noon sun on its frozen surface, could see but vaguely the surrounding objects. Besides, many of the peaks were unknown to me, and I could be sure of only the most important ones. Yet I could not mistake the colossal summit of Mont Blanc, which rose far above me; that of Velan; one more distant, but still higher, which I took to be Mont Rosa; and, on the opposite side of the valley, near me but lower down, the *Dent de Morcles*, beyond the chasms. The peak that I could not climb, shut off what was perhaps the most striking part of this vast scene. For, behind it, stretched the long depths of the Valais, inclosed on each side by the glaciers of Sanetsch, of Lauterbrunnen, and of the Pennine Alps, and ending in the domes of the Saint Gothard and the Titlis, the snows of the Furca, and the pyramids of the Schreckhorn and the Finster-Aar-Horn.

But this view of the mountain-tops outspread at the feet of man, this view so grand, so majestic, so far removed from the monotonous vacuity of the plains, was still not the object of my quest in the midst of unfettered nature, of silent fixity, of unsullied ether. On the lowlands, natural man is of necessity undergoing continual change by breathing that social atmosphere, so dense, stormy, seething, forever troubled by the clamor of the arts, the din of ostensible pleasures, the cries of hate, and the endless laments of anxiety and of sorrow. But on those desert peaks, where the sky is measureless, and the air is more stable, and time less fleeting, and life more permanent,—there, all nature gives eloquent expression to a vaster order, a more visible harmony, an eternal whole. There, man is reinstated in his changeful but indestructible form; he breathes a free air far from social emanations; he exists only for

himself and for the universe; he lives a life of reality in the midst of sublime unity.

This was the feeling that I desired, that I sought. Uncertain of myself, in an order of things which has been devised with unwearied pains by ingenious and childish minds, I scaled the heights to ask of nature why I should feel ill at ease in their midst. I wished to know whether my existence was out of place in the human economy, or whether the present social order is unrelated to eternal harmony, like some irregularity or accidental exception in the progress of the world. At last I believe I am sure of myself. There are moments which dispel mistrust, prejudice, uncertainties,—when the truth comes to us with an overruling and unalterable conviction. . . .

I cannot give you a true impression of this new world, or express the permanence of the mountains in the lan-

guage of the plains. The hours seemed to me both more serene and more productive; and, even as though the planets, amid the universal calm, had been arrested in their course, I was conscious that the gradual train of my thoughts, full of deliberation and of energy, could in no wise be hastened, yet was pressing forward at unusual speed, . . . and I inferred that the consciousness of existence is really more inert and more sterile amid the tumult of human surroundings. I realized that thought, while less hurried, is more truly active among the mountains—on their peaceful heights—even though visible movements are more gradual. The man of the valleys consumes without enjoyment the span of his restless and feverish days; he is like unto those ever-moving insects which waste their efforts in futile vacillations, while others, equally weak, but more tranquil, by their straight and unflagging course, outstrip them in the race.

The day was hot, the horizon veiled with haze, the valleys flooded with mist. The brilliancy of the fields of ice filled the lower atmosphere with its luminous reflections; but an undreamed-of purity seemed to form the essence of the air I breathed. At that height, no exhalations from the lowlands, no effects of light and shade, either disturbed or interrupted the vague and sombre depth of the skies. Their seeming color was no longer that pale and luminous blue, the soft canopy of the plains, the charming and delicate blend which forms a visible inclosure to the inhabited earth, and is a rest and a goal to the eye. In those high regions, the invisible ether allowed the gaze to lose itself in boundless space; in the midst of the splendor of the sun and of the glaciers, to seek other worlds and other suns, as under the vast sky of the night; and above the burning atmosphere of the day, to penetrate a nocturnal universe.

Stealthily the mist rose from the glaciers and was shaped into clouds at my feet. The snows had lost their dazzling brightness, and the sky grew deeper still and full of shadow. A fog covered the Alps; here and there a solitary peak rose out of this ocean of mist; held in their rugged clefts, lines of shimmering snow gave the granite a blacker and a sterner look. The snow-white dome of Mont Blanc lifted its imperishable mass above this gray and moving sea, above these drifts of fog, which were furrowed by the wind and piled in towering waves. A black point appeared in this abyss; it rose rapidly, and came straight towards me; it was the mighty eagle of the Alps; his wings were wet, his eye fierce; he was in search of prey, but at the sight of man he fled with a sinister cry and was lost as he plunged into the clouds. Twenty times the cry reëchoed, but the sounds were short and sharp, like

twenty separate cries in the universal silence. Then absolute stillness fell upon all things, as though sound itself had ceased to exist, and the power of sound had been effaced from the universe. Never has silence been known in the tumultuous valleys; only on the icy summits does that stability, that solemn permanence reign, which no tongue can express, which the imagination is powerless to attain. Except for the memories of the plains, man could not conceive of any movement in nature beyond himself; the course of the planets would be incomprehensible; even to the changes of the mist, everything would seem to subsist in the very act of change. Each actual moment having the appearance of continuity,¹⁵ man would have the certainty without ever having the sentiment of the succession of things; and the perpetual mutations of the universe would be to his mind an impenetrable mystery.

I wish that I could have kept surer records, not of my general impressions in that land of silence, for they will never be forgotten, but of the ideas to which they gave birth, and of which scarcely a memory has been left to me. In the midst of scenes so different, the imagination recalls with difficulty an order of thought which seems to be in disaccord with all the objects of its present surroundings. I should have had to write down what I felt; but then my emotions would soon have fallen to the level of everyday experience. This solicitude to harvest one's thought for future use has in it an element of servility which belongs to the painstaking efforts of a dependent life.

Not in moments of ardor does one take heed of other times and other men; in those hours one's thoughts are not born for the sake of artificial conventionalities, of fame, or even for the good of others. One is more natural,

without even a desire to utilize the present moment: no thoughts that come at one's behest, no reflection, no spirit of intellectual investigation, no search for hidden things, no attempt to find the new and strange. Thought is not active and ordered, but passive and free: dreams, and complete abandonment; depth without comprehension, greatness without enthusiasm, energy without volition; to muse, not to meditate, — this is one's attitude. Do not, then, be surprised if, after an experience in thought and emotion which will perhaps never be repeated during my life, I still have nothing to tell you. You remember those nature-lovers of the Dauphiné, who expected so much from Jean-Jacques, and were so bitterly disappointed. They went with him to a vantage ground well suited to the kindling of a poetic genius; they waited for a magnificent burst of eloquence; but the author of *Julie* sat on the

ground, dallied with some blades of grass, and said not a word.

It may have been five o'clock when I noticed how the shadows began to lengthen, and how the cold crept over me, in the angle, open to the western sky, where I had long lain upon the granite rock. It was too treacherous to walk over those steep crags, and so I could not keep in motion. The mists had disappeared, and I saw that the evening was beautiful even in the valleys. . . .

Descending once more to inhabited earth, I felt that I again took up the long chain of anxieties and weariness. I returned at ten o'clock; the moon shone upon my window. I heard the rushing of the Rhone; there was no wind; the city slept. I thought of the mountains I had left, of Charrières which is to be my home, of the liberty which I have claimed as mine.

LETTER VIII

Saint-Maurice, September 14th, 1st year.

I HAVE just returned from a trip of several days among the mountains. . . . Before retiring, I opened a letter; it was not in your handwriting; the word *haste*, written in a conspicuous way, filled me with uneasiness. Everything is open to suspicion when one has with difficulty escaped from former fetters. . . .

I think you will readily suspect what it was. I was crushed, overwhelmed; then I decided to neglect everything, to rise above everything, to forever abandon all things that would be a link to the life I had left behind. But after many uncertainties, whether reasonable or weak I know not, I thought it best to sacrifice the present, for the sake of future rest and security. I submit, I leave Charrières.

This morning I could not endure the thought of so great a change. I went to Charrières. . . . I stood among the fields; it was the last mowing. I lingered on a rock, to see only the sky; it was veiled with haze. I looked at the chestnut-trees; the leaves were falling. Then I went to the river, as though I feared lest that also might be silent; but it was still flowing.

Inexplicable necessity of human affairs! I am going to Lyons; I shall go to Paris; this is my decision. Farewell. Let us pity the man who finds but little, and from whom even that little is taken away.

LETTER IX

Lyons, October 22d, 1st year.

I LEFT for Meterville two days after your departure from Lyons, and spent eighteen days there. . . . The

grounds are not extensive, and the situation is more restful than striking. You know the owners, their character, their ways, their simple friendship, their winning manners. I arrived at a happy moment. On the following day the grapes were to be gathered from a long trellis, open to the south, and facing the woods of Armand. At supper-time it was decided that the grapes, which were to be made into choice wine, must be carefully picked with our own hands, so as to leave the unripe bunches on the vines to mature.

On the next day, as soon as the morning mists had lifted, I put a winnowing fan on a wheelbarrow, and was the first to go to the farther end of the vineyard and begin the harvesting. I worked almost alone, without trying to find a quicker method; I liked this deliberate way, and saw with regret that others came, now and then, to help; the harvesting lasted, I believe, for

twelve days. My wheelbarrow came and went through unfrequented paths, overgrown with wet grass; I chose the least level, the most uneven ones, and thus the days passed by in forgetfulness, in the heart of the mist, in the midst of the fruit, under an autumn sun. And when the evening came, we drank our tea, with milk warm from the cow, and smiled at the men who go in search of pleasures; we walked beside the old yoke-elms, and we lay down content.

I have seen the vanities of life, and in my heart I carry the glowing germ of the strongest passions. There, too, I bear the consciousness of great social issues, and of philosophic ideas. I have read Marcus Aurelius, and was not surprised; I can conceive of the sterner virtues, and even of monastic heroism. All this can stir my soul, but cannot fill it. My wheelbarrow, which I load with fruit and push gently along, is a firmer support. The hours move peace-

fully on, and this slow and useful motion, this measured walk, seem better to represent the needs of our daily life.

LETTER XI

Paris, June 27th, 2d year.

I OFTEN spend a couple of hours at the library, not exactly to gain knowledge, for that desire has materially cooled of late, but because, not knowing how to fill those hours which still flow irrevocably on, I find them less intolerable when employed outside than when consumed in the house. Occupations that are somewhat regulated suit me in my discouragement; too much liberty would leave me in indolence. I feel more at rest among people as silent as myself than when I am alone in the midst of a seething crowd. I love those long halls, some empty, others filled with studious men, the an-

cient and cold repository of all human vanities and efforts. . . .

The halls surround a long, quiet court, overgrown with grass, where two or three statues stand, a few ruins, and a basin of green water, which looks to be as old as the monuments. I rarely leave without lingering for a time in this silent inclosure. I love to dream as I walk upon these ancient pavements, cut from the quarries so that their hard and barren surface might be laid beneath the feet of man. But time and neglect have, in a way, buried them anew under the ground, by covering them with a fresh layer of earth, and adding the green grass and the hues that were its portion of old. I find these pavements more eloquent, at times, than the books that have absorbed me.

Yesterday, when I was consulting the *Encyclopédie*, I opened the volume at a chance page, and do not even re-

member now the title of the article; but it spoke of a man, who, weary of tumult and affliction, plunged into complete solitude by following out one of those resolutions which conquer circumstances and lead us to congratulate ourselves forever after on having had so much strength of will. The idea of this independent life did not recall to my imagination either the free solitudes of the Ismaüs, or the happy isles of the Pacific, or the nearer Alps already so deeply regretted. But a clear memory pictured vividly to my mind, with a sense of wonder and inspiration, the barren rocks and the woods of Fontainebleau. . . .

You know that when I was still young, I lived for several years in Paris. My parents, in spite of their love for the city, spent, at different times, the month of September with friends in the country. One year it was at Fontainebleau, and twice again we stayed

with these same friends, who, at that time, lived at the foot of the forest, towards the river. I was, I believe, fourteen, fifteen, and seventeen years of age, when I saw Fontainebleau. After a restricted, inactive, and tedious childhood, I felt as a man in some ways, but was still a child in many others. Awkward and timid, anticipating all things, it may be, but knowing nothing, an alien amid my surroundings, my nature was characterized by restlessness and discontent. The first time I went to the forest I was not alone; I cannot clearly recall my impressions, and merely know that that spot was dearer to me than any other, and was the only one to which I longed to return.

The following year I wandered eagerly through these solitudes; I purposely went astray, and was overjoyed when I had completely lost my way, and could not find any frequented path.

When I came to the edge of the forest, I saw with regret the wide expanse of bare plains, and the distant steeples. Then I turned back and plunged into the densest part of the woods, and when I reached a clearing, shut in on all sides, where nothing could be seen but stretches of sand and of juniper-trees, there came to me a sense of peace, of liberty, of savage joy, the sway of nature first felt in careless youth. Yet I was not gay ; almost happy, I felt only the exuberance of well-being. But enjoyment grew wearisome, and a feeling of sadness crept over me as I turned my steps homeward.

Often I was in the forest before the rising of the sun. I climbed the hills still deep in shadow ; I was all wet from the dew-covered underbrush ; and when the sun shone out I still longed for that mystic light, precursor of the dawn. I loved the deep gullies, the dark valleys, the dense woods ; I loved the

hills covered with heather; I loved the fallen boulders and the rugged rocks,¹⁶ and, still better, I loved the moving sands, their barren wastes untrodden by the foot of man, but furrowed here and there by the restless tracks of the roe or the fleeing hare. When I saw a squirrel, when I startled a deer, I paused, I felt more content, and for a moment I ceased my wanderings. It was then that I noticed the birch, a lonely tree which even in those days filled me with sadness, and which, since that time, I have never seen without a sense of pleasure. I love the birch; I love that smooth, white, curling bark; that wild trunk; those drooping branches; the flutter of the leaves, and all that abandonment, simplicity of nature, attitude of the desert.

Wasted hours, never to be forgotten!
Vain illusions of a responsive and impressionable nature! How great is man in his inexperience; how productive

would he be, if the cold glance of his fellow, the sterile breath of injustice, came not to wither his heart! I had need of happiness. I was born to suffer. You know those sombre days, fore-runners of the frost, when even the dawn, as it gathers the mist, heralds the light by touching the cloud-mass with a sinister glow of fiery color. That gloomy veil, those sudden gales, those pale gleams, that whistling of the wind through the trees as they bend and tremble, those endless wails like funeral lamentations, — such is the morning of life; at noon, colder and more enduring gales; at eventide, denser gloom, and the day of man is finished.

That specious and perpetual illusion, which is born with the heart of man, and would seem to have a life as enduring as his own, was rekindled in me one day; I went so far as to think that my longings would be fulfilled. But this sudden and all too impetuous

fire burned itself out in empty space, and was quenched ere it had shed abroad one ray of light. Even as in the season of storms a sudden lightning-streak will gleam in the cloud-dark night, to alarm all living creatures.

It was in March; I was at Lu—. There were violets at the foot of the thickets, and lilacs in a little meadow, springlike and peaceful, open to the southern sun. The house stood high above. A terraced garden hid the windows from sight. Below the meadow, steep and rugged rocks formed wall upon wall; at the foot, a wide torrent, and beyond, other ledges covered with fields, with hedges, and with firs! Across all this stretched the ancient walls of the city; an owl had made his home among the ruined towers. In the evening, the moon shone, distant horns gave answering calls; and the voice that I shall never hear again! . . . All this deceived me. My life has, be-

fore now, held but this solitary mistake. Why then this memory of Fontainebleau, and not that of Lu—?

LETTER XII

July 28th, 2d year.

AT last I feel as though I were in the desert. Here, there are wide tracts of land without a trace of man. I have escaped, for a season, from those restless cares which consume our years, mingle our life with the darkness that goes before, and the darkness that follows after, and grant it no larger boon than to be a less tranquil void. . . .

Can you understand the joy I feel when my foot sinks into the moving and burning sands, when I walk with difficulty, and there is no water, no freshness, no shade? I see a mute and barren stretch of land; bare, decayed, and shattered rocks; and the forces

of nature laid under subjection to the forces of time. Is it not like unto a sense of peace that falls upon me, when I find, in the outer world, beneath a burning sky, obstacles and excesses other than those of my own heart?

I do not care to know where I am ; on the contrary, I go astray whenever I can. Often I walk in a straight line, without following any path. I strive not to keep any trace of my way, and not to grow too familiar with the forest, so as always to have something new to find. There is one path that I love to follow ; it winds in a circle, keeping to the line of the forest, and leads neither to the plains nor to the city ; it goes by no wonted course ; it is neither in the valleys nor on the heights ; it seems to have no end ; it passes through everything, it reaches nothing ; I think I shall tread this path all my life. . . .

In former days, when I wandered

through these woods, I saw, in a dense thicket, two roes fleeing from a wolf, who was close upon them. I felt sure he would capture them, and followed, to be in at the struggle, and to help them if I could. They sprang from the cover of the woods into a clearing filled with rocks and heather ; but when I reached the spot they were out of sight. Then I scrambled down into the very depths of the rough and hollow moor, from which large quantities of sandstone had been quarried for the street pavements ; but I found nothing. On my way back to the forest by a different path, I came upon a dog, who stood gazing at me in silence until I started to move on. Then he barked, and I saw that I had almost stepped upon the threshold of the dwelling over which he was watching. It was a sort of cave, inclosed partly by a natural wall of rock, and partly by piles of stones, branches of juniper, and heaps

of heather and moss. A workman, who for more than thirty years had cut stone in the neighboring quarries, having neither family nor goods, had retired to this spot so as to be released from forced labor in his last days, and to escape the workhouse and contempt. Near his rock-dwelling, in a barren piece of ground, was a garden plot; and together they lived, he, his dog, and his cat, on bread, water, and liberty.¹⁷ "I have worked much, and have had nothing," he said to me; "but at last I am at rest, and soon I shall die." It was the story of humanity, told me by this uncouth man. . . .

You may now understand the power of the memory that came to me so unexpectedly at the library. This sudden thought opened up to me the full consciousness of a real life, a wise simplicity, the freedom of man amid a nature of which he is the master.

Not that I consider as such the life

that I lead here, nor think that in the midst of my rocks, surrounded by the wretched plains, I am the man of nature. . . . But, since I am condemned ever to wait for life, I strive to vegetate alone and in solitude. . . .

May I once again, beneath the autumn sky, in the last of the beautiful days that are filled with the mystery of the mist, seated by the side of the stream that carries the yellowed leaf upon its current, — may I listen to the deep and simple notes of an artless melody. May I one day, as I climb the Grimsel or the Titlis, alone with the man of the mountains, listen, while lying near the snows upon the close-cut grass, to the familiar and romantic sounds of the cows of Unterwalden and of Hasli; and once before I die, may I there say to a man who can understand me: Had we but lived!

LETTER XIII

Fontainebleau, July 31st, 2d year.

WHEN an irresistible feeling carries us far beyond the things that are ours, and fills us first with rapture, then with regret, giving us a vision of blessings which are beyond our reach, this deep and fleeting sense is but the inner proof of the superiority of our faculties over our destiny. And for this very reason it lingers but for a while, and is soon changed to regret ; it is enchanting, then heartrending. Dejection follows every immoderate impulse. We suffer for not being what we might be ; but were we to find ourselves in that order of things for which we long, we should no longer have either that excess of desire or that redundance of faculties ; we should no longer enjoy the delight of being above

our destiny, greater than our environment, more productive than we have need to be. Were we to be in possession of those delights which our imagination had so ardently pictured, we should be found cold, often dreamy, indifferent, even wearied; because we cannot produce beyond our possibilities; because we should then feel the irresistible limits of our human nature, and, in employing our faculties on the things of actual life, they would no longer be at our service to bear us beyond, into the imaginary region of the ideal brought into subjection to the sovereignty of actual man.

But why should these things be purely ideal? This is what I cannot understand. Why does the non-existent seem more in accord with man's nature than what exists? Actual life is also like a dream; it has no whole, no continuity, no end; it has elements that are positive and settled; it has

others that are nought but chance and dissonance, that pass like shadows, and hold nothing but deceptive illusions. Thus, in sleep, we think of things true and connected, and of things strange, disconnected, and chimeric, all united by some indefinable link. The same medley forms the dreams of the night and the sentiments of the day. It has been said, by the wisdom of the ancients, that the moment of awakening will come at last.

LETTER XIV

Fontainebleau, August 7th, 2d year.

MR. W——, whom you know, said recently: “When I take my cup of coffee, I arrange the world to my liking.” I, too, indulge in this kind of dream ; and when my path lies through the heather, between the dew-covered junipers, I find myself pictur-

ing the lot of happy men. I fully believe that men might be happy. It is not my wish to create another species, or a new earth; it is not my desire to make a widespread reform. That kind of hypothesis leads to nothing, you declare, because it is not based on actual life. Then let us take what necessarily exists; let us take it as it is, arranging merely those things that are accidental. I have no longing for new or visionary species; my materials lie within my reach, and with them I form my plan after my own ideal.

I want two things: a settled climate, and sincere men. If I know when the rain will overflow the rivers, when the sun will scorch my plants, when the hurricane will shake my cottage, it is the part of my industry to battle with the forces of nature that are arrayed against my needs. But when I am ignorant of the coming event, when misfortune crushes me while I am still

unwarned of danger, when prudence may be my ruin, and the interests of others confided to my care forbid unconcern and even a sense of security, is not my life, of necessity, both restless and sorrowful? Is it not inevitable that inaction follows in the train of forced labor, and that I should consume my days, as Voltaire has so well said, in the convulsions of unrest or in the lethargy of weariness?

If almost all men are deceitful, if the duplicity of some forces others at least into the refuge of reserve, does it not follow that to the inevitable wrongs against their fellows, committed by some men in their own interests, is added a far larger share of useless wrongs? Does it not follow that men injure one another without intent, that each one is watchful and guarded, that enemies are inventive, and friends are prudent? Is it not inevitable that an honest man should fall in public esti-

mation by an indiscreet remark or a false judgment; that an enmity born of a baseless suspicion should grow to be mortal; that those who would have wished to do well are discouraged; that false principles are established; that craftiness is of more use than wisdom, valor, or magnanimity; that children reproach their father for not having been a trickster, and that states perish for not having committed a crime? In this state of endless uncertainty, I ask what becomes of morality; and in the uncertainty of things, what becomes of security; and without security, without morality, I ask if happiness is not a child's dream? . . .

A settled climate, and men sincere, unmistakably sincere, is all I require. I am happy if I am sure of things. I leave to the heavens its storms and its thunderbolts; to the earth, its mire and its dryness; to the soil, its sterility; to our bodies, their weakness, their

degeneration; to men, their differences and incompatibilities, their faithlessness, their errors, their vices even, and their necessary egoism; to time, its slowness and irrevocableness. The city of my dreams is happy, if life is ordered, and thought undisguised. The only added element it requires is a good government; and this cannot fail her, if thought is unconcealed.

L E T T E R X V

Fontainebleau, August 9th, 2d year.

THE day was at its close; there was no moon; there was no stir; the sky was calm, the trees motionless. A few insects under the grass, a solitary bird singing, far away, in the warmth of the evening. I lingered long, at rest upon the ground; my mind seemed filled with indistinct ideas. My thoughts wandered over the earth and the

centuries; I shuddered at the work of man. I came back to myself, and saw myself in this chaos; I saw my life lost in its depths; I foresaw the future ages of the world. Rocks of the Righi! had your chasms been there!

Already the night was gloomy. Slowly I left the spot; I wandered at random, I was filled with weariness. I had need of tears, but could only groan. The early days have passed away; I feel the torments of youth, but no longer have its consolations. My heart, still wasted by the fire of an immature and profitless age, is withered and parched as though it had reached the exhaustion of the age that has outlived passion. My life is dead, but I am not calm. Some men enjoy their sufferings, but for me all things have passed away; I have neither joy, nor hope, nor rest; nothing is left to me, not even tears.

LETTER XVI

Fontainebleau, August 12th, 2d year.

WHAT noble sentiments! What memories! What quiet majesty in a night soft, calm, luminous! What grandeur! But the soul is overwhelmed with doubt. It sees that the feelings aroused by sentient things lead it into error; that truth exists, but in the far distance. Nature seems incomprehensible at sight of those mighty planets in the changeless sky.

Such permanence is bewildering; it is to man a fearful eternity. All things pass away; man passes away, but the worlds do not pass! Thought is lost in a gulf between the changes of the earth and the immutability of the heavens.

LETTER XVII

Fontainebleau, August 14th, 2d year.

I GO to the woods before the coming of the sun; I see it rise in a cloudless sky; I walk in the dew-covered brakes, in the midst of the brambles, among the hinds, under the birches of Mont Chauvet. A sense of the happiness that might have been takes full possession of me, drives me onward, and overpowers me. I climb, I descend, I press on like a man longing for joy; then a sigh, discontent, and a whole day of wretchedness.

LETTER XVIII

Fontainebleau, August 17th, 2d year.

EVEN here I love only the evening. The dawn delights me for a moment ; it seems as though I should feel its beauty, but the day which is to follow in its train must be so long ! . . . Here, nothing crushes me, nothing satisfies me. I even believe that my weariness is on the increase ; it is because I do not suffer enough. Am I, then, happier ? Ah, no ; suffering and unhappiness are not the same ; neither are enjoyment and happiness.

My lot is easy, but my life is sad. I am in the best of surroundings : free, tranquil, well, without cares, indifferent towards the future, from which I expect nothing, and drifting away without regret from the past, which has brought me no joy. But I am filled

with an unrest that will never leave me; it is a craving I do not comprehend, which overrules me, absorbs me, lifts me above the things that perish. . . . You are mistaken, and I too was once mistaken; it is not the desire for love. A great distance lies between the void that fills my heart and the love that I have so deeply desired; but the infinite stretches between what I am and what I crave to be. Love is vast, but it is not the infinite. I do not desire enjoyment; I long for hope, I crave knowledge! I need endless illusions, which shall ever lure me onwards, and ever deceive me. What do I care for things that will cease to be? The hour that will come in sixty years is near me now. I have no liking for what is prearranged, for what approaches, arrives, and is then no more. I desire a good, a dream, a hope, that shall be ever before me, beyond me, greater even than my expectation, greater than

what passes away. I should like to be pure intelligence, and I wish that the eternal order of the world. . . . And thirty years ago the order was, and I was not!

LETTER XIX

Fontainebleau, August 18th, 2d year.

THERE are moments when I am filled with hope and a sense of liberty; time and things pass before me with majestic harmony, and I feel happy, as though happiness were possible to me. I have surprised myself returning to my early years; once more I have found in the rose the beauty of delight, and its celestial eloquence. Happy! I? And yet I am, and happy to overflowing, like one who reawakens from the terrors of a dream to a life of peace and liberty; like one who emerges from the filth of a dungeon,

and, after ten years, looks once again upon the serenity of the sky; happy like the man who loves the woman he has saved from death! But the moment passes; a cloud drifts across the sun and shuts out its inspiring light; the birds are hushed; the growing darkness drives away both my dream and my joy. . . .

LETTER XX

Fontainebleau, August 27th, 2d year.

HOW few are the needs of the individual who desires only to exist, and how many are those of the man who wishes to live happily and usefully. If a man were strong enough to renounce joy, and realize that it is beyond his reach, he would be far happier; but must one live forever alone? Peace itself is a sad blessing when there is no hope of sharing it.

I know that there are many who care for nothing more lasting than the good of the moment ; and that others know how to limit themselves to a manner of life without order and devoid of taste. . . . Such a life is called a simple life. I call it an unfortunate life, if it is temporary ; a life of misery, if it is necessary and enduring ; but if it is voluntary, if it is not distasteful, if it is the accepted life of the future, then I call it a life worthy of ridicule.

Contempt of riches is a beautiful sentiment when expressed in books ; but one who has a family and no money must be either callous, or endowed with resolute strength ; and I question whether a man of high character would submit to such a life. One endures whatever is accidental ; but to forever bow one's will before misery is to adopt misery. Are such stoics wanting, perhaps, in that sense of propriety which teaches man that a life of this kind

is unworthy of his nature? Their simplicity, without order, without delicacy, without shame, approaches nearer, it seems to me, to the gross penitence of a fakir than to the strength and indifference of a philosopher.

There is a propriety, a care, a harmony, a completeness, even in simplicity. . . .

LETTER XXI

Fontainebleau, September 1st, 2d year.

THE days are beautiful, and I am filled with profound peace. In times past, I should have enjoyed with keener zest this full liberty, this relinquishment of all business, of all projects, this complete indifference to events.

I begin to feel that I am advancing in life. Those exquisite impressions, those sudden emotions which stirred

me once so deeply, and carried me so far beyond this world of sadness, are now all changed and weakened. That longing, awakened in me by the feeling for every beauty which exists in the natural world, that hope so uncertain and so full of charm, that celestial fire which dazzles and consumes the heart of youth, that all-embracing rapture which sheds a light over the vast illusion — all these have passed away.

You who know the limitless cravings of my nature tell me what I shall do with my life, when I shall have lost those moments of illusion which shone in the darkness, like tempest-gleams on a stormy night ! They made life more sombre, it is true ; but they were an earnest that it might change, and that the light still burned. . . .

I was far different in those days when it was possible for me to love. I had been romantic in my childhood, and even then pictured a retreat to my

taste. . . . The word Chartreuse had impressed me, and there, near Grenoble, I built the house of my dreams. I then believed that pleasant places went far to make a happy life; and there, with the woman I loved, I felt that the changeless joy, for which my baffled heart had ardently longed, might at last be mine. . . .

The farther I look back into my youth, the deeper are the impressions I find. If I pass beyond the age when ideas begin to have some breadth; if I seek in my childhood for the earliest fancies of a melancholy heart, which never had a true childhood, and was intent upon strong emotions and unusual things at a time when a love or a distaste for play was scarcely developed — if I look back to my experiences at seven years, at six years, at five years, I find impressions as enduring, more confiding, sweeter than than those of later days, and shaped by those

complete illusions which have been the happiness of no other age. . . .

September 2d.

. . . Prettiness amuses the mind, beauty sustains the soul, sublimity astounds or exalts it; but the beauties that captivate and impassion the heart are broader and more undefined, rare, beyond comprehension, mysterious, and ineffable.

Thus, love makes all things beautiful to hearts capable of loving, and adds a sense of exquisiteness to their feeling for everything in nature. Creating as it does in us the noblest of all possible relationships outside of ourselves, it opens to us the consciousness of every relationship, of all harmonies; it unveils a new world to our affections. Swept along by this swift current, fascinated by this power which holds immeasurable promise, and of which nothing has as yet disillusioned

us, we seek, we feel, we love, we desire
all that nature holds in fee for man, . . .

L E T T E R XXII

Fontainebleau, October 12th, 2d year.

I LONGED to see once more all the places through which I loved to wander in the past. Before the nights grow cold, before the trees lose their leaves, before the birds take wing, I am exploring the most distant parts of the forest.

Yesterday I was on my way before the break of day; the moon still shone, and the dawn had not yet dispelled the shadows. The valley of Changis still lay in the shades of night; but I had already gained the heights of Avon.¹⁸ I descended to the Basses-Loges, and reached Valvin as the sun, rising behind Samoreau, colored the rocks of Samois.¹⁹

Valvin is not a village, and has no cultivated land. The inn stands solitary, at the foot of a hill, on a small, level strand, between the river and the woods. Valvin or Thomery²⁰ may be reached by water, in the evening, when the shores are sombre, and we hear the belling of the stags in the forest; or else, at the rising of the sun, when the earth is still at rest, when the boatman's cry startles the roes, and echoes under the high poplars and through the heath-covered hills all steaming in the early break of day. . . .

Then I turned to the west, in search of the spring of Mont Chauvet . . . and descended into the quiet valley where its waters are lost without forming a stream. In turning aside, towards the cross of the Grand-Veneur,²¹ I came upon a solitude as austere as the wilderness that I am seeking. I passed behind the rocks of Cuvier; I was filled with sadness; I lingered long among

the gorges of Apremont.²² Towards evening I reached the solitudes of the Grand-Franchard,²³ an ancient monastery standing alone among the hills and the sands; . . . the moon shone faintly as if to add to the solitude of this deserted monument. Not a sound, not a bird, not a movement stirred the silence of the night. But, when all that oppresses us is at rest, when all things sleep and leave us to repose, then phantoms hold watch in our own hearts.

The next day I turned to the south, and, as I wandered among the hills, I watched with delight the gathering of a storm. I found an easy shelter in the hollows of the overhanging cliffs. From the depths of my retreat, I loved to see the junipers and the birches wrestling with the strength of the winds, while their roots were crowded within a small and arid space; I loved to see them hold their poor and inde-

pendent life, while their only support was the face of the rocks, in the clefts of which they stood balanced, and their only nourishment a handful of moist earth, caught in the crevices into which their roots had crept.

When the rain had lessened, I plunged into the wet woods, which were clothed with fresh beauty. I followed the edge of the forest near Recloses,²⁴ la Vignette, and Bourron. Towards evening, I turned my steps homeward with regret, and felt well pleased with my walk, if anything can give me a sense of pleasure or of regret.

I care no longer for desires ; they do not deceive me. Not that I wish them to die, for such absolute silence would seem more sinister still. But they are like the vain beauty of the rose which blooms before eyes that have closed : they hold up before me what I can never possess, what I can scarcely see.

If hope seems still to throw a ray of light into the night which envelops me, it heralds nought but the bitterness that is her last bequest before she dies ; it illumines only the depths of the void where I sought, and found nothing.

Soft climates, beautiful places, the sky of the night, significant sounds, early memories ; times, opportunities ; nature, beautiful and expressive ; sublime affections — all have passed before me, all allure me, and all abandon me. I am alone ; the strength of my heart is not given out, it reacts on itself, it waits. I am here in the world, a wanderer, solitary in the midst of a people for whom I care nothing ; like a man, deaf for many years, whose eager eyes gaze upon the crowd of silent beings who move and pass before him. He sees everything, but everything is withheld from him ; he divines the sounds that he loves, he seeks them, and hears them not ; he suffers the silence of all

things in the midst of the noise of the world. Everything passes before him, but he can grasp nothing; universal harmony reigns in external creation, it is in his imagination, but is not in his heart; he is apart from the entirety of beings, no bond unites him to them; in vain do all things exist around him, he lives alone, he is isolated in the midst of the living world.

LETTER XXIII

Fontainebleau, October 18th, 2d year.

WILL it also be given unto man to know the long peace of autumn, after the unrest of the strength of his years, even as the fire, after its haste to be consumed, lingers before it is quenched?

Long before the equinox, the leaves had fallen in quantities, yet the forest still holds much of its verdure and all

of its beauty. More than forty days ago everything looked as though it would end before its time, and now all things are enduring beyond their allotted days; receiving, at the very door of destruction, a lengthened life, which lingers on the threshold of its decay with abundant grace or security, and seems to borrow, as it weakens with gentle loitering, both from the repose of approaching death and from the charm of departing life.

LETTER XXIV

Fontainebleau, October 28th, 2d year.

THE frosts depart, and I give no heed; spring dies, and I am not moved; summer passes, and I feel no regret. But I take delight in walking over the fallen leaves, on the last of the beautiful days, in the unclothed forest.

Whence come to man the most last-

ing of the delights of his heart, that rapture of sadness, that charm full of secrets, which make him live on his sorrows and be still content with himself in the midst of the sense of his ruin? I cling to the happy season that will soon have passed away; a belated interest, a contradictory delight, draws me to her as she is about to die. The same moral law which makes the idea of destruction painful to me, makes me also love the sentiment of it in the things of this world that must pass away before me. It is natural that we should more fully enjoy the life which perishes, when, conscious of its frailty, we feel that it still lives on within us. When death separates us from things, they subsist without us. But when the leaves fall, vegetation is at an end, and dies; while we live on for new generations. Autumn is full of delight, because, for us, spring is yet to come.

Spring is more beautiful in nature;

but man, by his works, has made autumn sweeter. The awakening green, the singing bird, the opening flower, and that fire which returns to give strength to life, and the shadows which shield those hidden retreats, and that luxuriant grass, that wild fruit, those soft nights which invite to liberty! Season of joy! You fill me with dread in my burning unrest. I find deeper repose towards the eve of the year; the season when all things seem to die is the only time when I sleep in peace on the earth of man.

L E T T E R X X V

Fontainebleau, November 6th, 2d year.

I LEAVE my woods; I had intended to stay here through the winter, but if I want to free myself from the business which brought me within reach of Paris, I must neglect it no longer. . . .

So I shall leave the forest, its life, its dreamy ways, and the peaceful, though imperfect image of a free land.

LETTER XXX

Paris, March 7th, 3d year.

IT was gloomy and cold; I was heavy-hearted; I walked because I could do nothing else. I passed near some flowers, which grew on a wall at arm's height. A daffodil was in bloom, the most perfect expression of longing, the first fragrance of the year. I was filled with a sense of all the joy to which man is heir. That ineffable harmony of beings, the image of the ideal world, took possession of me; never before had I experienced an emotion so instantaneous, and so full of grandeur.

I know not what form, what analogy, what secret affinity led me to see

in this flower a measureless beauty, the expression, the elegance, the attitude of a happy and simple woman in all the grace and splendor of awakening love. I shall not strive to render that power, that immensity which nothing can express; that form which nothing can contain; that idea of a better world which we feel, but which nature cannot have given us; that celestial ray which we think to grasp, which impassions us, leads us on, and is nought but an invisible, wandering spirit, straying in the dark abyss.

But this spirit, this image, touched with a mysterious beauty, mighty with the magic power of the unknown, which has become needful to us in the midst of our miseries, and has grown natural to our overburdened hearts, — where is the man who can see it even for a moment, dimly, and ever forget the vision?

When the opposition, the inertia of

a power dead, brutal, unclean, fetters us, envelops us, imprisons us, holds us plunged in uncertainties, loathing, puerilities, imbecile or cruel follies ; when we know nothing, possess nothing ; when all things pass before us like the whimsical figures of an odious and absurd dream, — what can repress in our hearts the longing for a different order of things, for another nature ?

LETTER XXXII

Paris, April 29th, 3d year.

A SHORT while ago, at the *Bibliothèque*, I heard some one near me address by name the famous L. . . . At another time I happened to be sitting at the same table with him ; . . . he gave me some idyls, written by an obscure Greek author, which he had found in an old Latin manuscript.

LETTER XXXIII

Paris, May 7th, 3d year.

THE author to whom I referred in my last letter said to me yesterday, "If I mistake not, my idyls do not interest you greatly. Possibly you would prefer a moral or philosophic fragment, attributed to Aristippus, spoken of by Varro, and afterwards supposed to have been lost. But, as it was translated in the fifteenth century into contemporary French, it must have been still in existence at that time. I found it in manuscript, at the end of an unused and imperfect copy of Plutarch, published by Amyot."

I acknowledged that, not being a scholar, I had the misfortune to prefer things to words, and was far more deeply interested in the sentiments of Aristippus than in an eclogue, were it written by Bion or Theocritus.

But, in my opinion, there was not sufficient evidence to prove that Aristippus²⁵ was the author of this short fragment, and we owe it to his memory not to attribute to him what he would perhaps have disclaimed. If he did write it, then the famous Greek, who was as misjudged as Epicurus, and was supposed to have been effeminately voluptuous, or of a too pliant philosophy, really possessed that severity which is exacted by prudence and order, the only severity which becomes a man born for enjoyment, and a wayfarer upon the earth.

MANUAL OF PSEUSOPHANES

“Thou hast awakened gloomy, downcast, already weary of the hours that have just begun. Thou hast raised upon life the glance of disgust; thou hast found her vain, dull; after a while thou shalt feel her to be more endurable. Will she then have changed?”

“ She has no definite shape. All the experience of man is in his heart ; all his knowledge is in his thought. His whole life is within himself.

“ What ruin can crush thee thus? What canst thou lose? Does there exist outside of thee anything that is thine? Of what account is that which perisheth? All things pass, excepting justice, which is hidden beneath the veil of mutable things. For man all is vain, unless he walks with an even and tranquil step, obedient to the laws of the intelligence.

“ Everything is in a ferment around thee, everything holds a menace; if thou givest thyself up to alarms, thy anxieties will be endless. Thou shalt not possess what cannot be possessed, and thou shalt lose thy life which belonged to thee. The things that happen pass away forever. They are necessary accidents, generated in an endless circle; they vanish even as an unexpected and fleeting shadow.

“What are thy ills? Fanciful fears, hypothetical needs, passing vexations. Impotent slave! Thou cleavest to what does not exist; thou art the servant of shadows. Leave to the deluded multitude whatsoever is illusive, vain, and mortal. Give heed only to intelligence, which is the principle of the order of the world, and to man who is its instrument; intelligence which we ought to follow, man whom we ought to aid.

“Intelligence struggles against the opposition of matter, against those blind laws whose invisible results have been called chance. When the power that has been given thee has become the handmaid of intelligence, when thou hast added thy share to the order of the world, what more canst thou desire? Thou hast lived in accordance with thy nature; and what is better for the being who is endowed with feeling and knowledge than to exist in conformity with his own nature?

“Each day, as thou art born to a new life, remember that thou hast resolved not to walk in vain upon the earth. The world advances to its end. But thou dost linger, thou dost retrograde, thou dost remain in a state of suspense and languor. Thy days that have passed, will they ever return at a better time? The whole of life is gathered into the present,²⁶ which thou dost neglect in order to sacrifice it to the future; the present is time, the future is only its semblance.

“Live in thyself, and seek that which perisheth not. Consider the desires of our thoughtless passions; among such a throng, is there one which is sufficient unto man? Intelligence finds, in herself alone, food for her life; be just and strong. No one can know the day that is to come; thou wilt not find peace in outward things, seek her in thy heart.

“Strength is the law of nature, and

will is power ; intensity in suffering is better than apathy in gratification. He who obeys and suffers is often greater than he who enjoys or he who commands. Thy fears are vain, thy desires are vain. One thing only is good for thee : to be what nature has ordained.

“Thou art intelligence and matter. So also is the world. Harmony transforms individuals, and the whole follows the road to perfection through the endless improvement of its different parts. This law of the universe is also the law of man.

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“Console, enlighten, and support thy fellows ; thy part has been marked out by the place thou dost fill in the immensity of living beings. Know and obey the laws of man, and thou wilt help other men to know and to follow them. Consider and show them the centre and the end of things ; let them see the reason of what surprises them,

the instability of what troubles them, the nothingness of what sweeps them along.

“Do not isolate thyself from the entirety of the world; keep thine eyes ever fixed upon the universe; and remember justice. Thus thou wilt have filled the measure of thy life, and have accomplished the work of man.”

LETTER XXXIV

EXTRACTS FROM TWO LETTERS

Paris, June 2d and 4th, 3d year.

I HAVE seen, within a few days, the difficult part of *Mahomet* played by the only three actors who are capable of attempting it. . . .

This tragedy of *Mahomet* is one of the most beautiful plays of Voltaire; but had Voltaire not been a Frenchman he might not have made the con-

quering prophet the lover of Palmyra. It is true that the love of Mahomet is masculine, imperious, and even somewhat fierce; he does not love as Titus did, but it might have been better had he not loved at all. We know the passion of Mahomet for women; but it is likely that after so many years of dissimulation, of retirement, of perils, and of triumphs, the passion of this deep and ambitious heart did not partake of love.

This love for Palmyra was ill-suited to his high destiny and his genius. Love is out of place in a stern heart, filled with its own projects, grown old under the craving for authority, knowing pleasure only through forgetfulness, and for which happiness itself is nothing more than a diversion.

What does he mean by exclaiming, "*L'amour seul me console*" ?²⁷ Who forced him to seek the throne of the East, to leave his wives and his obscure

independence, and to lift the censer, the sceptre, and the sword? "*L'amour seul me console!*" To rule the destiny of nations, to change the religion and the laws of one portion of the globe, to raise up Arabia on the ruins of the world, was this so sad a life, so dull a lethargy? It was, doubtless, a difficult task, but it was the very occasion not to love. These cravings of the heart have their spring in the emptiness of the soul; he who has great things to do has far less need of love. . . .

FIRST FRAGMENT

5th year.

I question whether it is good for man, as he is, to be invariably happy, without ever having struggled against adverse fate. It may be that the happy man among us is he who has suffered much, not habitually and with that slow atrophy which dulls the faculties, but rather with an intensity which excites

the secret energy of the soul and forces it, happily, to seek within itself resources of which it had been before unconscious.

It is a gain for the whole of life to have been unhappy at the age when head and heart begin to live. It is the lesson of fate; it shapes good men, it enlarges the ideas, and it matures the heart not yet weakened by old age; it moulds a man early enough in his career for him to be a complete man. Though unhappiness may take away pleasure and delight, it excites the sense of order and the desire for domestic joys; it gives the greatest satisfaction for which we may look, that of expecting nothing more than a calm and useful existence. We are far less unhappy when we desire merely to live; we are nearer to usefulness when, in the full strength of life, we seek nothing more for ourselves. Misfortune alone, I believe, has the power, before the

coming of old age, to thus develop the ordinary man.

True goodness exacts wide conceptions, a great soul, and restrained passions. If goodness is the highest merit of man, if moral perfections are essential to happiness, it is among those who have greatly suffered during the early years of the heart's life that we shall find the men who are most fitly framed for their own good and for the good of all — men who are the most just, the most rational, the nearest to happiness, and the most steadfastly virtuous. . . .

The upright man is steadfast; he has not the passions of any faction, nor has he the habits of any profession; he is not the tool of any man; he can have neither animosity, nor ostentation, nor folly; he is not surprised at goodness, because it exists within him, or at evil, because it exists in nature; he is indignant against crime, but does not hate the guilty; he despises meanness of

soul, but is not angered at the worm because the unfortunate creature has no wings. . . .

He is virtuous, not because he is a fanatic, but because he is in quest of order ; he does good so as to lessen the uselessness of his life ; he prefers the happiness of others to his own, because others can enjoy, and he cannot ; he desires merely to reserve for himself the means of doing some good, and of living in peace ; calm is the necessary portion of those who do not look for joy. . . . He is not satisfied with what he does, because he feels that he might do far better. . . . Thus he will pass his days, while drawing ever onward toward the highest good ; at times with an energetic but hampered step ; oftener with uncertainty, with some weakness, with the smile of discouragement.



It is a small thing not to be like the common type of men ; but it is a step towards wisdom not to be like the common type of sages.

LETTER XXXVI

Lyons, April 7th, 6th year.

SUPERB mountains, falling of the avalanches, solitary peace of the forest glen, yellow leaves floating on the silent stream ! What would you be to man, if you spoke not of other men ? Nature would be mute, did man no longer live. Were I alone upon the earth, what would I care for the sounds of the relentless night, the solemn silence of the great valleys, the light of the sunset in a sky filled with melancholy, above the calm waters ? Nature is felt only in human relationships, and the eloquence of things is nothing more than the eloquence of man. The

fruitful earth, the broad skies, the moving waters, are but an expression of the relationship that our hearts create and hold. . . .

But the relationships of human life have multiplied; the friendship of the ancients is far from our hearts, or from our destiny.



Man grows old, and his slighted heart grows old before him. If all that he can love is in man, all that he must shun is there also. Where there are many social conventionalities, there, too, of stubborn necessity, are many discords. And thus the man whose fears are greater than his hopes lives apart from his fellows. Things inanimate have less power, but they belong to us more fully; they are what we make them. They hold less of what we seek, but we are surer of finding the things that they contain. They

are the joys of mediocrity, limited but certain. Passion goes in quest of man, but reason is sometimes obliged to forsake him for things that are less good and less fatal. Thus has been forged a powerful link between man and this friend of man. . . .

NOTES

NOTE I, Page vii

THE following is a list of Senancour's works:—

Réveries sur la Nature primitive de l'Homme.

Obermann.

De l'Amour.

Libres Méditations.

Traditions morales et religieuses.

La Chine.

République romaine.

Empire romain.

De Napoléon.

Valombré, comédie.

Isabelle à Clémence.

Observations sur le Génie du Christianisme.

Vocabulaire de simple vérité.

France littéraire.

De l'athéisme imputé à Voltaire.

l'Amitié.

Senancour wrote, in addition, a number of political pamphlets, letters, and articles; and in the last years of his life he began a work, *De la Religion*

éternelle, the manuscript of which was lost. He also planned, it would seem, to write a second part to *Obermann*.

NOTE 2, Page 3

The method of dating the letters that was used in the last French edition, and that was presumably the original system followed by Senancour, has been strictly adhered to. Although *Obermann* was written during three years, from 1801 to 1803, the letters were made to cover apparently a period of nine years.

NOTE 3, Page 3

This and the following pages refer to the time when, in 1789, Senancour fled from Paris and took refuge in Switzerland in order to avoid entering the priesthood, to which his father had destined him, and for which he felt an unconquerable aversion. It is probable that, after this, Senancour saw his mother only at rare and uncertain intervals; for she died in 1796, and the French Revolution, which broke out almost immediately after Senancour's flight, kept him an exile in Switzerland for many years. When we read his tender and beautiful words about his mother, in the chapter on irreparable faults in the *Méditations*, we feel that in later years Senancour deeply repented his hasty act.

NOTE 4, Page 13

Cully is a small village on the margin of lake Lemane, between Vevey and Lausanne. Above it rise the vine-covered slopes of La Vaux.

NOTE 5, Page 15

The *Vies des Pères du désert* was probably the French translation made in the early part of the seventeenth century by René Gautier from the original Latin work, *Vitæ Patrum, sive Historiæ Eremeticæ, libri X*. This *Acta Sanctorum*, which was published at Antwerp in 1628, by P. Herbert Rosweyde, Jesuit, contained in ten books all the biographies and authentic notices of the fathers of the desert which Rosweyde was able to collect. The Bollandists afterwards carried out more fully the original design of the Jesuit father. Among the contents of the *Vitæ Patrum* are the lives of the chief patriarchs of the Thebaid, written by St. Jerome, St. Athanasius, St. Ephrem, and others; lives of holy women; biographical notices by Ruffinus; maxims and examples from the lives of the fathers; the *Historia Lausiaca*, written by Palladius, afterwards Bishop of Helenopolis, who visited Egypt in about 390, and who gives a narrative of the three years he spent among the hermits; and accounts of the holy hermits of Asia. Montalembert, in his *Monks of the West*, speaks of this collection as "one of the noblest of existing books."

NOTE 6, Page 17

This lake must be that of Neuchâtel.

NOTE 7, Page 17

The river Thièle, or Zihl, connects lake Neuchâtel with the lake of Biemme.

NOTE 8, Page 22

Compare Matthew Arnold in *Tristram and Iseult* : —

“Dear saints, it is not sorrow, as I hear,
Not suffering, which shuts up eye and ear
To all that has delighted them before,
And lets us be what we were once no more.
No, we may suffer deeply, yet retain
Power to be moved and soothed, for all our pain,
By what of old pleased us, and will again.”

NOTE 9, Page 25

Compare this and several other passages of the same character, in which Senancour emphasizes the importance of living according to the dictates of one's own nature, with the following sentences from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius : —

“No man can prevent you from living according to the principle of your nature. . . .

“Each one should act in accordance with his natural constitution. . . .

“Think nothing of importance except to act as your nature dictates, and to bear whatever universal nature brings.”

Compare also these lines from Emerson's essay on *Self-Reliance*: —

“No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. . . . The only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it.”

NOTE 10, Page 28

We can follow Senancour's trip of two months, from the 8th of July to the 3d of September, through the cantons of Vaud, Neuchâtel, Berne, and Fribourg, to the Valais. His first letter was written at Geneva. From that point his itinerary lay along the northern shore of lake Lemman through Nyon to Lausanne, which covers the slopes of Mont Jorat. Crossing northward, he went to Yverdun by way of Moudon, then to Neuchâtel, and after a trip through the Val de Travers, to Saint-Blaise, on the northeastern point of lake Neuchâtel, and to Bienne. He stopped for several days at Thiel, on the frontier of Neuchâtel and Berne, and, passing by lake Morat, went southward to Vevey, through Payerne. Skirting the eastern end of lake Lemman, he visited Clarens and Chillon, and then journeyed on to Saint-Maurice, where he decided to make his home.

I have not followed Senancour's spelling of Swiss names, as it is frequently incorrect.

NOTE 11, Page 28

Villeneuve is a small, ancient town on the eastern point of lake Lemane, where the road leaves the borders of the lake and enters the valley of the Rhone.

NOTE 12, Page 29

This narrow gorge is described by Rogers in *Saint Maurice* :—

“’T was dusk; and journeying upward by the Rhone,
That there came down a torrent from the Alps,
I entered where a key unlocks a kingdom;
The road and river, as they wind along,
Filling the mountain-pass.”

NOTE 13, Page 29

The bridge of Saint-Maurice unites the cantons of Vaud and of Valais. With its one arch, seventy feet wide, it spans the river, which is here a rapid torrent, and rests on one side upon the *Dent de Morcles* and on the other side upon the *Dent du Midi*.

NOTE 14, Page 29

The town to which Senancour here alludes is that of Saint-Maurice.

NOTE 15, Page 43.

Compare the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, in

the eleventh book, xi, on time and eternity (edited by William G. T. Shedd):—

“Who shall hold their heart, and fix it, that it be settled awhile, and awhile catch the glory of that ever-fixed Eternity, and compare it with the times which are never fixed, and see that it cannot be compared; and that a long time cannot become long but out of many motions passing by . . . but that in the Eternal, nothing passeth, but the whole is present? . . . Who shall hold the heart of man, that it may stand still, and see how eternity, ever still-standing, neither past nor to come, uttereth the times past and to come?”

NOTE 16, Page 56

The masses of bare sandstone rock, well known as the *grès de Fontainebleau*, give to the forest much of its picturesqueness. Deep valleys and gorges separate the long ridges of sandstone, and in their hollows lie piles of rocks heaped up in rugged masses.

NOTE 17, Page 62

This adventure, which happened to Senancour when he was about fifteen or sixteen years of age, seems to have left a deep impression on his mind, for he recurs to it again in the *Méditations*. In his preface to that book, he declares, in order to cover his own identity, that he discovered the manuscript of the *Méditations* in the rock-cave of

the forest of Fontainebleau, and he calls himself merely the editor of a moral treatise which, he suggests, may have been written by some recluse-philosopher who had lived in the former dwelling of Lallemand, the poor quarryman.

NOTE 18, Page 83

Avon is the only village within the precincts of the forest of Fontainebleau.

NOTE 19, Page 83

Valvin, Samoreau, and Samoïis are all border forest-villages situated on the banks of the Seine.

NOTE 20, Page 84

Thomery, which lies at the west of the forest, by the banks of the Seine, is a village of gardens. It is surrounded on almost every side by vineyards, which yield the famous Chasselas grapes, and by orchards and gardens; its streets are filled with trees, vines, and flowers, hedges of roses, and orchards of plum-trees.

NOTE 21, Page 84

According to an old legend, the *Grand Veneur*, the terrible spectre huntsman, haunted the forest, and with torch and hounds followed through the night a spectre stag which, like an *ignis fatuus*, ever allured him and ever eluded him. To this nightly ride he had been condemned as a punishment for

an offense against St. Hubert. It was this phantom *Chasseur Noir* who is said to have appeared to Henry IV a short time before his assassination, and to have uttered the words, "Amendez vous!"

NOTE 22, Page 85

The gorges and valley of Apremont which lie on the northwest of the forest, not far from the now famous artist village of Barbizon, contain some of the wildest and most picturesque scenery in the Fontainebleau district.

NOTE 23, Page 85

Beyond Apremont to the south is the Hermitage of Franchard, now solitary and abandoned, buried in rocks and sand, and lying in ruins among the hills. The monastery was founded in 1197, by monks from Orleans, under Philippe Auguste. During the wars of the fourteenth century it was partially destroyed, and was afterwards used as a stronghold by bands of brigands, who so terrorized the neighborhood that Louis XIV ordered the ruins to be razed to the ground.

NOTE 24, Page 86

Recloses, la Vignette, and Bourron are border forest-villages on the south.

NOTE 25, Page 96

There is every reason to believe that this story

about the discovery of the *Manual of Pseusophanes* is fictitious and invented by Senancour, who doubtless was himself the author of the *Manual*.

I have to acknowledge with sincere thanks the courtesy of M. Barringer, of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* at Paris, who, in response to an inquiry as to whether there exists, in that library, either the defective copy of Plutarch or the fragment of Aristippus, referred to by Senancour, writes:—

“In spite of my most minute investigations in the Department of Printed Books, I have been unable to discover the slightest trace of the defective copy of Plutarch mentioned by Senancour. In the Department of Manuscripts, M. Omont went through, with me, all the inventories and catalogues, in none of which was found the name of Aristippus. Under such circumstances, I think you are right in supposing the *Manual* an offspring of Senancour’s fertile imagination. . . . Yours very truly, S. S. Barringer, *Bibliothécaire*.”

NOTE 26, Page 99

Compare the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, eleventh book, xvii, xviii, and xx, on the idea of time (edited by William G. T. Shedd).

“Who will tell me that there are not three times, past, present, and future, but only one, the present, because those two are not? . . . For if times past and to come be, I would know where they be. Which yet if I cannot, yet I know

wherever they be, they are not there as future, or past, but present. For if there also they be future, they are not yet there ; if there also they be past, they are no longer there. . . . What now is clear and plain is, that neither things to come, nor past, are. Nor is it properly said, ‘ There be three times, past, present, and to come : ’ yet perchance it might be properly said, ‘ There be three times ; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.’ ”

Compare also the following from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius : —

“ The present is the same for all, and what is lost also is the same ; for what escapes us is only the passing moment. Death cannot rob us of either past or future ; for how can one take from a man what he has not ? . . . The one who lives longest and the one who dies soonest suffer an equal loss. The present moment is all that either is deprived of, since that is all he has. A man cannot part with what he does not possess.”

NOTE 27, Page 102

Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophète, by Voltaire, second act, fourth scene. Mahomet speaking to his lieutenant, Omar : —

“ Tu sais assez quel sentiment vainqueur
Parmi mes passions règne au fond de mon cœur.
Chargé du soin du monde, environné d’alarmes ;

Je porte l'encensoir, et le sceptre, et les armes :
Ma vie est un combat, et ma frugalité
Asservit la nature à mon austérité.
J'ai banni loin de moi cette liqueur traîtresse,
Qui nourrit des humains la brutale mollesse :
Dans des sables brûlants, sur des rochers déserts,
Je supporte avec toi l'inclémence des airs.
L'amour seul me console ; il est ma récompense,
L'objet de mes travaux, l'idole que j'encense,
Le dieu de Mahomet ; et cette passion
Est égale aux fureurs de mon ambition."

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