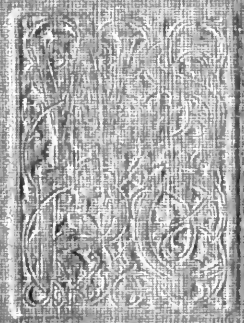

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SENANCOUR'S OBERMANN.

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∴ FOR FULL LIST OF THE VOLUMES IN THIS SERIES, SEE CATALOGUE AT END OF BOOK.

OBERMANN. BY ÉTIENNE PIVERT DE SENANCOUR. TRANSLATED, WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES, BY J. ANTHONY BARNES, B.A.

VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTION.

EVERY reader of Matthew Arnold must have felt his curiosity aroused by the two poems entitled "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of *Obermann*," and "*Obermann* Once More," the former composed in 1849, and the latter some twenty years afterwards. They tell us little about the person to whom they refer, but the air of mystery with which they surround him holds our attention with a spell far stronger than the interest of personal details. They hint at more than they reveal, like the silken drapery beneath which we can trace the profile of a recumbent marble figure. They suggest a beauty that is firm, clear-cut, and noble, though infinitely sad in its marble coldness, and they make us eager to lift the veil and study every detail of the figure for ourselves. They call up the image of a stern and lonely spirit wandering amid scenes of Alpine purity and grandeur, wrapped in silent and sorrowful meditation—

> "Yes, though the virgin mountain air
> Fresh through these pages blows;
> Though to these leaves the glaciers spare
> The soul of their white snows;
>
> Though here a mountain-murmur swells
> Of many a dark-bough'd 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."

This Alpine recluse is ranked as a seer with Wordsworth and Goethe—

"Yet, of the spirits who have reign'd
In this our troubled day,
I know but two, who have attain'd,
Save thee, to see their way.

By England's lakes, in grey old age,
His quiet home one keeps;
And one, the strong much-toiling Sage,
In German Weimar sleeps."

When the poet is recalled from communion with this solitary spirit and his dreams to the realities of daily life, he cries:

"I go, Fate drives me: but I leave
Half of my life with you."

And in the later poem, Obermann is addressed as the "master of my wandering youth." Some of Arnold's finest and best known lines are put into his lips; the description, for instance, of the effete Roman world, beginning:

"On that hard Pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell;"

and the beautiful, if despairing, reference to the Founder of Christianity:

> "Now he is dead! Far hence he lies
> In the lorn Syrian town;
> And on his grave, with shining eyes,
> The Syrian stars look down."

The place assigned to *Obermann* in these poems is confirmed by a note appended to them in prose, in which Arnold speaks of the profound inwardness, the austere sincerity of the work, the delicate feeling for nature which it exhibits, and the melancholy eloquence of many passages of it, and sums up his appreciation in the words: "To me, indeed, it will always seem that the impressiveness of this production can hardly be rated too high."

A work which Matthew Arnold, "the literary dictator of the nineteenth century," could eulogize so highly, must always appeal to the curiosity, even if it fails to command the admiration, of English readers.

Other great critics have held *Obermann* in equally high esteem, though it had to wait long for their verdict. It was published in 1804, more than a hundred years ago, and for a quarter of a century it endured a neglect as profound as that which befell Fitzgerald's *Omar*, and for similar reasons—the diffidence of the author, and the fact that the book appeared before the psychological hour for its appreciation had struck. Apparently Senancour himself regarded it as a failure, for he announced his resolve never to reprint it, and dismembered it to incorporate its best passages in later works. Sainte-Beuve, the Matthew Arnold of French

critics, was one of the first to call attention to it, and in 1833 he supplied the preface to a new edition which Senancour reluctantly allowed to appear. Seven years later a third edition was brought out, this time with a preface by George Sand. To her its chief interest was psychological, and she traces its affinities with Goethe's *Werther* and Chateaubriand's *René*. *Werther* represents frustrated passion; *René* the consciousness of superior powers without the will to exercise them; *Obermann* the clear, persistent, admitted consciousness of inadequate powers. René says: "'If I could will, I could do;' Obermann says: 'What is the use of willing? I am powerless to do. . . .' Obermann is a manly breast with feeble arms, an ascetic soul possessed by a cankering doubt which betrays its impotence instead of exhibiting its daring. He is a philosopher who just missed being a saint." She traces in Obermann a distant kinship with Hamlet, "that obscure yet profound type of human weakness, so complete even in its failure, so logical in its very inconsistency."

Vinet, the great Swiss theologian and critic, also draws out an elaborate parallel between *Obermann* and *René*, not to the advantage of the former, which was sure to be found wanting when weighed in the scales of orthodoxy. In Norway, Sweden, Finland, and America the book is well known and has found enthusiastic admirers. But in 1804, the year in which Napoleon was proclaimed Emperor, France was engrossed by the agitations and hopes that followed the Revolution and persisted through the stormful years of Napoleon, and few cared to listen to the introspective musings of a solitary dreamer. The popular note was

dogmatic Voltarianism, that ignored the maladies of the soul and was confident of finding complete satisfaction for human needs in external prosperity and splendour. But by the year 1830 this mood had changed; Goethe and Byron were in vogue; doubt had again awakened, doubt of materialism itself as well as of the religion it had so jubilantly banished; doubt of the wisdom of human laws and the worth of human ambitions, as well as of the laws and sanctions once believed in as divine. Hence the men of 1830 found in *Obermann* the expression of a mood they themselves were passing through, a phase of universal doubt that reduced all things to solution in the hope that some clear order would crystallize out of them by laws of nature's own. All this had been felt and uttered a quarter of a century before by a poor and unknown writer now growing grey in their midst.

Many who turn to *Obermann* in the hope of finding the haunting, elusive charm distilled from it by Matthew Arnold will be disappointed, and will agree with A. E. Waite, a recent critic and translator, that the poet presents him "in a kind of transfigured aspect." R. L. Stevenson confesses that he always owed Arnold a grudge for leading him to "the cheerless fields of *Obermann*" in the days of his own youthful despondencies. Much of it is akin to one of Tennyson's poems, "Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind," and might be aptly described by that title. It is perhaps the fullest expression in literature of the mood of ennui, that untranslatable word which occurs in so many of the letters. It is a diagnosis of the malady from within, as Marie Bashkirtseff's *Journal* is a diag-

nosis of frustrated ambition. Obermann is a pure and lofty soul, with fine sensibilities, and a great craving to love and to serve, but disheartened and disenchanted; chafed and repelled by the imperfections of the existing social order, he indulges in vague and beautiful dreams of unattainable ideals, only to wake to the paralyzing consciousness of his own impotence and life-weariness.

Sometimes this mood of ennui reflects with wonderful clearness and colour Obermann's natural surroundings, as some still forest pool reflects the flowers that fringe its margin and the trees that shut it in; blue sky and floating cloud are mirrored in it by day, and starry depths of space by night; sometimes an impatient gust ruffles its surface with chasing ripples as though it were trying to break away and flow like a living stream, a source of energy and fertility, but the impulse passes by, and the pool is there still, as motionless as ever.

Obermann is the pathology of a soul unequal to the demands of life, and scourged to exhaustion by the tyranny of the ideal. In a normal human being every faculty carries in itself the impulse to its own exercise, and in that exercise there is pleasure; or even if it be arduous and painful the craving of the whole man for some end is sufficient to outweigh the discomfort of particular faculties. But in Obermann the driving force of life is not sufficient for the machinery. His wheels move slowly and painfully. None of the prizes of life are sufficient to rouse him from his inertia. Not that he is blind to them. He sees them only too clearly; he sees through them and knows beforehand how hollow

and unsatisfying they are. Mere selfish pleasure has no charms for him. Power, benevolently used, is better worth striving for, but he sees that the reformer is often baffled, and that his greatest triumphs fall far short of establishing the ideal order. Love is the one illusion that could still cast over him a spell, but he has seen its bloom rubbed off by the sordidness of poverty and its promise blighted by fatal incompatibility, and he prefers to let it hover before him as a dream rather than risk all in the great venture. As a moralist and philosopher he follows Rousseau, and advocates a return to nature and simplicity of life.

His one intellectual interest is in analyzing and recording his own sensations, and he has sufficient physical vigour to find a moderate pleasure in bodily exertion. In Letter IX. he describes the restfulness of spirit he found in a quiet week of grape-gathering, in terms that remind us of Thoreau and his bean-field. His most interesting letters are those describing long solitary walks in the Forest of Fontainebleau or among the Alps. He comes nearest to the true and joyous self for which he is always yearning like a home-sick exile, when he has climbed the Dent du Midi and put the world beneath his feet (VII.), and he tastes positive exhilaration and rapture when he has lost his way in crossing the St. Bernard, and commits himself in the dark to the course of a mountain torrent, slipping, plunging, falling, forgetting everything in the tension of muscular exertion and the effort of self-preservation. And yet even then his delight is self-conscious, and he keeps saying to himself: "For this one moment I am willing what I ought, and doing what I will" (XCI.).

There is little plot or coherence in the book, and many of its admirers, including Saint-Beuve and George Sand, think it would be seen to best advantage in extracts, while others maintain, with the late M. Levallois, one of its most competent critics, that "it exhibits the only unity possible in a work of this kind, unity of soul . . . a personality sometimes in harmony, sometimes disordered, but always in touch with Nature." Apart from considerations of literary completeness, the present translator would have preferred to omit some of the reiterated expressions of personal moods and tedious philosophical discussions such as that on the nature of numbers in Letter XLVII., or the two fragments between XXXV. and XXXVI. on the good man and false contempt of money, or the fictitious *Manual of Pseusophanes* in XXXIII. But even when uninteresting in themselves these passages all help to throw light upon the working of the author's mind, and have their value for students of psychology.

Though the epistolary form of the book is evidently a mere literary device, and the imaginary friend to whom the letters are addressed is a lay figure of whom no clear picture is presented, the contents have every appearance of being a genuine record of experience. The descriptions of scenery both in Switzerland and Fontainebleau are as detailed and accurate as if pencilled on the spot, like James Smetham's "ventilators," and the varying shades of the writer's mood, his self-contradictions and inconsistencies, and the essential sameness of the ground-tone of ennui, have an equally convincing appearance of verisimilitude. It is probably safe to assume that we have here the contents of a

genuine private diary disguised in the form of letters, and moulded on a framework of incident more or less fictitious. In later life Senancour denied the strictly autobiographical character of the work, just as Borrow did in the case of *Lavengro*, and no doubt both authors handled their materials freely enough to justify them in taking shelter under this denial from inferences based on the supposition that their works were autobiographical. A brief comparison of the story of *Obermann* with the known facts of Senancour's life will bring out the intentional discrepancies.

The letters are supposed to cover a period of ten years, beginning immediately after the sudden flight of the writer from his home in France to Switzerland to escape the prospective yoke of an uncongenial vocation. He represents himself as being not yet twenty-one years of age. After a few months of wandering in search of an ideal peace and well-being, he is recalled to Paris to save the remnants of his fortune, now in the hands of the lawyers (I.-IX.). Weary of the law's delays, he seeks out a hermitage in the Forest of Fontainebleau, and spends the summer of the second year there (X.-XXV.). Spring of the third year finds him again in Paris, and his affairs are at last wound up, leaving him practically penniless, but with the remote prospect of a windfall that may restore to him a modest competence (XXVI.-XXXV.). The fourth year is passed over in silence, and the fifth is only represented by a brief fragment. The sixth year is spent in Lyons (XXXVI.-XLIX.), where a chance meeting with a former object of his affections, now married to a man much older than herself, stirs his pulses for a

moment, but only to let him fall back into a deeper sense of his helplessness. The letters of this and the following year include discussions on various topics, from the moral influence of feminine fashions to the ethics of suicide. Three letters bridge over the seventh year, which includes a visit to Paris (L.-LII.). In spring of the eighth year we find Obermann again in Switzerland, and before the end of summer he settles down at Imenstrôm, near the head of Lake Geneva, on a small estate which an improvement in his fortunes has enabled him to purchase. The letters take a more cheerful tone as he describes the erection of his wooden chalet and outbuildings, and his plans for spending his time (LIII.-LXXIII.). In the ninth year a further element of interest is brought into his life by the arrival of an old friend, Fonsalbe, to share his solitude (LXXIV.-LXXXIX.). The letters of the tenth year were added as a supplement to the second edition (1833). The sister of Fonsalbe, who is the old love of Obermann already referred to, now appears on the scene, but she is bound by a promise to her late husband's family not to marry again, and Obermann has not sufficient resolution or confidence in his own destiny to yield to his impulses and persuade her to break it. So once again he resigns himself to the austere life of a solitary thinker.

Turning now to the life of Senancour himself, we find its main outlines are clear, but in details there is either vagueness or complete dearth of information. Little was known of him by his own contemporaries. Matthew Arnold, writing three years after his death, was uncertain whether he was buried:—

" Where with clear-rustling wave
The scented pines of Switzerland
Stand dark round thy green grave;
. . . . .
Or whether, by maligner fate,
Among the swarms of men,
Where between granite terraces
The blue Seine rolls her wave,
The Capital of Pleasure sees
Thy hardly-heard-of grave;"

though he clears up the point in the second poem:

" At Sèvres by the Seine
(If Paris that brief flight allow)
My humble tomb explore!
It bears: *Eternity, be thou*
My refuge! and no more."

Doubtless this absence of personal details about the author constituted part of the charm of Obermann to Matthew Arnold, who was fond of such strange wandering figures, whether real or imaginary—as, for example, *The Scholar Gipsy*, *The Gipsy Child by the Sea Shore*, and *Empedocles on Etna*. The best authority is a monograph on the life and works of Senancour, published in 1897 by the late M. Jules Levallois, an enthusiast who devoted a great part of his life to the investigation of Senancour's history, and who had the advantage of personal acquaintance with Senancour's daughter and of perusing the scanty autobiographical material in her possession. But even this book is much more complete and luminous as a study of Senancour's works and the development of his thought than as a record of his outer life.

The bare facts, as established by Levallois, are as follows. Étienne Pivert de Senancour was born in Paris in the year 1770. His father was a *contrôlleur des rentes*, and had also the title of *conseiller du roi*. In 1789 (*æt.* 19), in consequence of some domestic differences, he accompanied his mother to Fribourg, in Switzerland. It is usually supposed that their departure was due to Senancour's revolt against an attempt on the part of his father to make him a priest, but Levallois treats this report as legendary, and Senancour himself in later life explicitly denied that he and his father were not on good terms.

A year later Senancour, still at Fribourg, married a young lady of good family but apparently without a dowry, and of a disposition incompatible with that of her husband. The explanation has been offered that Senancour married in haste, and more from a too scrupulous conscientiousness than from genuine affection, and the facts are said to be veiled under the episode related of Fonsalbe in Letter LXVII. M. Levallois was unable to elicit any confirmation of this view from Mlle. Senancour, who simply "shrugged her shoulders" when he mentioned it. But it was not a matter on which a father would be likely to take his daughter into his confidence, and even if she were aware of it she might prefer to keep her own counsel when talking to his biographer. Her expressive gesture might mean anything. Senancour had seen this analogy to Fonsalbe delicately suggested in an article by Saint-Beuve, and he pencilled in the margin of his copy: "All these analogies may be misleading"; but the mildness of his disclaimer does not leave us

much the wiser. Senancour's wife died six years after the marriage, leaving him with a son and daughter. Both his parents seem to have died not long before.

The Revolution had broken out a few weeks before Senancour left Paris in 1789, and during the Reign of Terror he was constantly passing to and fro between France and Switzerland, in a vain endeavour to save some remnants of the family property. These journeys were full of risk, and he was several times arrested under suspicion of being a refractory priest or an *émigré*, but his coolness and transparent sincerity brought him off safely. Few things in *Obermann* are more unaccountable than the absence of any reference to the scenes of the Revolution. The storming of the Bastille took place a month before his first departure, and in his later visits he must have seen something of the deluge of blood in the streets of Paris, but no hint of guillotine or grape-shot is given in his pages. Matthew Arnold's assertion that the fiery storm of the French Revolution, and the first faint promise and dawn of the new world, may be felt and almost touched in *Obermann*, is only true of the general spirit of the book. The writer is oblivious of current events.

After the death of his wife Senancour reluctantly left Switzerland for Paris, and began the long struggle for a livelihood as an author. His first book, *Rêveries sur la nature primitive de l'homme*, was written in 1797 at the house of a friend at Villemétrie, near Senlis, and published in 1799, but it fell dead from the press. *Obermann* was begun in Paris in 1801, and finished at Agis, near Fribourg, in 1803. These dates, given by M. Levallois, do not preclude the supposition already

stated that the letters were worked up from previously existing material.

The chief points in which the imaginary circumstances of Obermann differ from the actual facts of Senancour's life may now be summarized in the words of M. Levallois. "Senancour was married, Obermann is a bachelor; Senancour was poor and became still poorer, Obermann is fairly well off at the beginning of the book, and is so far favoured by circumstances that he escapes the cares of wealth, and yet fashions for himself eventually a very comfortable existence." But in the main the outer life of Obermann coincides with that of its author, and in a book that is chiefly a record of solitary musings it would be easy to introduce the changes in matters of fact enumerated above. Senancour's reluctance to have it regarded as autobiographical, and his subsequent dislike of the book and anxiety to suppress it, were probably due to the feeling that in it he had laid his soul too bare to the universal prick of light. All critics are agreed that *Obermann* is a perfect portraiture of Senancour's inner life between the ages of twenty and thirty, if not of his external circumstances.

On its first appearance in 1804, the book attracted no attention. Its author was too guileless and diffident to force it into notice, and he had no friendly log-rollers to perform the service for him. But in the following year he unwittingly took the surest means of gaining a hearing by publishing a book which shocked the *unco' guid*, and aroused some hostility in the religious press. It was entitled *De l'Amour considéré dans les lois réelles et dans les formes sociales de l'union des sexes;* and its object, as defined by its author in a later edition, was

"to combat alike the levity which ignores principles and the austerity which perverts them." A sufficient idea of its contents may be formed from the passage quoted from it at the end of Letter LXXX., and the author's views on the same topic may be further illustrated by Letter LXIII.

Senancour's career henceforth was that of a quiet, inoffensive, hard-working man of letters struggling to support himself by his pen, and at the same time to find such expression as might be possible for those high and pure ideals that were the source of his discontent and the secret of whatever charm his work still possesses. He attempted a play, wrote several political pamphlets, contributed to Reviews and Dictionaries of Biography, and compiled to order Histories of China and of Rome. All these were mere hackwork; the books in which Senancour reveals the development of his soul will be considered more fully after this outline of his external history.

In 1827 the second edition of his *Resumé de l'histoire des traditions morales et religieuses* involves him in a prosecution by the public prosecutor, the point of the accusation being that he had referred to Jesus as "a youthful sage" and "a moralist worthy of respect," and that these terms were an outrage on religion. Judgment was at first given against him, the penalty being a fine of 300 francs and nine months' imprisonment. An appeal was at once entered, and Senancour defended himself with great modesty, calmness, and ability. The decision was then reversed, and the result was hailed by the whole of the Liberal press as a victory for toleration and freedom of conscience. The re-

sultant notoriety widened Senancour's circle of literary acquaintance and increased the number of his readers. Within six years of the trial *De l'Amour* and *Libres Méditations* each passed through two new editions, and *Obermann* was dragged from its long obscurity and republished.

Between 1832 and 1836 Senancour made several applications to be admitted to the select fellowship of the Academy of Moral Sciences, but they were on each occasion politely refused. He was, however, elected a member of the Historic Institute in 1834, and retained his place in it until 1840, when he resigned, either because of the infirmities of age, or for the still more pathetic reason that in his straitened circumstances a twenty-franc subscription was more than he could well afford.

In 1841 he was designated for the Legion of Honour, but for some reason or other the Cross never came into his possession. Documentary evidence of the distinction exists in a curious and flattering letter of congratulation from the *hommes de peine* or men-of-all-work attached to the headquarters of the Legion of Honour. As M. Levallois naïvely remarks, "it is not easy to see what service these men could render Senancour, but it is obvious that the art of extracting tips had already reached perfection."

Unfortunately neither literary friendships nor the measure of popularity and public recognition he obtained brought much improvement in his material resources, though he always succeeded in keeping his head above water. A note quoted by Levallois from the third edition of the *Rêveries* (1833) is no doubt a

cry from the heart: "To spend the years of youth in uncertainty and the prime of life in unavoidable constraint; to forego, through lack of success, the simplicity one always yearned for; to undertake useless labours, to embrace distasteful cares, to struggle painfully to an undesired goal; to sacrifice oneself for relations whom one cannot make happy, or to sedulously hold aloof from people one might have deeply cared for; to be ill at ease with acquaintances and cool with friends; daily to speak and act without grace, naturalness, or freedom; to be utterly sincere and yet suppress one's frankness; to have a true soul and refined feelings and yet to exhibit neither nobility nor energy; to be for ever silent about one's dearest projects, and only to accomplish others very imperfectly—that is what it means to lose the whole of one's fortune."

Though Senancour was never robust, he seems to have retained a fair measure of health until late in life, and at the age of sixty-eight was still fond of taking long walks. He died on January 10th, 1846, at the age of seventy-five, in a private hospital at St. Cloud. By his own wish, it is said, no minister was invited to visit him, and the serenity with which he faced the unknown after his life-long search for truth was grandly exhibited in his last request to his son to inscribe on his tomb the words: *Éternité, sois mon asile.*

The most interesting and significant of the works that followed *Obermann*, as enabling us to trace the development of Senancour's mind, is the one entitled *Libres Méditations d'un solitaire inconnu sur divers objets de la morale religieuse*, and it may be supplemented by the new matter introduced into successive editions of

the *Rêveries*. These later works afford ample evidence that *Obermann* was to a great extent a mere phase in the spiritual history of Senancour, the preliminary burning and draining that was needful to prepare his swampy forest land for cultivation. True, Senancour's low-lying clearing never became very fertile and smiling; mists of doubt often overhung it, and blighting winds of poverty checked its most promising growths, but it was made of some service to the community and yielded a grudging sustenance to its struggling cultivator. He himself grew calmer as years went on, and learned to see blue sky and far horizons where once he only saw the mist.

In the second edition of the *Rêveries* (1809) he defends himself from the charge of atheism which was brought, not without reason, against his earlier works. "If God is not, can anything be at all? Might of all existing ordered being! A sense of order prostrates me at thy feet, but if my recognition of that order were more complete I should sink into nothingness before thee, O Changeless One. . . . From my childhood I felt myself under the eye of incorruptible truth, and I cannot conceive of anything good that is not also the true, or of anything real outside the universal harmony. Infinite source of order and existence, God or Truth!"

Ten years later the first edition of the *Libres Méditations* appeared. The real authorship is thinly veiled by the device of ascribing it to Lallemand, a noted hermit of Fontainebleau (*c.* 1753), in whose cell Senancour professes to have found the document of which he poses as editor. Compared with *Obermann*,

a more hopeful outlook pervades the whole book. The mood of ennui has disappeared; the stagnant pool has found an outlet. If Senancour has not in the full sense found his vocation, he has at least found something to do, and the effort to know what he can work at has delivered him from the barren misery of trying to know himself and his destiny. The endless recurrence of nature's changes that once filled him with weariness now stirs ripples of gladness, and he almost recovers that fresh and childish delight in outward things expressed by Stevenson's lines:

> "I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings,
> The world is so full of such numbers of things."

"Men complain of the ennui of their days," he writes, "but the ocean lifts its waves, the sun shines, and the flowers expand, and the endless panorama of the world's life is unrolled before us. Inexhaustible circulation of waters, secret beauty of wilderness flowers! you proclaim eloquently and unceasingly that the end of man is not to be found in a career whose noblest prize is human applause, and that the divine gleam ought never to be smothered in the shade of our dreary customs, our petty jealousies, and our unprofitable cares."

This sense of something above and beyond human life at times almost rises to a positive affirmation of God: "If one were to conclude that God is not, there would then be nothing great to look forward to, and one would take little interest in the passing of the irrevocable hours." In Senancour's darkest days, when all that he touched

"Fell into dust, and he was left alone
And wearying, in a land of sand and thorns,"

his quest had been that of light and truth, and silent and slowly out of the darkness there dawned on him the Gleam, indefinable and unknowable, that he never ceased to follow

"Until to the land's
Last limit he came."

One characteristic of this dawning hope in God and human destiny was that it refused to be bounded by the horizon of the present life. In *Obermann* he had tacitly assumed that death ended all, but now, even if he has nothing positive to affirm, he permits those cravings for continuance and emancipation that are within him to lift up their heads. "If I shared the misfortune of those who regard our immortality as a chimera, I should have lost the sole expectation that can give worth to existence."

This change had come about by no sudden conversion or revulsion of feeling; it was the natural development of a mind always seeking reality. He does not seem to have been aware of any contradiction in terms between the statements in *Obermann* and those made in the *Libres Méditations* until his critics taxed him with it. He justifies himself by saying that a distinction must be made between fundamental religious notions and the accidental beliefs of particular countries. The sarcasms of *Obermann* are directed against the latter; as to the former, he may be a doubter, but is never scornful. The solitary of the *Libres Méditations* is

Obermann grown older. "He still doubts, but he lays more stress on the verisimilitude of the religious ideas to which his wider thought has led him. . . . After his renunciation of the rash teaching of the sects, he first found nothing but doubt, but afterwards he felt deeply convinced that the real world, the world unseen, is the expression of a divine thought."

We cannot agree with Waite, who affirms that Senancour has "a distinct bond of union" with the Christian mystics, and in particular with Saint-Martin, a distinguished exponent of that school. It is impossible to characterize as Christian the attitude of one who held none of the crucial doctrines of Christianity, and who regarded its founder as "a youthful sage." Senancour is as far from Christianity as the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes; and indeed it would be easy to find striking parallels between his writings and that old Hebrew scripture. But we may admit with M. Levallois that of mysticism in the general sense there is a decided flavour in the *Libres Méditations.* Senancour is an illustration of the fact that the decadent and the mystic are but two faces under the same hood, a remark that has also been made about M. Bourget. If with Bourget himself we define decadence as "the weariness of life felt by those whose over-sensitiveness unfits them for the struggle of life under the conditions of modern civilization," we cannot have a more typical expression of this mood than in *Obermann.* And that very sense of being unequal to life is the strongest stimulus to the quest of a supernatural invigoration and comfort. Both decadence and mysticism are phases of a lack of healthy-mindedness. The thorough-going

mystic, whether Brahmin or Christian, withdraws himself from the world and broods over his conceptions of the deity until they excite within him an ecstasy as abnormal as his previous unrest and dejection. His spiritual satisfactions are the projections of his own hunger of soul. Senancour was saved from the excess of mysticism by his passion for reality. His belief in God never went beyond a reverent recognition of an inscrutable "something more," and his religion consisted in the effort to make effectual the divine order which he saw hinted at but obstructed in the world around him. He never made the mystic's claim to conscious fellowship with the Supreme. In a private letter to a lady he writes: "If you can pray, that is a refuge; in your case it cannot be other than noble and untrammelled by formulæ. . . . I know no speech common to the creature and the Infinite, to us who pass and the Unknown Permanence."

Senancour escaped from the Slough of Despond, not on the side of his intellect into abstract theology or rationalism, nor on the side of his emotions into mysticism, but on the volitional and active side of his nature into a working theory of life. The only sense in which that theory of life can be called mystical is in its recognition of a spiritual purpose and order in the Universe transcending human thought.

Some will say—why publish the story of Senancour's wallowings in ennui? Why not rather give us the more hopeful utterances of his later life? Such people will be disposed to apply to *Obermann* a sentence penned by Carlyle after reading Froude's *Nemesis of Faith*, another book of the *Obermann* type: "What on earth

is the use of a wretched mortal's vomiting up all his interior crudities, dubitations, and spiritual agonizing bellyaches, into the view of the public, and howling tragically 'See!'" But even Carlyle found relief for his soul in a private diary, and the most interesting of his works is the one in which he reveals his own struggles with the Everlasting No. We may justify *Obermann* out of Carlyle's own mouth: "The Great Goethe, in passionate words, had to write his *Sorrows of Werther* before the spirit freed herself, and he could become a man. . . . For your nobler minds, the publishing of some such work of art, in one or the other dialect, becomes almost a necessity. For what is it properly but an altercation with the devil, before you begin honestly fighting him? Your Byron publishes his *Sorrows of Lord George*, in verse and in prose, and copiously otherwise your Buonaparte represents his *Sorrows of Napoleon* opera, in an all-too stupendous style." So for Senancour the writing of *Obermann* was a spiritual necessity; it was an anodyne that saved him from desperation at the time, and when once he had written himself out he was freer to turn to external tasks.

It has its utility to-day for two classes of readers. First for those whose work it is to understand and develop the character of others. Even the pathology of a soul may be a contribution to the science of spiritual health. How to deal with minds of the *Obermann* type is a problem that Society is already face to face with. The schoolmaster does his best to grapple with it, guided by increasing light from psychology and medical science. His aim is to make

every child under his care equal to life; to awaken wholesome interests, to qualify for useful activities, to check morbid tendencies and fixed ideas, and to develop the joy of living. Already society is growing wiser in the treatment of its waste products. We are learning how to train the ears and fingers of the blind, and the eyes and lips of the deaf, and to keep them in an environment where they will be safeguarded from the dangers to which their defective sense would expose them. The mentally weak are taught such physical aptitudes as are possible to them. There are even indications of a more rational treatment of criminals, an attempt to safeguard them from the temptation to which a defective moral sense renders them liable, and to develop those powers by which they can contribute to the welfare of Society and live at peace with themselves and their fellows. As methods of discrimination improve we shall learn how to deal with every shade of morbidness of mind. And among the text-books essential to mastering the pathology of over-sensitiveness to which some of the best minds are liable, few could be more useful than *Obermann*, that "handbook of consistent egoism," as Stevenson calls it. "The first consideration with the psychologist," says George Sand, "is to diagnose the complaint; after that to look for the remedy. Possibly the human race will find one for its moral sufferings when it has probed and analyzed them as thoroughly as its physical maladies."

Concurrently with the improvement of methods for developing to the fullest extent every human individual will go some attempt to improve the stuff and substance of human nature; the segregation of all who are

physically or mentally unfit to share in the parentage of the coming race, thus ensuring as far as may be that all who enter life shall have vitality enough to find happiness in the exercise of life's activities.

The other class of persons for whom *Obermann* will possess interest is that of the kindred spirits whom Senancour has in mind in his introduction, those who are passing through a similar phase of development. It may console them to know that one who struggled so long and wearily in the Slough of Despond did at last come out on the other side, even if like Bunyan's Mr. Fearing he carried a Slough of his own in his heart to the end of his pilgrimage. And not less cheering is it to find that in these "wild and wandering cries" of Senancour's darkest days, when his life seemed an utter failure, there is so much of permanent worth—charm of description, penetration of thought, and purity of soul. Some of the shy woodland flowers of his uncleared forest have a fragrance and beauty that is unsurpassed by the more laboured if more useful products of his later days.

The only existing English translation of *Obermann* is the one by Waite, to which reference has already been made. The labours of the present translator have been much lightened by the fact that a track had been made over the untrodden snow, though his footprints rarely coincide with those of his predecessor, and often diverge widely from them. Why, for instance, send Obermann to gather grapes into a *winnowing-fan* (Letter IX.) instead of into the tub that is used in Switzerland? And why translate *l'histoire de Japon de Kœmpfer* (XXI.) as "the story of Japon de Kæmpfer"

instead of Kämpfer's History of Japan (XXI.)? *Tabac*, too, means snuff as well as tobacco, or we miss the point of the reference to the artisan "who goes without his tobacco (*sic*) when he is at work inside a house because he has no handkerchief which he can dare to use before everybody" (LXV.). "Muses" as a translation for *nourrices*, wet-nurses, must surely be a misprint, but why is *soufflet*, a box on the ear, translated "whistle," and *marché commode*, convenient market, rendered "broad walk?" It is true that Obermann is often obscure, as a writer must be who pours out the whole contents of his mind, whether digested or not; when his mood is nebulous his description of it will be so too; but can it be allowed that "Obermann's pages are often a running stream of sound . . . voicing too often the vaguest qualities of sense, using more than is endurable the terminology of the nebulous and insignificant—construction, in a word, without tangible meaning?" Waite claims that *Obermann* is a philosophical work and should be rendered into philosophical rather than colloquial terminology. But Senancour endeavours throughout to give it a colloquial character. Even if a more formal style is justifiable when Obermann wanders into philosophical discussions, it is hardly necessary to render such a phrase as *homme à gages* (hired servant) by "one in a fiduciary position."

Senancour in his Introduction offers an apology for the prolixities and digressions of his style and for his rambling and inaccurate meditations, and the present translator will be glad to take fullest advantage of that apology. But when it is stretched to its furthest limits

he is still painfully aware of many imperfections in his work that it fails to cover. He will be more than satisfied if he has succeeded to any extent in conveying to English readers the same impression of haunting charm that may be felt in the finest passages of Senancour's French.

Notes added by the translator are indicated by the letters *Tr.* or enclosed in square brackets; the rest are by Senancour himself, and are sometimes explanatory and sometimes intended merely to maintain the fiction of the authorship.[1]

[1] Since the preceding pages were in type a new life of our author has appeared, *Senancour: ses Amis et ses Ennemis*, by M. G. Michaut (Sansot). It supplies further details of his career, but does not affect our main conclusions.—TR.

J. A. BARNES.

March 1910.

OBSERVATIONS.

[By Senancour.]

It will be seen that these letters were penned by a man of feeling, not by a man of action. They are full of interest for the initiated, though they possess very little for outsiders. Many will discover with pleasure what one of themselves has experienced: many indeed have had the same experience themselves, but here is one who has described it, or at least has made the attempt. But he must be judged by the whole of his life, not by his earliest years; by all his letters, not by some casual passage too free or too romantic in expression.

Letters like these, without art or plot, will meet with little favour outside the scattered and secret brotherhood of which nature had made their writer a member. Those who belong to it are mostly unknown individuals, and the kind of private monument which one of them leaves behind can only reach the others through a public channel, at the risk of boring a great many serious, learned, and worthy people. The editor's duty is simply to state at the outset that it contains neither wit nor science, that it is not a *work*, and that possibly it will be said that it is not a rational book.

We have many writings in which the whole race is described in a few lines, and yet if these long letters were to make a single man approximately known they would be both fresh and useful. It will take a great

deal for them to attain this limited object; but if they do not contain all one might expect, they do at any rate contain something; and that is enough to justify their publication.

These letters are not a novel.[1] There is in them no dramatic movement, no deliberate working up of events, no climax, nothing of what is called the interest of a work—the gradual development, the incidents, and the stimulus to curiosity, which are the magic of many good books and the tricks of the trade in bad ones.

There are descriptions in them, such as help to a better understanding of natural objects, and throw light, possibly too much neglected, on the relation of man to what he calls the inaminate world.

There are passions in them; but they are those of a man who was destined to reap their results without actually experiencing them; to try everything, but only to have a single aim.

There is love in them, but love felt in a way that has perhaps never before found expression.

There are prolixities in them, but so there are in Nature; the heart is seldom concise; it is no dialectician. There are repetitions; but if a thing is good why so carefully avoid returning to it. The repetitions in *Clarissa*, the lack of arrangement and the feigned selfishness of Montaigne have never repelled any but merely pedantic readers. Jean-Jacques was often long-winded. The writer of these letters apparently was not afraid of the

[1] I am far from implying by this that a good novel is not a good book. Moreover, outside what I should strictly call novels there are many books of real worth or charm that are usually classed under this head, such as the *Chaumière indienne*, and others.

prolixities and digressions of an unconventional style; he wrote as he thought. True, Jean-Jacques was entitled to be a little long; if our author has used the same freedom, it is simply because he thought it good and natural.

There are contradictions in them; at any rate what are often called such. But why should it offend one to see the pros and cons of an open question stated by the same man? Since we must combine both sides to get the sense of them, to deliberate, to decide, to make one's choice, does it matter at all whether they are in a single book or in several? Nay, rather, when the same man states both, he does it with more equal emphasis, in a more analogous fashion, and you can see better what to adopt. Our affections, our desires, and even our feelings and opinions are modified by the teaching of experience, by opportunities for thought, by age, and in fact by our whole existence. The man who is rigidly consistent is either deceiving you or himself. He has a system; he is acting a part. The sincere man says: "I once felt like that, now I feel like this; there are my materials, build up for yourself the edifice of your thought."

A phlegmatic man is not a fit judge of the disparities of human feelings; since he does not know their range, neither does he know their fluctuations. Why should different ways of looking at a thing be more surprising in the same man at different ages—sometimes even at the same moment—than in different men. One may observe and investigate without deciding. Surely you do not expect a man to drop on the right weight the moment he takes up the scales? Everything should

be consistent no doubt in a precise and formal treatise on matters of fact, but would you have Montaigne true after the fashion of Hume, and Seneca as exact as Bezout? I imagine one might well expect to find as great or greater contrasts between different ages of the same man than between several cultured men of the same age. That is why it is not a good thing for legislators to be all old men; unless, indeed, they are a body of really picked men capable of acting on their general ideas and recollections rather than on their thought at the time. The man who devotes himself wholly to the exact sciences is the only one who has no need to fear being surprised by what he wrote when he was younger.

These letters are as unequal and irregular in style as in other respects. Only one point has pleased me; I have not found in them any of those exaggerated and trivial phrases which a writer should always regard as absurd, or weak, to say the least of it.[1] These expressions are either vicious in themselves, or else their too frequent repetition, by forcing them into wrong applications, has debased their original significance and caused their force to be lost sight of.

Not that I pretend to justify the style of these letters.

[1] The pastoral and descriptive styles are full of hackneyed phrases, the most intolerable of which, in my opinion, are similes that have been used millions of times, and from the first weakened the thing they pretended to magnify. The enamelled meadows, the azure skies, the crystal waters, the lilies and roses of her complexion, the pledges of his love, village innocence, torrents flowed from his eyes, to contemplate the wonders of nature, to scatter flowers on his tomb; and ever so many more that I would not condemn outright, but that I prefer not to meet with.

I might have something to say in defence of phrases which may seem too bold, and which notwithstanding I have left unchanged; but I know of no valid excuse for the inaccuracies. I am well aware that a critic will discover plenty to find fault with; it has not been my aim to "enrich the public" with a finished work, but to give to a few persons here and there in Europe the feelings, the opinions, the rambling and inaccurate meditations of an often solitary man, who wrote in privacy and not for a bookseller.

The editor has had, and will have, only one object in view. Everything that bears his name will lead in the same direction; whether he writes or simply edits he will never swerve from a moral purpose. He is not as yet attempting to reach the goal: an important treatise and one likely to be of service—a real *work*, such as one can only outline but never hope to complete—should not be hastily published or even entered on too soon.[1]

[1] Obermann needs to be read with a little imagination. He is far, for instance, from taking a definite stand on several questions that he raises. But possibly he is more decisive in the continuation of his letters. Up to the present time this second part is wholly missing.

OBERMANN.

FIRST YEAR.

LETTER I.

GENEVA, *July 8th* (I).

IT is only some three weeks since I wrote to you from Lyons, and I said nothing then of any new plan; I had none in fact; and yet now I have left everything, and am here on foreign soil.

I fear my letter will not find you at Chessel,[1] and that you will not be able to reply as soon as I should like. I want to know what you think, or rather what you will think when you have read this. You know how I should feel it if I were not on good terms with you, yet I am afraid you will think me to blame, and I am not quite sure that I do not deserve it. I did not even wait long enough to consult you. I should have liked to do so in a crisis of this kind; even yet I scarcely know what judgment to pass on a decision which annuls all previous arrangements, which suddenly transplants

[1] His correspondent's place of residence.

me into a new situation, and which destines me to events I had not foreseen, whose sequence and results I cannot even forecast.

But that is not all. It is true my action was as sudden as my decision, but it was not simply lack of time that kept me from writing. Even if I had had plenty, I fear you would still have been left in the dark. I should have dreaded your prudence; for once I felt the necessity of throwing it to the winds. A narrow and timorous prudence on the part of those among whom my lot has been cast has spoiled my earlier years, and I fear done me life-long injury. Wisdom takes the difficult middle course between mistrust and rashness, and is to be followed when she sees what is before her, but in things unknown we have only instinct. If that is a more dangerous guide than prudence, it achieves greater results; it is a case of kill or cure; its rashness sometimes becomes our only refuge, and it may possibly repair the injuries wrought by prudence.

It was a case of letting the yoke gall me for ever, or summarily throwing it off; so far as I could see there was no other alternative. If you are of the same opinion, reassure me by saying so. You are well aware what a wretched chain was about to be riveted. I was expected to do what I could not possibly do well; to undertake a profession merely for its profits, to employ my faculties in what went utterly against the grain. Ought I to have stooped to a temporary compliance, to have deceived a kinsman by pretending that I was undertaking permanently what I should have wanted to give up from the very start? Ought I to have lived

thus in a state of strain and perpetual repugnance? Let him recognize how powerless I was to satisfy him, and forgive me. He will one day realize that circumstances so varied and conflicting, in which the most diverse types of character find what is congenial to them, cannot be suited indiscriminately to all types; that if a profession which has to do with private interests and litigations is to be regarded as honest, it needs something more than the fact that one can make a couple of thousand a year by it without stealing; and that, in a word, I could not forego being a man in order to be a business man.

I am not trying to persuade you; I merely state the facts; judge for yourself. A friend should not be too lenient in his judgments, as you yourself once remarked. If you had been at Lyons I should not have decided without consulting you, for in that case I should have had to keep out of your way; as it was, I had simply to be silent. As one tries to find sanctions even in mere chance for what one believes to be necessary, your very absence seemed to me opportune. I could never have acted contrary to your advice, but I felt no uneasiness in acting without having your opinion, so thoroughly alive I was to all that reason could bring forward against the law that was laid upon me by a kind of necessity, against the feeling that carried me away. I paid more attention to this secret but imperious impulse than to the cold inducements to hesitation and delay, which, under the name of prudence, arise largely from my indolent disposition and tendency to shrink from carrying things out. I have set out, and rejoice in the fact; but who can ever know whether

he has acted wisely or not as regards the far-off consequences of things.

I have told you why I did not do what was expected of me; I must also tell you why I have acted as I have. I began by considering whether I should throw up entirely the line I was desired to take, and that led me to consider what other I should take, and what resolution I should come to.

I had to choose and enter upon, possibly for life, what so many people who have nothing else to boast of call a profession. I did not discover one that was not foreign to my nature or opposed to my convictions. I questioned my inmost self; I rapidly passed in review my surroundings; I inquired of men if they felt as I did. I inquired of the facts of life whether they were suited to my tastes, and I discovered that there was no harmony either between myself and society, or between my needs and what society has produced. I stopped short in dismay, perceiving that I was about to hand over my life to unbearable tedium, and to antipathies without end or aim. I set before myself in turn all that men strive after in the various professions they embrace. I even tried to invest with a glow of imagination the manifold objects they offer to their passions, and the visionary quest to which they devote their years. I tried, but it was no use. Why is the world so disenchanted in my eyes? I know nothing of satiety; everywhere I find emptiness.

On that day when I first perceived the nothingness around me, the day which changed the current of my life, if the pages of my destiny had been in my hands to be turned over or closed for ever, how unconcernedly

I would have resigned the vain procession of these long though fleeting hours, blighted by so much bitterness and never to be cheered by any real joy. It is my misfortune, as you know, not to be able to feel young; the dreary miseries of my earliest years have apparently destroyed the charm of life. Gilded appearances do not impose upon me; my half-closed eyes are never dazzled; they are too fixed to be surprised.

That day of indecision was at least a day of enlightenment; it revealed within me what I had never clearly seen. In this supreme anxiety of my life I enjoyed for the first time the consciousness of my true self. Hunted out of the gloomy calm of my settled apathy, driven to be something, I became at last myself, and in those hitherto unknown agitations I felt an energy whose outflowing, in spite of some strain and distress at first, was a kind of calm I had never before experienced. This welcome and unexpected state of mind gave rise to the consideration which decided me. I discovered why it is that differences in external circumstances, as one daily observes, are not the chief sources of human happiness or misery.

The real life of man, I argue, is within himself; what he receives from without is only accidental and subordinate. The effect things have upon him depends much more on the state of mind in which they find him than on their intrinsic character. Their lifelong influence may so far modify him that he becomes their handiwork, but in the never-ending procession of events he alone stands fixed though plastic, while the external objects related to him are completely altered. The result is that the impression each of them makes on

him depends far more for weal or woe on the mood in which it finds him than on the feeling it awakens or the immediate change it makes in him. Thus at each several moment the chief thing is that man should be what he ought to be. Next to that must be reckoned favourable circumstances; they are useful from moment to moment in a secondary sense. But as the whole series of these impulses becomes the real basis of man's inward motives, it follows that even though each one makes a very trifling impression, their sum total determines our destiny. Must we then consider everything of equal importance in this chain of affinities and mutual reactions? Though man's actual freedom is so questionable, and his apparent freedom so restricted, is he bound to a continual exercise of choice, requiring a steadfast will, always free and powerful? Though he can influence his circumstances so little, and cannot control the majority of his inclinations, can he only attain a peaceful life by foreseeing, directing, and deciding everything with a solicitude which would of itself be fatal to his peace, even if attended with uninterrupted success? If it seems equally necessary to control these two reciprocal forces [self and circumstances], and if on the other hand the task is beyond human strength, and every effort in that direction tends to produce the very opposite of the calm one expects from it, how can we come anywhere near the attainments of this result by giving up the impracticable method [*i.e.*, constant exercise of choice] which seemed at first sight the only means of securing it? The answer to this question would be the supreme achievement of human wisdom,

as it is the highest aim one can offer to the inward law which compels us to the pursuit of happiness. I think I have found a solution of this problem adapted to my present needs; possibly they had something to do with making me accept it.

It became obvious to me that in this endless action and reaction the primary combination is of the highest importance, since it determines more or less the whole series. Let us then, said I, first of all be what we ought to be; let us set ourselves where our nature demands; and then let us yield to the drift of circumstances, endeavouring simply to be true to ourselves. Thus, whatever happens, we shall regulate our circumstances without superfluous anxiety; not by altering things themselves, but by controlling the impressions they make upon us, which is the only thing that concerns us. It is easier too, and does more to establish our true self, by fixing its boundaries and economizing its energy. Whatever effect things produce on us by that intrinsic force which we cannot change, we shall at any rate retain much of our initial direction, and shall approximate more nearly by that means than we could hope by any other to the happy perseverance of the wise man.

As soon as man begins to think and is no longer at the mercy of the first desire or of the unconscious laws of instinct, all justice and morality become to some extent a matter of calculation, and prudence consists in reckoning up the surplus or deficit. The conclusion I reached seemed as clear to me as the result of a sum in arithmetic. As I am unfolding to you my plans and not my soul, and as I am less

anxious to justify my decision than to tell you how I reached it, I will not try to give you a better account of my calculation.

Following out this way of looking at things, I am letting go the far-off and manifold cares of the future, always so exhausting and often so profitless, and am devoting myself wholly to the task of adjusting, once for all, both myself and circumstances. I am well aware how far from complete this work will doubtless always be, and how much I shall be impeded by the facts of life, but I will at least do whatever I find feasible.

I thought it necessary to change my environment before changing myself. The first end can be more immediately attained than the second; and in my former manner of life I could not have taken myself seriously in hand. The difficult situation in which I found myself left me no alternative but to contemplate a change of surroundings. It is in freedom from the constraint of circumstances as in the silence of the passions that one can examine oneself. I am going to seek out a retreat among those quiet mountains that I used to gaze at in the distance even as a child.[1] I do not know where I shall stay, but write to me at Lausanne.

[1] From near Lyons the summits of the Alps are distinctly visible on the horizon.

LETTER II.

LAUSANNE, *July 9th*, (I.)

I arrived in Geneva after dark and spent the night in a somewhat dismal inn. My windows looked into a courtyard, but I did not at all begrudge the fact. As I was entering such a beautiful region I deliberately planned for myself a kind of surprise view; I reserved it for the best hour of the day; I wanted to enjoy it in all its fulness, without weakening its effect by coming upon it gradually.

On leaving Geneva I started out alone and free, with no fixed aim and no guide but an adequate map I carry with me.

I was entering on an independent life. I was going to live in perhaps the only country in Europe where in a fairly congenial climate one can still find the austere beauties of natural scenery. Calmed by that very energy which the circumstances of my departure had awakened in me, happy in the possession of my true self for the first time in my barren existence, seeking great and simple delights with the keenness of a youthful heart, and with a susceptibility which was the bitter though precious fruit of my dreary miseries, I was in a strenuous but restful mood. I felt happy under the lovely sky of Geneva[1] when the sun appeared above the snowclad peaks and illumined before my eyes this wondrous landscape. It was near Coppet that I saw

[1] The sky at Geneva is very much the same as anywhere else in the neighbourhood.

the dawn, not in barren splendour as I had so often seen it before, but in beauty and sublimity great enough to spread again the veil of elusive charm before my jaded eyes.

You have never seen this country, to which Tavernier thought nothing could be compared, except a single place in the East. You can form no adequate conception of it; Nature's great effects cannot be imagined as they really are. If I had been less impressed by the magnificence and the harmony of the effect as a whole, if the purity of the air had not given it a tone which words cannot describe, if I had been someone else, I might have tried to picture for you those snow-clad glowing peaks, those misty vales, the black escarpments of the ridge of Savoy, the hills of Vaux and Jorat, themselves perhaps too smiling, but overtopped by the Alps of Gruyére and Ormont; and then the sweep of Leman's waters, the motion of its waves and its rhythmic calm. Possibly my inward condition contributed something to the glamour of these places; possibly no one has ever felt just as I did at the sight of them.

It is characteristic of a deeply sensitive nature to find more intense pleasure in subjective ideas than in objective enjoyments; the latter betray their limitations, but those which are offered us by the sense of limitless power are vast as the power itself, and seem to point the way to that unknown world that we are always seeking. I would almost venture to say that the man whose heart has been crushed by his continual sufferings has gained from his very miseries a capacity for pleasures unknown to the happy, and superior to theirs

in being more self-contained, and permanent enough to be his stay even in old age. For my part I realized at that moment, when the only thing wanting was another heart in sympathy with my own, how an hour of life may be worth a whole year of existence, how completely everything within us is relative to what is without, and how our miseries chiefly arise from our mal-adjustments to the order of things.

The main road from Geneva to Lausanne is pleasant throughout; it clings as a rule to the shore of the lake, and it was taking me towards the mountains, so I was quite content to follow it. I did not stop until I was close on Lausanne, where, on a hillside not overlooking the town, I awaited the close of the day.

Evenings in an inn are not pleasant, except when the fire and the darkness help to pass the time till supper. During the long days one can only escape this tedious hour by making a halt during the heat of the day, and that is what I never do. Since my rambles at Forez I have adopted the plan of going on foot if the country is interesting; and when I am walking, a kind of impatience will not allow me to stop until I am nearly at my journey's end. Carriages are a necessity when one wants to leave rapidly behind the dust of the highways and the muddy ruts of the plains, but when one is not on business, and in genuine country, I see no reason for posting it, and to take one's own horses is to me too great a check on one's freedom. I confess that when one arrives on foot one does not all at once meet with so good a reception at an inn, but if the landlord knows his business it only takes him a few moments to discover that even if there

is dust on one's shoes there is no pack on one's shoulder, and that therefore one may be a profitable enough customer to make it worth his while to give one some sort of a polite salutation. You will soon have the servants asking you, just as they would anyone else, "Are you being attended to, sir?"

I was under the pines of Jorat; the evening was fine, the woods silent, and the air still; the western sky was hazy, but cloudless. Everything seemed settled, light-filled, motionless, and when I happened to lift my eyes after keeping them long fixed on the moss beneath me, I experienced a wonderful illusion which my pensive mood prolonged. The steep slope which fell away to the water's edge was hidden from me by the knoll on which I sat, and the surface of the lake seemed inclined at a high angle, as though its opposite shore were lifted into the air. The Alps of Savoy were partly veiled by clouds indistinguishable from themselves and of the same tint. The sunset light, and the dim air in the depths of the Valais, lifted these mountains and cut them off from the earth by making their bases invisible; and their huge formless bulk, neutral-tinted, sombre and touched with snow, light filled and yet partly invisible, seemed to me nothing but a mass of storm-clouds suspended in the air; and the only solid earth was that which held me up over empty space, alone, in immensity.

That moment was worthy of the first day of a new life; I shall have few like it. I was intending to finish this by chatting with you freely, but my head and hand are growing heavy with sleep. My recollections and the pleasure of telling them to you cannot stave it off,

and I do not want to go on describing to you so feebly what I felt so much more keenly.

Beside Nyon I had a fairly clear view of Mont Blanc from its base upwards, but the time of day was not at all suitable; it was badly lighted.

LETTER III.

CULLY, *July* 11*th* (I.).

I have no wish to rush through Switzerland as a mere traveller or novelty-hunter. I am trying to settle here, because I imagine I should be ill at ease anywhere else; it is the only country within reach of my own which possesses in the main the things I require.

I do not even yet know in which direction I shall turn. I know no one here; and not having any sort of ties, I can only make my choice on grounds based upon the character of the localities. In the places I should like best the Swiss climate is trying. I must have a fixed place to stay at for the winter: that is the point I should like to settle first; but the winter is long at high elevations.

At Lausanne I was told: "Here is the finest part of Switzerland, the one that all foreigners like. You have seen Geneva and the shores of the lake; you have still to see Yverdon, Neuchâtel, and Berne, and you should also go to Locle, which is celebrated for its [watch-making] industry. As for the rest of Switzerland, it is quite an outlandish country, and one gets

over the English craze for wearing oneself out and risking one's life to look at ice and sketch waterfalls. Here is where you will settle; the province of Vaud[1] is the only one suitable to a foreigner; and even in the province of Vaud there is only Lausanne, especially for a Frenchman."

I assured them that I should not choose Lausanne, and they quite thought I was making a mistake. The province of Vaud has very beautiful features, but I am satisfied beforehand that the greater part of it would be to me among the least attractive of the Swiss provinces. The place and people are pretty much the same as elsewhere; whereas I am looking out for other modes of life and different natural scenery.[2] If I knew German I think I should make for Lucerne, but French is only spoken in a third of Switzerland, and that third is just the part that is most gay and least remote from French customs, so I am in great uncertainty. I have almost made up my mind to see the shores of Neuchâtel and the Bas Valais; after that I shall go to the neighbourhood of Schwitz, or into the Underwalden, in spite of the very serious drawback of a language which is quite unfamiliar to me.

I had noticed a little lake, called Bré or Bray in the

[1] The word *Vaud* does not here mean valley, but it comes from the Celtic word from which Welsh is derived. The German Swiss call the province of Vaud *Welschland*. The ancient Germans used to designate the Gauls by the word Wale, whence come the names of the principality of Wales, of the province of Vaud, of the place in Belgium called Walon, of Gascony, etc.

[2] It is quite likely that at the present time Obermann would willingly settle in the canton of Vaud, and would consider it a delightful place to live in.

maps, situated in the highlands above Cully, and I came to this town in order to visit its shores, which are far from the main roads and almost unknown. I have given up the idea. I fear the district is too ordinary, and that the mode of life of the country folk, so near Lausanne, would suit me still less.

I was anxious to cross the lake, and yesterday I had engaged a boat to take me to the Savoy side. I have had to defer the project; the weather has been bad all day, and the lake is still very rough. The storm has gone by, and the evening is fine. My windows look out on the lake; the white foam of the waves is sometimes flung right into my room; it has even wet the roof. The wind is blowing from the south-west in such a way that just at this point the waves are strongest and highest. I assure you that this display of energy and these rhythmic sounds give a powerful stimulus to the soul. If I had to break away from ordinary life and really live, and if notwithstanding I felt disheartened, I should like to spend a quarter of an hour alone by a lake in storm. I fancy it would not be great things that would daunt me.

I am somewhat impatiently awaiting the reply I asked you for; and though as a matter of fact it cannot arrive just yet, I am constantly thinking of sending to Lausanne to see if they have neglected to forward it. It will no doubt tell me quite definitely what you think, and what you anticipate for the future, and also whether I did wrong, being the man I am, to take a step which in many people would have been the essence of caprice. I used to consult you about trifles, and yet I came to a conclusion of the utmost importance without you. You

will surely not refuse to give me your opinion; I need it to check or to encourage me. You have forgotten by this time, I hope, that I schemed this matter as if I wanted to keep it a secret from you; the errors of a friend can affect our thoughts but not our feelings. I congratulate you on having to forgive me some weaknesses; but for that I should not have so much pleasure in leaning on you; my own strength would not make me feel so safe as yours.

I write to you just as I should speak, or as if I were talking to myself. There are times when people have nothing particular to tell each other, and yet they yearn for a talk; it is often then that they chat most comfortably. The only kind of walk I know that gives genuine pleasure is one that has no object, when one rambles for the sake of rambling, observant without wanting anything in particular; when the weather is calm and nearly cloudless, when one has no business on hand and no wish to know the time; when one sets out to explore at random the swamps and forests of an unknown region; when one's talk is of mushrooms, and deer, and reddening leaves just beginning to fall; when I remark: "This place is just like one where my father stopped, ten years ago now, to play quoits with me, and where he left his hunting-knife, which next day we could not find"; and you chime in: "My father would have been charmed with the place where we just now crossed the brook. Towards the end of his days he used to drive out a good league from the town into a dense wood, where there were rocks and water; then he would leave his carriage and take his seat on a block of grit, sometimes alone, sometimes with me,

and there we would read the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*. He would say to me: 'If I had entered a monastery in my youth, as God called me, I should not have had all the afflictions that have befallen me in the world outside, and I should not now be so weak and shattered; but then I should have no son, and dying should leave nothing behind me.' . . . And now he is no more! They are no more!"

There are men who imagine they are taking a country walk when they trudge along a gravel path. They have dined; they go as far as the statue and return to backgammon. But when we used to lose ourselves in the woods of Forez, we roamed freely and at random. There was something sacred in those recollections of a time even then remote, coming to us as they did in the depth and grandeur of the woods. How the soul expands when it comes face to face with what is beautiful and unforeseen. In what concerns the soul I do not like to have things cut and dried beforehand. Let the understanding pursue its end methodically and reduce to system its achievements. But the heart, it toils not; and if you *ask* it to produce it will produce nothing; cultivation makes it barren. You remember the letters R. used to write to L., whom he called his friend. There was plenty of cleverness in those letters but no abandon. Each one contained something different and treated of a special topic; every paragraph had its purpose and line of thought. Everything was arranged as if for printing, like the chapters of a text-book. That will not be our method, I think; what do we want with cleverness? When friends converse it is to say whatever comes into their heads.

One request I will make; let your letters be long ones; take plenty of time to write, that I may be as long in reading; I will often set you the example. As to the contents I am not greatly concerned; of course we shall say what we think, and what we feel, and is not that just what we ought to say? When one wants to gossip, does one think of saying "Let us talk of such a subject; let us divide it up, and begin here?"

They were bringing supper in when I started to write, and now they have just announced that "really the fish is quite cold; at any rate, it will not be nice." Good-bye, then. They are Rhone trout. They praise them up to me as if they did not see that I shall take my meal alone.

LETTER IV.

THIÈLE, *July 19th* (I.).

I have been to Yverdon, and I have seen Neuchâtel, Bienne and its surroundings. I am staying a few days at Thièle, on the frontier between Neuchâtel and Berne. I engaged at Lausanne one of those hired chaises that are so common in Switzerland. I was not afraid of the monotony of the carriage; I was too engrossed in my situation, in my faint hopes, my uncertain future, my already barren present, and in the intolerable emptiness I find everywhere. I am sending you a few jottings made at various places on my way.

From Yverdon. I enjoyed for a little while the feel-

ing of being free and in finer scenery. I thought I should find here a better life, but I confess to you that I am not satisfied. At Moudon, in the heart of the province of Vaud, I asked myself, "Could I live happily in these be-praised and sought-after regions?" But a deep sense of dissatisfaction compelled me to leave it at once. Afterwards I tried to delude myself into thinking that this impression was due chiefly to something dreary in the locality. The landscape at Moudon is wooded and picturesque, but there is no lake. I resolved to spend the night at Yverdon, in the hope of recovering by its shores that state of well-being tinged with sadness which I prefer to joy. It is a beautiful valley, and the town is one of the prettiest in Switzerland. But in spite of the scenery, in spite of the lake, in spite of the loveliness of the day, I found Yverdon more dreary than Moudon. Whatever sort of place *will* suit me, I wonder?

From Neuchâtel. I left Yverdon this morning; the town is pretty enough, and to other eyes agreeable, but dreary in mine. I do not exactly know even yet what makes it so for me, but I feel myself quite a different man to-day. If I had to postpone my choice of that fixed abode I am on the look out for, I would far sooner decide to pass a year at Neuchâtel than a month at Yverdon.

From Saint-Blaise. I am returning from a tour in the Val de Travers. There I began to realize what sort of country I am in. The shores of the lake of Geneva are no doubt very fine, and yet it seems to me that one could find the same beauties elsewhere, while as for the people, one can see at a glance that

they are just like those in the lowlands, they and all their belongings.[1] But this vale, in a fold of the Jura, wears an aspect of grandeur and simplicity, it is wild and yet cheerful, it is at once peaceful and romantic; and though it has no lake it impressed me more than the shores of Neuchâtel or even of Geneva. The earth seems there less dominated by man, and man less enslaved to pitiful conventionalities. The eye is not everlastingly confronted with ploughed fields, with vineyards and country houses, the counterfeit wealth of so many unhappy regions. But alas! there were big villages, stone houses, aristocracy, affectation, vanity, smartness, irony. Where were my idle dreams leading me? At every step one takes here the enchantment comes and goes; at every step one hopes and loses heart; one's mood is ever changing in this land, so different both from others and from itself. I am going to the Alps.

From Thièle. I was on my way to Vevey by Morat, and did not think of stopping here, but to-day, on awaking, I was captivated by the finest spectacle the dawn can create in a landscape whose special type of beauty is rather genial than sublime. That has induced me to spend a few days here.

My window had been open all night, as usual. About four o'clock I was awakened by the coming of daylight and by the scent of the hay which had been cut in the cool of the night, by moonlight. I expected quite an ordinary view, but I had a shock of surprise. The

[1] This is not true if it is meant to apply to the whole of the north bank.

rains of the solstice had kept up the flood previously caused by the melting snows of the Jura, and the space between the lake and the Thièle was almost entirely under water. The higher ground formed isolated pastures amid these plains of water ruffled by the cool morning breeze. One could see in the distance the waves of the lake as the wind drove them upon its half submerged shore. Some goats and cows with their herdsman, who was drawing rustic sounds from his horn, were just passing along a strip of land left dry between the flooded plain and the Thièle. At the worst places stones had been set to help out or continue this kind of natural causeway. I could not distinguish the pasture for which these placid creatures were making, and to judge by their slow and hesitating steps one would have said they were going right into the lake to perish. The heights of Anet and the dense woods of Julemont rose from the bosom of the water like an uninhabited desert island. The mountainous range of Vuilly skirted the lake on the horizon. Southwards the outlook stretched away behind the hills of Montmirail, and beyond all, sixty leagues of æonian snowfields dominated the whole landscape with the inimitable grandeur of those bold natural features that make a scene sublime.

I dined with the toll-collector, whose ways rather pleased me. He is more given to smoking and drinking than to spite, scheming, and worry. I rather like these habits in other people, though I shall certainly not acquire them myself. They banish ennui; they occupy the time without our having to bother about it; they save a man from many worse things, and instead

of the calm of happiness, which one never sees on any brow, they do at least give that of a satisfying diversion which reconciles everything, and is only harmful to intellectual progress.

In the evening I took the key so that I could come in late, without being bound to time. The moon was not up, and I strolled along by the green waters of the Thièle. But feeling inclined for long musing, and finding it warm enough to stay out all night, I took the road to Saint-Blaise. I left it again at a little village called Marin, which has the lake to the south, and descended a steep slope to the sand on which the waves were breaking. The air was calm; not a trace of haze was visible on the lake. Everybody was asleep; forgetful, some of labours, others of griefs. The moon appeared; I stayed on and on. Towards morning she diffused over land and water the exquisite melancholy of her last beams. Nature seemed grand indeed, as one heard in one's long meditation the roll of the waves on the lonely shore, in the calm of a night still glowing with the radiance of a dying moon.

Inexpressible responsiveness, alike the charm and torment of our idle years, profound sense of a Nature everywhere overwhelming and everywhere inscrutable; infinite passion, ripened wisdom, ecstatic self-surrender, everything a human heart can hold of need and utter weariness, I felt them all, sounded the depths of all, during that memorable night. I took an ominous stride towards the age of decline; I swallowed up ten years of my life. Happy the simple-minded man whose heart is always young!

There, in the quiet of the night, I questioned my

problematic destiny, my storm-tossed heart, and that incomprehensible Nature which includes all things and yet seems not to include the satisfactions of my desires. What in the world am I? said I to myself. What pathetic combination of boundless affection with indifference to all the concrete objects of real life? Is imagination leading me to seek in an arbitrary scheme of things objects that are preferable for this sole reason, that their fictitious existence, which can be moulded at will, assumes in my eyes attractive forms and a pure unalloyed beauty even more unreal than themselves.

In that case, seeing in things relations which can hardly be said to exist, and always seeking what I shall never attain, an alien in nature and an oddity among men, I shall have none but barren affections, and whether I live in my own way or the world's, eternal constraint in the one case and my own limitations in the other, will be the ceaseless torment of a life always repressed and always miserable. But the vagaries of a vivid and unregulated imagination are as fickle as they are wayward; a man of that type, the sport of his fluctuating passions and of their blind ungoverned energy, will neither have constancy in his tastes nor peace in his heart.

What have I in common with such a man? All my tastes are invariable, everything I care for is feasible and natural; I only want simple habits, peaceable friends, an evenly-flowing life. How can my wishes be ill-regulated? I see nothing in them but the need, nay, the sense of harmony and the proprieties of life. How can my affections be distasteful to other men? I only like what the best among them have liked, I

seek nothing at the expense of any one of them ; I seek only what everyone can have, what the needs of all require, what would end their woes, what draws men together, unites, and consoles them ; I only want the life of the good, my peace in the peace of all.

True, I love nothing but Nature, and yet for that very reason my self-love is not exclusive, and what I love most in Nature is mankind. A resistless impulse sways me to all loving emotions; my heart has been too much concerned with itself, with humanity, and with the original harmony of existence to have ever known selfish or vindictive passions. I love myself, but it is as a part of Nature, in the order she desires, in fellowship with man as she desires him to be, in fellowship with man as she made him, and in harmony with the scheme of things as a whole. To tell the truth, up to the present time at any rate, no existing thing has fully claimed my affection, and an emptiness beyond words is the prevailing mood of my thirsty soul. But everything I crave might exist, the whole world might be after my own heart, without anything being changed in nature or in man himself, except the fleeting accidental features of the social fabric.

The eccentric man is not of this type. The grounds of his madness are artificial. There is no sequence of unity in his affections; and as error and absurdity only exist in human innovations, all the objects about which he is crazed are found in the sphere which rouses the lawless passions of men, and agitates their minds with a continual ferment of conflicting desires.

I, on the other hand, love existing things, and I love them as they are. I neither desire nor seek, nor imagine

anything outside Nature. Nay, far from letting my thoughts wander and settle on objects that are difficult of attainment or absurd, remote or extraordinary, far from being indifferent to what comes to hand, to what Nature regularly produces, and aspiring to what is denied me, to things strange and infrequent, to improbable surroundings and a romantic destiny, the very opposite is the case. I only want, I only demand of Nature and of men for my whole life, what Nature of necessity contains, and what all men ought to possess, that alone which can occupy our days and fill our hearts, that which makes life.

As I do not need things that are privileged or difficult of attainment, no more do I need things that are new-fangled, changing, manifold. What has already pleased me will always please me; what has satisfied my wants will always satisfy them. A day like a previous happy day is just as much a happy one for me; and as the practical needs of my Nature are always pretty much the same, simply seeking what is essential, I always desire pretty much the same things. If I am satisfied to-day, I shall be also to-morrow, for a twelvemonth, for a lifetime; and if my environment remains the same, my modest wants will always be supplied.

The love of power or of wealth is almost as foreign to my disposition as envy, hatred, or revenge. There is nothing in me to alienate the affections of others. I am not the rival of any of them; I can no more envy than hate them; I should decline what infatuates them, I should refuse to triumph over them, and I have no wish even to excel them in virtue. I am content with my native goodness. Happy in being able to avoid

wrong-doing without special effort, I will not torment myself needlessly; and so long as I am an honest sort of fellow I will not set up to be virtuous. That is a very praiseworthy quality, but fortunately it is not indispensable to me, and I resign it in their favour, thus abolishing the only ground of rivalry that could exist between us. Their virtues are ambitious like their passions; they parade them ostentatiously, and what they seek above all to get by them is pre-eminence. I am not their rival, and will not be even in that. What shall I lose if I resign to them this superiority?

Among their so-called virtues, some—the only useful ones, in fact—exist spontaneously in a man constituted as I am, and as I would gladly believe every man is at bottom; the others, which are complex, hard to acquire, impressive and brilliant, are not an essential outgrowth of human nature, and for that reason I count them either spurious or barren, and am not specially anxious to have the doubtful merit of possessing them. I have no need to struggle for what is part of my nature, and what is contrary to that nature I certainly will not struggle to attain. My reason rejects it, and assures me that in my case at any rate these ostentatious virtues would be defects and the beginning of deterioration.

The only effort required of me by the love of good is a continual watchfulness, which never allows the maxims of our spurious morality to gain admission to a soul that is too honest to wear them for outside show, and too simple to contain them within. Such is the virtue I owe to myself, and the duty I accept. I have an irresistible conciousness that my inclinations are natural;

it only remains that I should watch myself carefully to ward off from this general tendency any special impulse that might interfere with it, and to keep myself always simple and honest, amid the endless changes and confusions which may arise from the pressure of my precarious future, and from the frustrations of so many unstable circumstances. Whatever happens I must always keep the same, and always be myself,—I do not mean exactly what I am in habits opposed to my real needs, but what I feel myself to be, what I wish to be, what I really am in that inner life which is the one refuge of my sorrowful emotions.

I will question myself, I will study myself, I will probe to the bottom this heart of mine, naturally so true and loving, but already staled perchance by its many mortifications. I will ascertain what I am, or rather, what I should be; and when once that point is cleared up I will set myself to be loyal to it all my life, assured that nothing which is natural to me is either dangerous or blamable, satisfied that the only state of well-being is one in harmony with Nature, and resolved never to repress anything within me but what would tend to deteriorate my original form.

I have felt the spell of arduous virtues. In that sublime mistake I thought to replace all the motives of social life by this other motive, as illusory as they. My stoical hardihood defied alike misfortune and passion, and I felt sure of being the happiest of men if only I were the most virtuous. The delusion lasted nearly a month in full vigour; a single incident shattered it. Then it was that all the bitterness of a grey and fleeting life overflowed my soul as the last mirage that

had deceived it was dissipated. Since then I have made no pretence of using my life; I only seek to get through it; I no longer desire to enjoy it, but only to endure it; I am not concerned that it should be virtuous, but simply that it should never be culpable.

And yet even that, where shall I hope for it, where attain it? Where shall I find congenial, simple, well-spent, equable days? Where shall I escape misfortune? That is all I desire. But what a career is that in which sorrows remain and joys exist no more! Possibly some peaceful days may be given me, but as for charm, increase of that means increasing delirium; never a moment of pure joy—never! And I am not yet twenty-one! And I was born so responsive, so eager! And I have never known the taste of joy! And after death. . . . Nothing left in life, nothing in Nature. . . . I did not weep; the fountain of my tears is dry. I felt myself growing cold; I rose and started to walk, and the exercise did me good.

Insensibly I returned to my first inquiry. How shall I settle down? Can I do it? And what place shall I select? How, among men, can I live otherwise than they do, and how can I get away from them in a world whose furthest recesses they profane? Without money one cannot even get what money cannot buy, or avoid what money procures. The fortune I had reason to expect is falling to pieces, and the little I now have is becoming insecure. My absence will probably mean the loss of everything, and I am not the kind of man to launch out afresh. I fancy in this matter I must let things take their chance. My position depends on circumstances whose issues are

still remote. It is not certain that even if I sacrificed my present years to the task I could earn enough to arrange the future to my liking. I will wait, I will give no heed to a futile prudence, which would yoke me afresh to burdens that had become unbearable. And yet I cannot at present settle myself once for all and adopt a fixed location and a constant mode of life. I must put it off, perhaps for a long time; and so life slips away. I must for years to come be subject to the freaks of fate, to the bondage of circumstances, and to the so-called proprieties of life. I mean to live in a haphazard fashion, without a definite purpose, until the time arrives when I can adopt the only one that suits me. Well for me if in this fallow period I succeed in evolving a better; if I can select the location, the mode, the habits of my future life, rule my affections, control myself, and confine this yearning, simple heart of mine, to which nothing will be given, in the loneliness and limitations imposed upon it by accidental circumstances. Well for me if I can teach it to be self-sufficing in its desolation, to rest in vacancy, to be still in this galling silence, to endure though Nature is dumb.

You who know me, who understand me, but who, happier and wiser than I, submit without impatience to the customs of life, you know what are the needs in me which cannot be satisfied, separated as we are doomed to live. One thing indeed consoles me—that I am sure of your friendship; that feeling will never desert me. But as we always declared, we ought both to feel alike, to share the same destiny, to spend our lives together. How often have I regretted that we

were not so placed to each other! With whom would unreserved confidence be so sweet to me, and so natural? Have you not been until now my only comrade? You know that fine saying: *Est aliquid sacri in antiquis necessitudinibus.* I am sorry it was not uttered by Epicurus, or even by Leontius, rather than by an orator.[1]

You are the centre where I love to rest amid the distraction that sways me, to which I love to return when I have wandered everywhere and have found myself alone in the world. If we lived together, if we sufficed each other, I would take my stand there, I would know the meaning of rest, I would do something in the world, and my life would begin. But I must wait, and seek, and hurry on to the unknown, and though I know not whither I am bound I must

[1] Cicero was no common man; he was even a great man. He had fine qualities and fine talents; he occupied a distinguished position; he wrote well on philosophical topics; but I fail to see that he had the soul of a wise man. Obermann objected to his having merely a wise man's pen. He was of opinion too that a statesman has opportunity enough of showing what he is; he also believed that a statesman may make mistakes, but must not be weak, that a "father of his country" has no need to deal in flattery, that vanity is sometimes the almost unavoidable expedient of the unknown, but in other cases it is only due to littleness of soul. I fancy also that he objected to a Roman consul weeping *plurimis lacrymis*, because the wife of his bosom was obliged to change her abode. That was most likely his attitude towards this orator, whose genius was perhaps not so great as his talents. I fear I may be mistaken, however, in my interpretation of his feeling from the point of view of these letters, for I find I am attributing to him exactly my own. I am quite content that the author of *De Officiis* succeeded in the affair of Catiline; but I would have liked him to be great in his reverses.

flee from the present as if I had something to hope for in the future.

You excuse my departure; you even justify it; and that in full view of the fact that friendship demands a stricter justice than your leniency would mete out to strangers. You are quite right; I had to do it; circumstances compelled me. I cannot look without a kind of indignation on the preposterous life I have left, but I am under no delusion about the one before me. I enter with dread on years full of uncertainties, and I see something ominous in the dense cloud which rests in front of me.

LETTER V.

SAINT-MAURICE, *August 18th* (I.).

I have been waiting for a settled abode before writing to you. At last I have made up my mind; I shall spend the winter here. I shall make first of all some little excursions; but as soon as autumn is set in I shall not move again.

I meant to traverse the Canton of Fribourg, and enter the Valais through the mountains, but the rains compelled me to make for Vevey, by way of Payerne and Lausanne. The weather had taken up when I entered Vevey, but whatever the weather had been, I could not have determined to proceed by carriage. Between Lausanne and Vevey the road is all ups and downs, generally along the hillside, among vineyards which seem to me in such a region somewhat monot-

onous. But Vevey, Clarens, Chillon, the three leagues from Saint-Saphorien to Villeneuve, surpass everything I have hitherto seen. People generally admire the lake of Geneva near Rolle. Well, I have no wish to settle the point, but for my part I think it is at Vevey, and still more at Chillon, that one sees it in all its beauty. If only there were in this wonderful basin, in sight of the Dent de Jaman, of the Aiguille du Midi and the snows of Velan, just there, in front of the cliffs of Meillerie, a peak rising from the water, a rock-bound islet, well-wooded, difficult of access, and on that island two, or at most three, houses! I would budge no further. Why does Nature hardly ever contain what imagination creates for our needs? Is it that men oblige us to imagine and long for what Nature does not usually produce, and that if she happens to have produced it anywhere, they soon destroy it?

I slept at Villeneuve, a dreary place in so fine a region. I traversed before the day grew hot the wooded hills of Saint-Tryphon, and the succession of orchards filling the valley as far as Bex. I was advancing between two ranges of Alps of great elevation; looking up to their snows I was following a level road through fertile country, which seemed as though in times gone by it had been almost entirely under water.

The valley along which the Rhone flows from Martigny to the lake is cut in two, about the middle, by cliffs crowned with pastures and forests. These cliffs are the lowest terraces of the Dents de Morcle and du Midi respectively, and are only separated by the bed of the river. On the northern side the rocks are partly covered by chestnut woods, and above that

by pines. Here, in these somewhat outlandish regions, is my residence at the foot of the Aiguille du Midi. This peak is one of the most beautiful in the Alps, and also one of the loftiest, if judged not merely by its height above sea level, but also by its apparent elevation and the well-proportioned amphitheatre which brings out all the grandeur of its outlines. Of all the summits whose height has been determined by trigonometrical survey or barometrical readings, I do not see one, so far as I can tell from a glance at the maps and from the water system, whose base lies in such deep valleys. I think I am safe in assigning to it an apparent elevation almost as great as that of any other summit in Europe.

On seeing these tenanted, fertile, and yet wild ravines, I left the road to Italy, which turns off at this point for Bex, and made for the bridge over the Rhone, taking footpaths through meadows the like of which our painters hardly ever depict. The bridge, the castle, and the flowing Rhone form at this point a most charming picture; as for the town, the only special feature I noticed was a kind of simplicity. Its situation has a touch of melancholy, but the sort of melancholy I like. The mountains are fine, the valley level; the cliffs verge on the town and seem to overhang it; the muffled roll of the Rhone gives a tone of melancholy to this little self-contained world, whose sunken floor seems shut in on all sides. Though populous and cultivated, it seems notwithstanding to be frowned upon, or shall I say beautified, by all the austerity of the desert, when the black clouds overshadow it, rolling along the sides of the mountains,

darkening the sombre pines, drawing together, piling in masses, and hanging motionless like a gloom-filled roof; or when, on a cloudless day, the heat of the sun pours down upon it, fermenting its invisible vapours, pursuing with relentless energy whatever breathes beneath the arid sky, and making of this too lovely solitude a bitter desolation.

The cold rains I had just experienced as I passed the Jorat, which is a mere hillock compared to the Alps, and the snows under which at the same time I saw the mountains of Savoy grow white, even in the middle of summer, made me think more seriously of the severity and still more of the duration of the winters in the higher parts of Switzerland. I was anxious to combine the beauty of the mountains with the climate of the plains. I was hoping to find in the high mountain valleys some slopes of southern aspect, a serviceable precaution for clear cold weather, but of very little avail against the months of fog, and least of all against the lateness of the spring. As I had quite decided not to live down here in the towns I thought I should be well compensated for these disadvantages if I could lodge with worthy mountaineers, on some little dairy-farm, sheltered from the cold winds, beside a mountain-stream, amid pasture lands and evergreen pines.

Circumstances have decided otherwise. Here I have found a mild climate, not in the mountains, it is true, but surrounded by them. I have let myself be prevailed upon to stay near Saint-Maurice. I will not tell you how that came about, in fact I should be at a loss how to explain it if I were obliged.

What you may think on the face of it rather odd, is

that the utter ennui I felt here during four wet days contributed largely to my staying. My heart failed me; it was not the monotony of solitude I dreaded in the winter, but that of the snow. And then, too, I was led to decide involuntarily, without choice, by a kind of instinct which seemed to tell me that so it had to be.

When it was known that I thought of staying in the neighbourhood, several people expressed their goodwill in a very kind and unassuming way. The only one with whom I became intimate is the owner of a pretty house not far from the town. He urged me to stay at his country residence, or to make choice among some others he mentioned, belonging to his friends. But I wanted a picturesque locality and a house to myself. Fortunately I realized in time that if I went to inspect these various residences I should let myself be betrayed into taking one out of mere politeness or in weak compliance, even if they were all far from what I wanted. Then if I regretted a wrong choice I could not without discourtesy have tried any other alternative than that of leaving the district altogether. I frankly told him my reasons, and he seemed to appreciate them. I set out to explore the neighbourhood, visiting the scenes I liked best, and casually looking out for a house, without even ascertaining beforehand whether any were to be found there or not.

I had been engaged in the search for a couple of days, in a neighbourhood not far from the town, where there were places as secluded as any to be found in the heart of a wilderness, and where accordingly I only meant to spend three days on a quest that I did not want to push very far. I had seen many habitations

in places that did not suit me, and many lovely spots without buildings, or with such wretchedly-built stone houses that they made me think of giving up my scheme, and then I noticed a trace of smoke behind a grove of chestnuts.

The waters, the depth of the shade, the solitude of the meadows over the whole slope greatly charmed me; but it faced the north, and as I wanted a more genial aspect, I should not have stopped but for this smoke. After a good deal of winding about and crossing rapid streamlets I reached a solitary house on the edge of the woods and in the loneliest of meadows. A decent dwelling-house, a wooden barn, a kitchen garden bounded by a fair-sized stream, two springs of good water, some rocks, the sound of torrents, sloping ground, quick-set hedges, luxuriant vegetation, a sweep of meadow stretching away under scattered beeches and chestnuts right up to the pines of the mountain—such is Charrières. The very same evening I made arrangements with the tenant; then I went to see the landlord, who lives at Monthey, half a league further on. He offered me the most generous terms, and we settled the matter at once, though not on the too favourable basis of his first suggestion. His first offer could only have been accepted by a friend, and the one he insisted on my accepting would have been generous if we had been old acquaintances. Conduct like this must be native to some localities, especially in certain families. When I mentioned it to his people at Saint-Maurice, nobody seemed in the least surprised.

I want to taste the joys of Charrières before winter.

I want to be there for the chestnut-gathering, and I have quite decided not to miss the quiet autumn.

In three weeks I take possession of the house, the chestnut grove, and part of the meadows and orchards. I leave to the farmer the rest of the pastures and fruit-trees, the kitchen-garden, the hemp-ground, and, above all, the ploughed land.

The stream winds through the part I have kept for myself. This is the poorest land, but it has the finest woods and the loneliest nooks. The moss spoils the hay crop and the chestnuts are too crowded to bear much fruit; no outlook has been contrived over the long valley of the Rhone; everything is wild and neglected. They have not even cleared a place shut in by rocks, where trees blown down by the wind and rotted with age hold the mud and form a kind of dam. Alders and hazels have taken root on it and completely block the way. But the brook filters through the *débris* and pours from it all foaming into a natural pool of wonderful purity. Thence it finds its way between the rocks, dashing headlong over the moss, and far below it slackens its pace, leaves the woods, and flows in front of the house under a bridge made of three planks of pine. They say that the wolves, driven by the heavy snows, come down in winter and hunt right up to the doors for the bones and scraps of the flesh meat that man cannot do without even in pastoral valleys. Dread of these animals has long kept this house uninhabited. That is not what I am afraid of there. Let me be undisturbed by men, at any rate near the dens of the wolves!

LETTER VI.

SAINT-MAURICE, *August 26th* (I.).

A moment may transform one's mood, though such moments are rare.

It happened yesterday. I put off writing to you till next day; I did not want the agitation to subside so quickly. I felt I was really in contact with something. I had what seemed like joy; I let myself go; it is always good to have that experience.

Now do not smile at me because I acted for a whole day as if I were taking leave of my senses. To tell you the truth, I only just missed being so stupid as not to keep up my infatuation for a quarter of an hour.

I was entering Saint-Maurice. A travelling carriage was passing at a walking pace, and there were several people also coming off the bridge. You already conclude that one of the number was a woman. My French dress apparently drew attention to me; they bowed. Her lips are full; her glance. . . . As to her figure and everything else, I have no more idea than I have of her age; I am not at all concerned about that; it is even possible that she is not specially pretty.

I did not inquire to what inn they were going, but I stayed the night at Saint-Maurice. I suppose the innkeeper (the one to whose place I always go) must have put me at the same table because they are French; I fancy he suggested it to me. You may be sure I ordered something dainty for dessert that I might offer her some of it.

I spent the rest of the day by the Rhone. They must have left this morning; they are going as far as Sion, on the way to Leuk, where one of the travellers intends to take the baths. It is said to be a fine route.

It is really amazing how a man who is not without vigour will let his life be swallowed up in depression, when it takes so little to rouse him from his lethargy.

Do you think that a man who ends his days without ever having been in love has really entered into the mysteries of life, that his heart is thoroughly known to him, and that the range of his being has been revealed to him? It seems to me that he has remained an outsider, and has only seen from afar what the world might have been to him.

I let myself talk freely to you, because you will not say: "Ah! he is love sick." Never may that stupid remark be made about me by any but fools, for it makes ridiculous either him who says it or him of whom it is said.

When a couple of glasses of punch have put to flight our misgivings, and have given a sustaining impetus to our ideas, we fancy that henceforth we shall have more energy of disposition and enjoy a freer life, but next morning we are more out of conceit with ourselves than ever.

If the weather were not stormy I do not know how I should get through the day; but the thunder is already resounding among the crags, the wind is growing furious. I revel in this turmoil of the elements. If it rains this afternoon it will be cooler, and in any case I can read by the fire.

The postman who is due in an hour should bring me

some books from Lausanne, where I paid a subscription; but if he forgets I will do something better, and the time will slip away all the same,—I will write you a letter, if I only have courage enough to begin.

LETTER VII.

SAINT-MAURICE, *Sept. 3rd* (I.).

I have been up as far as the perennial snow-fields, on the Dent du Midi. Before the sun had risen on the valley I had already reached the top of the great cliff which overhangs the town, and was crossing the partly-cultivated terrace above it. I kept on up a steep slope, through thick pine-forests, which in places had been laid low in winters long gone by, forming an inextricable tangle of decaying remains and vegetation growing out of it. At eight o'clock I arrived at the bare peak which rises above this slope and forms the first step of that stupendous stairway from whose summit I was still so remote.

At this point I sent back my guide and trusted to my own resources. I did not want any mercenary bond to interfere with this mountain freedom, or any mere plain-dweller to tone down the sternness of nature at her wildest. I felt my whole being expand as I thus faced alone these forbidding obstacles and dangers, far from the artificial restrictions and tyrannical ingenuity of men.

With a thrill of delicious independence I watched the

disappearing figure of the only man I was likely to meet among those great precipices. I left on the ground my watch, my money, and everything I had with me, as well as most of my clothing, and strode away without even troubling to hide them. So you will say that my first independent action was an eccentric one, to say the least of it, and that I was like children who have been too much repressed, and who do all sorts of absurd things when left to themselves. I admit that there was something childish in my eagerness to leave everything behind, and in my novel get-up, but I moved more freely for it, and set myself to climb on hands and knees the rocky ridge which joins this minor peak to the main body of the hill, most of the time holding between my teeth the stick I had cut to help me on the downward slopes. Here and there I crawled along between two abysses which I could not see to the bottom of. Thus I reached at last the granite.

My guide had told me that I should not be able to climb beyond that point, and, as a matter of fact, I was brought to a standstill for some time ; but at last by going down again a little, I found an easier ascent. Attacking it with the daring of a mountaineer, I reached a basin-like depression, full of hard frozen snow which summer never melted. I climbed much higher still, but when I arrived at the foot of the highest peak in the range I could not scale it. The face of the rock was almost perpendicular, and towered to a height of some 500 feet above where I stood.

Although the snow I had crossed was trifling in extent, I had made no provision for it: my eyes were tired with its glare, and dazzled by the reflection of the

midday sun from its frozen surface, and I could not see anything distinctly. Moreover, many of the peaks I did see were unknown to me; I could only be sure of the most striking. Since I came to Switzerland I have given all my time to reading de Saussure, Bourrit, the *Tableau de la Suisse*, and the like, but I am still quite a novice among the Alps. I could not, however, mistake the huge bulk of Mont Blanc, which towered perceptibly above me, nor that of Velan; another further off but higher, I took to be Mont Rosa. On the opposite side of the valley, not far away, but lower down, beyond the abysses, was the Dent de Morcle. The mass I could not climb interfered considerably with what was probably the most striking part of this magnificent view. Behind that lay the long deep trough of the Valais, streaked on either hand by the glaciers of Sanetsch, Lauter-brunnen, and the Pennines, and closed by the domes of Gotthard and Titlis, the snows of Furka, the pyramids of the Schreckhorn and Finster-aar-horn.

But this view of mountain tops beneath one's feet, grand and imposing as it was, and far removed from the blank monotony of the plains, was not after all the object of my quest in this region of unfettered Nature, of silent stillness and pure air. On lower levels man as he is by nature cannot but be warped by breathing the turbid and restless atmosphere of social life, full of ferment as it is, always disturbed by the din of human occupations, and the bustle of so-called pleasures, by cries of hate and never-ending groans of anxiety and pain. But there, in mountain solitudes, where the sky is vast, the air calmer, the flight of time less hurried,

and life more permanent; there, all nature expresses a nobler plan, a more evident harmony, an eternal wholeness. There, man recovers that true self which may be warped, but cannot perish; he breathes a free air untainted by the exhalations of social life. He exists for himself as he does for the Universe; he lives a real life of his own in the sublime unity of things.

This was what I wanted to experience, what I was in quest of at least. Unsure of myself in the scheme of things arranged at great cost by a race of clever children,[1] I went to the hills to inquire of Nature why I am ill at ease among my fellows. I wanted to settle the point whether it is my existence that is alien to the human scheme, or the actual social order that has drifted away from the eternal harmony, and become something abnormal and exceptional in the development of the world. Now at last I believe I am sure of myself. There are single moments that put to flight doubt, mistrust, prejudice; moments in which one recognizes the real by an imperative and unshakable conviction.

Be it so then. I shall live unhappy, and almost an object of ridicule, in a world enslaved to the fancies of this fleeting age, counteracting my boredom by the conviction which sets me inwardly beside man as he

[1] If any youthful reader shares this feeling, let him not conclude that it will be permanent. Though you may not alter yourself, time will calm you; you will accept what is, instead of what you would like. Sheer fatigue will incline you to an easy life, and nothing is easier than this acquiescence. You will seek relaxation; sit at table, see the comic side of things, and inwardly smile. You will find an enjoyable kind of luxury in your very ennui, and will pass away forgetting that you have never really lived. So has many another passed away before you.

might be. And if there ever crosses my path any one with a disposition so unyielding that his nature, moulded on the primal type, cannot take the stamp of social forms—if, I say, it should ever be my lot to meet such a man, we shall understand each other; he will link himself with me, and I will be his for all time.

Each of us will transfer to the other his relations with the world outside, and rid of other men whose vain desires we will pity, we will follow if possible a more natural and evenly balanced life. And yet who can tell whether it would be any happier, since it would still be out of tune with its surroundings, and spent in the midst of suffering humanity!

I should be at a loss to give you a clear idea of this new world, and to describe the permanence of the mountains in the vocabulary of the plains. The hours seemed to me alike calmer and more fruitful, and in the deliberateness and intensity of my thought I was conscious of a progress which was more rapid than usual and yet unhurried, as though the spheric revolutions had been slowed down in the all-pervading calm. When I wanted to reckon how long this march of thought had lasted, I found the sun had not kept pace with it, and I inferred that the consciousness of existence actually weighs more heavily and is more barren in the unrest of human surroundings. I saw that on tranquil mountain heights, where thought is less hurried, it is more truly active, in spite of the apparent slowness of its movements. The dweller in the valley devours without enjoyment his chafed and restless span of life, like those unresting insects that waste their energies in idly darting to and fro, and are left

behind by others, as weak as themselves but calmer, that keep steadily moving onward.

The day was hot, the horizon dim, and the valleys hazy. The reflected glare of the ice-fields scattered gleams of light through the lower air, but an unknown purity seemed characteristic of the air I breathed. At that height no exhalation from below, no play of light, disturbed or divided up the dark and limitless depth of the sky. Its apparent colour was not that pale and luminous blue which vaults the plains, that charming and delicate tint which gives the inhabited world a palpable sphere as the resting-place and boundary of vision. Up there the impalpable ether allows the sight to lose itself in boundless space; from amid the glare of sun and glaciers it goes out in quest of other worlds and other suns, as though under a midnight sky; it reaches a universe of night beyond the air illumined by the lights of day.

Imperceptibly vapours rose from the glaciers and formed clouds beneath my feet. The glare of the snow no longer tired my eyes, and the sky grew darker and deeper than ever. A mist settled upon the Alps, and only a few solitary peaks stood out above the sea of cloud; some streaks of snow that lingered in their furrowed sides made the granite look all the more black and forbidding. The snow-clad dome of Mount Blanc heaved its ponderous bulk out of this grey and shifting sea, above the piling fogs, which the wind ridged and furrowed into mighty waves. A black speck appeared in the midst of them; it rose swiftly and came straight towards me; it was the mighty Alpine eagle; its wings were mist-drenched and its eye was ravenous;

it was hunting for prey, but on seeing a human form it turned to flee with an ominous cry, and disappeared headlong in the clouds. The cry was twenty times re-echoed, but in sharp, dry sounds, like so many separate cries in the all-pervading silence. Then an absolute calm fell upon everything; it was as if sound itself had ceased to be, as if the property of sonorous bodies had been struck out of the universe. Such silence is never known in the bustling valleys; it is only on the cold heights that stillness like this holds sway; no tongue can describe, no imagination conceive, its impressive abidingness. But for memories brought from the plains one could not believe that outside oneself there was such a thing as movement in Nature; the revolution of the heavenly bodies would be inexplicable, and everything would seem permanent in the very act of changing, even the transformation of the clouds themselves. Each present moment seeming endless, one would witness the fact without having the feeling of the succession of events, and the unceasing changes of the universe would be to one's thought an insoluble problem.

I should have liked to retain more definite impressions not only of my moods of mind in those silent regions—there is no fear of my forgetting them—but of the thoughts they gave rise to, for of these my memory has retained scarcely anything. In places so different, imagination can scarcely recapture a train of thought which surrounding objects seem to banish. I should have had to write down what I felt, but in that case the mood of exaltation would soon have deserted me. In the very act of recording one's thought

for future reference there is something that savours of bondage and the cares of a life of dependence. In moments of intensity one is not concerned with other times and other men; one does not then pay any heed to artificial conventions, to fame, or even public good. We are more spontaneous, not even considering how to utilize the present moment; we do not control our ideas, or will to follow out a train of thought, we do not set ourselves to get to the bottom of a thing, to make new discoveries, to say what has not been said before. Thought at such times is not aggressive and directed, but passive and free; we dream and let ourselves go; we think profoundly without mental effort; we are great without enthusiasm, energetic without volition; it is dreaming, not meditation.

You need not be surprised that I have nothing to tell you after experiencing for more than six hours emotions and ideas which the whole of my future life will perhaps never bring me again. You know how disappointed those men of Dauphiné were when they went botanizing with Jean Jacques. They reached a hill-top which was just the place to kindle poetic genius; they waited for a fine outburst of eloquence, but the author of *Julia* sat himself down, started playing with some grass blades, and said never a word.

It might be about five o'clock when I noticed how the shadows were lengthening, and felt a touch of cold in the westward-facing nook where I had stayed motionless so long on the granite. I could not have moved about; walking was too difficult among those crags. The clouds had dispersed, and I saw that the evening would be fine, even in the valleys.

If the clouds had thickened I should have been in real danger, but this had never occurred to me till that very moment. The stratum of turbid air which clings to the earth was too remote from me in the pure air I was breathing, close to where ether begins[1]; all caution had deserted me, as if it were only a convention of artificial life.

As I came down to inhabited regions I felt that I was taking up again the long chain of cares and boredoms. I reached home at ten o'clock; the moon was shining in at my window. The Rhone babbled noisily along; there was no wind, the whole town was asleep. I dreamt of the mountains I was about to leave, of Charrières where I am going to live, of the freedom I had won.

LETTER VIII.

SAINT-MAURICE, *Sept. 14th* (I.).

I am just home from a tour in the mountains, lasting several days. I do not mean to give you any description of it; I have other things to tell you. I had found a bit of lovely scenery, and was looking forward to many another visit to it; it is not far from Saint-Maurice. Before going to bed I opened a letter. It was not in your hand, and the word *urgent*, conspicuously written, gave me some uneasiness. Everything arouses suspicion in the man who is laboriously freeing himself from long-standing restrictions. In

[1] It is not known exactly where the so-called ether does begin.

my present tranquillity any change was bound to be distasteful; I expected nothing good, and I felt there was much to fear.

You will readily guess, I think, what was the matter. I was stunned, overwhelmed; then I resolved to let everything go, to rise above it all, and resign for ever what would entangle me again with the things I had left. Nevertheless, after much hesitation I came to the conclusion, either wisely or weakly, that I must sacrifice part of my time to ensure quiet in the future. I submit; I am giving up Charrières, and making ready to leave. We will discuss this unhappy affair when we meet.

This morning I could not bear the thought of such a revolution, and I even began to reconsider it. In the end I went to Charrières to make other arrangements and to announce my departure. It was there that I finally decided, while trying to keep at bay the idea of the approaching season and of the tedium that already began to weigh upon me. I went into the meadows; they were being cut for the last time. I lay back on a rock so as to see nothing but sky; it was hidden by a pall of cloud. I looked at the chestnuts, and saw falling leaves. Then I wandered to the brook, as if I feared even that would be dried up, but it was running just the same.

How inexplicable is the grip of compulsion on human affairs! I am going to Lyons, then on to Paris; so far things are settled. Good-bye. Pity the man who finds but little, and from whom that little is again snatched away.

Well, well; we shall meet at Lyons.

LETTER IX.

LYONS, *October 22nd* (I.).

I set out for Méterville on the second day after you left Lyons, and spent eighteen days there. You know how unsettled I am and in what wretched cares I am entangled, with no prospect of any satisfactory result. But while waiting for a letter which could not arrive for twelve or fifteen days, I went to spend the interval at Méterville.

If I cannot be calm and unconcerned amid the worries I have to take in hand when the issue seems to depend on myself, I am at any rate quite capable of forgetting them completely when there is nothing more I can do. I can calmly await the future, however threatening it may be, as soon as the task of preparing for it no longer demands immediate attention, and I am left free to banish the memory of it and turn my thoughts elsewhere.

As a matter of fact I could not desire for the happiest days of my life a deeper peace than I have enjoyed in this short interval. And yet it was secured amid cares whose duration cannot be foreseen. How? think you. By means so simple that they would excite the laughter of many who will never know the same calm.

This estate is of no great importance, and its surroundings are more restful than imposing. You know the owners of it, their dispositions, mode of life, unassuming friendliness, and engaging manners. I arrived at an opportune moment. The very next day

they were to begin gathering the grapes on a terraced slope facing the south and overlooking the forest of Armand. It was decided at supper-time that these grapes, which were meant for a choice brand of wine, should be gathered by our own hands alone, selecting the ripest, so that the backward bunches might be allowed a few days longer. Next day, as soon as the mist had somewhat thinned, I put my tub on a barrow and was the first to make my way into the heart of the enclosure and begin the vintage. I did it almost alone, without seeking any quicker method; I enjoyed the very slowness of it, and felt sorry when I saw any one else at work. It lasted, I think, twelve days. My barrow went and came along neglected paths overgrown with damp grass. I chose the roughest and most toilsome, and the days slipped imperceptibly away amid autumn mists, and fruits, and sunshine. When evening came we drank our tea with milk warm from the cow; we laughed at those who seek for pleasures; we wandered among the aged hornbeams, and went to bed contented. I have seen the vanities of life, and I have within me the living germ of the greatest passions; I have also an interest in great social movements and in the philosophic ideal; I have read Marcus Aurelius and found nothing in him to surprise me; I appreciate arduous virtues, even monastic heroism. All these can stir my soul and yet not fill it. This barrow that I load with fruit and trundle gently before me, supports it better. It seems to wheel my hours peacefully along, and this slow and useful exercise, this measured pace, seems suited to the normal course of life.

SECOND YEAR.

LETTER X.

PARIS, *June 20th* (II.).

Nothing makes any headway; the wretched business that keeps me here drags on from day to day, and the more I chafe at these delays the more doubtful it becomes how long it will last. Men of the agent tribe do business with the unconcern of those who are used to its tardiness, and they delight in that slow obstructed pace; it matches their crafty souls, and is convenient for their underhand wiles. I should have more of their mischief to report to you if they were doing less to me. Besides, you know my opinion of the trade; I have always looked upon it as most questionable or most pernicious. A lawyer is now dragging me through quibble after quibble; supposing me to be selfish and unprincipled, he is haggling for his own side. He thinks if he wears me out with delays and formalities he will get me to give what I cannot bestow, because I do not possess it. So after spending six months at Lyons against my will, I am still doomed to spend perhaps longer than that here.

The year is slipping away; one more to deduct from my existence. I bore the loss of spring almost without

a murmur, but summer in Paris! I spend part of my time in the irksome tasks inseparable from what is called attending to business, and when I would fain be at peace for the rest of the day, and seek at home a kind of refuge from these long-drawn irritations, I am irritated there more unbearably still. There I am in silence surrounded by uproar, and I alone have nothing to do in a bustling world. There is no mean here between turmoil and inaction; one cannot but be bored if one is free from business and from passions. I occupy a room which vibrates to the continual din of all the cries, the labours, and the turmoil of an energetic people. Beneath my window there is a kind of open space frequented by quacks, conjurers, costermongers, and hawkers of every description. Opposite is the high wall of a public building; the sun shines on it from two o'clock until evening; its white and glaring expanse clashes harshly with the blue sky, and the brightest days are to me the most excruciating. An indefatigable newsvendor reiterates the names of his papers; his rasping monotonous voice seems to make the sun-scorched square more arid still; and if I hear some washer-woman singing at her attic window I lose patience and clear out. For three days past a lame and ulcerated beggar has stationed himself at the corner of a street close by, and there he whines in a doleful, high-pitched voice for twelve long hours. Imagine the effect of this wail repeated at regular intervals right through the settled fine days. There is nothing for it but to stay out all day long, until he finds a fresh place. But where can I go? I know very few people here, and it would be a mere chance if

among so few there were a single one to whom I should be congenial, so I go nowhere. As for public promenades, there are in Paris very fine ones; but not one where I can spend half an hour without ennui.

I know nothing so exhausting as this everlasting dilatoriness of all things. It keeps one in a continual attitude of expectation; it lets life slip away before one has reached the point at which one really begins to live. And yet what have I to complain of! How few there are who make anything of life! Not to mention those who spend it in dungeons beneficently provided by the laws! How can such a one make up his mind to go on living? One, for instance, who holds out through twenty years of his youth in a dungeon? Well, he never knows how much longer he will have to stay; what if the moment of deliverance be at hand! I was forgetting those who would not dare to end it of their own free will; they have lived on simply because men have not allowed them to die. And we dare to bemoan ourselves!

LETTER XI.

PARIS, *June 27th* (II.).

Occasionally I spend a couple of hours in the library; not exactly to improve my mind—that longing is perceptibly cooling—but because I am at a loss for something to fill these hours which all the same are slipping irrevocably away, and they seem less irksome when I occupy them outside than when I have to struggle

through them at home. Tasks to some extent compulsory suit my mood of depression; too much freedom would leave me a prey to indolence. I have more peace of mind in the company of folk who are silent like myself, than alone in a noisy neighbourhood. I like these long rooms, some empty, others full of people engrossed in study, in that cool and venerable storehouse of human efforts and vanities.

When I read Bougainville,[1] Chardin,[2] or Laloubère,[3] I am impressed by old-time memories of effete civilizations, by the fame of far-off wisdom, or by the youthful vigour of the happy islands; but in the end losing sight of Persepolis and Benares, and even Tinian,[4] I foreshorten all time and place into the point of present consciousness in which the human mind perceives them. I see the eager minds around me acquiring knowledge in silent intensity of application, while endless oblivion flows over their absorbed and learned heads, bringing with it their inevitable end, and the dissolution in what to nature is but a moment, both of their being and their thought and their age.

The rooms surround a long, quiet, grass-grown court, in which are two or three statues, some ruins, and a basin, which looks as old as the monuments, full of green water. I seldom leave without spending a quarter of an hour in this silent enclosure; I love to

[1] Navigator, 1729-1811; wrote *Voyage autour du monde.*—Tr.

[2] Traveller in India and Persia, 1643-1713.—Tr.

[3] Sent by Louis XIV. to Siam to establish diplomatic and commercial relations, 1687. Wrote a full account of origin, manners, and government of Siamese.—Tr.

[4] One of the Ladrones or Mariana Islands in the North Pacific.—Tr.

pace meditatively these old stones riven from their quarries to afford a clean, dry surface for the foot of man. But time and neglect are replacing them, as it were, in the earth, by covering them with a fresh layer and restoring to the soil its vegetation and natural hues. Sometimes I find these stones more eloquent than the books I have just been reading.

Yesterday while consulting the *Encyclopædia* I opened the volume at a place I was not in search of, and I do not remember now the title of the article, but it was about a man worn out by distraction and disappointment, who broke away into absolute solitude by one of those masterful resolutions whose force of will is ever after ground for self-congratulation. The notion of this independent life did not suggest to me the freedom and solitude of Imaüs, nor the genial islands of the Pacific, nor the more accessible Alps, already so much regretted, but a vivid and impressive reminiscence brought up with a flash of surprise and inspiration the bare rocks and the woods of Fontainebleau.

Let me tell you something more of this outlandish place in the midst of our pastoral landscapes. You will then better understand why I am so fond of it.

You know that as a child I lived several years in Paris. The relations with whom I stayed, in spite of their liking for the city, on several occasions spent the month of September with friends in the country. One year it was at Fontainebleau, and on two subsequent occasions we visited the same people, who then lived on the edge of the forest next the river. I think I should be fourteen, fifteen, and seventeen when I saw Fontainebleau. After my stay-at-home, inactive, and

wearisome childhood, I was still a child in many respects, if I felt myself a man in others. I was awkward, hesitating; having a presentiment possibly of everything, but knowing nothing; alien to my surroundings, my only fixed trait was that of being restless and unhappy. On the first occasion I did not go alone into the forest, and remember little of what I felt in it; I only know that I preferred this place to all others I had seen, and that it was the only one I wanted to revisit.

The year after I eagerly explored these solitudes; I used to lose myself on purpose, happy in being completely out of my bearings, with no beaten track in sight. Whenever I reached the edge of the forest, I shrank from the sight of those wide bare plains and those steeples in the distance. I turned my back on them at once and plunged into the thickest of the woods, and when I found a clear space shut in all round, where I could see nothing but sand and junipers, then I had a sense of peace, of freedom, and of untutored joy—Nature's power realized for the first time, at an age when one is easily made happy. And yet I was not exuberant; I just missed happiness and only felt a wholesome eagerness. I grew weary even while enjoying it, and always came home sad. Several times I was in the woods before sunrise. I toiled up summits still wrapped in gloom, I drenched myself in the dewy heather, and when the sun appeared I thought regretfully of the dim light which heralded the dawn. I loved the hollows, the dusky vales, the thick woods; I loved the heather-covered hills; I greatly loved the scattered boulders and the crumbling rocks; still more

I loved those shifting sands, whose arid surface showed no mark of human foot, but here and there was ruffled by the hurried tracks of flying deer or hare. If I heard a squirrel or put up a stag, I stopped short, my spirits rose, and for the moment I wanted nothing more.

It was in those days that I noticed the birch, that solitary tree which even so early made me sad, though since I have never seen it without pleasure. I love the birch; I love its white, smooth-peeling bark, its sylvan stem, its branches drooping to the ground, its fluttering leaves, and all its careless, native grace and wilding pose.

Ah me! the days gone by, that one never can forget! How vain the glamour of an ardent, sympathetic soul! How great is man in his inexperience! How fruitful he would be if the cold glance of his fellows, and the parching breath of injustice, did not come to dry up his heart! I yearned for happiness; I was born to suffer. You know those dismal days just before the hoar-frosts, whose very dawn thickens the mists and only heralds the light of day by ominous streaks of glowing colour on the piling clouds. That pall of gloom, those stormy squalls, those pale gleams, that whistling of the wind through bending and shuddering trees, those long-drawn wails like funereal lamentations —such is the morning of life; at noon, still colder and more lasting gales; at nightfall, thicker gloom, and the day of man is done.

That infinite bewitching charm, born with the heart of man, and seeming as like to last as he, one day revived; I even fancied I should have the joy of satisfied desires. But the sudden and too violent flame blazed

up in vacancy, and died away without an object to illuminate. So in thundery weather, startling whatever lives, come swift flashes in the gloomy night.

It was in March; I was at Lu——. There were violets at the roots of the bushes, and lilacs in a delightfully quiet vernal meadow, facing the noonday sun. The house was above, much higher up; a terraced garden hid the windows from sight. Below the meadow rocks dropped steep and straight as a wall; at their feet a full torrent, and beyond that another wall of rock, with meadows, hedges, and pines above it. Through all ran the antiquated city walls; there was an owl in their ancient towers. At night the moon shone; horns answered each other in the distance, and the voice that I shall hear no more . . .! I was carried away by it all. It was the sole illusion of my life. Why then this memory of Fontainebleau, and not that of Lu——?

LETTER XII.

[Near Fontainebleau] *July 28th* (II.).

At last I can really fancy myself in the desert. There are regions here where not a trace of man is to be seen. I have fled for a while from those uneasy cares which wear away our term of days, and overcast our life with the shadows before and after, making it seem but a more restless emptiness than they.

This evening, when I traversed the length of the

forest, and came down to Valvin, beneath the woods, in silence, it looked as though I should be lost among torrents and morasses, in awesome and romantic scenes. What I found were mounds of tumbled boulders, little patches of sand, a landscape almost level and hardly picturesque; but its silence, its desolation, and its barrenness sufficed me.

Do you understand the pleasure I feel when my foot sinks in loose burning sand, when I make headway with difficulty, and there is neither water, coolness, nor shade, nothing but an untilled, silent waste; bare, crumbling, shattered rocks; Nature's forces conquered by the forces of time? Does it not seem as if the condition of peace with me is to find outside, under a burning sky, other difficulties and other devastations than those in my own heart?

I never take my bearings; on the contrary, I lose myself when I can. Often I keep straight on, ignoring the footpaths. I try not to retain any impressions of the landmarks, not to get to know the forest, so that I may always have something fresh to find in it. There is one road I like to follow; it describes a circle like the forest itself, leading neither to the plains nor the town; it does not take any usual line; it is neither in the vales nor on the hills; it seems to have no destination; it wanders everywhere and arrives nowhere. I can imagine myself tramping it for a lifetime.

"But one must come home at night," say you, not taking seriously what I say about my solitude. You are mistaken, however; you imagine I am at Fontainebleau, or in a village, or a cottage. Nothing of the sort. I like the rural dwellings of these regions as little as their

villages, and their villages as little as their towns. If I condemn luxury, I hate squalor. Were it not so, I had better have stayed in Paris; I might have found both there.

But now for the point I omitted to explain in my last letter, which was full of the unsettlement that often agitates me.

Once when I was roaming these woods, I saw, in a part where they were very dense, two deer flying from a wolf. It was close upon them; I concluded it was sure to overtake them, and I followed in the same direction to watch the struggle and to render help if possible. They broke from the wood into an open space, covered with rocks and heather, but when I reached the spot they were no longer to be seen. It was an undulating and uneven kind of moor, where a quantity of stone had been quarried for paving; I explored all its hollows, but found nothing. On taking another direction to re-enter the wood, I caught sight of a dog. At first he watched me in silence, and did not bark until I moved away. I was really making straight for the entrance of the dwelling he was guarding. It was a kind of underground place, formed partly by natural rock, partly by piled up boulders, branches of juniper, heather, and moss. A workman who had quarried paving stones in the adjoining quarries for more than thirty years, being without property or family, had taken refuge there, so that he might escape the necessity of slaving till the day of his death, without submitting to the degradation of the workhouse. I saw he had a larder, and in a patch of poor soil beside his bit of rock were a few vegetables. There they were living, himself, his dog,

and his cat, on bread and water and freedom. "I have worked hard," he said, "and never had a thing to call my own; but I am having a quiet time now, and the end will soon come." In those words the simple fellow had told me the story of mankind; but did he know it? Did he fancy other men happier than himself? Did he suffer as he compared himself with them? I made no enquiries about all that; I was quite young. His boorish, half-savage look haunted my thoughts. I had offered him a five-franc piece; he took it, and said he would get some wine. That lowered him in my estimation. Wine! thought I; there are more useful things than that; possibly it is wine and misconduct that have brought him here, and not love of solitude. Forgive me, simple fellow, unhappy hermit! I had not then learned that one may drink to forget one's sorrows. I know now the bitterness which chafes our energies and the aversions which paralyze them; I can respect the man whose first want is to have a moment's rest from groaning; I am indignant when I see men with whom everything goes smoothly, harshly rebuking some poor fellow for drinking wine when he has no bread. Whatever sort of soul can these people have, if they know no greater misery than that of being hungry!

Now you can understand the force of the reminiscence that unexpectedly flashed upon me in the library. That sudden image filled me with the idea of a real life, of a wise simplicity, of being independent of man in a Nature all one's own.

Not that I imagine the life I lead here is such a one as that, or that amid my boulders on these dismal moors I fancy myself to be man in harmony with nature. Just

as well might I, like some denizen of the ward of Saint-Paul, exhibit to my neighbours the rural charms of a pot of mignonette standing in a spout, and of a bed of parsley boxed up on a window-ledge, or give to a half-acre of ground encircled by a streamlet the names of the capes and lonely shores of another hemisphere, in order to recall striking memories and far-off customs amid the thatch and plaster of a hamlet in Champagne.

The simple fact is, since I am doomed to be always waiting for life, I am trying to vegetate in perfect loneliness and solitude; I prefer to spend four months so than to waste them in Paris on greater and more pitiful stupidities. I will tell you when we meet how I chose my hermitage and how I enclosed it; how I conveyed here the few things I have brought, without letting anybody into my secret; how I live on fruit and a few vegetables; where I go for water, what I wear when it rains; and all the precautions I take to keep well out of sight, so that no Parisian, spending a week in the country, may come here to ridicule me.

You also laugh, but I do not mind that; your laugh is not like theirs. I have laughed at it all myself before now. All the same, I find great charm in this life, when, the better to feel its superiority, I leave the forest and enter the cultivated lands, and see in the distance some pretentious mansion in a bare landscape, when beyond a league of blank ploughed fields I notice a hundred thatched cottages, huddled into a wretched heap, whose streets, stables, gardens, walls, floors, dank roofs, and even clothes and furniture seem all one slough, in which all the women screech, the children sob, and the men sweat. And if amid these squalid

miseries I look for any moral peace or religious hopes for these wretched people, I find as their patriarch a greedy priest, soured by regrets, set apart too soon from the world; a melancholy stripling, without dignity, without wisdom, without fervour, who enjoys no respect and no privacy, who damns the weak and does not comfort the good; for any symbol of hope and unity I find a symbol of dread and of sacrifice; a strange emblem, the mournful relic of great and venerable institutions that have been miserably perverted.

And yet there are men who regard all that quite calmly, and who never even suspect that it is possible to take another view of it.

Ah sad and vain ideal of a better world! Unutterable out-going of love! Regret for the hours that slip fruitlessly away! Universal Consciousness,[1] sustain and swallow up my life; what would it be without thy awful beauty? Through thee that life is realized, and through thee it will perish.

Ah, sometimes again, under an autumn sky, in those

[1] The current conception of a man of feeling is too narrow. It is usual to represent an absurd sort of person, sometimes even a woman, I mean one of those women who cry over the illness of a pet bird, who faint at the blood of a needle-prick, and who shudder at the sound of such words as serpent, spider, grave-digger, small-pox, tomb, old age.

My conception includes a certain restraint in our emotions, a sudden combination of opposite feelings, an attitude of superiority even to the affection which sways us, a seriousness of soul and a depth of thought, a breadth of view which instantly calls up in us the secret generalization with which Nature would have us meet a particular sensation; a wisdom of the heart in its continual agitation; in a word, a blending, a harmony of all things that only a man of deep feeling is capable of. In his energy he has a foretaste of all that is in store for man; in his

lingering fine days all mellowed by the mists, sitting where some stream bears away the yellow leaves, may I hear the simple moving tones of a rustic melody! One day climbing high on Grimsel or on Titlis, alone with some herdsman of the mountains, may I hear in the short-cropped pastures that border on the snow the well-known romantic tinkling of the herds of Underwalden and of Hasly; and there just once before I die, may I say to a man who understands—"Had we but lived!"

LETTER XIII.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *July 31st* (II.).

When we are carried away by a resistless tide of feeling, and filled with ecstasy, soon followed by regret, at the idea of bliss which nothing can impart, this deep

restraint he alone has known the melancholy of pleasure and the charm of sorrow.

The man who feels warmly, and even deeply, without restraint, wastes that almost supernatural energy on things of no importance. I do not say that he will be deficient in it when there are opportunities for genius; some men who are great in little things are notwithstanding just as much so on great occasions. In spite of their real worth, this temperament has two drawbacks. They will be counted mad by fools and by many clever people, and they will be prudently avoided even by men who realize their value, and form a high opinion of them. They degrade their genius by prostituting it to utterly base uses, among the lowest types of men. Thus they supply the general public with plausible grounds for asserting that commonsense is worth more than genius, because it has not its aberrations, and for asserting what is more fatal still, that strong, upright, outspoken, and generous men are not superior to those who are prudent, ingenious, methodical, always reserved, and often selfish.

yet evanescent mood is nothing but an inward testimony to the fact that our capacities are superior to our lot. That is why it is so brief and turns so soon to regret; it is delicious, then heartrending. Prostration inevitably follows excessive stimulation. We suffer from not being what we might be, and yet if we really were in a scheme of things adjusted to our desires, we should no longer possess that over-plus of desires and capacities, we should cease to enjoy the pleasure of being above our lot, greater than our environment, and more creative than necessity requires.

If we experienced those delights which imagination paints in such glowing colours, we should remain cold and often absent-minded, uninterested, perhaps even bored; for no one can really be more than himself. We should become aware of the rigid limitations of our nature—of the fact that we cannot have our faculties engrossed in things around us and at the same time use them to transport us beyond, into that imaginary sphere where ideal circumstances are at the beck and call of the actual man.

But why should such circumstances be wholly ideal? That is what I am at a loss to understand. Why should that which is not seem more in harmony with human nature than that which is? Our actual life itself is like a dream; it has no unity, no sequence, and no aim; some of its elements are sure and stable, others are mere chance and discord, fading like shadows, and never yielding to us what they seemed to promise. In like fashion there enter our minds in sleep things true and consecutive along with others that are fantastic, disconnected, and incongruous, yet

somehow bound up with the first. The feelings of the day are a medley like the dreams of the night. The wisdom of the ancients said the waking moment would arrive at last.

LETTER XIV.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *August 7st* (II.).

Mr. W——, whom you know, remarked the other day, "When I am sipping my coffee, I arrange the world beautifully." I too indulge in dreams of this kind, and sometimes as I tramp through the heather, between the still dewy junipers, I catch myself picturing men as happy. Honestly, it seems to me they might be. I do not want another species, or another globe; I do not want to reform everything; schemes of that kind, you say, never come to anything, because they are not applicable to things as we know them. Very well, let us take what exists of necessity; take it as it is, simply adjusting what is accidental. I do not desire new or utopian species; given the materials, with them I will work out my ideal scheme.

Two things I should like to have—a settled climate and true men. If I know when the rain will flood the river, when the sun will scorch my plants, when the storm will shake my dwelling, it rests with my diligence to cope with the natural forces opposed to my interests; but if I know not when anything will happen, if misfortune overtakes me without warning, if caution may ruin me, and the concerns of others entrusted to my

care prevent me from taking things easily or even feeling secure, must not my life of necessity be ill-at-ease and unhappy? Must not inaction alternate with over-exertion, and as Voltaire has so well said, must I not spend all my days in the pangs of anxiety or in the stagnation of ennui?

If men are nearly all deceivers, if the double-dealing of some compels others to be at least on their guard, is it not a necessary consequence that there will be added to the evil which many are trying to do to others for selfish ends a far greater number of gratuitous evils? In spite of themselves people will mutually injure each other, every one watching and guarding against his fellow; enemies will be cunning and friends cautious. A good reputation will be liable to be lost through a rash statement or an error in judgment; enmity based on misunderstanding will become deadly; the well-meaning will be discouraged; false principles established, craft prove more serviceable than wisdom, courage, and magnanimity. Children will reproach their father for neglecting sharp practice, and States will perish for not stooping to crime. What becomes of morality, in the dark as we are about our fellows? What of security, in our equal uncertainty about things around us? And without security or morality, is not happiness a mere infant's dream?

I would let the moment of death remain unknown. When existence ends, evil ends too; and for twenty other reasons death should not be counted a misfortune. It is well not to know when the end will come; we would seldom begin what we knew could not be finished. I admit then that man's ignorance of the

length of his life, even in his present condition, is more profitable than disadvantageous, but uncertainty about what will happen in life is not at all the same thing as uncertainty about its duration. An unforeseen event dislocates your plans and lets you in for long-continued obstructions, but death does not dislocate, it annihilates; what you know nothing about you will not suffer from. The scheme of those who are left behind may perhaps be obstructed by it, but if we have light for our own affairs we have light enough, and I have no wish to conceive a state of things absolutely satisfactory from man's point of view. I should have misgivings about the world I am planning if there were no evil left in it, and I should be dismayed at the idea of a perfect harmony; Nature seems to me not to admit of one.

A settled climate, and above all true men, inevitably true, would satisfy me. I am happy when I know things as they are. The sky may still keep its storms and thunderbolts, the earth its mud and drought, the soil its barrenness, our bodies their weakness and decay; men may keep their inequalities and incompatibilities, their fickleness, their mistakes, even their vices and their ineradicable selfishness; time may still be tardy and irrevocable; my Utopia will be happy if the course of events is regular and men's motives are known. Nothing more is needed but good legislation, and that cannot be lacking if motives are known.

LETTER XV.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *August 9th* (II.).

Among some handy volumes I brought with me, I hardly know why, I have discovered that clever romance, *Phrosine and Mélidor*[1]; I have been through it, and read and re-read the conclusion. There are days when sorrows seem in season; when we love to seek them within us, to sound their depths and stand aghast at their huge proportions; we taste in our miseries, if nowhere else, that attribute of affinity with which we would fain invest our empty shade before the breath of time effaces it.

What a terrible moment in the story, what a tragic situation, is that death in the night, within reach of mystic raptures! So much love, such depths of loss, such horrors of revenge, enveloped in that shroud of mist! And then that rending of a heart deceived, when Phrosine, swimming for the rock and the torch, is led astray by a treacherous light and perishes exhausted in the mighty deep. I know no catastrophe more impressive, no death more pathetic.

The daylight was fading; there was no moon; everything was still; the sky was calm, the trees motionless. A few insects among the grass and a single far-away bird were piping in the warm night. I sat down and did not stir for a long time, vague ideas drifting through

[1] [An opera in three acts by Arnault *père;* played at the Opera Comique, May 4th, 1794. A story of virtuous lovers persecuted by cruel parents. — TR.]

my mind. I viewed the world and its past ages, and shuddered at the handiwork of man. I came back to myself, and found chaos and a wasted life; I dipped into the future of the world. Ah, cliffs of Rigi, if you had been at my feet![1]

By this time it was dark. I wandered slowly back, stepping aimlessly, utterly heart-weary. I longed for tears, but could only groan. My early days are gone; I have the sufferings of youth but none of its consolations. My heart, still vexed by the fires of a useless past, is wilted and dried up, as if its strength were sapped by chill old age. I am deadened without being calmed. Some there are who find pleasure in their woes, but with me all is over; I have neither joy, nor hope, nor rest; nothing is left, not even tears.

LETTER XVI.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *August 12th* (II.).

What generous emotions! What memories! What calm sublimity there is on a mild, still, starlight night! What grandeur! And yet the soul is sunk in perplexity. We see that the impressions made upon us by external things are misleading; we see that truth exists, but how terribly remote. Nature passes our understanding when we gaze on those vast stars in the unchanging sky. Its permanence overwhelms us; to man it seems

[1] The Rigi is near Lucerne; the lake is at the foot of the precipices referred to.

an appalling eternity. Everything else passes away, man himself passes; but the worlds above never pass! Thought hangs in an abyss between the changes of the earth and the unvarying skies.

LETTER XVII.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *August 14th* (II.).

I wander into the woods before the sun is up; I watch him rise with promise of a lovely day; I tramp through dewy ferns and brambles, among the deer and under the birch trees of Mont Chauvet; a sense of the happiness that might have been throbs powerfully within me, urgent and yet oppressive. Up hill and down dale I go, like one who means to enjoy himself; then a sigh, a touch of bitterness, and a whole day of misery.

LETTER XVIII.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *August 17th* (II.).

Even here, it is only the evening that I love. The dawn gladdens me for a moment; I fancy I could feel the charm of it if the day that is to follow were not bound to be so long! I certainly have a free domain to wander in, but it is not wild and impressive enough. Its features are tame, its rocks small and uninteresting, the vegetation as a rule lacks the luxuriance and pro-

fusion I like to see; one never catches here the murmur of a torrent far down in the depths; it is a land of plains. Nothing burdens me here; nothing satisfies me. I fancy, if anything, my boredom increases; simply because I have not enough to suffer. I am happier then, you think? Not a bit of it; to suffer and to be unhappy are not at all the same thing, no more than enjoyment is identical with happiness.

I am delightfully circumstanced, and yet I live a melancholy life. I could not be better off than I am here: free, undistracted, well in health, unyoked from business, unconcerned about a future from which I expect nothing, and leaving behind without regret a past I have not enjoyed. But there is within me a persistent unrest, a yearning I cannot define, imperative and absorbing, which takes me out of the sphere of perishable creatures. . . . No, it is not the yearning to love; you are mistaken there, as I once was mistaken myself. The interval is wide enough between the emptiness of my heart and the love it has so eagerly desired, but the distance between what I am and what I want to be is infinite. Love is vast, but it is not infinite. I do not want to enjoy possession; I want to hope, I should like to know. I need limitless illusions, receding before me to keep me always under their spell. What use to me is anything that can end? The hour which will arrive in sixty years' time is already close at hand. I have no liking for anything that takes its rise, draws near, arrives, and is no more. I want a good, a dream, in fact a hope that is ever in advance, ever beyond me, greater than my expectation itself, greater than the things which pass away. I would

like to be pure intelligence, I would like the eternal order of the world. . . . And yet, thirty years ago, that order was, and I had no existence.

Worthless and accidental creature of a day, I used not to exist, and soon I shall exist no more. I discover with surprise that my thought is greater than my being, and when I consider that my life is absurd in my own eyes, I lose my way in hopeless darkness. Truly, happier is he who fells trees and burns charcoal, and flies to holy water when the thunder peals. He lives like the brute. Nay; for he sings at his work. I shall never know his peace, and yet I shall pass like him. His life will glide along with time, but mine is led astray and hurried on by excitement and unrest, and by the phantoms of an unknown greatness.

LETTER XIX.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *August* 18*th* (II.).

There are moments, however, when I find myself full of hope and freedom; time and events unroll before me in majestic harmony, and I feel happy, as if a happy life might be in store. I surprise myself returning to my early years; I recapture in the rose its delightful charm and heavenly eloquence. Happy! I? Yes, even I am happy; happy to overflowing, like one who wakes from the terrors of a dream to a life of peace and liberty; like one who leaves behind the filth of dungeons and sees once more, after ten years, the

peaceful sky; happy as the man who loves—her whom he has saved from death! But the moment passes by; a cloud before the sun cuts off his stimulating light; the birds fall silent, the spreading shadow involves and drives before it my dream and joy alike.

Then I start to my feet; I hurry sadly homewards, and soon return to the woods, because the sun may again appear. In all this there is something which calms and consoles. What it is I do not exactly know; but even when I am benumbed by sorrow, time does not stand still, and I love to watch the ripening of the fruit which an autumn gust will bring to the ground.

LETTER XX.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *August 27th* (II.).

How little is needed by the man who wishes simply to live, and how much by him who wishes to live with satisfaction and to make good use of his time. If one had strength to renounce happiness as too impracticable one would be far happier, but must one remain always alone? Peace itself is a mournful gift if one has no hope of sharing it.

I know that many do not look beyond the good of the moment, and that others can put up with a mode of life without order and refinement. I have seen such a one trimming his beard before a broken mirror; the children's linen was hung out of the window, and one of their frocks over the handle of the frying-pan; their

mother was washing them beside the table, on the bare top of which some hashed beef and the remains of Sunday's turkey were set out in cracked dishes. There would have been some soup, if the cat had not upset the broth.[1] That is called a simple life; I call it an unhappy life, if it is temporary; a life of misery if it is compulsory and permanent; but if it is voluntary and not irksome, if one takes it as a matter of course, I call it a ridiculous existence.

Contempt of riches is a very fine thing in books, but with a house to keep up and no money, one must either be devoid of susceptibility or have unquenchable vitality; now I doubt whether a strong character would tolerate such a life. One can put up with what is accidental, but to give in permanently to this wretchedness is to make it one's own. Are Stoics like this devoid of that sense of the fitness of things which tells a man that to live thus is not living according to his nature? Simplicity like theirs, without order, refinement, or decency, is more akin, in my opinion, to the sordid self-denial of a begging friar, or the brutal penance of a fakir, than to philosophical resignation.

In simplicity itself there is neatness, carefulness, harmony, unity. The people I refer to have not a tenpenny mirror and yet they go to the play; they have broken china and clothes of fine material; they have stylish cuffs on shirts of coarse cotton. If they take a stroll, it is to the Champs-Elysées; they say they go to see the passers-by, hermits though they are; and in

[1] No doubt the author of these letters would have apologised for these and other details if he had foreseen their publication.

order to see them they submit to their contempt, and sit on some patch of turf amid the dust raised by the crowd. In their philosophic apathy they disdain appearances, and sit munching their cakes on the ground, among dogs and children and the feet of those who are passing to and fro. There they study man, while gossiping with servant-girls and nurses; there they plan a treatise in which kings will be warned of the dangers of ambition, the luxury of high life be reformed, and all men be taught to moderate their desires, to live according to nature, and to eat the cakes of Nanterre.[1]

I will say no more about it. If I put you too much into the humour for joking on certain topics, you might also poke fun at my curious mode of life in my forest; there is certainly something childish in creating for oneself a desert close to a capital. You must admit, however, that there is a vast difference between my woods near Paris and a tub in Athens,[2] and I will grant on my side that the Greeks, though as cultured as ourselves, were freer than we are to do eccentric things, because they were nearer primitive times. The tub was chosen in order to exhibit publicly, in the maturity of age, a wise man's life. That is certainly extraordinary, but the extraordinary was no special bugbear to the Greeks. Custom and the usual thing were not their ruling principles. Everything with them could preserve its individual character, and the rare thing was to meet with anything common and universal. As

[1] Nanterre is famous for a special kind of cake, of which children are very fond.

[2] This incident of the tub is disputed on several grounds.

a people whose social life was still tentative, they seemed to be trying experiments with institutions and customs, and to be still in the dark as to what lines of conduct were entirely satisfactory. But we who have no doubt on the matter, we who have adopted the best way possible in everything, we rightly consecrate our minor manners, and punish with contempt the man who is stupid enough to leave so obvious a track. Joking apart, however, it is excuse enough for me, who have no wish to imitate the cynics, that I do not pretend either to be proud of this juvenile freak, or when living among my fellows, to set up my mode of life in opposition to theirs, in things which duty does not prescribe. I take the liberty of being singular in a matter which is of itself indifferent, and in some respects, I consider, wholesome for me. It would clash with their way of thinking, and as that seems to me the only drawback it could have, I avoid it by keeping out of their sight.

LETTER XXI.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *Sept.* 1*st* (II.).

The weather is simply perfect, and I am in a mood of utter calm. Once I should have felt keener delight in this complete freedom, this throwing up of all business and planning, this indifference to whatever may happen. I begin to realize that I am getting on in life. Those rapturous impressions, those sudden emotions that once used to thrill me and transport me so far from a

world of sadness, I now only recover in a modified and weakened form. The desire that every perception of beauty in external objects used to awaken in me, the vague and captivating hope, the heavenly fire which dazzles and consumes a youthful heart, the overflowing ecstasy with which it irradiates the mighty phantom before it, all these are even now no more. I begin to have an eye for what is useful and convenient, and no longer for what is beautiful.

Tell me, you who know my limitless needs, what I shall make of life when I have lost these moments of enchantment which glowed in the darkness like stormy glimmers on a lurid night. They made it darker I confess, but they showed that it might change, and that light existed still. But what will become of me now if I must restrict myself to what is, and be tied down to my mode of life, my personal interests, and the cares of getting up, killing time, and going to bed again?

I was quite different in those days when love was still a possibility. I had been romantic as a child, and still pictured a haven suited to my tastes. I had mistakenly imagined, somewhere in Dauphiny, a combination of Alpine features with a climate fit for olives and citrons. Eventually the name *Chartreuse* took my fancy, and it was there near Grenoble that I fixed my dream dwelling. In those days I used to fancy that pleasant places went far to make a pleasant life, and that there, with a loved one by my side, I might possess that incorruptible felicity for which my deluded heart was yearning.

Now here is a very curious thing, from which I can

draw no conclusion and about which I will assert nothing except that it is literal fact. I had never seen and never read anything, so far as I know, to give me any idea of the surroundings of the Grande Chartreuse. The only thing I knew was that this solitary spot was among the mountains of Dauphiny. My imagination fashioned out of this vague idea and its own inclinations the situation the monastery would be in, and close by it, my dwelling. It came remarkably near the truth. Long after, on seeing an engraving of this very place, I said to myself, before reading the title, "That is the Grande Chartreuse," so vividly did it recall what I had pictured. And when it proved to be really so, it gave me a shock of surprise and regret; it seemed as if I had lost something which was, as it were, destined to be mine. Since that project of my earliest youth I have never heard the word Chartreuse without a pang.

The further I go back into my youth the deeper impressions I find. If I go beyond the age when my ideas had begun to expand, if I look in my childhood for the first notions of a mournful heart, which never had a real childhood, and which was drawn to powerful emotions and things out of the common before it had even decided whether to be fond of games or not; if, I say, I try to find out what I felt at seven, at six, at five years old, I find impressions as ineffaceable as any since, more trustful too and sweeter, and based on those perfect illusions which no later age has been fortunate enough to possess.

I am not mistaken as to the time. I am perfectly sure how old I was when I thought of certain things and read a certain book. I read Kämpfer's *History of*

Japan[1] in my usual seat by a particular window in that house by the Rhone which my father left a little before his death. The summer after, I read *Robinson Crusoe*. That was the time when I lost the exactness for which I had been remarkable. I became unable to do, without a pen, less difficult sums than one I had done at four and a half without writing anything and without knowing a single rule of arithmetic, unless it were addition; a sum which amazed all who were present at Madame Belp——'s, at a certain party you have heard about.

At that age the power to perceive indeterminate relations got the better of the power to combine mathematical relations. Moral relations were becoming apparent, the sense of beauty was being born. . . .

September 2nd (II.).

I found I was drifting into a line of argument, so I broke off. In matters of feeling one can only consult oneself, but in things open to discussion it is always an advantage to know what other people have thought. I have by me a volume containing the *Pensées Philosophiques* of Diderot,[1] his *Traité du Beau*, etc. I took it up and went out.

If I hold Diderot's opinion it may seem to be because he has spoken last, and I own this usually counts for

[1] Kämpfer spent two years in Japan, 1692-94.—Tr.

[1] Diderot, 1713-84, a voluminous writer, and editor of the notorious *Cyclopédie*. The *Pensées* were burned by the parliament of Paris, 1746.—Tr.

much; but I modify his thought in my own way, for I still have the last word.

Leaving out Wolf,[1] Crouzas,[2] and the sixth sense of Hutcheson,[3] I agree in the main with all the rest, and for that reason I do not think the definition of the beautiful admits of such brief and simple expression as Diderot has given it. I believe with him that the feeling for beauty cannot exist apart from the perception of relations, but of what relations? If one has a notion of beauty at the sight of any relations whatsoever, it is not because one actually perceives it; one only imagines it. Seeing relations, we assume a centre; we conceive analogies, we anticipate a fresh expansion of soul ideas; but what is beautiful does not make us think of all that merely by suggestion, or incidentally; it contains and exhibits it. It is an advantage, no doubt, when a definition can be stated in a single phrase, but this conciseness must not make it too general and therefore false.

This is my statement of it: *The beautiful is that which evokes in us the idea of relations tending to a common end, on lines in harmony with our nature.* This definition includes the notions of order, proportion, unity, and even utility.

These relations are directed to a centre or end; that

[1] Wolf, German philosopher, 1679-1754; popularized Leibnitz and gave a great impulse to Rationalism.—TR.

[2] Crouzas, Swiss philosopher and mathematician, 1613-1748; tried to conciliate contemporary systems and refute extreme ones, especially Bayle's scepticism and the formalism of Wolf and Leibnitz.—TR.

[3] Hutcheson, 1694-1746, Professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow, one of the founders of the Scottish School of Metaphysics.—TR.

gives order and unity. They move on lines which are nothing but proportion, regularity, symmetry, and simplicity, according as one or other of these principles happens to be more or less essential to the nature of the whole constituted by these relations. This whole is the unity without which there is no result, no work of beauty, because in that case there is not a work at all. Every product must be a thing in itself; we have made nothing if we have not made it a coherent whole. Without this coherence nothing is beautiful; it is not a thing at all, but a collection of things which may produce unity and beauty when they are combined to form a whole with what is still lacking. Until then they are mere materials; their association does not generate beauty, though they may be severally beautiful, like those private note-books whose formless contents do not constitute a work, though they may be filled up and entire. Thus a compilation of random and disjointed moral reflections of the noblest kind is far from being a treatise on morals.

If this coherent whole, complete in itself though more or less composite, is perceptibly adapted to the nature of man, it is directly or indirectly serviceable to him. It can supply his needs, or at any rate extend his knowledge; it may serve as a new instrument, or afford scope for a new industry; it may intensify his life and gratify his restless, grasping spirit.

The object is more beautiful and has a genuine unity when the relations we perceive in it are exact, and converge to a common centre; and if there is absolutely nothing but what is necessary to produce this result, its beauty is greater still; it has simplicity. Every

quality is impaired by the admixture of a foreign quality; when there is no admixture the thing is more exact, more symmetrical, simpler, more of a unity, more beautiful; it is perfect.

There are two chief ways in which the idea of utility enters into that of beauty. First, the utility of every part to the common end; next, the utility of the whole to us who have correspondences with that whole.

In the *Philosophie de la Nature* we read: "It seems to me that the philosopher may define beauty as the obvious harmony of a whole with its parts." I find from a note that you once defined it thus: "The adaptation of the different parts of a thing to their common end on the most effective and at the same time the simplest lines." That has almost the very flavour of the statement of Crouzas. He gives five characteristics of the beautiful, and thus defines proportion, which is one of them: "Unity *flavoured* with variety, with regularity and order in each part."

Given something which is well-adjusted, adapted to our requirements, and evoking a sense of beauty, if it seems to be superior or equal to what we contain within us we call it beautiful; if it seems inferior we call it pretty. If its adaptation to ourselves has reference to matters of slight importance, though they minister directly to our habits and immediate desires, we call it agreeable. If its correspondences are with our souls, inspiring and broadening our thought, expanding and ennobling our affections, showing us in external objects new and striking adaptations which awaken in us the sense of a universal order, of an end common to a host of beings, then we call it sublime.

The perception of definite relations is the source of the idea of beauty, and the expansion of soul resulting from their adaptation to our nature constitutes the feeling of beauty.

When the relations referred to have a touch of vagueness and immensity, when their correspondences with ourselves and with part of Nature are better felt than seen, they evoke a delightful mood, full of hope and charm, an indefinable joy that gives promise of joys unbounded; that is the kind of beauty which enchants and enthrals. What is pretty diverts us; the beautiful sustains the soul, the sublime astounds or uplifts it; but that which ravishes and captivates the heart is that still more elusive and pervading beauty, little known, never explained, mysterious and ineffable.

Thus it is that in hearts meant for love, love gives radiance to all things, and makes every phase of consciousness an ecstasy. As it sets up within us the highest relation we can have with anything external, it makes us readily responsive to all relations, to all harmonies; it reveals a new world to our affections. Borne along by its rapid movement, carried away by that energy which promises everything, and even yet in spite of all deludes us, we seek, we feel, we love, we long for all that Nature has in store for man.

But the frustrations of life come to curb us, driving us in upon ourselves. As we retreat we set ourselves to renounce eternal things, and limit ourselves to actual needs; a melancholy sphere, where bitterness and baffled questioning do not wait until we die, but dig a yawning grave within our hearts which swallows up

and extinguishes all they might have had of candour, charm, desire, and native goodness.

LETTER XXII.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *August 9th* (II.).

I felt I must see once more all the places I used to be so fond of, and I am visiting the most distant before the nights grow cold, the trees are stripped, and the birds take their flight.

Yesterday I set out before daybreak; the moon was still shining, and the shadows it cast were perceptible in spite of the dawn. The valley of Changy was still in darkness while I was on the heights of Avon. I dropped down to Basses-Loges, and was just arriving at Valvin when the sun rose behind Samoreau and glowed on the rocks of Samois.

Valvin is not a village and has no arable land. Its inn stands solitary at the foot of an eminence, on a smooth strip of beach between the river and the woods. To see the place at its best, one ought either to put up with the tedium of the coach, a horrid conveyance, and reach Valvin or Thomery by water in the evening, when the slope is in gloom and the stags are belling in the forest, or else at sunrise, when everything is still asleep, when the deer are put to flight by the cry of the boatman as it rings through the tall poplars and echoes from the heather-clad hills all steaming in the first rays of the sun.

In a level country, mild effects like this are worth a

great deal. At the very least they are interesting at certain hours. But the slightest alteration spoils them; rid the neighbouring woods of fallow deer, or cut down the trees that clothe the hill, and Valvin will be nothing. Even as it is, I should not care to stay there; in broad daylight it is a very ordinary place; besides, the inn is not fit to sleep in.

On leaving Valvin I took an uphill road to the north, skirting a mass of sandstone whose situation in flat and open country, encircled by woods and facing the west, gives a sense of desolation touched with melancholy. As I walked on, I compared this place with one near Bourron which had given me just the opposite impression. Finding the two places very much alike in all save aspect, it dawned on me at last why, among the Alps, places identical in appearance had produced on me such contrary effects. Thus Bulle and Planfayon saddened me, though they have the characteristic features of La Gruyère, on the borders of which they are situated; and in both localities the tone and customs of a mountain region are at once perceptible. On the other hand, I felt sorry when I was prevented from settling in a wild and barren gorge of the Dent du Midi.[1] So I found ennui at Yverdon[2]; but at Neuchâtel, on the same lake, an exceptional sense of well-being. The charm of Vevey and the melancholy of Unterwalden are thus accounted for, and possibly the different characteristics of the people may be explained on similar grounds. People are influenced as much, or even more, by differences in aspect, climate, and

[1] See Letter V.—Tr.

[2] *Ibid.*, IV.—Tr.

humidity than by differences in laws and customs. In fact, the last-mentioned variations have themselves arisen, in the first instance, from physical causes.

I next turned westward and hunted up the fountain of Mont Chauvet. With the boulders that strew the ground a shelter has been contrived to protect the spring from the sun and the drifting sand, and there is also a circular mound where it is usual to breakfast when one comes to draw water. Sometimes one meets with sportsmen, ramblers, working men; but sometimes also with a dismal gathering of Parisian valets, and shopkeepers from the Quartier Saint-Martin or the Rue Saint-Jacques, who have retired to a town patronized by the king. Here they cluster, either by the water, which is convenient when one wants to eat a meat pie with one's friends, or by a certain naturally hollowed boulder near the road, which greatly interests them. They regard it with reverence and call it the *confessional*, recognizing in it with emotion one of those freaks of Nature that mimic sacred objects and prove that the national religion is the end and aim of all things.

I, however, plunged into the lonely vale, where this feeble rivulet sinks away without forming a brook. Turning towards the cross of Grand-Veneur, I discovered a solitude as stern as the renunciation I am striving after. I went round the rocks of Cuvier, steeped in sadness, and stayed a long time in the gorges of Aspremont. Towards evening I neared the solitudes of Grand-Franchart, an old monastery isolated among hills and stretches of sand; its now deserted ruins were originally dedicated by human vanity, even

in this uninhabited region, to morbid humility and the craving for notoriety. At a later time brigands, they say, replaced the monks; they restored the principles of freedom, but in a way disastrous to any who were not free, as they were. Night was coming on, so I selected a shelter in a kind of parlour, the ancient door of which I burst open. I collected into it some brushwood along with bracken and other herbage, so as not to spend the night on the bare stone, and then I wandered off for some hours longer, for the moon was due to shine. As a matter of fact so it did, and yet dimly, as if to add to the solitude of that desolate relic. Not a cry, not a bird, not a movement broke the silence the whole night long. But when all that chafes us is still, when everything sleeps and leaves us in peace, then awake the spectres in our own hearts.

Next day I turned southwards, and while I was among the hills a storm passed over. I was delighted to see it brewing, and easily found a shelter among the rocks, which were full of clefts and piled one upon another. From the back of my cave I loved to see how the junipers and birches withstood the gusts of wind, defrauded though they were of a fertile habitat and congenial soil, and how they maintained their free though impoverished existence, with no support but the walls of fissured rock between which they hung, and no nourishment but a little earthy moisture collected in the crevices their roots had penetrated.

When the rain began to pass off, I plunged into the moist and freshened woods and skirted the edge of the forest towards Reclose, La Vignette, and Bourron. Then I veered again towards Little Mont Chauvet as

far as Croix-Hérant and took my way between Malmontagne and Route-aux-Nymphes. I reached home regretfully towards evening, well pleased with my ramble; if anything can strictly be said to give me either pleasure or regret.

There is within me something out of joint; a kind of delirium which is not that of the passions, any more than that of insanity; it is the irritation of ennui, the discord it has set up between myself and circumstances, the uneasiness that long-suppressed wants have substituted for desires.

Not that I still crave for desires; they do not in the least delude me. No more do I wish for their extinction; that utter silence would be more dreadful still. Desires are but the futile beauty of the rose before an eye for ever closed; they point to what I can scarcely see and could never possess. If hope still seems to fling a gleam into the darkness round me, it tells of nothing but the gloom it will leave behind when it fades; it only reveals the vastness of that void in which I have groped and found nothing.

Lovely climates, beautiful places, nightly skies, special sounds, old memories, times and seasons, Nature full of charm and meaning, noble affections, all have passed before my eyes; all entice and all elude me. I am alone. The energies of my heart have no outlet, they react upon themselves; they wait and wait. Here I am, wandering and solitary in the earth, amid a crowd which to me is nothing, like a man long since by accident deprived of hearing. His eager eye is fixed on all the silent beings who pass and bustle before him; he sees everything, and everything is

denied him ; he imagines the sounds he loves, he listens for them, and hears them not ; he endures the silence of all things amid a world of noise. Everything presents itself to his gaze but he cannot grasp it ; an all-pervading melody is in external things, it is in his imagination, but no longer in his heart ; he is cut off from the universe of life, there is no longer any point of contact between them ; everything exists before him in vain, he lives alone, he is an alien in the living world.

LETTER XXIII.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *October* 18*th* (II.).

Can there be for man too the long peace of autumn, after the unrest of his years of vigour? Like a fire that blazes furiously and then dies lingeringly away.

Long before the equinox the leaves were falling thick and fast, and yet the forest still keeps much of its greenness and all its beauty. Six weeks ago everything seemed as if it must end before its time, and yet here it is still, holding out beyond the expected limit, having obtained a reprieve on the brink of destruction ; and as this added term glides swiftly to dissolution, it is poised a moment in graceful security, and then slips gently away in lingering sweetness which seems to blend the peace of its on-coming death with the charm of the life left behind.

LETTER XXIV.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *October 28th* (II.).

When the days of hoar-frost are over I scarcely miss them; spring passes and leaves me unmoved; summer too, and I feel no regret; but I do enjoy tramping over the fallen leaves in the bare forest during these last fine days of the year.

Whence comes this most abiding joy of man's heart, this ecstasy of melancholy, this mystic charm, which gives him life through its sorrows and self-contentment even in the consciousness of its decay? I love this happy season which so soon will be over. It awakens a belated interest, a kind of self-conflicting pleasure, just as it is drawing to a close. The same moral law makes me on the one hand shrink from the idea of dissolution, and on the other makes me in love with the signs of it here, in what must end before myself. It is natural to feel a deeper joy in our perishable existence when, with open eyes to all its frailty, we feel it holding out within ourselves. When death severs us from external things they live on without us. But at the fall of the leaf vegetation stops and dies, while we remain to watch its generations come and go. Autumn is delicious because for us another spring will come.

So far as Nature herself is concerned spring is more beautiful; but to man, as he has made himself, autumn is sweeter. Ah, breaking buds and singing birds, and opening flowers! Returning warmth that quickens

life, protecting shade of dim, secluded nooks, luxuriant herbage, wilding fruits, genial nights that leave one free to wander! Ah, happy, dreaded time to me, all vehement and restless as I am! I find more calm in the eventide of the year; the season when all seems ending is the only one in which I sleep in peace in the world of men.

LETTER XXV.

FONTAINEBLEAU, *November 6th* (II.).

I am leaving my woods. I had some notion of staying here for the winter, but if I want to get rid finally of the business that brought me to Paris I cannot any longer neglect it. They keep sending for me, urging me, dinning it into me that since I calmly stay on in the country, I can apparently afford not to have it settled at all. They have little idea how I live here; if they had, they would say just the reverse; they would think it was for the sake of economy.

Even apart from that, I fancy I should have decided to leave the forest. By great good luck I have hitherto remained undiscovered. Smoke would betray me; I could not escape the notice of woodcutters, charcoal-burners and sportsmen; I do not forget that I am in a well-patrolled district. Besides I have not been able to make the arrangements that would be necessary for living here all the year round; I might not quite know what to do with myself during the deep snows, the thaws and cold rains.

So I am leaving the forest with its wandering, pensive life, and its faint though restful suggestion of a land of liberty.

You ask me what I think of Fontainebleau apart from the memories that give me a special interest in it, and from my mode of life during this visit.

The district as a whole is no great things, and it would not take much to spoil the best corners of it. The impressions produced by places which Nature has not invested with grandeur are inevitably variable, and in some sense precarious. It takes twenty centuries to alter the look of an Alp, but a wind from the north, the felling of a few trees, a new plantation, or comparison with other places, are quite enough to transform the appearance of an ordinary landscape. A forest full of fallow deer suffers much from their removal, and a place that is merely pleasant suffers still more when seen through older eyes.

What I like about it is the great extent of the forest, the magnificence of the woods in certain parts of it, the solitude of its tiny valleys, the freedom of its tracts of sand, its wealth of beech and birch; I like, too, the trim and comfortable appearance of the town, the very considerable advantage of never being muddy, and the no less rare one of seeing little poverty. Then there are fine roads, a great choice of byways, and a host of accidental features; though these, to tell the truth, lack prominence and variety. But as a place of residence it could only be really congenial to some one who had never known or imagined anything better. One could not seriously compare these low-lying regions with any scenery of real grandeur; they have neither waves nor

torrents, nor anything to surprise or charm—a mere monotonous surface which would have no beauty left if its woods were felled; a dull and commonplace medley of little tracts of heather, little gorges, and paltry, regular cliffs; a land of plains, where one can find plenty of men greedy for the lot they mean to win, but not one satisfied with that which he has.

The calm of a place like this is only the silence of a brief spell of charm; its solitude is not wild enough. To create the spell there must be a clear evening sky; or a dim yet settled autumn sky, with the forenoon sun shining through the haze. There must be deer and other woodland creatures to haunt the solitudes, filling them with romantic interest—the sound of the stags belling near and far in the night, the squirrel leaping from branch to branch of the lovely woods of Tillas with its chatter of alarm. Ah, lonely cries of living creatures! Ye do not people the solitudes, as the trite phrase wrongly puts it, you make them more impressive and mysterious; it is through you that they become romantic.

THIRD YEAR.

LETTER XXVI.

PARIS, *February 9th* (III.).

I must tell you all my weaknesses so that you may help me out, for I am in a hopeless muddle. Sometimes I feel sorry for myself, and sometimes just the reverse.

When I meet a carriage driven by a woman anything like my ideal, I go close alongside the horse until the wheel almost touches me; then I drop my eyes, clutch the lamp-bracket and bend a little, and the wheel goes past.

Once I was dreaming like this, looking hard, though not exactly staring. I had forgotten the wheel, so she was obliged to pull up. She was both young and womanly, verging on the beautiful, and exceedingly gracious. She reined in her horse, and seemed to check a rising smile. I still kept my eyes on her, and found myself smiling in reply, heedless of the horse and the wheel. I am sure my gaze was even then full of sadness. The horse cleared me, and she leaned over to see if the wheel had not touched me. I still dreamed on, but directly after I stumbled over those bundles of firewood that fruiterers make up to sell to the poor, and

the spell was broken. Is it not high time to display firmness, to be oblivious, or rather, to be engrossed only in things meet for manhood? Ought I not to leave behind these puerile fancies that make me so weak and weary?

I should be only too glad to get rid of them; but I do not know what to put in their place; and if I say to myself, I really must be a man at last, I find myself wholly at a loss. In your next letter, tell me what it is to be a man.

LETTER XXVII.

PARIS, *February 11th* (III.).

I cannot make out at all what people mean by Self-love [*amour-propre*]. They condemn it, and yet they say one ought to have it. From this I might have inferred that the love of self and of proprieties is good and necessary, that it is inseparable from a sense of honour, that its excess alone is pernicious, as all excess must be, and that in the case of actions prompted by self-love, one ought to consider whether they are good or bad, and not to censure them solely on the ground that self-love seems to have prompted them.

That is not what one finds in practice. One must have self-love—or be a servile toady [*pied-plat*, flat-foot], and yet one must never act from self-love; things good in themselves, or at any rate indifferent, become bad when self-love instigates them. You are

more used to society than I am; unravel its mysteries for me, please. I fancy you will find this question easier to answer than the one in my last letter. Moreover, as you have no patience with the abstract, here is a concrete instance, so that the problem to be solved may be one of practical experience.

A visitor was recently staying with some well-to-do friends in the country; he considered it a duty to his friends and himself not to lower himself in the estimation of the servants, and he assumed that appearances would be everything with that class of people. He received and paid no calls, but one solitary individual, a relative who chanced to turn up, happened to be an oddity, and badly off to boot, and his eccentric manner and somewhat common appearance were bound to give the servants the impression that he was a low kind of person. One does not talk to servants; one cannot enlighten them by a word, or enter into explanations; they do not know who you are, and they see none of your acquaintances except a man who is far from commanding their respect, and at whom they may indulge in a laugh. The gentleman I refer to was therefore greatly annoyed. He was blamed for it all the more because it was a relative who provoked it. There you have a reputation for self-love established at once, and yet in my opinion it was undeserved.

LETTER XXVIII.

PARIS, *February 27th* (III.).

You could not have asked me at a more opportune moment for the origin of the term *pied-plat*. This morning I knew no more about it than you, and I fear I am not much wiser this evening, though I have been told what I am about to tell you.

The Gauls submitted to the Romans, therefore they were meant for servants; the Franks invaded the Gauls, therefore they were born to conquer: startling conclusions! Now the Gauls or Welsh had very flat feet, and the Franks had high-arched ones. The Franks despised all these flat-feet, these conquered serfs and clod-hoppers, and now when the descendants of the Franks are in danger of having to obey the children of the Gauls, a flat-foot is still a man meant for a servant. I do not remember where I was reading lately that there is not a single family in France that can claim with any show of reason to be descended from that northern horde which took an already conquered country that its masters could not keep. But origins which elude the noble art of heraldry are demonstrated by existing facts. In the most heterogeneous mob one can easily pick out the grand-nephews of the Scythians,[1] and all the flat-feet recognize their masters. I have not the faintest recollection of the

[1] Some erudite gentlemen allege that the Franks and the Russians are the same race.

more or less aristocratic outlines of your foot, but I warn you that mine is that of the conquerors; it is for you to see whether you can still address me in familiar style.

LETTER XXIX.

PARIS, *March 2nd* (III.).

I cannot endure a country where the beggar must enforce his plea in the name of Heaven. What a people is that to whom man for his own sake counts for nothing!

When some forlorn creature says to me: "May the good Virgin bless you!"—when he thus voices his pathetic gratitude, I am far from hugging myself in secret pride because I am free from the bondage of superstitions and from those anti-religious prejudices which also sway the minds of men. Nay, my head droops involuntarily, my eyes are fixed on the ground, and I am distressed and humbled to see the mind of man so vast and so obtuse.

When it happens to be some feeble creature, begging all day long with the wail of tedious suffering in the heart of a crowded city, I am roused to indignation, and could find it in my heart to roughly handle those who go out of their way to avoid him, who see him only to ignore him. I am chafed to rawness in such a mob of sordid tyrants. I take a just and manly delight in fancying an avenging conflagration annihilating those cities and all their handiwork, their petty crafts, their

worthless books, their studios, forges and wood-yards. And yet do I know what should, what can be done? I have not the least idea.

I look at the facts of life, and am sunk in doubt; everything is wrapped in gloom. I will resign the very idea of a better world. Frustrated and weary, I only bewail my barren existence and chance desires. Knowing not where I am, I wait for the day that will end everything and explain nothing.

At the dress-circle entrance to the theatre the poor fellow did not find a single person to give him anything; they had nothing to give, and the doorkeeper who was looking after the smart people roughly ordered him off. He went towards the booking-office for the pit, where the doorkeeper, with a less imposing function, pretended not to see him. I still kept my eyes on him. At last a man who looked to me like a shop-assistant, and who already had in his hand the coin he needed for his ticket, refused the beggar courteously, then hesitated, felt his pockets but found nothing, and finally handed over to him the silver coin and turned away. The beggar realized the sacrifice; watched him going away, and stepped out as best he could, impelled to try and overtake him.

LETTER XXX.

PARIS, *March 7th* (III.).

The day was dull and somewhat cold; I was feeling depressed and was taking a walk because I could do nothing else. I passed some flowers set out on a wall

breast-high. A single jonquil was in bloom. It is the strongest expression of desire, and it was the first fragrance of the year. I caught a glimpse of all the happiness meant for man. That indescribable harmony of creation, the vision of the ideal world, was rounded to completeness within me; I have never felt anything so sudden and inspiring. I should be at a loss to say what form, what likeness, what subtle association it was that suggested to me in this flower an illimitable beauty, the expression, the refinement, and the pose of a happy, artless woman in all the grace and splendour of the days of love. I cannot picture to myself that power, that vastness which nothing concrete can display; that form which nothing can reveal; that conception of a better world which may be felt, but never found in Nature; that heavenly radiance which we think to grasp, which captivates and enthralls us, and which is but an intangible phantom, wandering and astray in depths of gloom.

But what man could catch a single glimpse of that phantom, that vague and lovely vision, and ever forget it, mighty as it is with all the charm of the unknown, essential to us in our miseries, and natural to our overweighted hearts?

When the blank resistance of a mere sordid brute force fetters and entangles us, binding us down and keeping us sunk in doubts, loathings, puerilities, and weak or cruel follies; when we know nothing and possess nothing; when all things pass before us like the weird figures of an absurd and hideous dream; who can still within us the craving for another order and another nature?

Is that light nothing but a capricious gleam? In the all-pervading darkness it entices and overcomes us; we yield to it and follow; even if it betrays us, at any rate it enlightens and inspires. We give reins to fancy, and see a world of peace, order, unity, and justice, in which all men feel, desire, and enjoy with the restraint that makes pleasure and with the simplicity that enhances it. When one has had a glimpse of delights that cannot be tarnished or destroyed, when one has imagined unstinted ecstasy, how vain and pitiful seem many of the cares, the longings, and the pleasures of the visible world. Everything feels cold and hollow; we languish in a place of exile, and from the core of our loathings we set our outweary heart on its imagined homeland. Everything that occupies and detains it here is then only a degrading chain; we should smile in pity if we were not overwhelmed with grief. And when imagination reverts once more to those better regions and compares a reasonable world with the world in which everything over-taxes and chafes us, we no longer feel sure whether that glorious vision is a mere happy fancy which distracts our thoughts from things as they are, or whether social life is not itself one long distraction.

LETTER XXXI.

PARIS, *March 30th* (III.).

I take great pains in little things, and in such matters have an eye to my interests. I never neglect the details of anything, those niceties which would evoke a smile

of pity in practical men. If serious affairs seem to me trifling, trifles on the other hand are precious to me. I must try to account for these peculiarities, and see whether I am naturally precise and faddy.

If it were a question of really important concerns, it I were responsible for the welfare of a nation, I know I should rise to the occasion under the heavy and noble burden. But I am ashamed of the concerns of every-day life; the cares of men all seem to me but childish worries. Many great schemes I can only regard as wretched encumbrances, in which man would not seek his greatness, if he were not weakened and confused by a delusive ideal.

I tell you in all sincerity, if I look at things thus it is because I cannot help it; I am not bigoted with empty conceit on the matter. I have many a time wanted to regard things differently, but have never succeeded. What shall I say? More wretched than others, I suffer among them because they are weak; and even if I were naturally stronger than they, I should suffer all the same, because they have weakened me to their level.

If you only knew how engrossed I am in trifles that one should dispense with at the age of twelve, how fond I am of those discs of hard clean wood which serve for plates in the mountains; how I save up old newspapers, not to be re-read, but because one can wrap things up in soft paper! How at the sight of a straight smooth board I cannot but exclaim, "Is not that fine?" While a well-cut jewel scarcely seems to me worth notice, and a string of diamonds makes me shrug my shoulders.

I only recognize immediate utilities; indirect advantages do not readily occur to me; I should feel the loss of ten louis less acutely than that of a handy knife I had long carried about with me.

You used to tell me long ago "Be sure not to neglect your affairs and let slip what you have left; you are not the sort of man to make money." I do not think you will have changed your mind even yet.

Am I then in bondage to trifles? Shall I assign these peculiarities to a taste for simplicity and to revolt from boredom, or are they a mere childish craze, the sign of incapacity for social, manly, and generous interests? When I hear so many over-grown children, shrivelled by age and self-interest, talking of their serious occupations, when I glance with disgust at my own fettered life, when I consider that nothing of all the human race requires is being produced, then it is that a frown gathers on my brow, the light fades from my face, and an involuntary quiver trembles on my lips. My eyes grow sunken and discouraged, and I look like a man worn-out with sleepless nights. A person of some importance once said to me, "You must be hard-worked!" Luckily I did not laugh. My embarrassment did not tell of diligence.

All these people who essentially are nobodies, yet whom I have to meet sometimes, compensate me a little for the ennui inflicted by their towns. The more sensible among them I like fairly well; they interest me.

LETTER XXXII.

PARIS, *April 29th* (III.).

Some time ago in the Library I heard the celebrated L—— addressed by name close beside me. Another time I happened to be at the same table, and as there was no ink, I passed him my inkstand. This morning I noticed him as I entered, and seated myself near him. He very kindly showed me some idylls he had discovered in an old Latin manuscript by a little-known Greek author. I copied the shortest only, as it was nearly closing-time.

LETTER XXXIII.

PARIS, *May 7th* (III.).

"If I am not mistaken, my idylls do not greatly interest you," remarked to me yesterday the author of whom I told you. He was looking out for me, and beckoned when I arrived. I was trying to find a reply that would be polite and yet true, but he kept his eyes on me and spared me the trouble by adding at once—"Perhaps you would prefer this moral or philosophical fragment, which has been attributed to Aristippus,[1] and is mentioned by Varro,[2] but has since been considered

[1] Greek philosopher, *c.* 390 B.C.; pupil of Socrates and founder of hedonistic philosophy.—TR.

[2] Probably M. Terentius Varro, 116-125 B.C., said to have been the most learned of all the Romans.—TR.

lost. It was not so, however, for it was translated in the fifteenth century into the French of that period. I have found it in manuscript, bound up with a set of Plutarch, in a copy printed by Amyot that nobody had used, because many of its leaves were missing."

I admitted that, not being a scholar, I really had the misfortune to prefer facts to words, and was therefore much more interested in the opinions of Aristippus than in an eclogue, were it even by Bion or Theocritus.[1]

There is no sufficient proof, so far as I can see, that this little document is really by Aristippus, and it is due to his memory that one should not attribute to him what he would perhaps repudiate. But if it is by him, then that noted Greek, as grossly misjudged as Epicurus, set down as an effeminate voluptuary or the advocate of a loose philosophy, had after all the strictness required by prudence and order, the only strictness meet for man, who was born to enjoy his brief passage through the world.

I have turned its occasionally choice though antiquated style into modern French as best I could. In several passages it cost me some trouble to get at its meaning. Here then is the whole piece, with the exception of the greater part of two lines that could not be made out. Its title in the manuscript is *The Manual of Pseusophanes.*

THE MANUAL.

Suppose you have just awakened dull and depressed, already weary of the coming day. You face life with aversion; it seems

[1] Greek pastoral poets of third century B.C.; the latter especially famous for his *Idylls.*—TR.

profitless and burdensome; an hour later it will seem more endurable; is the change then in life?

It has no definite quality; everything man experiences is in his heart, everything he knows is in his thought. He is wholly self-contained.

What losses can thus overwhelm you? What have you to lose? Does anything belong to you outside yourself? What do things perishable matter? Everything passes away, except the justice veiled behind the transient show of things. Everything is profitless for man if he does not advance with calm and steady pace according to the laws of intelligence.

Everything around you is restless and threatening; if you give way to fears, your anxieties will be endless. You cannot possess what is beyond possession, and you will lose your life, which does belong to you. Whatever happens is gone for ever. Events occur in an endless circle of necessity; they vanish like an unforeseen and fleeting shadow.

What are your evils? Imaginary fears, fancied needs, the frustrations of a day. Weak slave! You cling to what has no existence, you follow phantoms. Leave to the deluded crowd whatever is illusive, unprofitable, and transitory. Take account only of intelligence, which is the source of order in the world, and of man who is its instrument—of intelligence to be followed and man to be aided.

Intelligence wrestles with the resistance of matter, and with the blind laws whose unknown consequences used to be called chance. When the strength bestowed upon you has followed intelligence, when you have served the order of the world, what would you more? You have acted according to your nature; and what is there better for a being who feels and knows, than to exist according to his nature.

Daily, as you are reborn to life, call to mind that you have resolved not to pass through the world in vain. The world is travelling to its goal. But you, you stand still, you lose ground, you are still drifting and languid. Can the days gone by be lived again in happier times? Life rests wholly on that present

which you neglect for the sake of the future; the present alone is time, the future is but its reflection.

Live in yourself, and seek what does not perish. Examine what it is that our heedless passions seek. Among so many things, is there one to suffice the heart of man? Intelligence only finds in itself the food of its life; be just and strong. No one knows the morrow; you will never find peace in external things; seek it in your heart. Force is the rule of Nature; will is power; energy in suffering is better than apathy in pleasure. One who obeys and suffers is often greater than one who enjoys or commands. What you fear is vain, and what you desire is vain too. The only thing that can profit you is to be what Nature intended.

You are made up of intelligence and matter. The world itself is nothing more. Bodies are modified by a presiding harmony, and the whole tends to perfection by the continual improvement of its different parts. That law of the Universe is also the law of individuals.

. . . . . .

Thus everything is good when intelligence directs it, and everything is bad when intelligence forsakes it. Use the good things of the body, but with the prudence which makes them subservient to order. A pleasure enjoyed in accordance with Nature is better than a privation she does not require, and the most immaterial action of our life is less harmful than the struggle of those superfluous virtues which check the spread of wisdom.

There is for us no other morality than that of man's own heart, no other knowledge or wisdom than the recognition of its needs and a true estimate of the means of happiness. Have nothing to do with useless knowledge, supernatural systems, and mystic doctrines. Leave to other intelligences of a higher order or a different type what is remote from yourself. What cannot be clearly discerned by your intelligence was never intended for it.

Comfort, enlighten, and support your fellows. The part you are to play is fixed by the place you fill in the vast scale of

being. Recognize and follow the laws of manhood, and you will help other men to know and follow them. Ponder and show to them the centre and end of things; let them see the cause of what astounds them, the instability of what disturbs them, the nothingness of what allures them.

Do not hold aloof from the rest of the world; always take account of the Universe, and be mindful of justice. You will have spent your life worthily and played the man.

LETTER XXXIV.

EXTRACT FROM TWO LETTERS.

PARIS, *June 2nd and 4th* (III.).

Actors of the front rank occasionally visit Bordeaux, Marseilles, and Lyons, but to see a good play you must go to Paris. Tragedy and genuine comedy require an *ensemble* that cannot be found elsewhere. The performance of high-class plays becomes tame or even ridiculous if they are not acted with almost perfect skill; they afford no gratification to a man of taste when he cannot applaud in them a worthy and faithful representation of natural expression. In plays of the second-rate comic order it is sufficient if the leading actor has real talent. Burlesque does not require the same strict harmony; it even admits of incongruities, because it is itself based on a fine sense of incongruity; but when the subject is heroic one cannot tolerate faults that raise a laugh in the pit.

Some spectators are so happy as not to need a

realistic setting; they always fancy the thing is real, and whatever the acting they are sure to weep at sighs or a dagger. But people not given to weeping would hardly go to the play to hear what they could read at home; they go to see it interpreted, and to compare one actor's treatment of a passage with another's.

I have seen at intervals of a few days the difficult part of Mahomet played by the only three actors who are equal to attempting it. La R—— was badly got up, and spouted away with too much animation and too little dignity, exaggerating the final speech most of all, and only pleased me in three or four passages where I recognized the able tragedian one admires in parts that suit him better.

S. P—— plays the part well; he has studied it thoroughly, and interprets it satisfactorily, but he is always the actor, never Mahomet.

B—— seemed to me really to understand this wonderful part. His manner, in itself remarkable, seemed just that of an Oriental prophet, though perhaps not so great, so stately, so imposing, as befitted a conquering lawgiver, a divinely-sent messenger ordained to convince by astounding, to subdue, to triumph, to reign. True, Mahomet—

"Chargé des soins de l'autel et du trône"

was not so ostentatious as Voltaire has made him, nor was he such a knave. But the actor I refer to is perhaps not exactly the Mahomet of history, though one might reasonably expect him to be the Mahomet of the tragedy. He satisfied me better than the other

two, however, though the second has a finer presence, and the first greater resources on the whole. B—— alone was tactful in checking the imprecation of Palmyra. S. P—— drew his *sword*, and I feared a burst of laughter. La R—— put his hand on it, and cowed Palmyra with his look; what then was the use of putting his hand on his scimitar—that threat against a woman, against Palmyra, young and beloved? B—— was not even armed; I liked that to begin with. Then when he was weary of listening to Palmyra and wished to silence her, his piercing, terrible glance seemed to command her in the name of God, and compelled her to stand wavering between the dread inspired by her former faith and the despair she felt when love and conscience were deceived.

How can one seriously assert that the mode of representation is a mere matter of convention? It is a mistake akin to the false application usually given to the saying, "There's no accounting for tastes."

What did M. R. prove by singing to the same notes, "I have *lost* my Eurydice," and "I have *found* my Eurydice?" Admitting that the same notes may be used to express the highest joy or the bitterest sorrow, is the significance of the music entirely contained in the notes? In substituting the word *found* for *lost*, in replacing sorrow by joy, though you keep the same notes, you completely transform the secondary signs of expression. Even a foreigner who understood neither of the words would infallibly perceive the difference. These secondary signs also form part of the music; one might say the particular note is immaterial.

This play [*Mahomet*] is one of Voltaire's finest; but

perhaps for an audience of different nationality he would not have made the conquering prophet the lover of Palmyra. True, the love of Mahomet is manly, imperious, somewhat fierce even; he does not love like Titus,[1] but it would have been better had he not loved at all. Mahomet's fondness for women is well known, but it is probable that in his great ambitious heart, after so many years of deception, retreat, peril, and triumph, it was not the fondness of love.

This love for Palmyra is not in keeping with his noble destiny and his genius. Love is out of a place in a stern heart engrossed in its schemes, aged by the hunger for power—a heart to which pleasures would be impossible without forgetfulness, and even happiness would only be a distraction.

What signifies his "Love alone consoles me?" Who compelled him to seek the throne of the Orient, to leave his wives and his humble independence for the censer, the sceptre, and arms? "Love alone consoles me!" Was it then so dull and sluggish a life of inactivity to shape the destiny of nations, to transform the worship and laws of half the globe, to exalt Arabia on the wreck of a world? It was a difficult task, no doubt, but just the one to leave no room for love. The cravings of the heart arise from the emptiness of the soul; he who has great things in hand has the less need of love.

One could understand it if this man who had long distanced his fellows, and had to reign as God in a

[1] The reference is probably to the Roman emperor of that name (40-81 A.D.); a humane and benevolent prince, beloved of his subjects. —Tr.

spell-bound universe, if this favourite of the God of battles had loved a woman who could help him to bewitch the universe, or a woman born to rule like Zenobia;[1] or even if he had been loved in return; but here we have that Mahomet, who subdued nature to his stern will, besotted with love for a child who cared nothing for him.

A night with Laïs[2] may perhaps be man's greatest pleasure, yet after all it is a pleasure only. But to be devoted to an extraordinary woman, by whom one is loved, is more; it is even a duty, though after all only a secondary duty.

I cannot understand those great ones to whom a glance of their mistress is law. I know pretty well what love can do, but a man who governs is not at its mercy. Love entails mistakes, illusions, blunders; and the blunders of a great man are too far-reaching and deadly; they are public misfortunes.

I cannot endure those men entrusted with great authority who forget to govern as soon as they find anything else to do; who set their affections above their duty, and think that everything has been placed at their disposal for their own pleasure; who manipulate the affairs of nations to suit the caprices of their private life, and who would make mincemeat of their army to get a sight of their mistress. I pity the nation whose monarch rates it lowest in the scale of his loves, and whose fate would be sealed if some favourite's chamber-maid saw a prospect of gain by betraying it.

[1] Queen of Palmyra and governor of the East; led in triumph to Rome by Aurelian, 272 B.C.—TR.

[2] A notorious Corinthian courtesan.—TR.

LETTER XXXV.

PARIS, *July 8th* (III.).

At last I have found a reliable man to wind up the affairs that have been detaining me. There was not much left of them in any case; there is no help for it; everybody knows I am beggared. I have not even a bare pittance, until a contingency, that may be very remote, occurs to improve my position. I am not at all distressed about it, and I do not seem to have lost much in losing all, for I got no pleasure out of it. True I may have more unhappiness than I had, but I cannot well have less happiness. I am alone, I have only my own wants to supply, and so long as I am neither ill nor in prison, my lot will always be bearable. I have little fear of bad luck, for I am sick to death of futile good. Life must needs have its reverses; then is the time for endurance and courage. Then hope awakens and we say "I am passing through my time of trial, I am working off my share of misfortune, better days will surely follow." But in prosperity, when circumstances seem to rank us with the happier, and yet the heart has joy of nothing, we begrudge the loss of what fortune will not continue to bestow. We bewail the sadness of our best days, and we dread the misfortune that awaits us in the ups and downs of life,—all the more because we are so unhappy even as things are that we cannot but regard the fresh burden it will lay upon us as quite unsupportable. Thus it is

that people who live in the country can better endure its tedium in winter, which they call beforehand the dismal season, than in summer, when they expect the compensations of country life.

I can do nothing more to remedy what is past, and I cannot tell what step to take in the future until we have talked it over together, so I think of nothing but the present. What a happy riddance of all anxiety! Never have I been so tranquil. I am starting for Lyons; I will spend some ten days with you in blissful indifference to my fate, and then—we shall see.

FIFTH YEAR.

FIRST FRAGMENT.

If happiness were proportioned to our privations or our prosperity there would be too much inequality between men. If happiness were solely dependent on character that inequality would still be too great. If it were absolutely dependent on the combination of character with circumstances, those whom their prudence and their destiny agreed to favour would have too many advantages. Some men would be very happy and others profoundly unhappy. But it is not circumstances alone that constitute our lot, nor even the concurrence of existing circumstances with the effect or with the established habits of past circumstances, or with the distinctive features of our character. This combination of causes has far-reaching effects, but it is not sufficient to account for our awkward temper and vexation, our discontent, our dissatisfaction with men and things, and with human life as a whole. We have within ourselves this general principle of coldness and aversion or indifference; we all have it, quite apart from anything our personal inclination may have to do with augmenting it or modifying its consequences. A specific mood of mind, or a certain attitude of our whole being is bound to produce in us this moral affec-

tion. Sorrow is necessary to us as well as joy; we have as much need to be chafed by things as we have to enjoy them.

Man can no more desire and possess uninterruptedly than he can suffer without intermission. Neither happy sensations nor unhappy ones can last long in the complete absence of contrary sensations. The instability of the affairs of life does not admit of constancy in the affection that life inspires in us, and even if external things were otherwise ordered, our own organization is not capable of invariability.

If the man who believes in his luck does not see misfortune approaching from without, he is not slow to find it within, and the poor wretch who receives no outward consolations soon finds them in his heart. When we have planned and obtained everything essential to constant enjoyment we are far from achieving happiness. There must still be some unwelcome and distressing factor, for if we had succeeded in banishing all evil, then the good itself would fail to please us.

But if neither the faculty of enjoyment nor of suffering can be exercised to the complete exclusion of what was meant by our very nature to counterbalance it, either of them for the time being may be greatly in excess of the other; hence circumstances, without being all in all to us, have a powerful influence over our inner moods. If the favourites of fortune have no great provocatives of suffering, small ones are sufficient to produce it in them; causes being absent, everything becomes an occasion. The victims of adversity, with their great occasions for suffering, will suffer acutely, but when they have suffered enough for the present they

will not suffer habitually; as soon as circumstances leave them in peace they will suffer no longer, because the need of suffering is satisfied within them, and they will even enjoy, because each need reacts with all the more regularity when the satisfaction of its opposite has carried us too far in the other direction.[1]

These two forces tend to equilibrium, but they never reach it, unless it be for the race as a whole. If there were no tendency to equilibrium there would be no order, and if equilibrium were established in details, all would be rigid, there would be no movement. On either supposition there would be no unity with variety, the world would not be.

It seems to me that the man who is very unhappy, but by fits and starts, is bound to have a steadfast inclination towards joy, calm, delights of affection, confidence, friendship, integrity.

The man who is very unhappy but in a steady, protracted, monotonous fashion, will be continually torn by two impulses; his temper will be uncertain, awkward, irritable. Always imagining the good, and for that very reason always chafed by evil, conscious in every detail of this antithesis, he will be more wearied than captivated by the least illusions; he is at once disenchanted, and is equally interested and disheartened by everything.

He who is constantly half happy and half unhappy, so to speak, will verge on equilibrium, and in this even mood will be good rather than great; his life will be

[1] In the state of unhappiness the reaction will be all the stronger, for the nature of an organized being urges him more definitely to his well-being and self preservation.

pleasant rather than happy; he will have judgment, but little genius.

He who is always enjoying, and never has any outward misfortune, will be captivated by nothing; he has no further need of enjoyment, and amid his external well-being he is secretly conscious of a perpetual need of suffering. He will not be generous, indulgent, loving, but will be unmoved by the greatest joys, apt to find a grievance in the smallest inconvenience. Unaccustomed to experience reverses, he will have confidence, but it will be in himself and his luck, not in his fellows; he feels no need of their support, and as he is more fortunate than the majority, he almost fancies himself wiser than all. He would fain always enjoy, and most of all would like to seem to be enjoying himself to the full, and yet he experiences an inner need for suffering; hence on the slightest pretext he readily finds reason for quarrelling with circumstances and being unsociable with his fellows. Devoid of real well-being, yet having nothing better to hope for, he will desire nothing definitely, but will be fond of change in general, and will like it better in details than in his life as a whole. Possessing too much, he will be ready to part with all. He will take a certain pleasure and foster a kind of vanity in being irritable, unsociable, suffering, discontented. He will be hard to please, exacting; for otherwise what would remain to him of the superiority he claims over others, a superiority he would still aspire to even if he no longer claimed it? He will be a hard man, seeking to surround himself with slaves, so that others may admit his superiority, and at least suffer from it when he himself has no joy of it.

I question whether it is good for man in his present state to be uniformly fortunate without ever having the fates against him. Perhaps the happy man, among beings like ourselves, is he who has suffered much, but not constantly, nor in that protracted wearing manner which enervates our faculties without being extreme enough to rouse the secret energy of the soul and bring it to the happy resolve to seek for unknown resources within.[1] It is a lifelong advantage to have been unhappy at the age when mind and heart were beginning to live. It is the admonition of fate; it fashions good men,[2] it broadens ideas, and matures the heart before old age enfeebles it; it develops man soon enough for him to be man in the fullest sense. If it rob us of joy and gaiety, it inspires a sense of order and a taste for domestic blessings; it bestows the greatest happiness we ought to expect, that of expecting nothing beyond a vegetative existence in usefulness and peace. We are far less miserable when we are content simply to live; we are far nearer being useful when even in the very prime of life we seek nothing for self. I am not aware of anything but unhappiness that can thus mature the average man before he reaches old age.

True goodness requires broadened conceptions, a great soul, and curbed passions. If goodness is man's highest merit, if moral perfections are essential to happiness, then it is among those who have suffered deeply in the early years of their heart's life that we

[1] All this, though expressed in a positive manner, must not be taken as rigorously true.

[2] There are men whom it embitters; those who are not wicked and yet fall short of goodness.

shall find characters best moulded for their own ends and for the interest of all, most gifted with justice and intelligence, nearest to happiness, and most inflexibly loyal to virtue.

What matters it to the social order that an old man renounces the objects of his passions, or that a weak man harbours no destructive schemes? Goody-goody folk are not good men; those who only do good through weakness would do much harm under other circumstances. Capable of mistrust, of animosity, superstition, and, most of all, of obstinacy, he who is a blind instrument in various laudable undertakings in which his fancy has enlisted him will equally become the base sport of any mad idea that turns his brain, or craze that perverts his heart, or pernicious scheme in which some rogue or other will employ him.

But the good man is invariable; he shares the passions of no set, and the habits of no class, he is not made a tool of; he is incapable either of animosity, ostentation, or foolish crazes; goodness does not surprise him, because he would have done the same himself; nor does evil, because it is part of nature; he is indignant at crime without hating the culprit; he scorns baseness of soul, but he is not angry with the worm for not having wings.

He is no enemy of the superstitious man, for he cherishes no contrary superstitions. He inquires into the origin, often rational enough,[1] of many a senseless

[1] Obscure or profound ideas deteriorate with time, and we become accustomed to regard them in a different light; when they begin to be false the masses begin to think them divine, and when they have become utterly absurd then men are willing to die for them.

opinion, and laughs to see how men have followed a false scent. His virtues spring from love of order, not from fanaticism; he does good that his life may be more useful; he sets the joys of others before his own, for enjoyment is possible to them though scarcely to himself; he wants simply to keep for himself the means of being of some use, and to live in peace and quietness, for calm is indispensable to one who has no pleasures in prospect. He is by no means suspicious; but as he is not taken in, he sometimes thinks it well not to give himself away; he can enjoy being played with a little, but he does not mean to be a dupe. He may have something to put up with from rascals, but he is not their cat's-paw. At times he will allow certain men to whom he is serviceable to secretly pride themselves on being his protectors. He is not content with his achievements, for he feels they might be much greater; it is only with his intentions that he feels a measure of satisfaction, though without being prouder of these inward features than he would be of a well-shaped nose. Thus he will spend his time in pressing on towards the best, sometimes with vigorous though encumbered steps; more often with faltering hesitation, and the smile of one who has lost heart.

When it is necessary to contrast human merit with other feigned or useless merits by which men try to confuse and debase everything, he maintains that the supreme merit is the calm integrity of the good man, for that is the most infallibly useful; and on being taxed with pride he laughs. When he endures the discomforts and forgives the injuries of domestic life, and is asked why he does not attempt greater things, he

laughs. When such great things are entrusted to him, and he is accused by the friends of a traitor and blamed by the victim of their treachery, he smiles and goes on his way. His own people tell him it is an unheard of injustice, and he laughs still more.

SIXTH YEAR.

SECOND FRAGMENT.

I AM not surprised that accuracy of ideas on ethical matters should be so rare. The ancients, even without the experience of centuries to guide them, sometimes thought of entrusting the control of the human heart to sages. Our modern policy improves on that; it leaves the supreme science to the tender mercy of preachers, and the mob called men of letters by the printers, while it religiously protects the art of icing cakes and inventing new styles of wigs.

When we turn our attention to the grievances of a certain class of people and begin to ascertain the grounds of them, we discover that one of the most novel and serviceable tasks we could undertake would be that of warning men against deceptive truths and destructive virtues.

Contempt for money is absurd. No doubt it is a crime to prefer gold to duty, but we all know that the dictates of reason set duty before life as well as before riches. And if life is none the less a good thing, speaking generally, why should not gold be good too? Certain

independent and isolated individuals do right to dispense with it, but all are not in that category, and great harm is done to virtue by such vain and half false declamations. The principles of conduct are thereby filled with contradictions; and if virtue is nothing but a struggle for order, will it be furthered among men by all this disorder and confusion? Though I myself set greater store on qualities of heart than of head, I still think that the educator of a people would find it easier to curb the bad-hearted than to conciliate the wrong-headed.

Christians and others have declared perpetual chastity to be a virtue, but they have not exacted it of men; they have not even advised it, except for those who were aiming at perfection. Though a law from heaven should be absolute and indiscriminating, it did not dare to go further than this. And in telling men not to love money we cannot display too much moderation and precision of language. Religious and philosophical abnegation have inspired in various individuals a genuine indifference to riches and even to ownership of any kind, but in everyday life the desire for gold is unavoidable. With gold, in whatever inhabited region I find myself, I make a sign that means—prepare for me, feed me, clothe me, amuse me, respect me, wait on me and mine, let all around me be merry, let the sufferer speak and see the end of his troubles! And straightway the order is carried out.

Despisers of gold are like despisers of glory, of women, of talents, of bravery, of merit. When feebleness of mind, impotence of body, or coarseness of soul render them incapable of using any privilege without perverting it, they revile the privilege itself without realizing that

they are holding up to reprobation their own baseness. A dissolute man despises women; a dull thinker rails at mind, a sophist utters platitudes against money. Doubtless the weak slaves of passion, fools who try to be clever, and gaping Philistines, would be either more miserable or more depraved if they were rich; people of that sort ought to own little, for with them to possess and to abuse are one and the same. Doubtless, too, the man who grows rich, and sets himself to get all out of life that a rich man can, does not gain, and often loses, by his altered circumstances. But why is he no better off than before? Because he is not really richer; with increase of wealth he has more worry and uneasiness. He has a large income, and he lives in such style that the merest trifle creates a deficit, and his debts multiply until he is ruined. Obviously such a man is poor. To multiply his wants a hundred-fold, to do everything for show, to keep twenty horses because someone else has fifteen, and to raise the number to thirty next day if his neighbour reaches twenty—all this is to load himself with the fetters of a more galling and anxious penury than he lived in at first. But to have a convenient house in a healthy situation, clean and tidy within, to have something to spare, and combine simplicity with elegance, to live in the same style even if one's wealth is increased four-fold, to employ the surplus in relieving the embarrassment of a friend, in preparing for a rainy day, in restoring to a good man in adversity what he gave in his youth to those now more prosperous than himself, in making up the loss of her one cow to some good mother, in sending corn to the farmer whose crop has been spoiled by hail, in

mending the road where wagons have been upset[1] and horses injured, in exercising one's own faculties and tastes, in developing the intelligence, orderliness, and talents of a family—all this is well worth the privation so inaptly extolled by spurious wisdom.

Contempt of gold, when really encouraged in those of an age ignorant of its value, has often robbed superior men of one of the greatest and perhaps most infallible means of living more usefully than the crowd.

How many girls, in choosing a husband, pride themselves in caring nothing for worldly goods, and thus plunge themselves into all the sordidness of straitened circumstances and into the settled ennui which in itself contains so many evils?

A quiet and sensible man who despises a frivolous character is apt to be captivated by similarity in tastes; he leaves to the crowd gaiety and merriment, and even vivacity and energy; he chooses a serious, pensive wife, who grows melancholy over the first obstacle, who is soured by worries, who becomes taciturn, brusque, exacting, and austere with increasing years, who grudgingly submits to forego anything, and finally foregoes everything in a spirit of pique and to set an example to others, and ends by making the whole household miserable.

It was in no trivial sense that Epicurus used to say, "The wise man chooses a friend of a cheerful and cordial disposition." The philosopher of twenty lightly

[1] The word *Char* is not used in this sense in the greater part of France, where two-wheeled carts (*charettes à deux roues*) are more used. But in Switzerland and elsewhere the term is applied to light wains and four-wheeled country carriages.

ignores this advice, and it is much if he does not resent it, for he has cast off popular prejudices; but he will realize its importance when he has outgrown the prejudices of philosophy.

It is a small thing to be superior to the common herd of men, but it is a real step towards wisdom to be superior to the ruck of philosophers.

LETTER XXXVI.

LYONS, *April 7th* (VI.).

What would Nature be to man if she did not speak to him of other men? Glorious mountains, shuddering rush of drifted snows, lonely peace of wooded vales, yellow leaves borne down by some still stream—all would be dumb, if our fellows were no more. If I were left the last man on the earth, what meaning could I find in the weird sounds of night, in the solemn stillness of wide valleys, in the sunset glow of a pensive sky above unruffled waters. We are only conscious of Nature under human relationships, and the eloquence of things is nothing but the eloquence of man. The fruitful earth, the vast skies, the running streams, are only phrases to express relationships which our hearts alone create and contain.

Could we but have a perfect understanding, an old-time friendship! When he who enjoyed an unstinted affection received the pages on which he recognized the hand of a friend, had he any eyes left to study the

beauties of a landscape or the dimensions of a glacier? But human life has grown more complicated; our consciousness of its relationships is vague and uneasy, beset with coolnesses and jars; the older friendship is far remote from our hearts and our lot. Its links are unwelded as we hover between hope and caution, between the delights we look for and the bitterness we experience. Fellowship itself is clogged by boredom, or weakened by participation, or thwarted by circumstances. Man grows old, and his baffled heart ages faster than himself. If in his fellows there is all he could love, all that he shrinks from is there too. Where one finds so much social affinity, there inevitably are all discords as well. Thus he whose fear is greater than his hope holds himself aloof from men. Inanimate things have less grip, but they are more at our disposal; they are what we make them. They afford less of what we seek, but what they do afford we are more sure of finding when we like. They are average blessings; limited, but secure. Passion draws us to our kind, but reason sometimes drives us to leave them for inferior but less fateful beings. Thus has arisen a strong bond between man and the friend he has chosen from another species, a friend who suits him so well because less than himself and yet more than inanimate things. If a man had to choose a friend by mere chance he would do better to take one from the canine than the human race. The lowest of his fellows would be a less fruitful source of peace and comfort than the lowest of dogs.

But when a family is lonely and friendless, when its weak and harassed members, with so many avenues of

unhappiness and so few of satisfaction, with but a moment for enjoyment and only a day to live—when husband and wife, mother and daughter, have no forbearance and no unity, when they will not share the same interests or bring themselves to accept the same hardships and bear up unitedly at equal distances the chain of sorrows; when each one through selfishness or ill-nature refuses his help, and lets it drag heavily over the rough ground, ploughing the long furrow from which with fatal productiveness spring the briers that tear them all—— Alas! alas! How rasping then are his fellows to man!

When any little attention, or word of peace and good-will and forgiveness is met with disdain and ill-temper or with freezing indifference . . . so it has been ordained by the nature of things, that virtue might grow stronger and the heart of man become still nobler and more resigned under the load that crushes it.

LETTER XXXVII.

LYONS, *May 2nd* (VI.).

There are times when I almost despair of controlling the restlessness that tears me to pieces. At such times everything allures and mightily elates me, only to let me fall back and be lost in the gulf my misgivings have opened.

If I were absolutely alone such moments would be unbearable, but I write, and the effort to express to you what I feel seems to relax and alleviate the feeling.

To whom could I reveal myself thus freely? Who else would put up with the wearisome babble of my dismal moods and idle sensitiveness. The only pleasure I have is that of telling you what I can say to you alone, what I should not care to say to any one else, and what no one else would care to hear. I care little about the contents of my letters. The longer they are, and the more time I spend on them, the more good they do me; and if I am not mistaken, the bulk of the packet has never repelled you. One can spend ten hours at a stretch in talking, why should one not write for two?

Not that I want to cast any reflection on you. You are briefer, less prolix than I. Your duties exhaust you, and you find less pleasure than I do in writing, even to those you love. You tell me what as an intimate friend you have to say; but I, hermit and eccentric dreamer that I am, have nothing to say, and yet take all the longer to say it. Whatever enters my head, whatever I would say if we were chatting together, I write if a chance occurs; but what I think and feel, that I write of necessity; it is a need of my nature. When I give it up, you may conclude that I am past feeling, that my soul is quenched, that I have grown calm and sensible, and am spending my days in eating, sleeping, and playing cards. I should be happier so!

I wish I had a trade; it would invigorate my arms and soothe my head. An accomplishment would not serve so well; though I think I should not be so restless if I could paint. For a long time I was in a kind of torpor, and am sorry to find myself aroused. My depression then was calmer than it is now.

Of all the brief, uncertain moments when I have fancied in my simplicity that we were sent into the world to *live*, not one has left deeper impressions than three weeks of unreflecting hopefulness, when one springtime, beside a mountain stream at the foot of the rocks between the smiling hyacinth and the lowly violet, I began to think that it might be given me to love.

I touched what I was never to grasp. Had I been without inclinations and without hope I could have vegetated in placid boredom; I should have felt the faint pulsation of human energy, but have found it tolerable to doze through my darkened life. What baneful influence showed me a vision of the world just to rob me of the bliss of ignorance?

Inspired with generous activity, eager to love, sustain, and comfort everything; always buffeted to and fro between the longing to see so many harmful things altered and the conviction that they will not be altered, I am worn out by the ills of life, and even more indignant at the treacherous allurements of pleasure, my gaze always fixed on the vast sum of hatred, injustice, infamy, and wretchedness in this distorted world.

And myself! Here I am in my twenty-seventh year, my best days gone, and I have never had a glimpse of them. Unhappy at the age of happiness, what can I expect from my later years? I have spent the golden age of confidence and hope in emptiness and ennui. Frustrated and suffering at every point, with a bruised and empty heart, I have reached while still young the regrets of old age. So used am I to see all the flowers of life wither under my blighting footsteps, that I am

like those old men who have lost all; but more pitiable than they, for I have lost it long before my own end has come. Still hungry of soul, I cannot be at peace in this death-like silence.

Ah, memory of days long past, of things for ever gone, of places I shall never see again, of men no longer what they were! Alas, the pang of a life that is spoiled!

What places ever were to me what they are to others? What times were endurable, and under what sky did I ever find rest of heart? I have seen the bustle of towns and the dulness of country places, and the austerity of the mountains; I have seen the boorishness of ignorance and the strain of art; I have seen barren virtues, fruitless successes, and the swallowing up of all blessings in all calamities; man and his destiny, always unequally matched, endlessly cheating each other; and in the unbridled struggle of all the passions I have seen the hateful victor receive as the prize of his triumph the heaviest link in the chain of evils he had forged.

If man were adapted to unhappiness I would pity him much less, and in view of his fleeting existence I would despise on his account as well as my own the anguish of a day. But he is surrounded by all good things, all his powers command him to enjoy; everything bids him "Be happy;" and yet man has said, "Be happiness for the brute; art, science, glory, greatness, shall be mine." His mortality, his sufferings, even his crimes, are the merest fraction of his wretchedness. I bewail his losses, calmness, freedom of choice, unity, and undisturbed possession. I bewail the wasting of a century by millions of thinking beings in cares and

bondage amid everything that could give safety, freedom, and joy; living a life of bitterness in a world of rapture, because their hearts were set on imaginary and exclusive blessings.

Yet all that amounts to little; half a century ago I saw nothing of it, and half a century hence I shall see it no more.

I used to say in those bygone days, "If it is not my lot to re-establish primitive customs in some circumscribed and isolated region, if I must compel myself to forget the world, and count myself sufficiently happy in securing passable days for myself on this deluded earth, then I only ask one blessing, one phantom in the dream from which I would fain never more awake. There remains on the earth, even as it is, one illusion which can still enthral me; it is the only one; I should be wise enough to yield to it; nothing else is worth the effort."

So I used to think then; but chance alone could grant me this priceless infatuation. Chance is slow and uncertain, life swift and irrevocable; its springtime is passing, and that frustrated yearning, by causing the wreck of my life, is bound at length to estrange my heart and warp my nature. Sometimes even now I feel myself growing sour and cynical, and my affections contracting; impatience will make me headstrong, and a kind of contempt inclines me to great but austere schemes. But this bitterness soon flags, and then I let myself drift, as if I realized that distracted men and uncertain events and my own brief life were unworthy of a day's anxiety, and that a rude awakening is useless when one must so soon fall asleep for ever.

LETTER XXXVIII.

LYONS, *May 8th* (VI.).

I have been to Blammont to visit the surgeon who set so skilfully the arm of that officer who fell from his horse on his way home from Chessel.

You will not have forgotten how, when we entered his house on that occasion, more than a dozen years ago, he hurried out to gather from his garden the finest apricots, and how as he came back with his hands full, the old gentleman, even then a little shaky, stumbled over the door-step and scattered nearly all the fruit. His daughter exclaimed harshly, "There you go again! You will put your finger into everything, and you only make a mess of it; can't you stay quietly in your chair! Here's a pretty state of things!" He felt it, but made no reply, and our hearts were sore for him, poor fellow! He is now more to be pitied than ever. He is paralyzed, laid on a real bed of suffering, no one near him but this wretch of a daughter. Some months ago he lost his speech, but his right arm is not yet affected and he uses it to make signs. He made one which, to my regret, it was not for me to interpret, and his daughter, as often happens, did not understand it. He wanted to tell her to offer me some refreshment. When she was called away by duties outside I took the opportunity to let her unhappy father know that I understood his misfortunes; his hearing is still quite good. He gave me to understand that his daughter, considering his end very near, begrudged

him everything that would lessen by a few pence the very comfortable fortune he was leaving her; but that though he had often been grieved, he forgave her everything, so that he might not in his last hour cease to love the only being left him to love. Fancy an old man watching his life ebb away like this! A father ending his days in bitterness in his own house! And our laws are helpless!

Depths of wretchedness like this cannot but appeal to our instincts of immortality. If it were possible that after reaching years of discretion I had radically failed in duty to my father I should be unhappy for the rest of my life, because he is no more, and my fault would be as irretrievable as it was unnatural. True, one might argue that a wrong done to one who no longer feels it, who no longer exists, is strictly speaking imaginary, as it were, and of no consequence, as things are that are dead and done with. I could not deny it, and yet it would bring me no comfort. The cause of this feeling is very hard to find. If it were merely the consciousness of having missed the opportunity of retrieving a disgraceful failure with a nobility that would give inward consolation, we might still find compensation in the sincerity of our intention. When nothing but our own self-esteem is involved, the will to do a praiseworthy thing should satisfy us as well as its execution. The latter only differs from the former in its consequence, and there can be none when the injured person is no more. And yet one finds that the consciousness of an injustice whose effects are no longer present to overwhelm us may humiliate and torment us as if its results were to be eternal. One might think that the

victim of it was merely absent, and that we should have to re-assume our old relations with him in a sphere which will admit of no change and no reparation, where the wrong will last for ever in spite of our remorse.

The human mind is always baffled by this connection between deeds done and their unforeseen results. It is conceivable that these notions of a future life and an infinite series of consequences have no other basis than that of being thinkable, and that they must be reckoned among the agencies which tie man down to the instability, the contradictions, and the continual uncertainty into which he is plunged by his partial view of the qualities and causal relations of events.

. . . . .

As my letter is not sealed, I must give you a quotation from Montaigne. I have just dropped on a passage so apt to the idea in my mind that I was quite struck and delighted with it. In a coincidence of thought like this there is a thrill of secret joy; it is the basis of man's need for man, because it fertilizes our ideas, gives confidence to our imagination, confirms our self-assurance.

In Montaigne one does not find what one seeks; one takes what there is to find. He should be opened haphazard, and that is a compliment to his style. He is very original, without caricature or affectation, and I am not surprised that some Englishman has placed the *Essays* above everything. Montaigne has been blamed for two things which gave him distinction, and for which I need not vindicate him between you and me.

In Chapter VIII. of Book II., he writes:—"As I know by certaine experience, there is no comfort so sweet in the losse of friends as that our owne knowledge or

conscience tells vs we never omitted to tell them everything, and expostulate all matters vnto them, and to have had a perfect and free communication with them." [Florio's Translation.]

This complete understanding with a moral being like ourselves, side by side with us in honourable fellowship, seems an essential feature of the part allotted us in the play of life. We are dissatisfied with ourselves if, when the act is over, we have failed irrevocably in the performance of the scene entrusted to us.

That proves, you will perhaps reply, that we have a premonition of another life. I grant it; and we shall agree too that the dog which starves out its life because its master has lost his, or which flings itself into the blazing pyre that consumes his body, is bent on dying with him because it firmly believes in immortality, and has the comforting assurance of rejoining him in another world.

I do not like to ridicule anything that men would fain substitute for despair, and yet I was almost on the point of jesting. The confidence with which man buttresses himself in opinions that please him, on matters beyond his ken, is worthy of respect in so far as it assuages the bitterness of his woes, but there is a touch of absurdity in the religious infallibility with which he tries to invest it. He would not accuse of sacrilege any one who asserted that a son might lawfully cut his father's throat; he would take him to the asylum, and think no more about it; but he grows furious if one ventures to hint that perhaps he will die like a dog or a fox, so terribly afraid is he of believing it. Cannot he see that he is giving proof of his own

uncertainty? His faith is as hollow as that of certain pious folk who would raise the cry of profanity if one doubted whether eating a chicken on Friday would doom one to hell, and yet would eat it themselves on the sly; so little does the dread of eternal punishment weigh against the pleasure of eating a couple of mouthfuls of meat without waiting for Sunday.

Why not leave to each man's own fancy the choice of what tickles his sense of humour, and even of the hopes that all cannot equally share? Morality would gain much by resigning the support of a spasmodic fanaticism and basing itself firmly on inviolable evidence. If you want principles to appeal to the heart take those that exist in the heart of every normally constituted man.

Let your motto be—In a world of delight and of sadness man's destiny is to augment the sense of joy, to develop a radiant energy, and to do battle in every phase of experience with the source of degradation and suffering.

THIRD FRAGMENT.

THE ROMANTIC IN NATURE, AND THE "RANZ DES VACHES."

The sensational captivates crude and lively imaginations, but thoughtful minds of genuine susceptibility are satisfied with the purely romantic. Nature abounds in romantic effects in out-of-the way places, but in time-worn regions they are spoiled by incessant culti-

vation, especially in plains which have readily submitted in every part to the sway of man.[1]

Romantic effects are the accents of a tongue which is not intelligible to all men, and is becoming in some places quite a dead language. We soon cease to understand them when we no longer live in their midst, and yet this romantic harmony is the only thing which can keep fresh in our hearts the colours of youth and the bloom of life. The society man is no longer conscious of these effects; they are too remote from his mode of life, and he ends by saying "What use are they?" His constitution is burnt out, as it were, by the parching heat of a slow and constant poison; he is old when he should be in full vigour, and the springs of life are relaxed within him though he still wears the husk of a man.

But you, whom the man in the street considers his equals, because you live simply and make no display of cleverness with your gifts, or just because your life is open to him and he sees that you eat and sleep as he does—you, men of primitive tastes, dispersed here and there to preserve the flavour of natural things in this age of vanity, you recognize each other, you hold converse in a tongue the crowd knows nothing of, when the October sun shines through the mist above the yellowing woods; when beneath the setting moon a tumbling streamlet drops into a wood-girt meadow; when in a cloudless summer dawn, a woman's voice is heard not far away singing amid the walls and roofs of some great town.

[1] The force of the word romantic has been modified since the period when these words were written.

Imagine a vast though bounded sheet of clear transparent water, oblong in shape, and sweeping in a wide curve towards the western horizon.[1] Lofty peaks and glorious ranges enclose it on three sides. You are seated on the mountain side that slopes down to the northern beach on which the waves are breaking. Behind you sheer precipices lift their heads to the clouds; the dreary polar wind has never breathed on this happy shore. On your left the mountains open out and a quiet valley stretches far into their depths; a mountain stream comes tumbling downward from the snow-clad heights that bound it. Then when the morning sun appears between the icy peaks above the mists, when mountain voices betray the whereabouts of châlets above the meadows still in shadow, that is the awakening of an unspoiled world, and the proof of what a destiny we have ignored.

Or take the hour of twilight, the time of rest and soul-expanding pensiveness. The valley is hazy and darkening fast. Southward night has fallen on the lake; the rocks beyond it form a belt of gloom below the icy dome that crowns them, where the light of day still lingers on the frozen snow. Its last gleams gild the countless chestnuts above the desolate crags, they shoot in long rays between the tall stems of the mountain pines, they glow on the Alps, they kindle the snows, they flame in the air, and the unruffled lake, radiant with light from the skies reflected in its breast, becomes infinite like them, and purer, more ethereal, more lovely even than they. Its calm is a marvel, its

[1] The passage that follows is evidently a description of the head of Lake Geneva, near Montreux.—Tr.

clearness a mystery; the aerial splendour it mirrors seems ensphered in its depths, and under those mountains, cut off from the earth as though hung in mid air, you see at your feet the vaulted heavens and the great round world. It is a time of enchantment and ecstasy. Sky and mountains and the solid ground beneath you seem adrift in space; the level lake and the horizon are dissolved. Your ideas are transformed, your sensations wholly new, common life is left behind, and when the dusk has settled on this sheet of water, when the eye can no longer distinguish objects and distances, when the evening breeze ripples the surface, then the western extremity of the lake alone gleams with pale light, but the part encircled by mountains is all one gulf of thickest gloom. Then from the depths of shadow and silence a thousand feet below there reaches your ear the ceaseless wash of the waves, as billow follows billow without intermission to surge over the sand with measured pulse, to be shattered by the rocks or to break on the shore, while its peals reverberate with a long-drawn murmur in the invisible abyss.

It is in sounds that Nature has vested the most forceful expression of the romantic element; it is through the sense of hearing above all that one can bring to mind extraordinary places and things with the fewest touches and in the most effective way. The associations stirred by scents are swift and vast, but vague; those of sight have more interest for the mind than the heart; seeing evokes wonder; hearing, emotion.[1]

The voice of a loved one is sweeter than her features;

[1] The harpsichord of colours was ingenious; a corresponding one of scents would have been more interesting.

sublime scenery makes a deeper and more lasting impression by the sounds that haunt it than by its forms. I have seen no picture of the Alps which recalled them to me so vividly as a genuine Alpine melody.

The "Ranz des Vaches" does more than awaken reminiscences; it paints a picture. I know that Rousseau has stated the opposite, but I think he is wrong. It is not mere imagination; a case in point is that of two people looking through the plates of the *Tableaux pittoresques de la Suisse* independently, and remarking at the sight of the Grimsel, "That is the place to hear the 'Ranz des Vaches.'" If it is performed with sympathy rather than art, if the player's soul is in it, the first notes transport us to the high valleys on the fringe of the bare, reddish gray rocks, beneath the sun that burns in a cool sky. We rest on some rounded grass-grown knoll, steeped in the unhasting calm of things and in the grandeur of the scene; we see the plodding step of the cows and the measured swing of their big bells, close under the cloud belt, on the gently sloping breast between the solid granite crags, and the granite screes of the snow-streaked ghylls. The wind moans desolately through the distant larches, and one can distinguish the hum of the unseen torrent deep sunk in the gorge it has carved out in the course of ages. To these lonely sounds succeed the hurried doleful tones of the cowherds'[1] songs, the pastoral

[1] *Küher* in German, *Armailli* in Romance, a man who drives the cows up the mountains and spends the whole season in the high pastures making cheese. Usually the Armaillis spend four or five months in the high Alps, quite cut off from the society of women, and often even from that of other men.

expression of sober gladness and mountain exhilaration. The songs come to an end; the man disappears in the distance; the cow-bells have passed the larches; and now one only hears the rattle of falling stones and the intermittent crash of trees borne down by the torrent to the valley below. These Alpine sounds swell out and fail on the wind; and in the intervals of silence, all seems chill, motionless, and dead. It is the domain of the phlegmatic man. He sets out from his low and ample roof, secured with heavy stones against the gales, and whether the wind rages or the thunder rolls beneath his feet it is all one to him. He trudges off to where his cows should be, and there they are; he calls them and they gather up and take their turns; then back he goes with the same steady pace, carrying milk for the plains he will never see. The cows stand chewing the cud; nothing stirs, not a soul is visible. The air is chilly; the wind drops as twilight falls; and nothing is left but the glimmer of perpetual snows, and the plunge of torrents whose lonely hum comes up from below, and seems to emphasize the unbroken silence of the towering peaks, the glaciers, and the night.[1]

[1] Several attempts have been made to write words for this Shepherds' March. One such attempt, in the dialect of La Gruyère, contains forty-eight lines:—

"Les armaillis di Columbette
De bon matin sé son léva," etc.

Another of these ballads, said to have been composed at Appenzell, is in German, and ends somewhat as follows:—"Retreats profound, unruffled calm! O peace of men and fields, O peace of vales and lakes! Ye sturdy shepherds with your rural homes and artless ways! Ah, give to our hearts the charm of your châlets and the resignation learnt beneath your frigid skies. Untrodden peaks! Chill sanctuary. Last resting-place of a free and simple soul!"

LETTER XXXIX.

LYONS, *May 11th* (VI.).

The glamour that is possible in all the relations that bind each man to his fellows and the Universe, the eager longing that a young heart feels when all the world is before it, the unknown and wonderful territory there is to explore—that charm is faded, transient, fled. The outside world to which I must re-act has become desolate and bare; I thought to find in it the life of the soul, but it is not there.

I have seen a valley suffused with mellow light beneath a lovely veil of morning mist; then it was beautiful. I have seen it change and tarnish; the devouring orb passed over it, scorching and exhausting it with its glare, and leaving it burnt up, sapless, and pitifully barren. So the happy veil of our days is slowly lifted and dispersed. There no longer remain any of those half-lights and hidden regions so delightful to explore. There are no more misty beams to take the eye. Everything is arid and exhausting like the burning sand beneath the sky of the Sahara. Stripped of this misty robe all objects exhibit with ghastly realism the ingenious but dreary mechanism of their naked skeleton. Their ceaseless, inevitable, resistless movements involve me without interesting me, and disquiet me without quickening my life.

For years past this misery has been threatening, accumulating, becoming definite and chronic. If nothing occurs, not even calamity, to break this deadly monotony, I shall be driven to end the whole concern.

LETTER XL.

LYONS, *May 14th* (VI.).

I was under the long wall on the bank of the Saône, where formerly as growing lads we used to stroll together and talk of Tinian,[1] when our hearts were set on happiness and we really meant to live. I was watching the river rolling on as it did then and the autumn[2] sky, as calm and fine as in those days of which no trace remains. A carriage approached; I drew to one side unconsciously and kept walking on, gazing at the yellow leaves which the wind was sweeping over the dry grass and along the dusty road. The carriage stopped; Madame Dellemar alone and her six year old daughter were in it. I got in and went as far as her country house, but declined to enter. You know that Madame Dellemar is not yet twenty-five, and that she is greatly altered; but she stills talks with the same simple and perfect grace; her eyes have a more sorrowful but not less lovely expression. We did not mention her husband. You will remember that he is thirty years her senior, a capitalist of some sort, well up in money matters, but a nonentity in everything else. Unhappy woman! Hers is a spoiled life, and yet fate seemed to promise her such a happy one! She had every qualification for happiness and for making another happy. And it is all thrown away. It will soon be

[1] See note on Letter XI.—TR.

[2] The reference to autumn sky and yellow leaves is inconsistent with the date at the head of the letter.—TR.

five years since I last saw her. She sent the carriage back to town with me, but I got out near the place where she overtook me, and stayed till a late hour.

On my way home a feeble, broken-spirited old man came up to me, looking hard at me the while. He addressed me by name and appealed for charity. I failed to recognize him at the time, but afterwards I was quite shocked by the recollection that it could be none other than our old Third Form master, good and painstaking fellow that he was. I made some enquiries this morning, but am not sure whether I shall succeed in discovering the wretched attic in which no doubt he is spending his last days. The poor fellow would conclude that I did not want to recognize him. If I find him, we must see that he has a room and a few books to keep him in touch with his old ways. His sight seems still quite good. I do not know what I am at liberty to promise him on your behalf; let me know, please. It is not a question of temporary relief, but for the rest of his life. I will do nothing without your instructions.

I had spent, I should think, more than an hour that evening hesitating in which of two directions to take a short stroll, and though the place where I met her was the further from my house, something drew me that way; it must have been the yearning in another of a sadness fit to match my own.

I should readily have declared that I should never see her again. That resolution had been firmly taken, and yet. . . . Her image, though dimmed by depression, by time, and even by the shaking of my confidence in affections too often disappointed and

useless, is still bound up with my inner consciousness and all my outlook on life. I see it with the mind's eye, but it is like the persistent memory of a vanished dream, like those castles in the air of which the mind retains a trace, though at my time of life they are no more.

For I have really come to man's estate. My repulsions have matured me, and thanks to my destiny, I have no other master than that grain of sense one receives from above, one knows not why. I am not under the yoke of passion, nor led astray by desire; pleasure will not corrupt me. I have said good-bye to all those vagaries of strong souls. I shall not make myself ridiculous by going into raptures over sensational things and then having to recant, or by becoming the dupe of a fine sentiment. I feel equal to looking with indifference on a lovely view, a fine sky, a virtuous deed, or a touching display of feeling; and if I thought it worth while, I could, like any well-bred gentleman, perpetually yawn and smile, pretend to be amused though bored to extinction, and die of ennui with the utmost calmness and dignity.

I was taken by surprise when I met her, and am so even yet, because I do not see what it can lead to. But what necessity is there for it to lead anywhere? Plenty of isolated events happen in the world, or events which have no perceptible results. And yet I cannot rid myself of a kind of instinctive habit of looking for a sequel and consequences to everything; most of all to things brought about by chance, I cannot help trying to see a purpose in it and the working out of some necessity. This curious tendency amuses me;

we have more than once laughed over it together, and just at present it is not at all inopportune.

I am quite sure I should not have chosen that road, if I had known I should meet her; but I believe it would have been a mistake all the same. A visionary should see everything, and a visionary unfortunately has nothing special to fear. Besides, is there any need to shun everything which pertains to the life of the soul, and everything which may remind it of its losses? Is it possible so to do? A scent, a sound, a ray of light will bring home to me equally well that there is more in human nature than mere digestion and sleep. A throb of joy in the heart of an unhappy man, or the sigh of one who is merry can equally reveal to me that mysterious duality which the understanding maintains in an infinite series of perpetual oscillations, a duality in which our bodies are only the materials with which an eternal idea sketches out the plan of something invisible, and which it casts like dice, or manipulates like numbers.

When back on the bank of the Saône I said to myself, How incomprehensible is the eye! Not only does it receive, so to speak, the infinite; it seems also to reflect it. It sees a whole world, but it mirrors, it reveals, it expresses something vaster still. An all-captivating grace, a profound and tender eloquence, a significance deeper than the things signified, a universal bond of harmony—all this is in the eye of a woman. All this, and even more, is in her voice if she feels deeply. When she speaks she arouses lapsed emotions and ideas; she wakes the soul from its lethargy and charms it to follow her through the whole sphere of

moral life. When she sings she seems to influence and transform our surroundings and to create new sensations. Natural life is no longer commonplace; everything is romantic, inspired, intoxicating. There, sitting quietly, or busy with some task or other, she transports us with her into the full swing of the mighty world, and our life gains dignity from its sublime, unhasting revolution. How tame seem then those men who make so much to do about mere trifles! To what nonentity they limit us, and how exhausting it is to live among such noisy, uninspiring creatures.

And yet when training and talent, successes and gifts of chance, have all united to fashion a lovely face, a shapely form, a polished manner, a noble soul, a tender heart, and a broad mind, it only takes a day for ennui and despondency to set about the obliteration of them all, in the desolation of a cloister, in the repulsions of a mistaken marriage, or in the bareness of an irksome life.

I shall continue to meet her. She no longer expects anything from life, so we shall get on well together. She will not be surprised to find me consumed with ennui, and I need not fear that I shall add to hers. The situation of each of us is fixed, and so definitely that I shall not alter mine by going to see her when she returns to town.

I already picture to myself the smiling grace with which she hides her weariness and receives the visitors who tire her out, and how eagerly she longs for the morrow on her days of pleasure. Almost every day brings the same irksome round. Concerts, parties, and all such entertainments are the toil of the so-called

happy; it is their task, as the toil of the vineyard is the labourer's; but heavier, for it does not bring its own compensation; it produces nothing.

LETTER XLI.

LYONS, *May 18th* (VI.).

It almost seems as if Fate set itself to rivet upon us again the fetters we try to snap off in spite of it. What have I gained by leaving everything in quest of a freer life? Even if I have seen things suited to my nature, it was only in passing, without enjoying them, as if to increase my craving for them.

I am not the slave of passion, but am none the happier for that. Its vanity will not delude me; but then one must fill life with something. What satisfaction is there in an empty existence? If life is a mere distracted nothingness, is it not better to forsake it for a nothingness without the distraction. One's understanding postulates a result; I wish some one would tell me what the result of my life is to be. I want something to mark and charm away my hours; I cannot go on for ever with them dragging past so heavily in slow succession, without desires, illusions, or aim. If I can know nothing of life but its miseries, was the gift worth having? Is it wise to keep it?

You will not suppose me so weak in face of the ills of humanity that I cannot even endure the dread of them; you know me better than that. It is not mis-

fortune that would make me think of flinging away my life. Resistance invigorates the soul and gives it a nobler air; we feel our feet in the struggle with great griefs; we find pleasure in the effort of it, there is at least something to be done. But the obstructions, the boredoms, the limitations, the insipidity of life, it is these that wear me out and sicken me. A man dominated by passion can brace himself to suffer because he means to enjoy by-and-by, but what motive can sustain the man who has nothing to expect? I am weary of leading so vain a life. True, my patience might hold out longer, but life is slipping away without my doing anything useful, and as devoid of enjoyment and hope as it is of peace. Do you suppose an unconquerable soul could submit to that for long years to come?

I might assume that there is also a purpose in outward events, and that necessity itself has a regular route and some sort of aim which the understanding can foresee. I sometimes ask myself whither I shall be led by this enforced ennui, this apathy I cannot shake off, this blank and insipid environment from which I cannot free myself, and in which there is nothing but disappointment, delay, and elusiveness; where every probability vanishes, effort is frustrated, and every change miscarries; where expectation is always deceived, even the expectation of some calamity, which would at least be stimulating; where one might almost conclude some hostile will had set itself to keep me in a state of indecision and embarrassment, or to delude me by vague circumstances and baffling hopes into spending my whole life without attaining, producing, or possessing anything whatever.

I review the dreary vista of my long and wasted years. I see how the ever seductive future changes and dwindles as it draws near. Struck with a deadly blight by the funereal glimmer of the present, it loses its glow the very moment one seeks to enjoy it, and dropping its mask of seductions and already vapid charm, it glides past neglected and alone, dragging heavily its battered and dingy sceptre, as if mocking the weariness inflicted by the terrible clanking of its endless chain. When I forecast the disenchanted years through which the rest of my youth and of my life must be dragged out, when I follow in thought the downward grade on which everything is slipping to destruction, what do you suppose I can expect at the end of it, and who can hide from me the abyss in which everything must perish? Baffled and weary, and convinced of my impotence, must I not at any rate seek rest? And when a force I cannot escape relentlessly weighs me down, how can I rest unless I fling myself headlong?

Everything must have an aim congenial to itself. Since my life on the social side is severed from the rest of the world, why should I vegetate on through long years, alike useless to others and wearisome to myself? For the mere instinct of self-preservation! Just to draw breath and grow older! To wake in bitterness when everything sleeps, and to long for night when the earth is blossoming; to be utterly blank of desire and only to dream of existence; to be dislocated and solitary in this world of sorrows, making no one the happier, and having only a theory of the part man should play; to cling to a blighted life, an abject slave excluded from life and yet grasping at its shadow;

greedy of existence, as if real existence were still within reach, and submitting to live miserably for lack of courage to die.

What use to me are the specious arguments of a comfortable and flattering philosophy, the hollow mask of a cowardly instinct, the empty wisdom of sufferers who prolong the evils they endure so meekly, and who find sanction for our bondage in an imaginary necessity?

"Wait awhile," they tell me; "moral suffering wears itself out in course of time: wait; times will improve, and you will be satisfied; or if they remain the same, you yourself will alter. By making the best of the present you will tone down your too glowing conception of a better future, and by taking life as it is you will find it grow better as your heart grows calmer." A passion may cool, a loss be forgotten, a misfortune be retrieved; but I have no passions, I bewail neither loss nor misfortune—nothing that can cool, be forgotten, or retrieved. A new passion may compensate us for an old one, but on what shall I stay my heart if it loses the thirst which consumes it? It longs for everything, wills to do everything, embraces everything. What can replace the infinite my thought demands? Regrets may be forgotten, banished by other advantages; but what advantages can outweigh boundless regrets. Everything adapted to human nature has to do with my being; I have tried to feed on it in harmony with my nature, and have pined away on an impalpable shadow. Do you know any compensation for the loss of a world? If my calamity is simply the emptiness of my life, will time cure the

ills it aggravates, and must I hope they are abating when it is just their duration that is making them intolerable?

"Wait; better days will perhaps bring about what your present lot seems to make impossible." Ye men of a day who keep planning as you grow older, scheming for a distant future though death is on your track, dreaming of comforting illusions amid the instability of everything, do you never realize the flight of time? Do you not see that your life is being rocked to sleep, and that this vicissitude, which is the stay of your deluded hearts, is just the preliminary to their annihilation in one final and imminent catastrophe? If man's life were endless, or if it were merely longer, and if it remained uniform almost to his last hour, then hope might beguile me, and I might possibly look forward to what would at any rate be possible. But is there any permanence in life? Will the future have the wants of the present, and will what we need to-day be good to-morrow? Our heart changes more swiftly than the seasons; their alternations have at least some constancy, for they are repeated through the course of ages. But our days, which nothing can renew, have never two hours alike; their seasons, which never recur, have each their own wants, and if a single one of them misses its due, it is gone for ever, and at no later age can we enjoy what we have missed in the prime of life.

"It is only a madman who tries to fight against necessity. The wise man takes things as they come; he only gives heed to those aspects of them which can make him happier; without needless anxiety about the track he shall follow through the world, he knows how

to secure at each stage of his journey the comforts of civilization and a good night's rest, and in view of the nearness of his destination he travels without exertion, and even loses his way without uneasiness. What would it profit him to want more, to withstand the force of the world and to try to evade its fetters and inevitable catastrophe? No individual can check the whole trend of things, and nothing is more futile than to bewail the ills which are inseparable from our nature." But if everything is necessitated, what fault can you find with my ennuis? Why censure them? Can I feel differently? If, on the other hand, our individual lot is in our own hands, if man can exercise choice and volition, there may exist for him obstacles he cannot overcome, and miseries he cannot evade, but the united effort of the human race cannot do more than end his life. The only man who can be subjected to everything is the man who is determined to live at any price; he who claims nothing can be subjected to nothing. You expect me to be resigned to inevitable ills; I am perfectly willing to be so, but as soon as I resolve to quit the whole concern, inevitable ills no longer exist for me.

The many blessings man enjoys even in misfortune would not detain me. No doubt in the abstract, goods outnumber evils, but we should be strangely mistaken if we estimated things thus in practice. A single evil we cannot overlook outweighs twenty goods we seem to enjoy, and whatever reason may say there are many evils that only time and effort can cure, unless one happens to be a crank with a touch of fanaticism. Time, it is true, dispels these evils, and a wise man's

firmness makes still shorter work of them, but the busy imagination of other men has so multiplied them that new ones are always ready to take their place. Joys, too, pass away as well as sorrows, and even if man had ten pleasures for a single pain, so long as one pain can mar a hundred pleasures while it lasts, life will be, to say the least of it, insipid and unprofitable to one who is stripped of illusions. The ill is permanent, the good temporary; by what attraction, for what end, should I tolerate life? The climax of the plot is known—what is there left to be done? The one irreparable loss is the loss of desire.

I know that a natural inclination binds man to life, but it is a kind of instinctive habit, and in no way proves that life is good. A living creature clings to existence simply because it exists; it is reason alone that can enable us to view annihilation without dread. It is strange that man, whose reason professes to despise instinct, should fall back on the blindest of his instincts to sanction the fallacies of that same reason.

It will be objected that habitual impatience is due to the violence of the passions, and that the more an old man is calmed and enlightened by age the more firmly he clings to life. I will not stop to inquire at present whether the reason of a man in the decline of life is worth more than that of one in his prime; nor whether each stage of life has not a type of feeling appropriate at the time but unseasonable before and after; nor, finally, whether our futile institutions and those senile virtues which are the product in the first instance of decay are a solid argument in favour of the age at which the fires of life are cooled. I will simply reply

that every mixed blessing is regretted when we lose it; an irrevocable loss after long possession is never viewed dispassionately; our imagination, as experience shows, always disregards a benefit as soon as won, to direct our energies to what there still remains to win, and, when a thing ends, only gives heed to the good we lose, not to the ill from which we are set free.

. This is not the way to estimate the worth of actual life to the majority of men. But ask them each day of their ever-hoping existence whether the present moment satisfies, disappoints, or is indifferent to them; your conclusions will then be reliable. Every other estimate is simply a mode of self-deception, and I want to substitute a clear and simple truth for confused ideas and exploded fallacies.

This advice will then be given me: "Curb your desires; limit your too-grasping needs; set your heart on things attainable. Why seek for what circumstances forbid? Why exact what men can so well do without? Why wish for things that are useful? So many people never even think of them! Why mourn over public calamities? Do you find that they disturb the sleep of anybody who is happy? What gain is there in these throes of a strong soul, this instinct for things sublime? Can you not dream of perfection without attempting to crane up to it the crowd which ridicules it, even amidst its groaning? Must you have greatness or simplicity, a stimulating environment, unique scenery, men and things just to your taste, before you can enjoy life? Given existence, everything is good for man; and wherever he can live at all there he can live in contentment. If he has a

good reputation, a few acquaintances who wish him well, a house and something respectable to turn out in, what more does he need?" Quite right; I have no fault to find with such counsels as these which a practical man would give me; in fact, I believe them to be very good—for those who find them so.

Nevertheless, I am calmer than I used to be, and am beginning to tire even of my impatience. Grim but tranquil thoughts visit me more frequently. I ponder freely on those who have found their eternal night in the morning of their days; this mood rests and comforts me; it is the premonition of eventide. "But why," they ask, "this craving for darkness? Why does the light distress me?" They will know some day; when they too have changed; when I shall be no more.

"When you will be no more! . . . Are you contemplating a crime?"

If, worn out with the ills of life and supremely disenchanted as to its goods, already dangling over the abyss and marked to fall, restrained by friends, accused by moralists, condemned by my country,—if, I say, I had to reply to the arguments and reproaches of the social man in whose eyes I am guilty, this it seems to me is what I might say:—

I have sifted everything thoroughly, if not by actual experience, at any rate by anticipation. Your sorrows have blighted my soul, they are unbearable because they are aimless. Your pleasures are illusory and fleeting; it takes but a day to ransack and leave them. I sought happiness within me, though not like a fanatic, and I found that it was not meant for man in isolation; I suggested it to those around me, but they had no

time to think of it. I questioned the multitude enervated by misery and the favoured oppressed by ennui; they replied: "We suffer to-day, but we shall be happy to-morrow." For my part I know that the coming day will follow in the footsteps of the one that is passing. Live on, you whom a bright illusion can still deceive, but as for me, weary of hope betrayed, bereft of expectation and almost of desire, I am no longer bound to live. I regard life from the standpoint of a man on the brink of the grave; let it open to receive me. Shall I postpone the end when it is already at hand? Nature presents illusions to faith and love; she only lifts the veil when the hour of death has struck. She has not lifted it for you, live on then; she has lifted it for me, my life is already over.

It may be that man's real good is moral independence, and that his miseries are only the consciousness of his innate weakness in manifold situations; that everything outside himself is a dream, and that peace dwells in the heart that is inaccessible to illusions. But where can disenchanted thought find rest? What is there to do in life when one is indifferent to all it contains? When the passion for all things—that infinite yearning of strong souls—has consumed our hearts, the spell on our desires is rudely broken, and irreparable ennui springs from the cold ashes. Funereal and ominous, it swallows up all hope; it holds sway over the ruins of life; it devours and extinguishes; with resistless force it digs our grave, that refuge which will at least give rest through oblivion and calm in annihilation.

Without desires, what can one make of life? To vegetate in stupidity; to drag oneself through the dull

round of cares and business; to grovel abjectly with the meanness of the slave or the vacancy of the mob; to think without serving the universal order, to feel without living! Thus, the pitiful sport of an inexplicable fate, man will abandon his life to the chances of things and of time. Thus, baffled by the conflict between his wishes, his reason, his laws, and his nature, he hastens with a gay and daring step towards the darkness of the tomb. With eager, restless, spectre-haunted eyes and sorrow-laden heart, he seeks and goes astray, he vegetates and lulls himself to sleep.

World-wide harmony, glorious dream! Moral aim, social obligation, laws, duties—words sacred among men! It is only in the opinion of the deluded crowd that I shall seem to set you at defiance.

Of a truth, I leave some friends whom I shall distress, my country whose obligations I have far from repaid, all men whom I ought to serve; but these are occasions for regret, not remorse. Who can prize more than I the worth of unity, the authority of duties, the delight of being useful? I once hoped to do some good—it was the most flattering and the wildest of my dreams. You, in the perpetual uncertainty of your ever distracted and precarious life of bondage, all follow with blind docility the beaten track of the established state of things, thus handing over your life to use and wont, and wasting it without regret as you would waste a day. Had I too been swept away by this all-prevailing deviation, I might have left behind me some kind actions in these paths of error; but such kindness is easy to all men, and will be done without me by good men. There are such men; long may they live, and

be happy in finding themselves useful. It will be no comfort to me, I confess, in this gulf of misery, if I can do no more than that. A single poor fellow at my side may possibly be relieved, but a hundred thousand still groan, and I shall look helplessly on while the bitter fruits of human error are attributed to the nature of things, and while those miseries in which I find the accidental caprice of tentative experiments towards perfection are perpetuated as if they were the inevitable result of necessity! Let me be severely blamed if I refuse to sacrifice a happy life for the general good; but when, in prospect of a useless future, I court a repose too long delayed, it is regret, I repeat, and not remorse that I feel.

Under the burden of temporary misfortune, having regard to the fluctuations of moods and circumstances, I should no doubt look forward to better days. But the calamity that burdens my years is no temporary one. Who can fill the emptiness in which they glide sluggishly away? Who can restore desires to my life and expectation to my will? It is the good itself that I find useless; let men see to it that they have nothing but ills to deplore! During a storm we are buoyed up by hope, and are fortified against the risk because it will come to an end, but if calm itself wearies you, what can you hope for then? If to-morrow may be good, I am willing to wait; but if my lot is such that to-morrow cannot be better but may be unhappier still, I will not see that fatal day.

If it is a real duty to live out the life that has been given me, I will certainly face its miseries; swift time will soon sweep them away. However oppressed our

days may be, they are bearable, because they are limited. Death and life are in my power; I do not cling to the one, nor do I yearn for the other; let reason decide whether I have the right to choose between them.

I am told it is a crime to desert life. And yet those very sophists who debar me from death will expose me or send me to it. Their innovations multiply it around me; their maxims lead me to it; their laws inflict it upon me. It is glory to renounce life when it is sweet; it is justice to kill a man who wants to live; and the death one must court when dreaded it would be a crime to seek when desired! You trifle with my existence on a hundred pretexts, either plausible or absurd; I alone have no rights over myself! When I love life, I must despise it; when I am happy, you doom me to die; but if I long for death, then it is that you debar me from it; you thrust life upon me when I abhor it![1]

[1] Beccaria has some excellent arguments against capital punishment, but I cannot see my way to agree with him. He asserts that the citizen—"who can only part with the merest fraction of his liberty," cannot consent to the loss of his life; and further, that "as he has no right to kill himself" he cannot hand over the right of killing him to the State. [Beccaria was a celebrated writer on jurisprudence; his treatise *On Crimes and Punishments* led to many reforms in the penal codes of Europe.—TR.]

One should be very careful only to say what is just and incontestable when discussing the principles on which positive laws and ethics are based. It is dangerous to buttress the best causes with merely specious arguments, for when some day the illusion is dispelled, the truth itself which they seemed to support totters with them. Things that are true have real reasons in their favour; there is no need to seek arbitrary ones. If the moral and political legislation of antiquity had been based only on evident principles, its validity, though less plausible at first

If I cannot put an end to my life, no more can I expose myself to imminent death. Is that the kind of prudence you expect of your subjects? Then on the battlefield they ought to estimate the probabilities before charging the enemy, and your heroes are all of them criminals. The command you give them does not justify them; you have no right to send them to death if they had no right to agree to be sent. An identical unreason sanctions your martial fury and dictates your maxims, and by glaring inconsistency you justify injustice equally glaring.

If I have not this right of death over myself, who has given it to society? Have I surrendered what was not mine to give? What social principle have you devised which will explain to me how a society can acquire an internal and mutual authority which was not

and less calculated to make enthusiasts, would have remained unshaken. If an attempt were made now to erect that still unbuilt edifice, I admit that possibly it would only be of service when time had cemented it, but that consideration by no means detracts from its beauty or dispenses us from undertaking it.

Obermann does nothing but doubt, theorize, and dream; he ponders but scarcely ever reasons things out; he examines without deciding or reaching a conclusion. What he says is nothing, if you like, but may lead to something. If in his independent, unsystematic way he still follows some principle, it is primarily that of trying to utter nothing but truth in support of truth itself, of admitting nothing that all ages would not acknowledge, of not confusing good intention with accuracy of proof, and of not thinking it immaterial by what argument one supports a good cause. The history of ever so many religious and political sects proves that expeditious methods only produce ephemeral results. This attitude seems to me of the utmost importance, and it is my chief reason for publishing these letters, which in other respects are so lacking in matter and clearness.

possessed by its members, and how I have conferred a right which may be used to oppress me, when I did not possess it even to escape from oppression? Shall I be told that if man in isolation enjoys this natural right he forfeits it by becoming a member of society? But this right is in its nature inalienable, and no one can make a contract which deprives him entirely of the power to break it when it is being used to his detriment. Others have proved before me that man has no right to part with his liberty, or in other words, to cease to be a man; how then can he forego the most essential, the most secure, the most irresistible right of that same liberty, the only one which guarantees his independence, his last resort against calamity? How long will such palpable absurdities keep men in bondage?

If it can be considered a crime to abandon life I will lay the blame on you, for it is your fatal innovations that have driven me to desire death; apart from you I might have staved it off. Death is an absolute loss which nothing can retrieve, and even of that last melancholy refuge you would dare to deprive me, as if some control over my last hour was in your hands, and as if, too, your legal forms could limit rights beyond their sphere of government. Oppress my life if you like, law is often the strongest reason; but death is the limit I set to your power. Elsewhere you command; here you must prove.

Tell me plainly, without your usual circumlocutions, without that sham, wordy eloquence which does not deceive me, without the great perverted words—force, virtue, eternal order, moral destiny; tell me simply whether the laws of society are made for the actual and

visible world, or for a distant future life. If they are made for the existing world, tell me how laws relative to a definite order of things can be binding when that order is no more; how that which regulates life can extend beyond it; how the fashion to which we have conformed our relationships can exist when those relationships are ended; and how I could ever consent that conventions should bind me when I have had enough of them? What is the basis, or rather, the pretext, of your laws? Did they not promise the *happiness of all?* When I desire death, obviously I am not happy. Must the contract that oppresses me be irrevocable? An irksome engagement in the details of life may have compensations, and we can forego one advantage when we retain the privilege of enjoying others, but can the idea of absolute abnegation be entertained by any man with a sense of right and truth? All society is based on co-operation and mutual service; but if I injure society, does it not withdraw its protection? If then it does me no good, or a great deal of harm, I have also the right of refusing to serve it. When our contract no longer suits society, it breaks it; when it no longer suits me, I break it too. I do not revolt; I make my exit.

It is the last effort of your jealous tyranny. Too many of your victims would escape you, too many signs of the prevailing wretchedness would contradict the empty noise of your promises and would display your crafty codes in all their dreary nakedness and financial corruption. It was foolish of me to speak to you of justice! I saw the pitying smile in your paternal look. It told me that men are swayed by force and self-interest.

Still, you have decreed against self-destruction. Well, how will your law be enforced? On whom will fall the penalty for its infraction? Can it touch the man who is no more? Will it take vengeance on his family for the act it contemns? What futile madness! Multiply our miseries, you will need to for the great things you purpose; you will need to for the glory you seek; enslave and torture if you will, but do at least have an object; perpetrate iniquity and cold-blooded cruelty, but at least let it not be aimless. What mockery—a law of slavery that is neither obeyed nor avenged!

Where your power ends, there your false pretences begin, so essential it is to your sway not to cease making men your sport. It is nature, you say, it is the Supreme Intelligence that would have me bow my neck under the heavy and insulting yoke. They would have me hug my chain and drag it meekly, until the moment when it pleases you to break it over my head. Whatever you do, you claim that a God has put my life in your hands, and that the order of the world would be turned upside down if your slave escaped.

The Eternal, say you, has given me existence and set me my part in the harmony of his works; I must fulfil it to the end, and I have no right to elude his sway. You are very soon forgetting the soul with which you credited me. This earthly body is but dust, you remember, surely. But my intelligence, an imperishable breath derived from the universal Intelligence, can never evade His law. How can I desert the empire of the Master of all things? I only change my place; places are nothing with Him who contains and governs

all. He has no more bound me exclusively to the earth than to the country where he fixed my birth.

You argue, again, that Nature cares for my preservation; I ought to do the same in obedience to her laws, and by giving me the fear of death she forbids me to seek it. That sounds very fine; but Nature preserves me or sacrifices me at will; the course of events shows no trace of a known law in that. When I want to live a gulf opens and swallows me up, the bolt falls and annihilates me. If Nature takes away the life she has made me love, I will take it away myself when I no longer love it; if she robs me of a good, I renounce an ill; if she places my existence at the mercy of events, I forsake it or preserve it as I please. Since she has given me the power to will and to choose, I will make use of it when I have to decide in the most important matters of all; and I cannot see that in availing myself of the liberty she has given me to choose what she suggests I am violating it. As a product of Nature, I investigate her laws, and find in them my freedom. As a member of the social order I dispute the erroneous maxims of moralists, and I repudiate any laws that no legislator had a right to make.

In everything not forbidden by a higher and obvious law, my desire is my law, for it is the sign of natural impulse; it is my right by the mere fact of being my desire. Life is not sweet to me if I am disenchanted as to its goods and have nothing left but its ills. It then becomes my bane, and I have the right as a being who chooses and wills, to leave it.

If I dare to decide where so many have doubted, it is the outcome of profound conviction. Even if my

decision happens to tally with my wants, at any rate it has not been dictated by any partiality; if I am in error, I venture to affirm that I am not guilty, for I cannot conceive where the error lies.

My object in all this has been to ascertain what I *could* do; I make no statement as to what I *shall* do. I feel neither despair nor passion; it is sufficient for my peace of mind if I am certain that the useless burden can be shaken off when it weighs too heavily. Life has long been a weariness to me, and every day it becomes more so, but I am far from desperation. I still feel some repugnance to parting irrevocably with my being. If I had to decide here and now either to break all bonds or to be held by them of necessity forty years more, I do not think I should feel much hesitation; but there is the less reason for hurry because I can do it just as well a few months hence as to-day, and the Alps are the only region suited to the particular way in which I should like to put an end to my existence.

LETTER XLII.

LYONS, *May 29th* (VI.).

I have read your letter several times through. A too kindly interest dictated it. I appreciate the friendship that misleads you; you have made me feel that I am not so lonely as I professed to be. You ingeniously set forth some very praiseworthy motives; but believe

me, though a great deal might be said to a passionate man in the grip of despair, there is not a single valid answer to a tranquil man discussing his own death.

Not that I have decided anything. I am overwhelmed with ennui, steeped in disgust. I know the evil is in myself. Why cannot I be content just to eat and sleep? For I do manage to eat and sleep The life I lead is one of no great hardship. Every one of my days is endurable, but it is their totality that overwhelms me. An organized being must act, and act according to his nature. Does it suffice him to be well sheltered and warmed, softly pillowed, fed on delicate fruits, surrounded by the murmur of waters and the scent of flowers? If you keep him passive, this softness wearies him, these fragrances pall on him, these choice fruits fail to nourish him. Take back your gifts and your chains; let him act, let him suffer even; for action is enjoyment and life.

Nevertheless, apathy has become almost natural to me. The idea of an active life seems to dismay or to stun me. A narrow sphere repels me, yet I cannot get out of its groove. A wide sphere always attracts me, but my indolence dreads it. I know neither what I am, nor what I like, nor yet what I want; I groan without cause; I desire without object, and the only thing I see is that I am not in my right place.

I regard this inalienable privilege of ceasing to be not as an object of steadfast desire or fixed resolution, but as the consolation which is left in long continued calamities, as a limit to disgusts and annoyances that is always within reach.

You call my attention to the concluding sentence in

one of Lord Edward's letters.[1] I see nothing in it to disprove my point. I agree as to the principle, but the law which forbids under all circumstances the voluntary surrender of life does not seem to me a necessary inference.

Man's morality and enthusiasm, his restless wishes and perpetual craving for expansion, seem to suggest that his goal is not in things that pass away, that his activity is not confined to visible phenomena, that his thought is concerned with necessary and eternal conceptions, that his business is to work for the betterment or the reformation of the world, that his vocation is in some sense to develop, to refine, to organize, to give more energy to matter, more power to living beings, more perfection to instruments, more fecundity to germs, better adjustment to correspondences, wider sway to order.

He is often regarded as Nature's agent, employed by her to give the finishing touches to her work, to turn to account whatever portions of brute matter are accessible to him, to bring shapeless masses under the laws of harmony, to refine metals, improve plants, disentangle or combine principles, to volatilize solids and transform inertia into energy, to bring up to his level those who fall short of it, and himself to rise and progress towards the universal principle of fire, light, order, and harmony.

On this supposition, the man who is worthy of so high a calling will stay at his post to the last moment, victorious over obstacles and aversions. I respect such

[1] Perhaps a character in a drama by Alexander Duval (1802), based on Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV.*—Tr.

constancy, but I am not convinced that that is his post. If man survives apparent death, why, I repeat, should his post be limited to earth any more than to the circumstances or the place he was born in? If on the other hand death ends all, what more can be expected of him than the betterment of society? He has duties to fulfil, but as they are necessarily confined to the present life, they can neither bind him beyond nor compel him to remain under their sway. While in the social order he must maintain order; among men he must serve men. No doubt a good man will not forsake life so long as he can be useful in it; to be useful and to be happy are for him the same thing. If he suffers and yet at the same time is doing much good, he is more pleased than dissatisfied. But when the ill he experiences outweighs the good he achieves, he may quit everything, and indeed must do so when he is useless and unhappy, if only he can be sure that in these two particulars his lot will not change. Life was given him without his consent, and if he were also bound to keep it, what freedom would he have left? He can part with his other rights, but never with that; without that last refuge his dependence would be appalling. To suffer much for the sake of being a little useful is a virtue one may recommend during life, but not a duty one can prescribe for a man who is leaving it. So long as you are using the things of life it is an obligatory virtue; it is on that condition that you become a member of the State; but when you surrender the contract, it no longer binds you. Besides, what is meant by being useful, when it is said that each of us may be so? A shoemaker who does his

work properly spares his customers some discomfort, and yet I doubt whether an utterly miserable shoemaker is in conscience bound to go on measuring feet until he dies of paralysis. When we are useful in this sense it is quite permissible to discontinue our usefulness. It is often noble in a man to bear the burden of life, but that does not mean that he is always bound to do it.

I seem to have said a great deal about a very simple matter. But simple though I take it to be, do not imagine that I am infatuated with the idea and attribute more importance to the voluntary act which puts an end to life than to any other act of that life. I fail to see that dying is such a very great concern; plenty of men die without having time to think about it, without even being aware of it! No doubt a voluntary death ought to be well considered, but so should all actions whose consequences are not confined to the present moment.

When a contingency becomes probable, let us forthwith see what it will require of us. It is worth while to consider it beforehand, so as not to be oppressed by the alternative of acting without deliberation or of losing in deliberation the opportunity of acting. If a man who has not determined his principles finds himself alone with a woman, he does not set himself to think out his duties; he begins by failing in his most sacred obligations; he will perhaps think of them later. How many heroic deeds too would never have been done if it had been necessary, before risking one's life, to spend an hour in considering the matter?

As I say, I have come to no resolution, but I like to

feel that I am not debarred from a resource which is in itself infallible, and the mere idea of which can often lessen my impatience.

LETTER XLIII.

LYONS, *May 30th* (VI.).

La Bruyère[1] somewhere remarks—"I should not object to entrust myself in confidence to a reasonable person, to be governed by him in all circumstances, both absolutely and for ever. I should be sure of doing the right thing without the anxiety of deliberation; I should enjoy the peace of mind of one who is governed by reason."

For my own part, I can say to you what I would say to no one else, that I should like to be a slave in order to be independent, though perhaps you will think I am jesting. A man who has a part to play in the world, and who can bend things to his will, is no doubt freer than a slave, or at any rate leads a more satisfying life, since he can live according to his thought. But there are men who are bound hand and foot. If they make a movement, the inextricable chain which holds them like a snare drags them back into futility; it is a spring that reacts with more force the further it is stretched. What can you expect of a poor wretch entangled like this? In spite of his so-called freedom

[1] French author, 1645-96; tutor to the Dauphin along with Bossuet; an opponent of Fénelon.—TR.

he can no more manifest his vital activities than a man who wears away his life in a dungeon. Those who have found a weak point in their cage, and whose fetters fate has forgotten to rivet, come and say: "Courage! you must make an effort; be daring; do as we do." They do not see that it was not themselves who did it. I do not say that chance produces human affairs, but I believe they are controlled, partly at any rate, by a force extraneous to man, and that a combination of circumstances independent of our will is essential to success.

Were there no moral power modifying what we call the probabilities of chance, the course of the world would be far more unstable than it is. By the laws of probability the lot of a nation would oftener fluctuate, every destiny would be at the mercy of an abstruse calculation; the world would be different, it would no longer have laws because they would have no causality. Who does not see the impossibility of it? There would be a contradiction; good men would be free in their projects.

If there is no general power controlling all things, what strange delusion prevents men from seeing with dismay that in order to keep up Roman candles, clerical collars, and christening cakes, they have so ordered everything that a single fault or a single occurrence can blight and ruin a man's whole existence? A woman, for losing sight of the future for one minute, has nothing to look forward to in that future but nine months of bitter anxiety and a lifetime of infamy. The heedless scoundrel who has just killed his victim will next day ruin his health for ever by forgetting in his

turn. And yet you fail to see that the present scheme of things, in which one incident can wreck a moral career, or a single caprice cost a thousand lives, though you call it the social edifice, is nothing but a conglomeration of masked wretchedness and delusions, and that you are like children who fancy their toys are very costly because they are covered with gilt paper. You calmly assert "That is how the world is made." Exactly; and is not that a proof that we are nothing else in the universe but marionettes worked by a showman, set in opposition, whirled here and there, made to laugh, to fight, to weep, to jump, for the entertainment of—whom? I cannot tell. But that is why I should like to be a slave; my will would be in subjection, and my thought would be free. As it is, in my alleged independence it is a necessity to act according to my thought, and yet I am unable to do so, and cannot clearly see why I am unable; the consequence is that my whole being is in bondage, without the resolution to endure it.

I do not really know what I want. Happy the man who only wants to attend to business; he can define to himself his aim. I feel deeply that nothing great, nothing that is possible to man and sublime in his conceptions, is beyond the reach of my nature; and yet I feel just as much that I have missed my aim, wrecked and rendered futile my life; it is already death-stricken; its agitation is as idle as it is excessive; it is energetic but barren, inactive and ardent amid the calm and endless travail of creation. I do not know what to wish for, so I am driven to wish for everything, for after all I can find no rest so long as I am devoured

with longing; I cannot find any foothold in emptiness. I would fain be happy! But what man has a right to expect happiness in a world where nearly all wear themselves out completely in merely lessening their miseries.

If I have not the peace of happiness, I must have the activity of power. Verily, I have no wish to drag myself from grade to grade, to take a position in society, to have superiors whom I acknowledge for the sake of having inferiors to disdain. Nothing is so absurd as that hierarchy of contempt which descends in accurately proportioned shades, and includes the whole state, from the prince who claims to be subject to God alone, down to the poorest street shoeblack, subject to the woman who lets him sleep on fusty straw. A steward dare not walk into his master's room; but once back in the kitchen, see how he lords it. You might take the scullion who trembles under him to be the lowest of men. Not a bit of it. He roughly orders about the poor woman who comes to carry away the sweepings, and who earns a few coppers by his patronage. The valet entrusted with orders is a confidential person, and he in turn gives orders to the valet whose less handsome figure is put to rough work. The beggar who has found a good line bullies with his cleverness the beggar who cannot boast of a sore.

He alone is completely victorious who spends the whole of his life in the place for which his temperament fits him, or he whose genius grasps many objects, whose destiny places him in every situation possible to man, and who is equal to the situation in all of them.

In the midst of danger he is a Morgan ;[1] as a ruler, a Lycurgus ; among barbarians he is Odin ; among Greeks, Alcibiades ; in the credulous East, Zoroaster ; in retirement he lives like Philocles ;[2] he governs like Trajan ; in the wilds he hardens himself for times to come ; he vanquishes alligators, swims rivers, chases the wild goat on frozen crags, lights his pipe at volcanic lava ;[3] he slaughters near his hut the polar bear, pierced with arrows made by his own hands. But man has so short a time to live, and the permanence of what he leaves behind him is so uncertain ! Were his heart not so ravenous perhaps his reason would advise him simply to steer clear of suffering, while imparting happiness to a few friends worthy to enjoy it without stultifying his work.

It is said that wise men, living without passion, live without impatience, and as they see everything in the same mood, they find peace and the dignity of life in their stability. But there are often great obstacles in the way of this tranquil unconcern. In order to take things as they come, sitting lightly to the hope as well as the fears of the future, there is only one sure way, a simple and easy one; and that is to banish the future

[1] Perhaps Henry Morgan, 1635-88, born in Glamorgan, became a buccaneer in the Barbadoes, and distinguished himself in expeditions against Spanish possessions.—Tr.

[2] Tragic Athenian poet, nephew of Æschylus, IV. Cent. B.C., surnamed Bile, and Salt from his acerbity. The other names in this paragraph need no explanation.—Tr.

[3] A case in point is related in the *Histoire des Voyages*. An Icelander told a Danish scientist that he had several times lighted his pipe at a stream of fire in Iceland which flowed for nearly two years.

from one's mind. The thought of it is always distracting because always uncertain.

To be free from fears and desires we must resign everything to circumstances as though to a kind of necessity, accepting joy or suffering as they come, and utilizing the present moment none the less calmly though the hour of one's death were in its wake. A strong soul accustomed to high thinking may attain to the wise man's unconcern about what the distracted and prejudiced call calamities and blessings, but how avoid distraction when the future has to be considered? How forget it, if it has to be provided for? How escape anxiety if one must arrange, make plans, and manage things? Events, hindrances, successes, must be foreseen, and to foresee them is to dread or to hope for them. Doing implies desiring, and to desire is to be dependent. The great misfortune is to be driven to act freely. The slave has far more facility for being really free. He has only himself to consider; he is led by the law of his nature, and that is natural to man, and simple. He is subject also to his master, but that law too is obvious. Epictetus was happier than Marcus Aurelius. The slave is free from anxieties, they are for the free man; the slave is not obliged to be always trying to adjust himself to the scheme of things, an adjustment always insecure and disturbing, the standing difficulty of one who would live a human life reasonably. It is certainly a necessity, nay more, a duty, to consider the future, to be engrossed with it, even to set one's affections on it, when one is responsible for the welfare of others. Indifference is then no longer permissible; and what man is there, however apparently isolated, who is not

good for something, and who ought not therefore to seek opportunities of being so? Who is there whose carelessness will injure no one but himself?

The Epicurean should have neither wife nor children, and even that is not sufficient. No sooner are the interests of another dependent on our prudence than little distracting cares mar our peace, disturb our soul, and often even quench our genius.

What will become of a man bound in such fetters and born to be chafed by them? He will be racked between the cares in which he is reluctantly engrossed, and the contempt which makes them uncongenial to him. He will neither be superior to circumstances—for his duty will not let him—nor equal to making good use of them. In wisdom he will be uncertain, and in business impatient or clumsy; he will do no good because he can do nothing according to his nature. If one would live independent one should be neither father nor husband, perhaps even not have a friend; but to be thus alone is to live very sadly and uselessly. A man in control of public affairs who plans and carries out great undertakings can do without special attachments; the people are his friends, and as a benefactor of men he can dispense with being such to any one man. But in an obscure life it seems to me there must be at least one person to whom we have duties to fulfil. Philosophic independence is a convenient sort of life, but a cold one. Any one but an enthusiast would find it insipid in the long run. It is dreadful to end one's days by saying: "No heart has been made happy through me; I have wrought nothing for the welfare of man; I have lived unmoved and ineffective, like some glacier in a mountain hollow

which has withstood the noonday sun but has not descended to the valley to refresh with its water the herbage withered by the scorching rays."

Religion settles all these anxieties;[1] it resolves so many uncertainties; it gives an end which is never unveiled because never attained; it dominates us in order to make us at peace with ourselves; it offers us blessings for which we can always hope, because we cannot verify them; it banishes the idea of annihilation and the passions of life; it frees us from our hopeless ills and fleeting goods, and gives us instead a dream, the hope of which is perhaps better than all concrete gains, lasting at least until death. If it did not proclaim appalling punishment it would seem as beneficent as it is solemn, but it plunges the thought of man into fresh abysses. It is based on dogmas which many cannot believe; they desire its effects, but cannot experience them; they yearn for its security, but cannot enjoy it. They seek for its heavenly visions, but see only a mortal dream; they love the good man's reward, but do not see that Nature is their debtor; they would like to live for ever, and they see that everything passes away. While newly-tonsured novices distinctly hear an angel commending their fasts and their merits, those who have a feeling for virtue know well that they cannot rise so high; overwhelmed with their weakness and the emptiness of their lot, they look forward to nothing but desire and distraction, and to vanishing like an unconscious shadow.

[1] The author does not say definitely what he means here by religion, but it is clear that he has in view more particularly the belief of western nations.

LETTER XLIV.

LYONS, *June 15th* (VI.).

I have re-read and pondered your objections, or if you like, your reproaches. The question is a very serious one, and I am going to reply fully. If the time spent in argument is generally wasted, that spent in writing is by no means so.

Do you really think that those views of mine which you say add to my unhappiness, depend on myself? I do not dispute that the safest plan is to believe. You confront me also with that other assertion, that belief is necessary as a sanction of morality.

First of all let me say that I do not set up to be positive; I should like not to deny, but I find it rash, to say the least of it, to affirm. No doubt it is a misfortune to be disposed to regard as impossible what one would fain believe true, but I do not know how one can escape this misfortune,[1] when one has been overtaken by it.

Death, you say, has no existence for man. You think *hic jacet* is profane. The man of character and of genius is not there, under that cold marble, in those dead ashes. Who said he was? In that sense *hic jacet* would be false on the grave of a dog; its loyal, busy instinct is not there either. Where is it then? It is no more.

[1] Perhaps by deeper reflection, which would restore their independence to more religious doubts.

You ask me what has become of the activity, the intelligence, the soul, of that body which has just collapsed. The answer is very simple. When the fire on your hearth goes out, as everybody knows, its light and warmth and energy leave it and pass into another world, to be there eternally rewarded for warming your feet, or eternally punished for burning your slippers! In the same way the music of the lyre just shattered by the ephor[1] will be shrilled from pipes until it has expiated by more austere sounds those voluptuous modulations which formerly corrupted morality.

"Nothing can be annihilated," you say. Not so; a being or an atom cannot, but a form, a relation, a faculty, can. I should be glad indeed to think that the soul of a good and struggling man survived him for eternal happiness. But if the mere idea of this blessedness has itself a touch of heavenly radiance, that does not prove it to be more than a dream. The dogma is no doubt beautiful and comforting, but its beautiful and comforting elements do not even give the hope of believing in it, much less convince me of its existence. When some charlatan professes to tell me that if I implicitly follow his instructions for ten days I shall receive at the end of that time supernatural powers, becoming invulnerable, ever young, possessing everything essential to happiness, equal to every good action and incapable of desiring evil; the dream will captivate my imagination no doubt; I may possibly hanker for its fascinating promises, but I could not persuade myself they were true. In vain will he object that I

[1] A Spartan magistrate.—TR.

run no risk in believing him. If he used even more lavish promises to persuade me that the sun was shining at midnight, it would not be in my power to believe it. If he turned round and said: "Frankly, I told you a lie, and other men are taken in by it; but do not tell them; it is all for their comfort;"—might I not reply that in this harsh and sordid world, where some hundreds of millions of immortals argue and suffer in the same uncertainty, some cheerful, exhilarated, and sprightly, others dejected, morose, and disappointed, no one has yet proved it a duty to say what one believes to be comforting and to suppress what one believes to be true.

Full of unrest and more or less unhappy we are always looking forward to the next hour, next day, next year. Last of all we need a next life. We have existed without living, so we *shall* live some day; an inference more tempting than accurate. If it is a comfort to the unhappy, all the more reason to suspect the truth of it. It is a beautiful dream which lasts until we fall asleep for ever. Let us cling to the hope; happy he who has it! But let us admit that the ground of its universality is not difficult to find.

It is true that one risks nothing by believing it if one can, but it is no less true that Pascal's dictum was puerile—"Believe, because you risk nothing by believing, but much by not believing." This argument is decisive in matters of conduct, but absurd in a question of faith. When did belief ever depend on the will?

A good man cannot but desire immortality, and from that the daring inference has been drawn that only a bad man will not believe in it. This rash judgment

classes with those who have reason to dread the eternity of justice many of the wisest and greatest of men. It would be atrocious in its intolerance were it not so imbecile.

It is further alleged that every man who believes death will be the end of him is necessarily selfish and vicious as a matter of calculation. Another mistake. Helvetius[1] showed more knowledge of the differences in human hearts when he said: "There are men so unfortunately constituted that they can only find happiness in acts which lead to the gallows." There are also men who can only be at ease when those around them are happy; who sympathize with everything that enjoys or suffers, and who would be dissatisfied with themselves if they were not serving their day and generation. Such as these try to do good without having much faith in the lake of brimstone.

"At any rate," it will be objected, "the masses are not like that. With the common herd each individual looks after his selfish interests, and will be vicious if not wholesomely hoodwinked." That may be true so far. If men neither should nor could be undeceived, it would then only be a question of deciding whether the public well-being justifies lying, and whether it is a crime, or at any rate an injury, to reveal the true state of the case. But if this wholesome—or supposed wholesome—error can only last so long, and if belief on hear-say will one day inevitably end, is it not obvious that your whole moral structure will be left

[1] A French philosopher, 1715-71; retired in 1751 from his office as queen's chamberlain, and gave himself up to literary labours, the education of his children, and the care of a small estate at Voré.—Tr.

without support, when once its imposing scaffolding has collapsed? In order to find a short and easy way of safeguarding the present you involve the future in a catastrophe that may be irretrievable. On the other hand if you had known how to find in the human heart the natural foundations of its morality, if you had known how to base upon them whatever was necessary to social organization and state institutions, your work, though more difficult and more intelligent, would have been permanent as the world itself.

If then, ye ministers of dogmatic truth, some one unconvinced of what the most respected among yourselves have not believed were to come and say: "The nations are beginning to want certainties and to recognize things that are practical; ethics are being transformed, and faith has died out; no time must be lost in showing men that, apart from a future life, justice is a necessity of their hearts, and that even for the individual there is no happiness without reason, while in society the virtues are as essentially laws of Nature as the laws of a man's physical needs"—if I say, some of those instinctively just and order-loving men whose chief aim is to restore unity, harmony, and gladness to their fellows, were to declare the incontestable principles of justice and universal love, while leaving in doubt what cannot be proved; if they ventured to speak of the invariable channels of happiness, and if, constrained by the truth they see and feel, and you yourselves admit, they were to devote their lives to proclaiming it in various ways and eventually with success—pardon, I pray you, the methods which are not exactly your own; bear in mind that stoning

is no longer in fashion, that modern miracles have provoked too much laughter, that times are changed and you must change with them.

Leaving then these interpreters of heaven, whose high function makes them very useful or very pernicious, wholly good or wholly bad, some of them venerable, others despicable, I come back to your letter. It would make mine too long if I replied to all its points, but there is one plausible objection I cannot allow to pass without remarking that it is not so well grounded as at first sight it might seem to be.

"Nature," you say, "is controlled by unknown forces and according to mysterious laws; order is its rule, intelligence its mainspring, and it is not far from these established though obscure premises to our inexplicable dogmas." Much further than you think.[1]

"Many remarkable men have believed in presentiments, dreams, secret workings of invisible powers; many remarkable men have therefore been superstitious." Granted, but at least they were not so after the fashion of small minds. The biographer of Alexander says that he was superstitious, so also was Brother Labre; but Alexander and Brother Labre were not superstitious in the same way; there were considerable differences in their mental processes. But we will discuss that another time.

[1] There is certainly a vast difference between admitting that there exist things inexplicable to man, and affirming that an inconceivable explanation of those things is correct and infallible. It is one thing to say in the dark, "I do not see," and another thing to say, "I see a divine light; you who follow me, do not say you fail to see it, but see it or be anathema."

I do not see any valid proof of divine origin in the almost supernatural efforts religion has inspired. All kinds of fanaticism have produced results which seem surprising in cold blood.

If your saints bestow their coppers freely on the poor out of an income of thirty thousand a year, they are lauded for charity. If as martyrs the executioner "opens the gate of heaven" for them, everybody exclaims that without grace from on high they would never have had strength to accept eternal blessedness. As a rule I fail to see anything in their virtues that is surprising from their point of view. The prize is great enough, but they are often very small. To keep straight they have need always to see hell on the left, purgatory on the right, and heaven in front. I do not say there are no exceptions; it is enough for my point that they are rare.

If religion has done great things it has been by great inducements. Those accomplished by natural goodness are less dazzling perhaps, less opinionated and less eulogized, but more stable and more serviceable.

Stoicism also had its heroes, even without eternal promises and infinite threats. If a religious cult had done so much with so little, grand proofs of its divine institution would have been drawn from it. I will resume to-morrow.

. . . . . .

There are two points to consider: whether religion is not one of the weakest influences with the class which receives what is called education, and whether it is not absurd that education should only be given to a tenth part of mankind.

To say that the virtue of the Stoic was spurious because he made no claim to eternal life is the height of bigoted insolence.

A no less curious instance of the absurdity into which rabid dogmatism can betray even an acute mind is found in this saying of the celebrated Tillotson[1]: "The real ground of a man's atheism is vice."

I admit that civil laws are found inefficient with the untutored and uncared for masses, whom we allow to be born and leave at the mercy of foolish propensities and intemperate habits; but this only proves that under the apparent calm of powerful States there is nothing but wretchedness and confusion, that policy in the true sense of the word has vanished from this earth of ours, where diplomacy and finance create countries that flourish in poetry, and gain victories to report in gazettes.

I have no wish to discuss a complicated problem; let history decide! But is it not notorious that the dread of the future has restrained very few who were beyond restraint by anything else? For others there exist more natural and direct, and therefore more powerful restrictions. What should have been done was to make every man conscious of the need of that order for which he possesses an intuitive appreciation. There would then have been fewer scoundrels than your dogmas have failed to restrain, and you would have been minus all those that dogmas have made.

It is said that first offences at once plant the torture of remorse in the heart and leave it rankling there

[1] One of the greatest of English preachers, 1630-94; originally a Presbyterian, but submitted in 1662 to Act of Uniformity and became Archbishop of Canterbury, 1691.—Tr.

for ever, and it is also said that a consistent atheist will fleece his friend and murder his enemy. That is one of the contradictions I think I see in the writings of defenders of the faith. But of course it cannot be one, for men who write on revealed truth should have no excuse for ambiguity and discrepancies; they are so superior to them that they cannot tolerate the mere semblance of them in those profane people who say they are endowed with a reason that is weak, not inspired, and with doubt, not infallibility.

"What matters inward self-satisfaction," say they again, "if one does not believe in a future life?" It matters to one's peace of mind in this life, which in that case is the only one.

"If there is no immortality," they continue, "what has the virtuous man gained by doing right?" He has gained what the virtuous man prizes, and lost only what he lightly esteems—namely, what your passions often covet in spite of your belief.

The only motive you recognize is the hope and dread of a future life; but may not a tendency to order be an essential feature of our inclinations, of our instinct, like self-preservation or reproduction? Is it nothing to enjoy the calm and security of the upright man?

Accustomed as you are to link every magnanimous sentiment and every just and pure idea exclusively with your immortal desires and other-worldly notions, you always conclude that everything not supernatural is base, that everything which does not exalt man to the realms of the blessed inevitably sinks him to the level of the brute, that earthly virtues are only a miserable pretence, and that a soul confined to the present life

has only debased desires and impure thoughts. So you would make out that if a good and upright man, after forty years of patience in suffering, of equity among rogues, and of generous efforts worthy of divine approval, were to recognize the falsity of the dogmas which consoled him, and sustained his arduous life with the hope of lasting repose, then this wise man, whose soul is nourished on the calm of virtue, and for whom doing right is life, would alter his present needs because he has altered his views of the future, and no longer desiring present happiness because he cannot live for ever, would begin to plot against an old friend who has never doubted him? He would busy himself with base and secret schemes for getting wealth and power, and so long as he could evade human justice would imagine that for the future it would be to his interest to deceive the good, to oppress the unfortunate, to keep up the mere prudent exterior of an honest man, while cherishing in his heart all the vices he had previously abhorred? Seriously, I should hesitate to put this question to your bigots, with their monopoly of virtue; for if they replied in the negative I should tell them they were very inconsistent. Now one must never lose sight of the fact that inconsistency is just what inspired men have no excuse for. If, on the other hand, they dared to assert the affirmative—well, I should be sorry for them.

"If the idea of immortality has all the characteristics of a beautiful dream, that of annihilation does not admit of rigid proof. The good man necessarily desires not to perish entirely; is not that ground enough to confirm it?"

If one could not be just without hope in a future life, that vague possibility would still be sufficient. It is superfluous to him who lives by reason; temporal considerations may afford him less satisfaction, but they are just as convincing; he feels a present craving to be just. Other men heed only the interests of the moment. They think of Paradise when religious rites are in question, but in matters of morality they are swayed solely by fear of consequences, of public opinion, of law, and by the bias of their minds. Imaginary duties are faithfully attended to by some, but real ones are set aside by nearly all when there is no temporal risk involved.

If men were gifted with sound understanding and goodness of heart there would be such a majority on the side of right that the rest would be constrained to follow, even by the most obvious and mercenary of their interests. As it is, you pervert the understanding and dwarf the soul. For thirty centuries the results have been worthy of the wisdom displayed. All kinds of compulsion have pernicious consequences and only ephemeral success; the right thing then is to convince by persuasion.

I am loth to leave a subject as important as it is inexhaustible.

I am so far from having any prejudice against Christianity that I regret in one sense what most of its zealous defenders would scarcely think of regretting themselves. I am as ready as they are to lament the neglect of Christianity, but with this difference: they regret it as it was in practice, as it existed a century ago, whereas I do not consider we are much worse off without that sort of Christianity.

Conquerors, slaves, poets, pagan priests, and nurses have succeeded in distorting the traditions of ancient wisdom by mingling races, destroying manuscripts, interpreting and confusing allegories, overlooking the real intrinsic meaning in the quest for absurd ideas to evoke admiration, and personifying abstractions in order to have more to worship.

Great conceptions became debased. The Principle of Life, Intelligence, Light, the Eternal, was simply the husband of Juno; Harmony, Fecundity, Union, henceforth became Venus; imperishable Wisdom was only known by its owl; the great ideas of immortality and recompense were reduced to the dread of turning a wheel and the hope of roaming through green woodlands. The indivisible Divinity was split up into a complex hierarchy swayed by sordid passions; the product of the genius of primitive races, the symbols of universal laws sank to mere superstitious practices for city children to laugh at.

Rome had changed most of the world, and began herself to change. The frenzied, restless West, oppressed or threatened, educated yet deluded, ignorant though disenchanted, had lost everything without gaining anything in its place; still fast asleep in error, it was already startled by confused murmurs of the truths that science was in quest of.

Under the same rule, with identical fears and interests, sharing the same spirit of resentment and revenge against the Romans, all nations were drawn together. Their customs had lapsed, their constitutions vanished; patriotism, the spirit of aloofness and isolation and hatred of outsiders were weakened in the common

desire to withstand the conquerors, or by the necessity of accepting their laws. The name of Rome had levelled all differences. The ancient national religions were now merely local traditions; the God of the Capitol had banished their own gods, and he in turn had been banished by the deification of the emperors. The most popular altars were those of the Cæsars.

It was one of the greatest epochs in the world's history; there was room for a shrine of majestic simplicity to be raised above the ruins of these manifold local shrines.

There was need of a moral faith, since morality pure and simple was unrecognized; there was need of dogmas, inscrutable perhaps, but in no way ridiculous, for light was spreading. Since all forms of worship were debased, there was need of some majestic form worthy of the man who endeavours to uplift his soul by the idea of a God of the world. Rites were needed that would be impressive, seldom performed, longed for, mysterious, yet simple; rites on the one hand transcendent, and on the other adapted to man's reason as well as his heart. There was needed what a great genius alone could establish, and what I cannot give more than a glimpse of.

But you have invented, patched up, experimented, corrected, and begun again a medley of paltry ceremonies and of dogmas quite calculated to scandalize the weak; you have associated this random conglomeration with a morality sometimes spurious, often very beautiful, and always austere—the only point in which you have not been clumsy. You spend several hundred years in settling all that by inspiration, and

the tardy result, diligently patched up but badly planned, is calculated to last barely as long as you have taken to accomplish it.

Nothing could be more supremely tactless than to entrust the priesthood to all comers, and to have a horde of men of God. A sacrifice whose nature was essentially unique was multiplied beyond all bounds. There seemed to be no regard for anything but immediate results and present convenience; offerers of sacrifice and confessors were planted everywhere; everywhere priests and monks were manufactured; they meddled in everything, and crowds of them existed everywhere in luxury or in beggary.

This multiplication is convenient, they say, for the faithful. But it is not a good thing in religious matters for the people to find everything they want at the next street corner. It is folly to entrust religious functions to a million persons; they are thus constantly being left to the lowest of men, and their dignity is compromised; their sacred character wears off by too frequent repetition, and the time is rapidly hastened when everything will perish that has not imperishable foundations.

LETTER XLV.

CHESSEL, *July 27th* (VI.).

I have never considered it a weakness to shed a tear over the ills of others, over a misfortune outside ourselves but well known to us. So he is dead—a little

thing in itself, for who escapes death? But he had always been unfortunate and sad; life had never been sweet to him; he had nothing but sorrow, and now he has nothing at all, I have seen him and pitied him; I respected him, for he was good though unhappy. He had no striking misfortunes, but he found himself on entering life in a dreary track of irksomeness and boredom; he stuck to it, he lived in it, he grew old in it before his time, and now he has ended his days in it.

I have not forgotten that country property he wanted, and that I went with him to look at, because I knew the owner. "You will be comfortable here," I told him; "better years will be in store for you to banish the memory of the past. You will take these rooms and find solitude and quiet in them." "I could be happy here," he said, "but it is too good to be true."

"You will realize it to-morrow, when you have signed the deed."

"You will see I shall never get it."

Nor did he; you know how it all fell through. The bulk of living men are sacrificed to the prosperity of a few, just as the majority of infants are sacrificed for the sake of those who survive, or as millions of acorns to the beauty of the mighty oaks that flourish over some great tract of country. And the pity of it is that among this crowd whom fate abandons and tramples into the mud of life's marshes there are some who cannot adapt themselves to their lot, but wear out their energies in impotent chafing against it. General laws are very fine things, and I would gladly sacrifice to them one, two, or even ten years of my life; but my

whole existence, that is too much. Though nothing to Nature, it is everything to me. In this great scramble the cry is—"Look out for yourself!" That would be all very well if every man's turn came sooner or later, or even if one could keep on hoping for it; but when life is slipping away, one knows well that the end is drawing near, even though the moment of death be uncertain. What hope is there left in a man who reaches sixty without anything but hope to go upon? These cosmic laws, this care for types and contempt for individuals, this progress of species is very hard on us poor individuals. I admire the providence that carves everything on such a scale; but how man is tipped out with the rubbish! And how absurdly we fancy ourselves to be something! Gods in thought, insects in happiness, we are that Jupiter whose temple is in Bedlam; he takes for a censer the wooden platter, steaming with the soup they bring to his cell; he reigns on Olympus till the buffet of his villainous gaoler brings him back to reality, to grovel and moisten with tears his mouldy bread.

Poor fellow! You lived to see your hair turn grey, and yet in all that time you had not a single day of satisfaction, not one; not even the day of your fatal marriage; that love match which gave you an estimable wife and yet was the ruin of you both. Even-tempered, affectionate, discreet, virtuous and pious, both of you the soul of goodness, you got on worse together than those maniacs who are carried away by passion and unrestrained by principle, and who cannot conceive what profit there is in goodness of heart. You said that you married for mutual help, to soothe

your pains by sharing them, to work out your salvation; and the same evening, the very first, dissatisfied with each other and your lot, you had no virtue nor consolation left to look forward to but that of patience to support you to the grave. What then was your misfortune, your crime? That of desiring the good, of desiring it too keenly, of being unable to ignore it, of desiring it scrupulously and with so much passion that you could only consider it in the detail of the moment.

You will have gathered that I knew them. They seemed glad to see me; they wanted to convert me; and although that scheme did not quite succeed, we had many a chat together. It was he whose unhappiness struck me most. His wife was no less good and estimable, but being weaker, she found in her abnegation a kind of peace which dulled her misery. Tenderly devout, consecrating her griefs, and full of the idea of future recompense, she suffered, but in a way that was not without its compensations. There was something voluntary, too, in her woes; she was unhappy for the love of it, and her groans, like those of saints, though sometimes full of pain, were precious and needful to her.

As for him, he was religious without being wrapped up in devotion; he was religious as a duty, but as free from fads and fanaticisms as from mummery; he used it to repress his passions and not to indulge some particular one. I could not even say positively that he enjoyed the assurance without which religion can please, but cannot satisfy.

That is not all. One could see how he might have been happy; one realized that the causes of his

unhappiness were outside himself. But his wife would have been pretty much the same wherever she had lived; she would have found scope everywhere for torturing herself and distressing others, while only seeking to do good, and in no wise self-centred; always under the impression she was sacrificing herself for all, yet never sacrificing her ideas, and undertaking every task except that of altering her manner. Her unhappiness therefore seemed in some sense to be part of her nature, and one felt more disposed to sympathize with her, and to take it for granted, as one does a consequence of irrevocable destiny. Her husband, on the other hand, might have lived as others do, had he lived with any one else but her. One knows how to set about the cure of an ordinary ill, especially one that is hardly worth considering, but one can see no end to the wretchedness of being doomed to pity her whose perpetual foolishness annoys us with the best of intentions, pesters us in tenderness, is always provoking us with unruffled serenity, hurts us by a kind of necessity, meets our indignation with nothing but pious tears, makes matters far worse by excuses, and incredibly blind though possessed of intelligence, drives us to the point of desperation by lamentations.

If any men have been a scourge to mankind it is surely those far-seeing legislators who have made marriage indissoluble to *compel* mutual love. To complete the story of human wisdom we still need a law-giver who, realizing the necessity of keeping a grip on a suspected criminal and also the injustice of making a possibly innocent man miserable while awaiting his trial, shall ordain in all cases two years in the cells as a preliminary instead of a month in prison, so that the necessity of

putting up with it may sweeten the prisoner's lot and make him fond of his chain!

We do not sufficiently take into account the intolerable succession of crushing and often mortal sufferings produced in private life by those awkward tempers, those bickering moods, those proud yet paltry attitudes in which so many women casually indulge, without suspecting it and without being able to get out of it, because we have never tried to make them understand the human heart. They end their days without discovering how useful it is to know how to live with men; they bring up children as stupid as themselves, and so the evil is handed down, until there turns up a happy disposition which strikes out a line of its own; and all that because we have thought they were well enough educated if taught to sew, to dance, to lay the table, and to read the Psalms in Latin.

I do not know what good can come of narrow ideas, and I fail to see that doltish ignorance constitutes simplicity; on the contrary, breadth of view produces less selfishness, less obstinacy, more honesty, helpful tact, and a hundred ways of compatibility. Among people of limited outlook, unless unusually good-hearted—and that is exceptional—you find nothing but ill-temper, differences, ridiculous obstinacy, endless altercations; and the slightest altercation grows in a couple of minutes to a bitter dispute. Harsh reproaches, ugly suspicions, and brutal manners seem to keep them in perpetual discord on the slightest provocation. There is just one thing in their favour: as they are swayed by temper only, if any trifle happens to distract them, or if some grudge against an outsider unites them, you

have them laughing and whispering together, after treating each other with supreme contempt. Half an hour later comes a fresh disturbance; a quarter of an hour after that they are singing a chorus. One must give such people credit for this, that as a rule nothing comes of their brutality, unless it be the unconquerable aversion of those who are compelled by special circumstances to live among them.

You who call yourselves Christians are still men, and yet in spite of the laws you cannot repudiate, and in spite of those you adore, you foster and perpetuate the most glaring disparities in the culture and interests of your fellow-men. The inequality exists in Nature, but you have exaggerated it beyond measure, though you ought rather to have striven to reduce it. The prodigies created by your efforts may well be a drug in the market, for you have neither time nor skill to do so many things that need doing. The mass of mankind is brutal, stupid, and left to its own devices; all our miseries spring from that. Either do not bring them into being, or give them a chance of living like men.

What then do all these long arguments of mine lead up to? That as man is insignificant in Nature, and everything to himself, he ought to concern himself somewhat less with the laws of the world and somewhat more with his own; dispensing perhaps with abstract sciences that have never dried a single tear in hamlet or attic; dispensing too with certain fine but useless arts, and with heroic but destructive passions, he ought to aim, if he can, at having institutions that will keep man human instead of brutalizing him, at

having less science but also less ignorance, and to admit that if man is not a blind force which must be left at the mercy of fatalism, if his activities have any spontaneity, then morality is the only science for man whose fate is in the hands of his fellows.

You are letting his widow enter a convent, and quite rightly, I think. That is where she should have lived; she was born for the cloister, though I maintain she would have been no happier there. So it is not on her account that I say you are doing the right thing. But if you took her into your own house you would display a futile generosity; she would be none the happier for it. Your prudent and enlightened beneficence cares little for appearances, and in considering what is best to be done only takes account of the larger or smaller sum total of good that will come of it.

LETTER XLVI.

LYONS, *Aug. 2nd* (VI.).

When day begins I am depressed, sad, and uneasy; I can settle to nothing, and see not how to fill up so many hours. Midday overwhelms me; I go inside and try to work, shutting everything up to keep out the cloudless glare. But when the light is fading and I feel around me that sweet evening charm now grown so strange to me, I am distressed and overcome; in my easy-going life I have more bitterness to weary me than a man weighed down by misfortunes. Yet people say, "You enjoy quiet now."

So does the paralytic on his bed of suffering. To waste the days of one's vigour as an old man passes those of repose! Always to wait, with nothing to hope for; always unrest without desire, agitation without object; time constantly a blank; conversations in which one makes talk and avoids speaking of facts; meals where one eats from utter ennui; dreary picnics of which nothing is welcome but the end; friends without fellowship; pleasures for the sake of appearances; laughing to please those who are yawning like oneself; and not a throb of joy in two whole years. Everlastingly to have a sluggish body, a restless brain, a doleful soul, and barely to escape in sleep from this consciousness of bitterness, repression, and uneasy boredom; it is a long-drawn agony of heart; it is not thus that man should live.

Aug. 3rd.

"If he does live thus," you will say, "it follows that thus he should live; what exists is in accordance with order; where would you look for causes if not in Nature?" I am bound to agree with you; but this order of things is only temporary, it is not in accordance with essential order, unless everything is irresistibly predetermined. If everything is necessitated, so is the fact that I must act as if there were no necessity; it is futile to argue; there is no feeling preferable to its opposite, no such thing as error, or utility. But if it be otherwise, let us admit we have gone astray, let us ascertain where we are; let us see how we can recover the ground we have lost. Resignation is often good for individuals; it can only be

fatal to the species. "It's the way of the world," is the reply of the man in the street when one talks of widespread miseries; it is that of the wise man only in particular cases.

Will it be said that one ought to fix one's attention on details of immediate utility in the existing state of things, not on ideal beauty or absolute happiness, and that as perfection is beyond the reach of humanity, still more of individual men, it is both useless and quixotic to discuss it with them? But even in Nature preparation is always more lavish than result. Of a thousand seeds a single one will germinate. We should try to see what is the highest possible, not simply in the hope of reaching it, but so that we may come nearer to it than if we regarded the attainable as the goal of our efforts. I am looking for indications of man's needs, and I look for them in myself to lessen the risk of error. I find in my own sensations a limited but reliable instance, and by observing the only man I can thoroughly know, I set myself to discover the characteristics of mankind as a whole.

You alone know how to fill your lives, you just and unaffected men, full of trust and generous affections, of calm, deep feeling, you who taste the fulness of life, and want to see the fruit of your days! You find your happiness in order and domestic peace, on the clear brow of a friend, on the smiling lips of a wife. Beware of coming under the yoke of wretched mediocrity and haughty ennui in our towns. Do not lose sight of natural things; do not subject your heart to the useless torture of questionable passions; their object, which is always remote, wears life out with suspense, until old

age too late deplores the vacuity in which the power of doing good has been swallowed up.

I am like those pitiable creatures in whom a too vivid impression has caused the permanent hyper-sensitiveness of certain fibres, and who cannot help the recurrence of their mania every time that first emotion is revived in them by imagination at the stimulus of a like object. A feeling for relations is always hinting to me of institutions congenial to order and the aim of Nature. That need of looking for conclusions whenever I see premises, that instinct to which the idea of existing in vain is repulsive—do you suppose I can overcome it? Do you not see that it is part of me, stronger than my will, necessary to me; and that it needs must enlighten or mislead me, make me unhappy and yet compel me to obey it? Do you not see that I am out of place, isolated, making no headway? I regret all that passes away; I rush and hurry from disgust; I flee the present without desiring the future. I wear myself out, I gulp down my days, I plunge on towards the end of my ennuis, with no desire for anything after them. They say time is only swift to the happy man, but they are wrong. I see it slipping away now faster than ever I knew it. May the worst man living never be happy like this!

I will make no secret of it; I once did count on inward satisfaction, but I have been sadly undeceived. What was it then that I looked forward to? I thought men would learn to adjust those details left to them by circumstances, to utilize any advantages offered them by their talents or temperament, to take up those hobbies of which one does not tire and that brighten

or while away the time; I thought they would learn not to waste the best of their years, and not to be more unhappy through their ill-management than ill-luck; that they would learn how to live! Should I then have ignored the lack of all this? Was I not well aware that this apathy, and still more this kind of mutual fear and distrust, this hesitation, this ridiculous reserve which with some is an instinct and hence with others a duty, were dooming all men to be bored by each other's society, to be slack in comradeship, languid in love, futile in co-operation, and to yawn together all their days for lack of saying, once for all, "Let us yawn no more?"

In all circumstances and everywhere men waste their existence, and then they are angry with themselves under the impression it was their own fault. In spite of our tenderness for our own failings, perhaps we are too severe in that particular, too prone to put down to ourselves what we could not avoid. When the time has gone by, we forget the details of that fatality which is inscrutable in its causes and barely perceptible in its results.

All our hopes are secretly sapped; the flowers all fade, the seeds all come to nothing; everything drops like setting fruits death-stricken by frost; they will not ripen, all will perish, and yet they still hang vegetating for a while from the blighted branches, as if the cause of their ruin had tried to remain unperceived.

One may have health and comradeship, one may see in one's possession the essentials for a happy sort of life; the means are quite simple and natural; we hold them and yet they escape us. How does it happen?

The explanation would be long and difficult, and yet I should prefer it to no end of philosophical treatises; it is not to be found even in the three thousand laws of Pythagoras.

Possibly we are too much given to neglecting things which are in themselves immaterial, and yet which one ought to desire, or at any rate accept, so as to occupy our time without languor. There is a kind of indifference which is very empty affectation, and yet into which we are betrayed unawares. We meet a great many people, and every one of them is so engrossed in his own pursuits that he either is or seems to be uninterested in many things about which we do not like to seem more keen than himself. So there grows up in us a settled attitude of indifference and detachment; it requires no sacrifices, but it adds to our boredom; trifles that are of no use separately become serviceable as a whole; they provide scope for that exercise of the affections which makes life. They are inadequate as causes of sensation, but they do deliver us from the calamity of not having any at all. Poor as they are, these interests are better suited to our nature than the childish superiority which scorns them and yet cannot supply their place. Vacancy becomes irksome in the long run; it degenerates into chronic gloom, and, hoodwinked by our haughty indolence, we let the flame of life smoulder away in dismal smoke for want of a breath of air to quicken it.

As I have said before, time flies ever the faster as one grows older. The days I have lost accumulate behind me; they crowd the dim past with their gray spectres; they pile up their wasted skeletons like the

gloomy phantom of a sepulchral monument. And if my restless eyes turn to gaze on the future, brighter once than the past, I find the full outlines and dazzling images of its successive days have sadly fallen off. Their colours are fading; that veil of distance whose magic dimness invested them with heavenly radiance is now stripped from their barren, dreary shapes. By the austere glimmer which reveals them in the eternal darkness I already see the last of them standing out alone on the brink of the abyss with nothing beyond it.

Do you remember our idle wishes and boyish schemes? The rapture of a lovely sky, of forgetfulness of men, and desert freedom!

What has become of that simplicity of hope, that young enchantment of a heart which believes in happiness and wills whatever it desires in ignorance of life? In those days the silent woods, clear streams, wild fruits, and our own comradeship sufficed us. The world around us has nothing to supply the place of those yearnings of an upright heart and restive mind, of that first dream of our earliest spring times.

If some brighter hour chance to smooth our brows with unforeseen tranquillity, the fleeting trace of peace and well-being, the hour that follows soon prints upon them morose and weary lines, effacing for ever their pristine freshness with wrinkles steeped in bitterness.

Since that age, now so remote, the rare moments which have revived the notion of happiness do not make up in my life a single day that I would care to live over again. That is the characteristic of my wearisome lot; others are more positively unhappy, but I doubt if there ever was a man less happy. I tell myself

that one is prone to complain, and that one feels every detail of one's own miseries while minimizing or overlooking those not experienced by oneself, and yet I think I am right in supposing that no one could have less enjoyment of life or more uniformly come short of his needs than myself.

Not that I am actively suffering, provoked, irritated; I am just weary, low-spirited, sunk in dejection. Sometimes, it is true, an unexpected wave of feeling lifts me out of the narrow sphere in which I am confined. It is too sudden to guard against; it fills me and carries me away before I have time to realize the futility of the impulse; thus I lose that philosophic calm which gives permanence to our woes by measuring them up with its mechanical instruments and pedantic, finite formulæ.

At such times I forget these accidental circumstances—mere wretched links of the brittle chain my weakness has forged; I see on the one hand my soul alone, with its energies and desires, as a circumscribed but independent centre of activity, which nothing can save from final extinction, and yet which nothing can hinder from being true to itself; and on the other hand I see everything in the world as its appropriate sphere, as its instruments, and the materials of its life. I disdain that timid and dilatory prudence which overlooks the force of genius and lets the fire of the heart die out for the sake of the toys it is shaping, and letting slip for ever the reality of life to arrange mere puerile shadows.

I ask myself what I am doing; why I do not set myself to live; what force enslaves me when I am

free; what weakness checks me when I am conscious of an energy whose suppressed struggles wear me out; what I expect when I hope for nothing; what I am seeking here, when I love and desire nothing; what fatality compels me to do what is against my will without my seeing how it compels me?

It is easy to get out of it; it is time I did; I must, in fact; and yet scarcely is the word spoken when the impulse is checked, the energy flags, and I am plunged once more into the sleep that stultifies my life. Time flows steadily away; I rise with reluctance, I go to bed weary, I wake without desires. I shut myself up, and am bored; I go out, and groan. If the weather is dull, I find it melancholy; if fine, to me it is profitless. The town is insipid, the country hateful to me. The sight of the unhappy distresses me, that of the happy does not deceive me. I laugh bitterly when I see men making themselves miserable, and if some are calmer, I smile to think that they are supposed to be contented.

I see how ridiculous is the attitude I assume. I snub myself and laugh at my impatience. None the less I seek in every circumstance that strange two-fold aspect which makes it a source of our miseries, and that comedy of contrasts which makes the world of men a conflicting scene, where everything is important amid universal insignificance. Thus I blunder along, not knowing which way to turn. I am restless because I have nothing to do; I talk to escape thinking; I am lively, through sheer dulness. I believe I even jest; I turn my grief to laughter and it is taken for mirth. "Look how well he is," they say; "he is pulling him-

self together." It is a case of necessity; I cannot stand it any longer.

August 5th.

I fancy, nay, am sure, that a change is imminent. The more closely I study my experience, the more deeply I am convinced that the facts of life are foreshadowed, arranged, and developed in a forward movement directed by an unknown power.

As soon as any series of events approaches a climax, the forthcoming result immediately becomes a focus to which many other events definitely converge. The tendency which binds them to the centre by universal ties makes it appear to us an end that Nature has deliberately adopted, a link she has forged in accordance with the general laws, and we try to discover in it and to trace out in detail the progress, the order, and the harmonies of the scheme of the world.

If we are mistaken in that, it is perhaps wholly due to our eagerness. Our desires always try to anticipate the order of events, and our impatience cannot wait for their tardy development.

It almost seems as if an unknown will, an intelligence of an indefinable nature, betrayed us by appearances, by numerical progressions, and by dreams whose correspondences with fact far exceed the probabilities of chance. One might think that it used all ways of seducing us; that the occult sciences, the extraordinary results of divination, and the enormous effects due to imperceptible causes wrought by its secret operations; that it thus brought about what we think we are managing ourselves, and that it led us astray to give variety to the world. If you want to form some idea

of that invisible force and of the impotence of order itself to produce perfection, reckon up all ascertained causes, and you will see that they do not account for the resultant effect. Go a step further; imagine a state of things in which each separate rule was observed, and each individual destiny fulfilled; you will find, I think, that the order of every detail would not produce the true order of things as a whole. Everything would be too perfect; that is not the way things work, nor indeed could it be; a continual variation and conflict in detail seems to be the great law of the universe.

Here, for instance, are certain facts in a matter which admits of an exact calculation of probabilities. Twelve or fifteen instances of dreams prior to the drawings of the Paris lottery have come under my own notice. The old lady who had them was certainly not possessed of the demon of Socrates nor of any other cabalistic gift, and yet she had better ground for obstinacy about her dreams than I had for shaking her faith. Most of them came true, though the chances were at least twenty thousand to one that they would not be thus verified by the event. She was taken in by it; she dreamed again, staked her money, and this time nothing came of it.

I am quite aware that men are deceived by false reckonings and by passion, but in matters admitting of mathematical calculation, have they in all ages ever believed what was only supported by as many occurrences as the laws of chance would give?

I myself, who have certainly paid little heed to dreams of this kind, once dreamed three times that I saw the numbers drawn. One of these dreams about

the event of next day was quite out of it; the second was as striking as if I had correctly guessed a number above 80,000. The third was stranger still; I saw the numbers 7, 39, 72, 81, in the order given. I did not see the fifth number, nor the third very distinctly; I was not sure whether it was 72 or 70. I had even made a note of both, but I decided for 72. On that occasion I wanted to try for the quaternion at least, so I staked on 7, 39, 72, 81. If I had chosen 70 I should have won the quaternion, a remarkable fact in itself, but a still more remarkable one is that my note, made in the exact order in which I had seen the four numbers, bore a determinate sequence of three, and it would have been one of four if, when hesitating between 70 and 72, I had chosen 70.

Is there in Nature an intention to hoodwink men, or at any rate many of them? Is this [the excess of coincidences over probability] one of its methods? is it a law necessary to make men what they are? Or have all nations been insane in supposing that actual occurrences exceeded the number intrinsically probable? Modern philosophy denies the discrepancy; it denies the existence of everything it cannot explain. It has supplanted the philosophy which explained what did not exist.

I am far from asserting and literally believing that there really is in Nature a force which deludes men apart from the glamour of their passions, and that there exists an occult chain of correspondences either in numbers or in our emotions, by which we can judge, or have a presentiment of those future events that we consider accidental. I do not say: "There

is;" but is it not somewhat rash to say: "There is not"?[1]

Can it be that presentiments are associated with a special type of mind and are denied to other men? We see, for instance, that most people cannot imagine any relation between the fragrance of a plant and the means of world-wide happiness. Ought they on that account to regard the consciousness of such a relationship as a freak of imagination? Because those two conceptions are so remote from each other in many minds, are they equally so for anyone who can trace the chain that unites them. He who struck off the tall poppy heads[2] knew well that he would be understood, and he knew too that his slaves would not comprehend the act, and get at his secret.

You must not take all this more seriously than I mean it. But I am sick of things that are certain, and am looking everywhere for doors of hope.

If you are coming soon, the prospect will somewhat revive my courage. Even that of always looking forward to the morrow is better than none at all.

[1] "It is stupid presumption to disdain and condemn as false what does not seem to us likely, and it is a common fault with those who think they have more than average capacity. I used to do it myself once . . . and now I think I was at least as much to be pitied myself."—*Montaigne.*

[2] Tarquin's reply to his son Sextus, who sent to ask how he should betray the city of Gabii into Tarquin's hands. The answer meant that he was to behead the leading citizens.—Tr.

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