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Some Aspects of Religion in French
Literature from the Close of
the Revolution till 1830

by

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Some Aspects of Religion in French Literature
from the close of the Revolution till 1830

This thesis is intended to illustrate the return of France to her traditional religion after the Revolution of 1789. An introductory chapter gives a rapid sketch of the religious ideas prevalent in France in the seventeenth century and the overwhelming influence of eighteenth century philosophy which attacked religion at its very roots, causing many of the intellectual section of the community to abandon their beliefs although the mass of the population remained fundamentally Catholic. Seven writers, Bonald, de Maistre, Mme de Staël, Nodier, Chateaubriand, Benjamin Constant and Lamennais serve to illustrate the reaction against the barren doctrines of Helvétius and d'Holbach, and the immense influence of Rousseau in bringing about a renewal of religious enthusiasm and respect for the things of the spirit. I have tried to show how the conflict between mind and heart or reasoning and sentiment is finally resolved in favour of sentiment, thereby giving rise to the cult of humanitarianism which was destined to militate against true religion and to cause the moral crisis in the Romanticism of 1830. The central figure in this study is Benjamin Constant whom I have chosen because his religious evolution is especially typical of his age.

First an atheist, then a sceptic, next a timid believer and finally a theoretical adherent to the Christian faith, he seems to illustrate particularly well the uneasiness and the disquiet of the period in which he lived. In the chapters devoted to Constant, his life and his philosophy, I have incorporated material collected over several years part of which I used for the documentation of a previous thesis on his religious ideas for the Doctorat de l'Université de Paris (May 1950). This present essay, however, covers a very much wider field. A deep interest in Constant has led to an interest in the religious ideas of the whole transitional period between the philosophical and the Romantic movements and I have attempted to trace the development of ideas linking the two contrasting currents of thought.

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Preface

Detailed studies of the religious ideas of great writers from Rousseau and Mme de Staël onwards abound in French and English. The present essay is an attempt to follow the general trend of religious thought among French authors from the Revolution of 1789 to the Revolution of July 1830. To illustrate the return of a nation to Christianity, I have chosen seven writers who represent different tendencies but all of whom are influenced by prevailing ideas and contribute to the general religious atmosphere.

When one considers French thought at the opening of the nineteenth century, one is struck by the fact that a doctrine which claims to be a Christian doctrine, embodied in a Christian literature, becomes thirty years later, the auxiliary of anticlericalism, without however, ceasing to appeal to the same principles and to venerate the same truths. By studying briefly the works and the influence of Bonald, de Maistre, Mme de Staël, Nodier, Chateaubriand, Benjamin Constant and Lamennais, I have tried to point out some of the causes of this paradoxical transformation.

The first chapter is devoted to a very rapid survey of the religious ideas and the attitude to religion prevalent before the Revolution because subsequent literature cannot be fully understood and appreciated without reference to the distant causes of the religious renaissance of 1801. I have attempted to indicate how the revival of sentiment introduced an element that later, in an accentuated form,

was to prove a corrupting influence on religion. The importance of foreign literature, particularly the literature of Germany and England, as the source of mystical ideas is treated in the chapters dealing with Bonald, de Maistre, Mme de Staël, Nodier and Chateaubriand. The religious evolution of Benjamin Constant and the composition of his long work on religion are the subject of a further chapter, showing how a man of powerful intellect, disposed to scepticism by his temperament, was nevertheless drawn to Christianity not only by personal experience and a sense of need, but by the force of contemporary opinion. The spiritual development of Constant and Chateaubriand provides an interesting contrast and the unorthodox approach of the Catholic and the Protestant serves to illustrate the refusal of both these writers to be bound by any rigid system. Their sincerity is undeniable, but they lack sufficient depth of conviction to persuade their disciples of the necessity for true religion involving self-discipline and self-denial. In a brief outline of Constant's religious philosophy, I have endeavoured to point out the noble elements in it, as well as the omissions which appear significant. Finally a rapid sketch of the main ideas of Lamennais is intended to trace the influence of Bonald, de Maistre and Chateaubriand on an essentially Romantic mind, leading to the rupture with authority and traditionalism. This in its turn brings us to the moral crisis of 1830 with its renewed outbreak of doubt and melancholy

when the religion of the Romantic writers breaks down to become the cult of humanitarianism, of love, of nature and the negation of dogma. The seeds had been sown as far back as Rousseau; the accent on the feelings had had a detrimental effect on will and led inevitably to a slackening of moral effort and an increase of self-pity and gentle melancholy.

In the chapters dealing with Constant's life and philosophy, I have incorporated material collected over several years part of which I used for the documentation of a previous thesis on Constant's religious ideas for the Doctorat de l'Université de Paris (May 1950). The present study, however, covers a very much wider field.

The method adopted here is synthetic rather than analytic. Others have long since analysed the thought of these writers. Nothing new could be said except by going into minute detail. I have aimed at a general view, giving the background in which these authors, each so individual, developed their ideas and their talent.

My very sincere thanks are due to Professor Turquet who has directed my work, to MM René Jasinski, Pierre Moreau and Daniel Mornet for their advice and encouragement, to M. Jean Mistler for his invaluable suggestions in my study of Benjamin Constant and for his liberality in lending me important documents and finally to M. Paul Laufer for the loan of four unpublished letters of Mme de Staël reproduced as an appendix to this study.

Lausanne, August 1951.

Chapter 1

The attitude to religion in France during the eighteenth century.

In order to understand the religious movement in France during the early nineteenth century, it is essential to look back over the preceding century to see what caused the reaction which in 1801 prompted Napoleon to conclude the Concordat with Pius VII. The life of a Protestant, Benjamin Constant and of a Catholic, Chateaubriand which ran their course during the transitional period at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century were to be profoundly influenced by the change of attitude towards religion which marks this period.

In the seventeenth century, few would have contested the fact that man was created by God to obey the will of God. Few Frenchmen would have questioned the authority of the Pope and of the priests to instruct them as to the nature of God's will. Man was meant to be humble and submissive and to have but one ideal, to win life everlasting. Already towards the end of the century, another current of thought was making itself felt. The influence of Descartes, Bayle and Fontenelle was being completed by that of the English philosophers, notably Bacon and Locke. Locke was a Christian, and a sincere one, but not a Catholic and he used reason to demonstrate Christianity. For him, the reason of the individual was the sole judge in religious matters.

Gradually there evolved a new conception of the nature of man. Saint-Évremond put forward the epicurean view that man is good by nature and that his own good sense is a sufficient guide for him. He advocated a moral law, but a moral law independent of the Christian ethic and indeed indifferent to it. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Spinoza was already more than a mere name. From his system of pantheism and from the works of lesser philosophers emanated the ideas adopted by the adversaries of Christianity. Locke and Bayle proclaimed the existence of natural religion revealed by the conscience to all men. They admitted a God, but denied that He has revealed Himself to the world and thus they founded the system of deism. Some of their contemporaries, among them Saint-Évremond, Fontenelle and Boulainvilliers, went a stage further and professed unbelief. These writers overthrew yet another firm belief of Bossuet and his century by asserting that there is a natural law independent of any religion. In this way, they dispensed with religious dogma. Bayle demonstrated that it is possible for atheists to be virtuous. Soon many were converted to this belief. It was but one step to prove that since natural religion is the essential of all religions, it is common to all civilized nations and therefore fanaticism and intolerance are not only cruel but absurd. Tolerance which was to become the important idea of the eighteenth century was towards 1715 in the minds of many people, merely a vague

feeling that the right to impose a religion by force, was not reasonable. Protestant theologians were openly defending tolerance. Fontenelle hinted constantly that there should be freedom of conscience. These new ideas did not however permeate the mass of the population; they remained almost exclusively the possession of the educated. In the salons and in the first cafés there was growing incredulity.

After 1715, the new spirit was fostered by the circulation of works either secretly printed or in manuscript. Voltaire as a young man saw more than a hundred copies of Testament du curé Meslier (Meslier died about 1729). Obscure writers, all more or less deists, some atheists, spread anti-catholic ideas throughout France. Most of their works were to be published or republished after 1760 by Voltaire, Diderot, Naigeon or d'Holbach. "On y trouve déjà constitué et prêt à l'usage, tout l'arsenal des arguments critiques, historiques et philosophiques contre la religion et la spiritualité ou l'immortalité de l'âme," writes Lanson.

Voltaire was the most important exponent of these ideas. He became known from the publication of Lettres philosophiques as an avowed deist. He considered all mystic belief and all fervour as lamentable aberrations. Not unnaturally he eulogized Bacon, Locke and Newton. Voltaire's deism had certain consequences beside the fact

that it propagated itself, the idea taking root rapidly among a people in whom the seeds of natural religion had been sown: it gave rise to the cult of tolerance. Voltaire condemned Christian fanaticism and came near himself to intolerance in his extremely violent reactions. He poured scorn on the providentialism that marks the writings of Fénelon and in Le Mondain and Discours en vers sur l'homme, he inveighed against Christian austerity. Thus through the works of Voltaire and of such writers as le Marquis d'Argens and even Montesquieu who although he denied that he was an unbeliever, nevertheless ridiculed miracles and the authority of the Pope in his Lettres Persanes, through these books the new ideas were diffused among the intellectual élite of France. There were nevertheless some Christian deists, mainly Protestant theologians who were attracted by the freedom of the conscience in this belief. However, during the first half of the century, relatively few held this belief and still fewer went so far as to profess materialism. The humanitarian and altruistic ethic, so popular after 1760, though perceptible in Voltaire and Montesquieu, exerted little influence before that date. Yet by half way through the century, men of letters had evolved very considerably in their religious beliefs. Sincere believers among writers of real merit could be counted. Many lesser authors did their best to defend Christianity and to stem the rising tide of unbelief, but they did not write well enough to convince many.

Before 1750, the diffusion of irreligious thought was considerably impeded, though not prevented by the ferocious punishments still inflicted for acts of impiety. It made great inroads among those who frequented the "salons" and among the rich who lived for pleasure. This was the time of the obscene novels of Crébillon which were to have a regrettable influence upon the youthful Benjamin Constant. The free-thinkers of society gathered round Mme de Tencin and Mme du Deffand and other great ladies eager for gossip and scandal, wit and brilliant repartee. In spite of the activities of the lettered, the mass of the people remained untouched by the fashionable irreligion. The middle and lower classes remained confidently pious. It is probable though that the new ideas of tolerance and the cult of happiness exercised a certain influence. It can at least be asserted that mysticism in religion was losing ground.

After 1750 there was much more evidence of unbelief. It gradually affected morals particularly in the big cities and the depravity of many members of cultured society bore witness to the fact that the restraining influence of organized religion had disappeared. The decisive struggle against religion took place between 1748 and 1770 and open war was declared with the publication of l'Esprit des Lois although Montesquieu was not a revolutionary. Yet he hated religious intolerance as vehemently as he deplored slavery. François-Vincent Toussaint inaugurated the cult

of humanitarianism with his book Les Moeurs in 1748. Although it was of no literary value, its ideas soon exercised a very considerable influence. His ironical and sceptical allusions to dogmatic religions, his denial of faith and his exaltation of reason prepared the ground for the Encyclopaedia the first volume of which appeared in 1751.

As the title said, the Encyclopaedia was "raisonné". Its intention was new, and although the articles on religion were neutral, prudent and even respectful, the very spirit of the work militated against religion in any shape or form. It set out to proclaim that man's destiny is not to direct his steps heavenward, gladly accepting hardship and resigned to authority, but to progress on this earth by developing his intelligence and reason. A materialist ideal was substituted for a mystic ideal and although it was not always stated explicitly, it was very definitely implicit in the Encyclopaedia. Behind the respect, any discerning reader could detect the irony in spite of the fact that so-called orthodox theologians had revised the articles on religion. D'Alembert did indeed admit to these tactics. Condorcet referred to "les articles détournés", where "on foule aux pieds les préjugés religieux". He showed how "des erreurs respectées" were betrayed "par la faiblesse de leurs preuves ou ébranlées par le seul voisinage des vérités qui en sapent les

fondements." The Encyclopaedia dispensed with a Christian moral law and substituted for it a moral code which was not based on religion. The basis of this moral code was utilitarianism. It was a tolerant and humanitarian code and was to have a great influence throughout the Revolution, through the Empire and the Restauration, even upon those who retained their religious beliefs or who like Chateaubriand returned to them.

Helvétius was one of the contributors to the Encyclopaedia whose influence was most considerable. It was perhaps the result of circumstances rather than of the intrinsic value of his book De l'Esprit which appeared in 1758 with the approval of the censors. It was obviously a materialist book, destructive of all religion and even of all moral law. It was not particularly well written, the philosophy of it was not exceptionally profound, but such was its appeal that nearly thirty years later, Benjamin Constant was so captivated by it that he planned to write a work to illustrate the superiority of pagan rites over Christianity.

Other and better philosophers recoiled before the over-simplified theories of Helvétius, and Rousseau, Voltaire and Diderot undertook to refute him. Nevertheless his ideas contributed towards confirming certain ideas of d'Holbach and of Voltaire and Diderot themselves.

During the period 1748 to 1770, Voltaire had become a philosopher of the first order or rather a philosophical historian. The humanitarian, tolerant philosophy of the Siècle de Louis XIV had become clearer and more forceful in l'Essai sur les Moeurs. Voltaire considered religious fanaticism as one of the greatest flails in human history, but underlying his hatred of intolerance is the hatred of Christianity. In praising oriental religions, he suggests to even the least discriminating reader that there is nothing good in Christianity which is not found already in these religions. The Essai is an apology of tolerance and deism and although Voltaire declares: "Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer", he is none the less for that an atheist at heart.

Diderot, perhaps the greatest of the eighteenth century French philosophers, gave to deism and materialism a new and vigorous form when he founded his system of experimental materialism. Voltaire and d'Holbach had put forward negative and over-simplified arguments against religion. Diderot formulated positive arguments in favour of natural religion. He recognised but one reality in the world: the existence of matter and since all matter is constantly being transformed and modified, he saw no reason to believe in good or evil. In his view our instincts are naturally good. The religious idea of nature corrupted by original sin was anathema to Diderot.

"La nature humaine est donc bonne?" he asks - "Oui, mon ami, et très bonne. L'eau, l'air, la terre, le feu, tout est bon dans la nature Ce sont les misérables conventions qui pervertissent l'homme, et non la nature humaine qu'il faut accuser." (1) We should then allow our instincts to guide us, but as selfishness destroys happiness, we must aim at putting others before ourselves. Thus Diderot became one of the most eloquent advocates of humanitarianism and although his work suggests consistently a negation of religion, yet he strove to create a real religion of virtue. He was nevertheless a dangerous unbeliever. He went so much further than Voltaire: indeed he reduced Christianity to nothing. One has only to read the titles of some of his works to realise how forthright were his views: De la suffisance de la religion naturelle (1747-1770) is but one example.

Rousseau was to support throughout his life the theory that man is good left to his natural state. Alas! his own life proved only too decisively the error of this idea. The system, if system it can be called, which Rousseau built on this idea was in direct contradiction to those of contemporary philosophers. Whereas they saw man's salvation in continued material progress, the result

(1) De la poésie dramatique II.

of human reason applied to human problems, Rousseau believed that material progress only brought greater misery. He saw in books and philosophy, perversion and degeneration. "L'homme qui médite est un animal dépravé", he wrote. (1) Although he knew that the principles he formulated were of necessity only theoretical, he tried to give some practical suggestions. He appealed to the sensibility of his readers to inspire them with his ideal of happiness and virtue whereas the other philosophers always appealed to reason. Rousseau realized the power of mystic forces and he knew that only they can transform the world morally. That is partly why Rousseau was admired by an ever-growing public. People were tired of pure reason. With the death of Fénelon in 1715, sentiment and mysticism seemed to have vanished from literature and reason had proved an arid and unsatisfying substitute.

Rousseau, as an autodidact and a calvinist attracted by quietism was better qualified than most to react against the intellectual and materialist arguments of the authors of the Encyclopaedia. He exalted the intuitive element in man. For him, the feelings, needs and passions of humanity were infinitely more important than the reasoning faculty. It is true that at times he was uncertain and

(1) Discours sur l'inégalité, 1st part, 1754.

often his opinions varied, he does even on occasions show hostility to all revelation, but on the whole he was favourable to the Christian faith and ardent Protestant though he was, he could at times speak with sympathy of the Catholic Church. His conversion to Catholicism although only an incident in his life had been perfectly sincere and when he became a Protestant again, his attacks on the Roman Church were no more than intermittent. When he came to write the Profession de foi du vicaire Savoyard, his thought was embroiled and contradictory and he was obliged to make it systematic. The importance of this part of Emile can hardly be exaggerated and its influence at the time was far reaching, and profound. It gave rise to a new current of religious ideas which influenced immeasurably not only the literature of a whole period, but the morals and even the religion. Rousseau rejects the aid of philosophy and appeals to the inner light as guide. He proves the existence of God through nature and through human conscience. This idea is the result in Rousseau of his heritage of a hundred and fifty years of calvinism. It is true that he had been a Catholic for a short time, but that episode in his life was superficial in the extreme. He was fundamentally a Protestant at heart. His deism is categorically different from the deism of Voltaire. While Voltaire was obliged by his beliefs to be a rabid anti-clerical, Rousseau found it possible to be unorthodox while yet remaining sympathetic to the wide community of the

Protestant Church. Rousseau, though he quarrelled with certain pastors remained nevertheless a Protestant, if a very liberal one.

The great difference between Voltaire and Rousseau lies in the fact that whereas Voltaire demonstrated the necessity of God by philosophical argument and social need, Rousseau believed in God. He had faith and hope and though he rejected dogma, revelation and ritual, he held fast to the religious sentiment, to the consolation of Christianity and the essential goodness of Providence. Rousseau reasoned as did Bossuet in his consideration of good and evil, justice and injustice upon this earth and like the great preacher, he inferred a compassionate Providence and the certainty of eternal life from the unequal distribution of the riches of this life. He explained suffering and injustice by the fact that the soul is immortal and that the after-life compensates for the evils of the terrestrial.

Rousseau introduced into French literature a characteristically Protestant conception of morality, not unlike that described in Constant's volumes on religion written some forty years later. On reading a life of Rousseau, one might suppose him to have been a completely amoral person, but a study of his literary work soon reveals a person much occupied with morality. His unpropitious start in life set his face in the direction of immorality and

grave faults marked his earthly progress, but it required a strict moral sense to bring him to a state of desiring perfection in the inner life. While others limited their morality to human kindness and pity, Rousseau sought by hard struggles to attain to the austere joys of moral progress. For him, God was at once the judge and recompense of his efforts to make his inner life beautiful.

What then was the real extent of Rousseau's influence on men and on letters in his capacity as restorer of religion? While remaining sceptical of the unlimited powers attributed to human reason by contemporary philosophers, Rousseau was a rationalist. It was hardly possible to escape rationalism altogether in his day, but he was not bound hand and foot by rationalistic ideas. Catholic and Protestant alike were attracted to his personal religion based on emotion and conscience. The sentiment and tolerance of the Vicaire Savoyard made a deep impression and Rousseau wielded a formidable influence which was to have repercussions on the writers of many years to come. His influence was salutary in the main, since it reduced to silence the facile mockery of those who denied the power of the spiritual, but there was in it nevertheless a disquieting element. The exaggerated exaltation of sentiment was to produce a moral disease that later caused corruption in the religion Rousseau had sought to restore.

His immediate influence was no doubt wholly beneficial. Lanson sums it up in a few lines: "Il a fondé toute sa politique, toute sa religion, toute sa morale sur l'instinct et l'émotion. Et ce qu'il était, il a aidé le public à le devenir. Il a aidé les âmes de nos Français à opérer une conversion dont ils avaient le besoin et qu'ils n'arrivaient pas à faire: rassasiés de raisonnement, d'abstraction et d'analyse, desséchés, vidés par un excès de vie intellectuelle, ils ont senti revivre leur coeur au contact du coeur de Rousseau, ils ont demandé au sentiment les certitudes et les jouissances que l'intelligence n'était pas capable de leur donner." (1).

* * *

The struggle against atheism was however far from being won in spite of the immense influence of Jean-Jacques. D'Holbach, resolute in his materialism and believing all religions to be false, was writing scathing criticism of Christianity. For him it was "un tissu d'absurdités, de fables décousues, de dogmes insensés, de cérémonies puériles, de notions empruntées des Chaldéens, des Egyptiens, des Phéniciens, des Grecs et des Romains." The ideas of such materialists as Morelly and La Mettrie were becoming known. A new demonstration against orthodox religion was introduced. It proclaimed that all religion sprang originally from a

(1) Histoire de la Littérature Française - Lanson, 12th ed. p. 799.

complicity of tyrants and priests to exploit man's credulity. All they could offer as a substitute for Christianity was a vague deism and a system of ethics based on obedience to passions. A significant proof of the diffusion of the ideas of natural law and natural religion is that they occur more and more in sincerely religious works.

Successive volumes of Buffon's Histoire naturelle were still appearing and although Buffon did not attack religion, and indeed had in 1753 preceded his fourth volume by a letter in which he abandoned "tout ce qui pourrait être contraire à la narration de Moïse", (the Sorbonne had been scandalised in 1751 by fourteen propositions from the Théorie de la Terre, which seemed to contradict Genesis), nevertheless he quietly professed determinism and eliminated God from all his explanations of natural phenomena. He thus contributed more effectively than by violent argument to separating science and religion.

The "bas clergé" as well as the "haut clergé" were becoming tainted with unbelief by 1770 and the idea of tolerance was by that date becoming the practice of tolerance. Gradually irreligious notions brought about a transformation of provincial morals and more than the educated upper classes began to be affected by the relaxed ideas of morality.

It must be affirmed very definitely that throughout this period, philosophy including the sentimental natural religion of Rousseau, met stubborn resistance from authority and official censure. Tradition is tenacious and the mass of the people reacted slowly to the new ideas - indeed their resistance was never wholly defeated. Practising believers were no doubt reduced in numerical strength, priests were guillotined during the Revolution, churches desecrated, but soon after there came the Concordat and the Restoration testifying to the fact that France had never really ceased to be a Catholic country. Between 1715 and 1789 some nine hundred works were published in defence of Christianity. Some of the defenders were talented or relatively so. Fréron did a certain amount of good with his Année littéraire. Pelissot at first attacked Diderot, Helvétius and Rousseau with great violence before reconciling himself with them. Mme de Genlis supported the cause of Catholicism with her Religion considérée comme l'unique base du bonheur et de la véritable philosophie (1787). Necker in his De l'importance des opinions religieuses, presented the view of a Protestant. But what are these writers in comparison with formidable opponents of the calibre of Voltaire, Diderot or Rousseau? It was hardly surprising that their success was fleeting and their influence very limited. At first they had discussed theological problems and their

polemics had been confined to calling down on their adversaries the wrath of authority, but as arguments about grace were incomprehensible to the masses, they began to appeal to the heart to convince men of religion and the battle between faith and free thought was no longer waged on theological or rationalistic grounds.

That too was part of Rousseau's influence. He had inspired the idea of apologetics ~~with~~ the emotions and although the Catholics' fury had been aroused at first by the Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard (1762) they had gradually accepted the fact that at least Rousseau did not advocate materialism. Indeed he was directly responsible for the change in the tactics of believers who began to realize that Jean-Jacques was introducing a religion whose aspirations could be confused with those of the Christian religion. The spirit of Rousseau pervaded books such as Chrétien par le sentiment (1764) by Père Fidèle and Les délices de la religion by l'abbé Lamourette.

After 1770, the direct rôle of the great leaders of philosophy was over, but their indirect influence began to make itself felt. The fame of Voltaire grew apace and at his death, he was universally acclaimed. Rousseau was read at least as much as Voltaire, but his disciples sought in him enthusiasm, hope and a religion that was both human and divine, while Voltaire was appreciated by a different section of society for his ironical scepticism

and his lucid reasoning. Lesser men like Mably, Delisle de Salles and Raynal found eager readers. Fréret wrote violent anti-Christian propaganda. It seemed that atheists were becoming brazen. Until 1770 only d'Holbach, Morelly and La Mettrie had dared to propose openly a system of atheism. The new champions contributed nothing original to former arguments, but the fact that they were read proves that authority itself had become less vigilant. Freedom of belief could no longer be prevented, intolerance was condemned and although philosophy had failed to de-Christianize France, yet it had spread unbelief or at least indifference among all classes of the population. This progress of irreligion continued from 1770 to 1787 and by the eve of the Revolution all France had begun to wonder whether her ancient religion had not been outmoded.

* * *

It seems probable that freemasonry contributed towards the spread of irreligious thought in France before the Revolution. It had grown rapidly between 1776 when there were 198 lodges and 1789 when 629 could be counted. Authority was at first hostile to them, but gradually vigilance grew nonchalant. Some historians such as Louis Madelin believe their influence to have been profound, others consider it insignificant. It is true that the theosophy of Swedenborg crept into freemasonry and that there were Martinist lodges inspired by the Philosophe Inconnu, Saint-Martin, others were inspired by Mesmer,

but it is not easy to disentangle the facts of the mystic currents in freemasonry. Their mysticism seems to have been symptomatic of the general uneasiness that pervaded the eighteenth century. The majority of freemasons were not philosophers, although Diderot and Helvétius were masons and Voltaire apparently belonged to a lodge at one time. Masonic tolerance was but the reflection of the general tolerance of the time.

France was ready for a change of heart, the people were tired of hearing Catholicism branded as an immense imposture. An excess of the experimental spirit had sent the pendulum swinging in the opposite direction and there was a real deep need for the mystery and the consolation of religion. A perpetual craving for faith tormented a generation that had become over-intellectual. The secret aspirations of the heart cried out for satisfaction. The vogue of quietism that penetrated free-masonry, bore witness to the persistence of the mystic current.

The desire for the irrational was by no means limited to the freemasons. A wave of mystic thought, much of it of foreign origin and some of it spurious, unfurled over France leaving in its wake dreamers, charlatans and fanatics. The sect known as the Illuminés had been founded in 1776 in Germany at the instigation of Adam Weisshaupt. In Sweden, the brilliant visionary Swedenborg (1688-1772) thought it his mission to regenerate Christianity. He had revelations,

received messages from angels and demons and from the dead. He wrote of the new Jerusalem which men could enter by purifying themselves with divine love. His works were translated into all the European languages and his influence was vast. He satisfied the mystic leanings of some, but he nourished the superstition of many. Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803) disciple of the Portuguese Jew Pasqualis and of Swedenborg and very popular with aristocratic society (1) created a religion without priests or form of worship and elaborated a Pantheon where the wise men, prophets, alchemists, Pythagoras, Jesus and Pasqualis were all grouped together. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and later and more surprisingly, Joseph de Maistre were influenced by this extravagant doctrine. Saint-Martin stayed several times, after 1771, in Lyons which was a centre of mysticism. In the sect presided over by Pasqualis, he found too much ritual, an excessive concern with material things. He gave himself up more and more to meditation and the cultivation of the inner life. His theosophy was not easy to follow, nor was it clearly expounded in his books. Sainte-Beuve made a sympathetic study of it, but discarded all the prophetic side of his writings and appreciated the philosopher and the moralist in him. His principal works are: Des Erreurs et de la vérité ou les hommes rappelés au principe

(1) He is the unknown philosopher of Balzac's Lys dans la Vallée.

universel de la science. (Lyon 1775); Tableau du naturel des rapports qui existent entre Dieu, l'homme et l'univers (Lyon 1782); l'Homme de désir (Lyon 1790); Ecce Homo (Paris 1792); Le Nouvel Homme (Paris 1792); Le Ministère de l'homme-esprit (Paris 1802).

After 1780, the fashionable mystics were Mesmer the German doctor, (1734-1815), Lavater the Swiss (1741-1801), and the German phrenologist, François-Joseph Gall (1758-1828). Lavater believed that he was himself a re-incarnation of Christ, a new Messiah and he drew to his house in Zurich crowds of the sceptical, the curious, or the convinced. All these men had at least a certain measure of sincerity, but their strange practices led others who were anything but genuine to impose upon a credulous public. Cagliostro was one such impostor. His real name was Joseph Balsamo (1743-1795) and he was the son of a Palermo shopkeeper who even went to the French court with his predictions of the future and his mystic rites to the gods Isis and Anubis. One must remember that as these men moved in aristocratic circles for the most part, a good deal of snobbery attached to so-called mysticism. It was fashionable to go and hear the phrenologist Gall in Paris or to frequent the salons where Saint-Martin could be admired and be initiated into his mysterious rites. Thus the need for mystery grew into an obsession. It was mystery and emotion of the most dubious kind and was to lead eventually

to the "mal du siècle" of the Romantics and to prepare the esoteric element of the symbolist movement.

Thus in the very heyday of the Encyclopaedia when the experimental and the rational seemed to triumph, the sense of mystery was maintained even in its most dangerous manifestations. This is hardly surprising after all: no whole nation could become totally rationalized at the expense of all feeling. Just as it is an error to suppose that the classical period neglected the emotions, it is a mistake of judgment to consider the eighteenth century as an age when only reason mattered. Charles Bonnet (1720-1793), the Geneva Protestant, naturalist and philosopher, expressed the feeling of many when he said to Fontanes in 1787: "Il est temps que la véritable philosophie se rapproche, pour son propre intérêt, d'une religion qu'elle a trop méconnue, et qui peut seule donner un essor infini et une règle sûre à tous les mouvements de notre coeur." (1) Bonnet appealed to nature to demonstrate Christianity and it was he who bequeathed to Ballanche (1776-1847) the term "palingénésie". He is indubitably one of Chateaubriand's sources. We find in his Recherches philosophiques sur les preuves du christianisme (1770) this passage on the Bible which is typical of his thought:

"L'élévation des pensées, et la majestueuse simplicité de l'Expression, la beauté, la pureté, je dirais volontiers l'Homogénéité de la Doctrine; l'importance, l'universalité et le petit nombre des Préceptes; leur admirable

(1) Quoted by Cassagne in Vie Politique de Chateaubriand.

appropriation à la Nature et aux besoins de l'homme; l'ardente charité qui en presse si généreusement l'observation, l'onction, la force et la gravité du Discours; le Sens caché et vraiment philosophique que j'y aperçois: voilà ce qui fixe le plus mon attention dans le Livre que j'examine et ce que je ne trouve au même degré dans aucune production de l'esprit humain." (1)

Pierre-Simon Ballanche (1776-1847) was considerably influenced by Bonnet. Son of a Lyons printer, he took to writing as a consequence of an unhappy love affair and reacted against eighteenth century philosophy. In his work: Du Sentiment considéré dans ses rapports avec la littérature et les beaux-arts, he exalts sentiment as the true source of inspiration, but it is no longer the sentiment of the eighteenth century, but the sentiment of the Génie du Christianisme, which tends towards religion and finally reverts to the Christian faith. He was imbued with the ideas of German philosophers, much affected by the mysticism that flourished in Lyons and guided by his deep religious sentiment, he attempted a synthesis between the contemporary theory of progress and Christianity. He conceived humanity as fallen as a result of original sin, but as being rehabilitated through history by successive expiatory and often terrible experiences provided by providential wisdom. He counted the Revolution as one such experience.

(1) Recherches philosophiques, ch. XIX.

He sought to broaden Catholic orthodoxy and to restore true Christianity. He, like Jean-Gaspard Lavater, hoped for a union of the churches. Lavater expressed his view in these terms: "Wir leben in einem Zeitpunkt, wo wahrlich weniger als je, von Protestantismus und Katholizismus, als zwei sich entgegengesetzten Dingen gesprochen werden sollte, wo die Redlichen Seiten sich für das Wesentliche des Christenthums, glauben an Christum, der christliche Liebe zeugt, vereinigen sollten." (1) (We live in a time when, less than ever, must one speak of Catholicism and Protestantism as of two contradictory things; when the sincere souls of the two parties must unite to safeguard the essential element of Christianity, faith in Christ, source of Christian charity.)

* * *

It is abundantly clear then that even before the Revolution although atheism was rife, yet there was a reaching out after a spiritual belief. With the Revolution and the Terror, more sought the inner peace, the deliverance, the appeasement that only religion could give. Many recoiled in horror from the atrocity of the times and believed anew and often their new-found faith was based much more on sentiment than on solid intellectual conviction. They

(1) Lavater, quoted by Georg Gessner, Johann Kaspar Lavaters Lebensbeschreibung III, pp.295-296.

longed for deliverance, not only from external strife, but from the inner torment of uncertainty. There was a real need of spiritual satisfaction, of the rest that can only come by committing present cares and anxieties to a gracious God. That is why France returned as a country to her former faith. As has been seen, the mass of the people had never been shaken in their faith; they had clung to the great truths and had continued somehow or other to practise their religion. But their leaders and especially their literary leaders had abandoned their religion. Now they were brought to realize their need. Vandal describes this religious revival: "De tous les points du territoire ancien ou nouveau, jour à jour, les rapports arrivent attestant la ferveur attisée par la persécution, cette ferveur agressive, cette volonté de la France de redevenir chrétienne.

Il était impossible que l'esprit profondément observateur de Bonaparte ne fût point frappé par l'impétuosité, la puissance et la spontanéité du mouvement. Ce mouvement, il ne l'a pas créé; il n'a nullement relevé d'autorité les autels et décrété la foi; il n'a fait que relever certaines prohibitions par trop odieuses, jeter le mot de liberté, et voici que de tous côtés les autels se relèvent d'eux-mêmes, repoussent par miracle. Le courant catholique existait avant lui; il existait latent et caché, cheminait sous l'amas des persécutions et des rigueurs; il a suffi de porter un coup dans ce bloc et

de le désagréger pour que la source captive s'élançe au jour, jaillisse et s'épande." (1)

Bonaparte was indeed aware of the change of heart in the country and he realized its importance far too well to ignore it. From 1795 there had functioned a régime in which Church and State were separated, for the Revolution had at one blow brought ruin not only to the monarchy and the old régime, but also to the régime which sixteenth century royalty had imposed on the Church of France. For a time, France had become virtually pagan: the élite had abandoned their beliefs although the mass of the people had clung to their religious faith. The failure of the civic cults inaugurated by the Directory and which amounted to theo-philanthropy and the measures of appeasement taken by Bonaparte (restitution of unsold churches, greater tolerance of Catholic worship) had brought a certain freedom into religion. Yet inside the Church, the Vaticanist tendency of the former refractory clergy remained predominant. To stop this tendency, Bonaparte negotiated the Concordat. His reasons were not of a religious nature, but political. He re-established in France the system of the Concordats because he saw in religion a means of government which was not to be neglected. Such a utilitarian attitude towards organized religion was by no means rare at the time. Bonaparte had not changed his

(1) Vandal: L'Avènement de Bonaparte, vol. II, pp. 72-73.

mind about religion since his return from his Italian campaigns when he had heaped insults upon the religion of France in the past. In his mildest moments he said: "Je ne vois pas dans la religion le mystère de l'incarnation." The Concordat was concluded with Pius VII on 16th July, 1801 because Bonaparte was aware of the overwhelming power that religion exerted over the people. Moreover, the re-establishment of worship corresponded to the needs and wishes of the great mass of the public. The Revolution and the materialistic philosophy of the eighteenth century had left the French bewildered in the face of formidable spiritual problems. Religious peace was the primary need and aspirations towards the infinite, the urge to find a solace in religious exaltation and mystery, mingled with a deep feeling for nature and love, grew into a vast movement reacting powerfully against the ideologies of the past.

Most of these writers were admirably prepared by their early education to assimilate new ideas. Many of noble birth, they had not believed in the Rousseau. They read Young and Gray with enthusiasm and their imaginations were soon captivated by Herbert. The Christian

Chapter II.

The effect of exile on French minds:
Bonald and Joseph de Maistre.

France cannot be separated from the rest of Europe in a study of pre-Romantic religious revival. There were internal causes that brought her back to the religion of her fathers, but there was also the influence of England and Germany. At the time of the Concordat, the spirit of the North had already been reacting for three quarters of a century against the classical mentality. Voltaire had eulogized English philosophy and Kant was gradually penetrating French minds with his theory of the superiority of practical reason over speculative reason. Pragmatism was the predominant tendency manifested either in the exaltation of will or else in the exaggeration of sentiment. This tendency was active in France from before the Revolution. Political events retarded its development and men were too preoccupied to be able to read German and English literature or to translate much of it, but on the other hand, many of the intellectual élite had been forced to emigrate and had consciously or unconsciously adopted the new ideas.

Most of these exiles were admirably prepared by their early education to assimilate new theories. Rich and of noble birth, they had had leisure to read Rousseau. They read Young and Gray with enthusiasm and their imaginations were soon captivated by Werther. The Christian

Bonald

conception of the supernatural seemed to be generally accepted among these men and when they returned to France, the great renewal of religious fervour was at its height. The need for peace and order might then have curbed the excessive exuberance of the sentiment, but even Bonald (1754-1840) in spite of his rationalist tendency, could not escape the exaggerated sentimentality of the period. In his Théorie du Pouvoir, he claims adherence to the principles of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Rousseau: "Des habitudes et non des opinions, des souvenirs et non des raisonnements, des sentiments et non des pensées: voilà l'homme religieux Je suis, dit avec beaucoup de raison l'auteur des Etudes de la nature, parce que je sens, et non parce que je pense." (1) Bonald is yet another writer who came strongly under the influence of Rousseau even though he adopted rationalist and philosophical views that were in opposition to Rousseau's ideas. He was an exile and published some of his books at Constance: their influence at first was strictly limited to his fellow exiles. When they were sent across the frontier into France, the Directory had them destroyed.

Bonald was a sectarian, a Catholic of morose disposition who thought he possessed the whole truth. He dismissed summarily any argument with which he disagreed:

(1) Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux dans la société civile, démontrée par le raisonnement et par l'histoire. (1796) 1st part, book VII, ch.VI.

Bacon did not even merit his consideration and although he claimed in the preface of his Recherches Philosophiques to be the first French writer to analyse the thought of Kant, he scarcely gives any evidence of having the least comprehension of Kant's philosophy. Descartes and Leibnitz are accorded a little more attention because he happens to agree with their ideas on many points. Philosophy, he affirms, "ne signifie, pour le plus grand nombre, que l'art de se passer de la religion." (1) Bonald's remark does not apply to the Encyclopaedists only, he includes all philosophy in his statement and represents an extreme position systematizing anti-revolutionary thought. In him the two contrary currents meet: his thought derives in part from Rousseau and in part from the rationalist thinkers, whom he denounces so vigorously. He was much more the product of his time than he suspected or would acknowledge.

An optimist, he saw in the world goodness and order, a merciful Providence ever active and God near at hand. With complete intellectual integrity and grave sincerity, he evolved a simple system which obstinately but intrepidly aimed at re-establishing tradition. At first sight, his system appears imposing, but upon examination, it is seen

(1) Recherches philosophiques sur les premiers objets de nos connaissances morales (1818) ch.1.

to contain elements that are merely puerile. He was the last of the schoolmen in that he started with one axiom and went on deducing from it ad infinitum. He was a logician, yet logic in others produced what he called the abject doctrines of the philosophers. Faguet wrote of him: "Il est peut-être l'homme qui, plus qu'aucun, a été pur raisonnement." (1) That is true, but it is important to stress that Bonald himself was far from realizing this. He thought that he was all that the philosophers were not and certainly he represented a completely different outlook. His scale of values in no way resembled theirs. He stood for tradition - the Christian tradition.

He held certain strange theories, strange for a man who denounced the cult of reason. He believed that books make history, that they are responsible for revolutions. Ideas, he thought, are the rulers of the world and yet he was scornful of the ideologues: "Idéologie," he wrote, "étude stérile, travail de la pensée sur elle-même, qui ne saurait produire." He contradicted himself flatly: he himself was a complete ideologue. Unlike Benjamin Constant who proclaimed that doubt was not incompatible with the religious sentiment, Bonald seemed to be terrified of doubting. He was obsessed with a craving for certainty leading him to construct his system which said the same thing over and over again in a variety of ways. It apparently satisfied his inmost longings: at least an

(1) Faguet - Politiques et Moralistes, lère série, p.105

imperturbable assurance was the result. He was convinced that man's destiny is in his heart and with this moralist tendency, he could have demonstrated that Christianity is true because it resolves so many problems, dispels doubt, does away with contradiction. Unfortunately, Bonald preferred to erect his own system and grace it with the certainty which was essential to his nature. It seems to show a fundamental lack of humility in him: he wanted to prove too much. Although he denied it, he obviously thought his reason was capable of understanding the inscrutable ways of God. Faguet described him as humble (1), but it is a strange kind of humility that while asserting man's incapacity to invent anything, arrogantly insists on producing a logical system that avoids paradox and refused to admit ignorance. His fantastic idea of the number three is an example of his obstinate confidence in a general idea based on the minimum of evidence. He saw the whole world as a system of trinities, a kind of magic combination that explained everything for him. It never once occurred to Bonald that such an assumption might be false. He was content to state that it was in the nature of things that this should be so. From this principle he deduced that the universe is monarchical: that is "raison raisonnante". He neglected observation, experience and historic fact. He preferred to ignore anything that might interfere with his system. It is strange that he should fail to see the practical usefulness of experience and fact: "Ceux qui, dans le gouvernement des affaires humaines, se

(1) Op cit., p.105.

dirigent uniquement par des faits historiques, et ce qu'ils appellent l'expérience, plutôt que par des principes qui apprennent à lier les faits et à en tirer l'expérience, ressemblent tout à fait à des navigateurs qui ne prendraient ni compas ni boussole, mais seulement des relations de voyages et des journaux de marins." Only a man of such a chill, unaccommodating disposition as Bonald's, entirely lacking in any sense of humour, could have carried to its logical conclusions this self-imposed task and have contemplated with such complete equanimity the absurdities to which perfect consistency and entire disregard of experience pushed him. His error is that he over-simplifies and when it is convenient, he would rather feel than think. His ternary idea is an arbitrary generality supported by a few forced analogies. "Il est orgueilleux comme un croyant, et, en même temps, tranchant comme un raisonneur du XVIIIe siècle" says Faguet. (1) He hated the eighteenth century because he detested all systems other than his own. He could not endure the extreme dogmatic rigidity of the philosophical tenets of Helvétius and Holbach. The planned Utopia of a William Godwin, product of omnipotent reason was anathema to him. He ~~calssed~~ ^{class} Rousseau, Condorcet and Volney in this category, oblivious the while of the fact that he shared their methods. He too allowed his cerebrations to carry him to extreme and at times ludicrous lengths. He wanted an inflexible discipline to humiliate reason:

(1) Op.cit., p.85.

immutable principles should in his view dominate society and these principles should emanate from the Church. "Hors de l'Eglise point de salut" was his war-cry. So dogmatic was he that he considered other systems as the denial of God and Man. "Ces vérités", he wrote, "je les publie donc hautement, et je porte à tous les politiques, même à tous les législateurs, le défi de les combattre, sans nier Dieu, sans nier l'homme."(1) He did not hesitate to say with Rousseau, that atheists deserved to die. "L'athée," he asserted, "se déclare en lutte ouverte avec le genre humain."

(1a) Some of Bonald's fantastic ideas were not unlike those of Jean-Jacques and his imperturbable confidence in his own ideas is distinctly reminiscent of Rousseau. Bonald seemed to believe sincerely in his own infallibility and he advanced hazardous conjectures as scientific statements. He was an ardent Gallican. In his Théorie du Pouvoir, he declared his position: "Je m'énonce conformément aux sentiments de l'Eglise gallicane, consignés dans la Déclaration du Clergé de France de 1682."(2) He contested the authority of the Pope and asserted that it should be the privilege of the Church as a body to make all important decisions. "L'Eglise ou les ministres de la religion, assemblés en Concile, est infaillible ... Si l'infaillibilité appartient au corps des ministres, elle ne peut être attribuée à aucun individu ni à aucune fraction de la profession sacerdotale." (3)

(1) Théorie du Pouvoir, préf.

(1a) Recherches philosophiques.

(2) Théorie du Pouvoir, 2nd part, book V, ch.1.

(3) Ibid. 2nd part, book IV, ch.V.

Bonald advocated State control of religion; in fact he was more devoted to the State than to religion. It is true that he considered it dangerous to depend entirely on the reasoning faculty and he was sceptical of the pernicious Utopias that rationalism offered to its adherents. "Ma sensibilité ne me trompe jamais," he wrote, "au lieu que mon imagination, et même mon entendement, se trompent et me trompent souvent."(1) The excesses of the Revolution arose in Bonald's opinion from the fact that "des opinions mensongères ont pris la place de Sentiments vrais et profonds."(2) However much Bonald may insist that reason is not a trustworthy guide and however violently he may condemn the Encyclopaedists, yet he is fundamentally a rationalist himself. His whole system is worked out on an intellectual basis and he made a true statement when he said that his understanding often deceived him, for his books are full of fallacious arguments. He was responsible for sophisms that were to mislead Lamannais and many others. He thought that he was in rebellion against the rationalist thinkers of his youth, but in reality he had adopted their attitude and like them, he judged the value of a doctrine by its utility.

In deciding which principles are useful, Bonald adopted de Maistre's criterion, namely common sense. He argued that once a doctrine had the universal consent of mankind, that doctrine was necessarily true and need not be

(1) Recherches philosophiques, ch.VII.

(2) Théorie du Pouvoir - conclusion.

verified by the reasoning power of the individual. By means of this universal consent, he proved the necessity for religion and the existence of God: "Le genre humain, c'est-à-dire les sociétés de tous les temps et de tous les lieux, eut le Sentiment de l'existence de la divinité; donc la divinité existe; car le Sentiment général du genre humain est infaillible."(1) Here indeed, Bonald deduces an axiom intuitively rather than as the result of reasoned conviction. He implies thereby a primitive revelation; our instincts, intuitions and feelings are sound guides, we have but to trust them; they are the gift of a merciful Providence who bestowed them upon us so that we should discern infallibly the truths that our reason is impotent to discover.

In spite of the apparent spirituality of much of Bonald's writings, he envisaged a paradise of material well-being and comfort - a paradise moreover for the privileged. His work abounds in contradictions. In the midst of his reasoned arguments, he states: "La religion est donc sentiment, non opinion; principe de la plus haute importance, clef de toutes les vérités religieuses."(2) The heart only is a sure guide and the reason can only mislead us. Time and time again, Bonald stresses this theory: "La foi de la divinité est sentiment en nous, non opinion,"(3) and also in De l'éducation dans la Société: "Les femmes ont reçu en

(1) Théorie du Pouvoir, 1st part, book 1, ch.1.

(2) Ibid, 2nd part, book 1, ch.11.

(3) Ibid, 1st part, book IV, ch.V.

sentiment leur portion de raison: c'est ce qui fait qu'elles savent, sans les avoir apprises, tant de choses que nous apprenons sans les savoir et ce qui leur donne un sens naturellement plus droit, quoique moins raisonné, un goût plus sûr, quoique plus prompt, un esprit et des manières moins étudiées et par cela même plus aimables."(1)

What Bonald fails to see is that true religion appeals to the heart and to the intellect. The understanding and the emotions are both brought into play in religious belief. An intellectual conviction cannot be operative if the feelings are not spontaneously stirred by the great truths of religion. Similarly, if faith is based on sentiment alone, it offers little hope of enduring; religion must satisfy the mind in so far as the human mind with all its limitations is capable of finding satisfaction.

For the purposes of his theory, Bonald bases his proofs indiscriminately on reason or sentiment. He carries his argument ~~that~~ faith is purely sentiment, to an extreme when he states that: "si la religion en général est sentiment, la religion de l'unité de Dieu est amour. C'est parce que la religion est amour que l'amour profane a été chez les Anciens une religion." (2) It is true that God is love, but love is not synonymous with religion, although there can be no religion without love. Religion is the recognition of a personal God entitled to obedience and love, but it is also a system of faith and worship. When Bonald equates religion with love, his motive is to substitute

(1) De l'éducation dans la société, ch. XII

(2) Théorie du Pouvoir, 2nd part, book 1, ch. 11

sentiment for logical investigation of the truth and by making part of the truth into the whole truth, he fails to realize that he is inviting his readers to let their feelings and their passions have full rein to the detriment of character. It is strange that such a pragmatist as Bonald should at times persist in closing his mind to the value of the intellectual faculty in justifying faith in the supernatural. He too will contribute towards maintaining romanticism in the error which began with Rousseau. Bonald in his usual categorical manner, advocates that the minimum attention be paid to the instruction of the people, for "la raison du peuple doit être ses sentiments; il faut donc les diriger, et former son coeur et non son esprit." (1)

Why, we may ask, did Bonald attribute such importance to sentiment? It was, no doubt, partly in reaction to the excessive emphasis on dialectical argument, but it was also partly due to the influence of Rousseau and his theory that instinct is man's natural guide. It was too the result of the idea that sentiment is the voice of Providence which mysteriously reveals to man where his duty lies. This is, of course, a theory that is almost as old as the earth: the theory of innate ideas, in fact the hypothesis of Plato, Descartes and Leibnitz. The fact that man has any conception of God at all is in itself a proof of His existence since man cannot conceive anything that is inexistant. As Bonald expresses it: "Les hommes nomment Dieu, donc il est.

(1) Théorie du Pouvoir, 3rd part, book 1, ch.II.

Car s'il n'était pas, il ne serait pas nommé."(1)

Saint-Martin, the mystic, had already said this in Des Erreurs et de la Vérité (2). Bonald went even further and said that man was incapable even of inventing language and that speech was with intelligence the gift of God to the first man. That then is the basis of universal consent and of innate ideas. Bonald speaks therefore of a sentiment that has a divine origin but we have seen how this sentiment degenerates in his hands into anarchy, an excuse for allowing the passions full sway. In his writings moreover, the sentiment uncurbed by discipline, does not lead him to poetic heights. He lacked the genius of a Rousseau or a Chateaubriand. He simply was not an artist: he was a true son of the eighteenth century in that he based his theories largely on reasoned argument and did not possess in any degree the poetic gifts that are notably absent from the century of the Encyclopaedists. He is an interesting case because in him we see the mingling of the two currents of thought, the philosophical and the emotional, but as he is far from being a writer of the first order, he retains many of the errors and exaggerations of these two opposing streams.

In Rousseau, we have an example of the way in which genius can transform ideas in themselves not new but which take on the appearance of novelty when inspiration gives them

(1) Législation Primitive, ch. IV

(2) "L'homme n'invente rien."

fresh expression. The eighteenth century which seemed to have forgotten the heart, also lost the power of lyrical expression. No poet to be compared with the great classical trio - Corneille, Molière, Racine, emerged from the eighteenth century until Rousseau revived the sentiment and unloosed the poetry that can spring only from the emotions. But whereas the seventeenth century realized that sentiment unchecked by reason is a bad guide, the disciples of Rousseau allowed their feelings to gain the mastery over them to such an extent that their religious sentiment tended to become extreme individualism, intolerant of tradition and authority and incapable of any real satisfaction.

* * *

Maistre

Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) although his name is often coupled with that of Bonald, had a vastly superior mind and held views that were widely different from those of his intransigent contemporary. They corresponded with each other and were on easy terms, although de Maistre wisely avoided subjects that would inevitably have caused disagreement between them. Like Bonald, de Maistre emigrated during the Revolution and published his first books abroad; many of their ideas appear similar on the surface, but their attitudes are nevertheless ~~in~~ radically opposed. Whereas Bonald preferred to ignore the contingent, de Maistre was ready to examine the opinions of others and to admit their relevance, even though he might disagree with

them. He enjoyed discussion while Bonald would never own that any opinion he adopted was debatable

De Maistre was not one to be enslaved by sentiment. Like Bonald, he was an ardent Catholic, but his attitude towards Catholicism was different. He examined current theories with a calm serenity which Bonald lacked. He saw in the Revolution the hand of God chastising the nobility who had renounced their religion while Bonald considered it as the plot of a handful of bandits against sacro-sanct institutions. Bonald, as we have seen, owed his conception of sentiment to Rousseau, but de Maistre was inspired by the Pensées of Pascal. More than any of his contemporaries, de Maistre reminds us of the apologist of Port-Royal. He did not exaggerate the power of human reason. "Mais que sommes-nous, faibles et aveugles humains?" he asks, "et qu'est-ce que cette lumière tremblotante que nous appelons Raison? Quand nous avons réuni toutes les probabilités, interrogé l'histoire, discuté tous les doutes et tous les intérêts, nous pouvons encore n'embrasser qu'une vue trompeuse au lieu de la vérité." (1) Yet de Maistre appreciated the reasoning faculty so long as it did not lead to consequences dangerous to religion. "Je n'entends point insulter la raison. Je la respecte infiniment malgré tout le mal qu'elle nous a fait; mais ce qu'il y a de bien sûr, c'est que toutes les fois qu'elle se trouve opposée au Sens Commun, nous devons la repousser comme une empoisonneuse!" (2)

(1) Considérations sur la France, 1797, ch. VIII

(2) Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, 4e, entretien.

De Maistre like so many writers of the period tends to judge the truth of a doctrine by its usefulness. "Tout ce qui est nuisible en soi," he says, "est faux, comme tout ce qui est utile en soi est vrai."(1) He develops this assertion in his book Considérations sur la France: "Et si nos conjectures sont plausibles; si elles ont pour elles l'analogie; si elles s'appuient sur des idées universelles; si surtout elles sont consolantes et propres à nous rendre meilleurs, que leur manque-t-il? Si elles ne sont pas vraies, elles sont bonnes; ou plutôt, puisqu'elles sont bonnes, ne sont-elles pas vraies?"(2) This is anti-rational pragmatism for which Rousseau was partly responsible, but de Maistre did not continue to hold this view. When he saw Lamennais doing his best to destroy reason, he retorted: "Vous voulez saisir la raison sur son trône et la forcer de faire une belle révérence, mais avec quelle arme saisirons-nous cette insolente? Avec celle de l'autorité sans doute, je n'en connais pas d'autre que nous puissions employer: nous voilà donc à Rome, réduits au système romain et à ces mêmes arguments qui ne vous semblent plus rien ... Prenez garde, Monsieur l'abbé, allons doucement, j'ai peur, et c'est tout ce que je puis vous dire."(3) But de Maistre judged doctrines by their utility most of his life; it is only in his last letters that one sees a

(1) Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, 6e entretien.

(2) Considérations sur la France, ch. 111

(3) Quoted by Georges Goyau in Revue des Deux Mondes, 1 April 1921.

modification in his views.

De Maistre shared the opinions of Bonald on the usefulness of religion, on universal consent and on the ontological argument for the existence of God. The fact that we have the idea of God, "cette seule idée prouve Dieu, puisqu'on ne saurait avoir l'idée de ce qui n'existe pas." (1) On the religious sentiment, these two writers professed similar doctrines, but on questions of the relationship between religion and politics, their views were diametrically opposed. Bonald believed that the Church should be subordinate to the monarchy, while de Maistre insisted upon the supremacy of the Church. De Maistre was an Ultra-montanist and in two of his principal works, l'Eglise Gallicane and le Pape, he set out to re-establish the authority of the Holy See in the Church and if possible in the State. He was prudent whenever he broached the latter subject and although he has been dubbed a theocrat, it is not true to say that he advocated theocracy during his whole career. The Jansenists and Bossuet earned his reprobation because of their share in the constitution of Gallicanism. What scandalized him most in the four articles of the declaration of the clergy of France drawn up by Bossuet in 1682, was that in his opinion they were contrary to reason - "Cette malheureuse déclaration, considérée dans son ensemble, choque au delà de toute expression les règles les plus simples du raisonnement." (2)

(1) Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, 8e entretien.

(2) De l'Eglise gallicane, book 1, ch.V.

De Maistre rarely allowed acrimony to distort his judgment, but he tended to be carried away whenever he criticized Gallicanism. His book on the Gallican Church was a manifestation against the spirit of individualism in favour of the Catholic and universal spirit.

The problem of evil in the world was one of de Maistre's chief preoccupations. Whereas the philosophers had seen in evil one of the principal objections to belief in a benevolent Providence, de Maistre saw in it the means whereby the purposes of God and the teachings of Scripture are made clear to mankind. Physical and mental suffering, wars and revolutions, said de Maistre, only appeared in the universe as a consequence and a sign of our moral degradation but they are a Divine means of expiation. "Coupables mortels, et malheureux, parce que nous sommes coupables!" he wrote, "c'est nous qui rendons nécessaires tous les maux physiques, mais surtout la guerre."(1) He had already said: "Le mal physique n'a pu entrer dans l'univers que par la faute des créatures libres; il ne peut y être que comme remède ou expiation."(2) The Revolution with all its horror was then a Providential event and de Maistre thought it would bring a new unity to France: "Tout annonce que nous marchons vers une grande unité que nous devons saluer de loin, pour nous servir d'une tournure religieuse. Nous sommes douloureusement et bien justement broyés; mais si

(1) Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, 7e entretien
 (2) Ibid., 1er entretien.

de misérables yeux tels que les miens sont dignes d'entrevoir les secrets divins, nous ne sommes broyés que pour être mêlés."(1)

In the Soirées, de Maistre suggested two ways of attenuating evil: by prayer and by sacrifice, particularly sacrifice involving bloodshed and especially the shedding of innocent blood. He expounded the doctrine of reversibility of merit - the innocent dying for the guilty and he wrote some admirable pages on prayer, noble, elevated and satisfying pages. The dogma of original sin had all his life been the key to the thought of Joseph de Maistre and in Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, his theories on the mystery of war and on the problem of pain did not vary from those he had developed summarily twenty years earlier in Considérations sur la France. The unity of his work is most striking; his logic is implacable, his point of view unswerving; perhaps he would have been more effective had he allowed time to modify if only slightly some of his very vigorous doctrines. Yet his system, rigid and severe though it is, discloses a fundamental goodness in de Maistre. In spite of a tendency to declaim, heritage of the eighteenth century whose influence he thought he had escaped, there is true eloquence and a certain witty vivacity in de Maistre's writing. He belongs very definitely to the category of great writers and the fact that his own personality is revealed in his work serves to make it more vivid and more penetrating.

(1) Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, 2e entretien.

De Maistre had a powerful influence upon Baudelaire who spoke of him as one of the "éducateurs de sa pensée." His intensive reading of de Maistre was partly responsible for his belief in the fundamental corruption of human nature, vitiated by original sin. Baudelaire saw nothing good in human nature left to itself, indeed he thought of it as satanic. He believed in a personal devil, the source of all evil, but he did not proclaim as de Maistre, any means of combating evil. His Christian mysticism lacked the power and the conviction of de Maistre's.

It should not be forgotten that de Maistre had certain contacts with the mystics and theosophists. He attended their meetings in Lyons and had even belonged to a Masonic lodge at Chambéry till the Revolution broke out when he withdrew from membership. In the Soirées, his sympathy with mysticism is apparent when he predicts the possibility of a third revelation. Chateaubriand had foretold "la consommation des siècles de mort et d'oppression nées de la chute", but de Maistre went further, thereby revealing an element of Romanticism in his nature. Ballanche protested against the expression, third revelation. He considered it unorthodox and preferred to state: "Ce n'est point une révélation nouvelle que nous devons attendre, mais peut-être nous est-il permis de compter sur une dernière forme d'initiation." (1) He thought of fallen humanity as being rehabilitated by means of a gradual series of religious

(1) Ballanche - Palingénésie sociale.

initiations. This theme of social regeneration was later to be taken up by Lamartine in his Chute d'un Ange (1838); it was also a cherished idea of Nodier.

What then, briefly is de Maistre's contribution to French thought? Starting from the need of certainty which seems inherent in human nature, he built up a coherent system of belief founded not on human reason alone, but on faith and obedience which spring from the conviction of the heart. Combating the dogmatic attitude of the eighteenth century, he wrote: "Ils ne doutent de rien, parce qu'ils ne se doutent de rien." (1) Finally, he adopted a middle way between mysticism and rationalism. It was: "marcher ferme, à égale distance de l'illumination et du scepticisme." De Maistre was the first apologist of his generation to expound and defend Catholic dogma in all its purity and in all its consequences, and this he did using the weapons of the eighteenth century philosophers against themselves. His originality lay in the fact that he believed that the whole social edifice would be shaken in its very foundations if men ceased to be concerned with the great truths upon which society rests.

De Maistre was always inspired by noble aims and his work bears the hall-mark of sincerity. His deep conviction results in a fine quality of writing which perhaps he owed to the Jesuit teachers of his youth. His errors too spring

(1) Essai sur le principe générateur des constitutions politiques et des autres institutions humaines (1809)

at least in part from their influence. They taught him to beware of the seductive power of reasoning, but they did not teach him to avoid partiality. Too often his tone is peremptory, his attitude intransigent, although not nearly to the same degree as Bonald's; too often he fails to justify his assertions by adequate and carefully verified fact. His research is often incomplete and uncertain except in the field of ecclesiastical history in which his documentation is sound and exhaustive.

His masterpiece is perhaps Du Pape (1819), the last work he published. Here we see de Maistre the Catholic, expressing his filial admiration for the Roman Church "mère immortelle de la science et de la sainteté." The book is divided into four parts treating in the first part the sovereignty and infallibility of the Pope; in the second, the relationship of the Pope to temporal sovereigns; in the third, the Pope and civilization and the happiness of the peoples; and in the final part, the Pope and the schismatic churches. Books two and three are specifically directed against Voltairian doctrine. De Maistre concludes with a warm appeal to dissidents whom he seeks to convince by logical and eloquent argument. This is a noble piece of writing in spite of the numerous paradoxes in it. It reminds us of Bossuet, but a Bossuet deprived of some of his serenity. It is to be regretted that de Maistre could not entirely escape the tendencies of his generation: his book too often descends to the level of mere polemics and

the calm attitude one would hope to find in such a book is all too frequently absent.

Until about 1830, de Maistre was commonly thought of as an absolutist, a legitimist and a partisan of the most rigid and narrowest dogmas and then certain posthumous manuscripts were published and he was seen in a different light as a delightful friend and an indulgent father, a charming country gentleman. To consider him as either exclusively the partisan or exclusively the kindly man he was in his private life, would be equally false. De Maistre undoubtedly is the advocate of infallibility and of the revocation of the edict of Nantes, but he is also the man who throughout his life enjoyed friendships with those of other communions and was always ready to be of service to them. His books have nevertheless a forbidding aspect: he seems for the most part to have kept the more pleasing side of his personality strictly out of them. When he writes he tends to see only the austere element in religion; he is indeed at times pessimistic in his outlook. Perhaps as a result of the Revolution, he seems to have thought of God as judge rather than Father, in spite of his views on Providence. This attitude led him to feel sincere pity for his fellow men. A similar train of thought is present in Benjamin Constant: he too feels the deepest pity for the sufferings of others and makes a religion of his emotion. These two writers have another trait in common: they are both intellectually honest to a degree. Far from

evading objections to their arguments, they begin by stating possible objections in all their force and they examine them objectively and seriously, not dismissing them contemptuously as Bonald habitually did. In the Soirées, de Maistre raises the objection that God punishes the innocent with the guilty and even for the guilty; He is therefore by human standards unjust. De Maistre answers this objection by asking the question: who is innocent? a very pertinent question which immediately disarms the objector. De Maistre had not read his New Testament in vain. Another similarity between de Maistre and Constant lies in the absence of any acknowledgment of Christ as the centre of the Christian religion. Christian love is conspicuously lacking in their works. It is as if they were unaware of the epistles of St. John. Faguet is justly surprised at this lack in de Maistre. "Je reste étonné," he writes, "devant ce christianisme où je ne trouve pas le Christ lui-même. On peut affirmer que de Maistre n'a ni l'amour, ni le culte, n'a pas même l'idée de Jésus. Je cherche ce qu'il en pense, et ne trouve rien. Jésus pour lui est une 'victime sanglante', et rien de plus. Et dès lors, je m'inquiète tout à fait, et je me dis: Est-ce que M. de Maistre ne serait pas au fond un païen? Il en a l'air au moins. Son idée de la continuité le hante à ce point qu'il lui échappe des mots un peu forts, comme celui-ci, que "les superstitions sont les gardes avancées des religions"; comme celui-ci, que "les évêques français

sont les successeurs des druides"; comme celui-ci, que "toute civilisation commence par les prêtres, ... par les miracles, vrais ou faux, n'importe" - A le bien prendre, ou à le prendre mal, mais son tort est d'offrir mille points à le prendre ainsi, son christianisme n'est ni amour, ni bonté, ni déclaration du droit que l'homme a de penser en dehors de la pensée de l'Etat, ce qui est, ce me semble, la grande invention du christianisme et l'affranchissement qu'il a apporté; son christianisme est terreur, obéissance passive et religion d'Etat. Cela n'est pas si loin des religions antiques, et l'on peut comprendre que le christianisme de de Maistre ne soit qu'un paganisme un peu "nettoyé".(1)

This is nevertheless a harsh judgment. It is true that one can choose to interpret de Maistre in this way just as Faguet has chosen to interpret Constant in a way that fails to do him justice. When de Maistre writes that superstitions are the advance guards of religions, he is stating a fact which illustrates his knowledge of psychology. Constant states the same fact when he says that man has never existed without religion, that the religious sentiment is present in the savage and finds its expression at first in superstitious rites. But whereas Constant's religious sentiment is an excuse for individualism in an extreme form, de Maistre is suspicious of all individualism. He sees in it a danger to the principle of unity within the

(1) Op.cit., p.59.

Roman Church. Here de Maistre is in fierce opposition to the eighteenth century. He hates the idea of human progress by human means. Absolute freedom of thought and absolute freedom of conscience are dangerous in his eyes and he would never exalt reason to the point of acclaiming it as supreme.

De Maistre combats all that the eighteenth ^{century} stands for in a much more positive way than Chateaubriand, because he is full of a burning zeal for the Roman Church which is lacking in the author of Le Génie. Yet he, like Bonald, like Constant and like Mme de Staël, is indelibly stamped with the mark of the eighteenth century. His blindness to all but the facts he wished to see and his limited critical sense are the very essence of the eighteenth century. His lack of a true sense of history and his obsession with a neat and comprehensive system are likewise failings of his time, but above all, his lack of artistic sense brands him as an eighteenth century writer. It is significant that he did not like the Greeks, failing to appreciate their ideal of beauty. He wrote well, even eloquently at times, but harmony and poetry are not to be found in his work. It did not occur to him to present religion as a thing of beauty, to seek by extolling the loveliness of Christianity to make it appeal to his readers. His books appeal to the reason instead and they neglect the aesthetic approach altogether. De Maistre remained entirely in the spirit of the eighteenth century, although he opposed

Chapter III
its ideas vigorously.

The first of these is the...
 The second is the...
 The third is the...
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 The ninety-fourth is the...
 The ninety-fifth is the...
 The ninety-sixth is the...
 The ninety-seventh is the...
 The ninety-eighth is the...
 The ninety-ninth is the...
 The hundredth is the...

It is...
 for the religious...
 had always been...
 his life had been...
 Germaine was twenty...
Importance of...
 praised the social utility of...
 flat and solemn. The text is white, serene, no doubt

Chapter IIIMadame de Staël and Charles Nodier

Let us now consider another writer of the period who was also preoccupied with the religious problem but who was of a different turn of mind as well as being a member of a different communion. Mme de Staël was in her early youth deeply influenced by the ideas of the eighteenth century. She reasoned upon every conceivable subject, often very ably; fanaticism in any form she condemned and she was satisfied with a sentimental deism. It seemed that she owed her rationalist spirit to Grimm, Buffon, Marmontel and Raynal and yet she admitted that she preferred the philosophy of Rousseau. Mme Necker, her mother, had always been attracted by the ideas of Rousseau and had wanted her daughter, Germaine, to be alive to the beautiful and to allow her emotions adequate expression, although she realized the need to find a firmer rule than the inconstant suggestions of sentiment. She need not have feared; her daughter was never one to suppress her emotions.

It is probable that M. Necker was largely responsible for the religious ideas and sentiments of Germaine. He had always been interested in religion and morality and his life had been guided by strict principles. When Germaine was twenty-two, he published his book: De l'Importance des opinions religieuses (1788). In it he praised the social utility of religion in a style at once flat and solemn. The book is naïve, mediocre, no doubt

written with the deepest sincerity, but betraying nevertheless vanity and pompousness in the writer. Mme de Staël was blind to these defects. She had an inordinate admiration for her father, not entirely without reason for in him she saw faith being practised in daily life and not the arid devotion of lip service. From him too she learnt true tolerance, not the tolerance of the philosophers like Holbach which arose out of indifference to religion, but the tolerance that respects other points of view in religious matters.

Besides reading Rousseau at an early age, she devoured Montesquieu and conversed with many of the leading writers of the 1780's. It was hardly surprising that she was soon imbued with their ideas and that she quickly shared their absolute faith in ideas. Her personality developed rapidly and with it her sentiments. Indeed these grew into ideas. It is interesting that in Rousseau she appreciated the apostle of the "morale du sentiment" rather than the political writer or even the creative artist. With him, she believed in God, in the immortality of the soul and in enthusiasm. In her Lettres sur les écrits et le caractère de J.-J. Rousseau, written in 1788, we see which of his ideas she accepted and which she rejected. Her views were already very decided and she was attracted by the supremacy that Rousseau gave to the feelings, but his theorizing left her indifferent. This did not mean that she was indifferent to reasoning in general. Her mother had taught her not to omit "de faire sa cour à cette bonne

raison qui sert à tout et ne nuit à rien," and indeed Mme de Staël made full use of her reasoning faculty. At the turn of the century, she was representative of the best elements in the contemporary philosophy: hope, belief in progress, humanism.

She had grown up in reaction to her mother's attitude to religion. Mme Necker's religion had preserved the character of a positive religion, an external authority to which she sacrificed her own power of reasoning. Her daughter was hostile to organized religion in any form, particularly to Roman Catholicism. She saw no need for a Church or churches. It is true that she sang the praises of Protestantism, but by Protestantism she meant individualism, freedom of conscience, the liberty to worship how and when she liked. She certainly did not extol the Protestantism of Calvin. She thought that Calvin represented all that was narrow and bigoted and over-precise. She revelled in the vague, indeed at that time her religion was merely religiosity. It was liberalism, an enthusiasm for lofty but imprecise ideals and chiefly the love of personal freedom. Her liberalism in politics and religion was a far cry from that of de Maistre. In her early days she made happiness her goal in life, personal happiness and the happiness of others. Her eagerness for happiness was a part of her passionate devotion to the theory of human perfectibility.

One of her great qualities at this time was her faith in the intrinsic value of truth. She believed in

the strength of truth, she knew it to be stronger than might and that surely is a step on the way towards religion. The thought of her first books is remarkable for its intuition and spontaneity and already she is seen as a moralist. Such remarks as this: "Peut-être la morale perfectionne-t-elle plutôt qu'elle ne change, guide-t-elle plutôt qu'elle ne ramène," (1) are typical of the preoccupations of her youth.

In 1796, she published her book De l'Influence des Passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations.

One is reminded of Vauvenargues in this treatise which celebrates all that is good and noble in man. There is little trace of system or dialectic in it, but it appeals by its enthusiasm and ardour. The work is of great intellectual and literary value and it shows us the stage of religious development she had reached. She has no very high opinion of positive religion or devotion as she calls it and she seems to have mistaken mere formalism for Christianity. She writes: "Elle (la dévotion) est presque toujours destructive des qualités naturelles; ce qu'elles ont de spontané, d'involontaire, est incompatible avec des règles fixes sur tous les objets. Dans la dévotion, l'on peut être vertueux sans le secours de l'inspiration de la bonté, et même, il est plusieurs circonstances où la sévérité de certains principes vous défend de vous y livrer. Des caractères privés de qualités naturelles, à l'abri de ce qu'on appelle la dévotion, se sentent plus à l'aise pour exercer des défauts qui ne blessent aucune des lois

(1) lettres sur les écrits et le caractère de J.-J. Rousseau: lettre II.

dont ils ont adopté le code. Par delà ce qui est commandé, tout ce qu'on refuse est légitime; la justice dégage de la bienfaisance, la bienfaisance de la générosité, et contents de solder ce qu'ils croient leurs devoirs, s'il arrive une fois dans la vie où telle vertu clairement ordonnée exige un véritable sacrifice, il est des biens, des services, des condescendances de tous les instants, qu'on n'obtient jamais de ceux qui, ayant tout réduit en devoir, n'ont pu dessiner que les masses, ne savent obéir qu'à ce qui s'exprime."(1) Mme de Staël contrasts this with natural religion which, she affirms, has none of the faults of organized religion. At the end of her book, she develops a religion of pity, pity of man for man which takes the place of religion in her life, and her continued belief in the progress of humanity enlightened by poets and philosophers amounted to a religion just as it did in Condorcet.

In 1800, Necker published another book on religion: Cours de morale religieuse which he wrote for his grandchildren, but Mme de Staël herself found inspiration in this work and her religious sentiment grew in fervour as she pondered it. In 1800, too, she published her first masterpiece: De la Littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales. With Le Génie du Christianisme, this book is a symbol. At the beginning of the century, wrote Alexandre Vinet, the Swiss philosopher and

(1) De l'Influence des Passions, section 11, ch. IV.

critic, "apparaissent à deux points opposés de l'horizon, deux symboles, deux drapeaux, plus apparentés qu'on ne le crut alors, et que ne l'étaient les hommes qui se rallièrent autour de chacun d'eux; car tous deux inauguraient le romantisme, et chacun plaçait la littérature à la lumière de l'une des deux constellations sous le regard desquelles l'esprit humain laboure son océan; la philosophie et la religion." (1) Indeed, la Littérature was a timely manifesto dedicated to hope. Perfectibility is the principle of the book. It was by no means a new idea: it was none other than the theory of Boileau's enemies in the famous quarrel handed down through the intermediary of the eighteenth century philosophers. It was timely because the early nineteenth century needed the promise of better things. How well Mme de Staël understood this need: "Il faut à toutes les carrières un avenir lumineux vers lequel l'âme s'élançe; il faut aux guerriers la gloire, aux penseurs la liberté, aux hommes sensibles un Dieu." (2)

Her book does not claim to expound a religious system, but for the first time she has constructed a coherent theory based regrettably on too general a principle to explain human history satisfactorily, but interesting nevertheless and capable of expressing her religious ideas. She treats Christianity as a substitute for philosophy and a great and memorable incident in the history of mankind. It was necessary at the time of its inception as an impetus to the progress of reason, but she implies that it can and will be

(1) Vinet: Le Semeur, vol.V, p.260. FRANÇAIS DU 18^{ME}

(2) De la Littérature, 2nd part, conclusion.

superseded. She loyally enumerates the benefits conferred on humanity by the Christian faith, but for the purposes of her rigid system she is obliged to stress the weaknesses so as to affirm the subsequent progress of man. As Vinet writes: "Cet argument a priori gagnerait quelque chose à être soutenu par des preuves de fait, et nous saurions gré à l'auteur de nous démontrer que dans le fond du coeur la génération présente vaut mieux que toutes celles qui l'ont précédée. M. de Chateaubriand, je l'avoue, n'est ni plus vrai ni plus sûr de son fait lorsqu'il nous dit "que le système de perfection, vrai pour tout ce qui est relatif à l'intelligence est faux pour ce qui regarde les moeurs;"(1) car, à certains égards, l'homme restant le même, les hommes peuvent devenir meilleurs; mais ni l'auteur du Génie du Christianisme, ni celui du livre sur la Littérature, n'ont regardé tout au fond: ils y auraient trouvé, de siècle en siècle, l'homme parfaitement égal à lui-même." (2)

It is a pity that in a book which has such fine qualities, the thought should at times be vague and lacking in penetration, but this defect is counterbalanced by sudden flashes of brilliant intuitive reasoning as in this statement: "Sans la vertu, rien ne peut subsister; rien ne peut réussir contre elle. La consolante idée d'une Providence éternelle peut tenir lieu de toute autre réflexion;

(1) Essai sur les Révolutions, 1st part, ch. XIV Oeuvres complètes 1, 89, note a (1826).

(2) Vinet: Etudes sur la littérature française au XIXe siècle, vol. 1, p. 60.

mais il faut que les hommes déifient la morale elle-même, quand ils refusent de reconnaître un Dieu pour son auteur."

(1) Her interest in man as a moral being is part of her Protestant heritage, but she does not yet seem to realize how great was the moral revolution effected by Christianity. Faguet expresses this opinion: "Je ne vois point qu'elle dise nulle part, elle si bien faite, avec ses idées individualistes, pour le comprendre, que c'est le christianisme qui a presque créé la dignité personnelle, l'autonomie individuelle, le "droit de l'homme", faisant une doctrine de ce qui n'était avant lui qu'un sentiment, et un sentiment aristocratique. La première institution qui ait séparé l'Église de l'État, c'est le christianisme, et dès que quelque chose a été séparé de l'État, l'individu a existé. Mme de Staël n'en est pas encore à voir nettement ce point." (2)

She understands the serious character of Christianity, but fails to see that it offers consolation to man in his moral solitude. For her "la religion chrétienne, la plus philosophique de toutes, est celle qui livre le plus l'homme à lui-même... Assez rapprochée du pur déisme, quand elle est débarrassée des inventions sacerdotales, elle a fait disparaître ce cortège d'imaginations qui environnaient l'homme aux portes du tombeau. La nature, que les anciens avaient peuplée d'êtres protecteurs qui habitaient les forêts et les fleuves et présidaient à la nuit comme au

(1) De la Littérature, 2nd part, ch.VI.

(2) Faguet; op.cit., p.141.

jour, la nature est rentrée dans la solitude, et l'effroi de l'homme s'en est accru."

Mme de Staël proves herself in la Littérature to be a moralist of discernment. Her system, while being too absolute, shows a mind capable of grasping abstract ideas and at the same time ready to admit when they fail to illustrate her theory. She feels that Europe is ready for a new spirit: "Nous sommes arrivés à une période qui ressemble, sous quelques rapports, à l'état des esprits au moment de la chute de l'empire romain et de l'invasion des peuples du Nord." (1) She is uneasy and uncertain herself and anxious to see natural religion established. She had written in April 1799: "Il faut seulement rallier pour le culte les idées religieuses que le sauvage comme l'homme civilisé, le prêtre comme le philosophe, l'ignorant comme le savant, saisissent également." (2) Mme de Staël over-simplifies the problem but realizes the need for worship. Since 1794, her ideas had gradually been modified through the influence of Constant and by 1800, she aspired to a new mysticism that would satisfy her religious sentiment. In 1802 she published Delphine and wrote in the preface that the dogma of any sect fettered the soul. In this novel, she describes three kinds of religion; arid formalism in Mathilde, burning imagination in Thérèse and deism without force or conviction in the heroine. It seems

(1) De la Littérature - Oeuvres complètes 11, 381.

(2) Circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution, pp.220-221, pub. in 1906.

evident that Mme de Staël herself derived little comfort from her religion at that date. However, Delphine had returned to her faith after a period of indifference and her creator felt more and more the need for a more definite belief. She remained as anticlerical as ever and especially anti-Catholic; indeed, her book had appeared as a kind of Protestant reply to Le Génie. About this time, Constant suggested to Mme de Staël that the mystic sect "les Ames Intérieures" might satisfy her inner longings. She was not convinced by their theories but she took a lively interest in them. While in Germany in 1803, under the impact of the ideas of Schlegel, Hess and Goethe, Mme de Staël experienced a religious transformation which might technically be called a conversion. It was the climax of a gradual movement towards religion and both her reading and her interminable conversations with German poets and theologians had much to do with her change of ideas. She adopted a semi-mystic view which conciliated her faith based on sentiment with her old anticlericalism.

On her return from Germany, Coppet became a "congrès de religions" (1). Bonstetten and Sismondi represented the rationalists, Catholic orthodoxy was defended by Mathieu de Montmorency, but the theosophist element predominated. De Sabran believed in the ideas of Saint-Martin and Auguste Schlegel called himself a theocrat although he was not initiated into the illuminism which attracted him. He held much the same views on mysticism as Mme de Staël herself.

(1) Expression of Pierre Kohler in Mme de Staël et la Suisse.

Like hers, his impressions were mixed. Mme de Staël was too hard-headed for mysticism to have any permanent hold upon her. In 1804, her views underwent a further change. On April 9 of that year, her father died and from then onwards his memory inspired all her writing. His death gave an impetus to the religious meditation with which she had been preoccupied since before the publication of Delphine and by 1807 when she published Corinne, it is probable that the transformation in her was complete. Most probably by then she had attained to spiritual maturity. Her second novel is full of brilliant flashes, the result perhaps of an inner revelation. Not even the finest moralists have made statements of greater depth than this pronounced by Oswald: "Sans doute le repentir est une belle chose, et j'ai besoin, plus que personne, de croire à son efficacité; mais le repentir qui se répète fatigue l'âme; ce sentiment ne régénère qu'une fois. C'est la rédemption qui s'accomplit au fond de notre âme: et ce grand sacrifice ne peut se renouveler."(1)

* * *

Four unpublished letters (2) of 1807, 1808 and 1809,

(1) Corinne, book X, ch. V.

(2) I owe a debt of gratitude to M. Paul Laufer, professor at the Faculté de théologie de l'Église libre du Canton de Vaud who very kindly lent me a copy of the four manuscript letters which he had found among papers belonging to his wife (née Gautier). Although none of these letters is signed, there can be no doubt of their origin: Mme de Staël frequently omitted to sign letters to her intimate friends and not only for political reasons. Only the letter of 1809 bears the full date with the year, but the three others mentioning only the day and month are easily placed because of their content.

addressed to a distant cousin, François Gautier de Tournes, throw new light on Mme de Staël's religious views at that time. Writing on 5 February 1807 from Acosta near Meulan, Seine-et-Oise, where she retired when Napoleon ordered her to leave Paris, she referred to Corinne in the following terms: "C'est sûrement ce que j'ai fait de mieux, et comme je suis plus religieuse que quand j'ai écrit Delphine, j'espère qu'on s'en apercevra." The second letter, also written from Acosta on 27 February 1807, shows how much importance she attached to the religion of her parents and how she wished her son Auguste to be well instructed in their faith. She had asked Gautier de Tournes to arrange for J.-Z. Samuel Célérier, a Vaudois minister to undertake his instruction. "Je remercie mille fois M. Célérier d'accepter que mon fils aille à cheval le voir deux fois par semaine. Ces deux heures seront pour lui les plus utiles et les meilleures. Je lui ai dit de lire l'Histoire Universelle de Bossuet, et je lui fais lire tous les dimanches ou l'Évangile ou les discours de mon père (1), mais je vous avouerai que je voudrais qu'on ne lui fît pas lire d'ouvrages catholiques.(2) Je tiens à notre religion, à celle de mon père et de ma mère, et mon fils ne doit pas s'en écarter. Qu'il soit pieux et vertueux comme ces respectables personnes et mon vœu est rempli merveilleusement."

There is no doubt that Mme de Staël did arrive at a

(1) The alternative is amusing.

(2) She no doubt means no books of the Fénelon, Mme Guyon school of thought, since she herself recommends him to read Bossuet!

form of Christianity, a very personal and somewhat strange mixture of deism, Romanticism and genuine faith which arose partly out of her very deep affection for her father and a desire to practise the religion which meant so much to him. In the third letter of 28 April 1808, written from Vienna, she asked after Gautier's health and added: "Dieu vous fera la grâce de vous rétablir, je l'espère: vous faites tant de bien dans ce monde car vous avez le don de la persuasion; je voudrais bien que mon ami (1) en sentît les effets. Je l'ai espéré un moment et ses lettres après avoir vu le chevalier(2) semblaient me le permettre, mais depuis qu'il est à Paris, il me semble que ces impressions s'effacent." It is amusing that Mme de Staël tried to interest Benjamin Constant in the mystic sect at Lausanne led by his cousin, the Chevalier de Langallerie and Constant, on the other hand, did his best to persuade her to join their number, if only to secure peace for himself. Till 1808, however, she had not found the calm that she envied in her cousin Gautier. In the same letter, she wrote: "Il y a un calme religieux dans le fond de vos âmes que j'implore en vain du ciel jusqu'à présent."

Mais au moins il y a une chose de moi que vous désirez et que je ferai: j'écrirai des lettres sur l'Allemagne et j'y dirai que j'ai eu tort dans les opinions philosophiques que j'ai exprimées autrefois, et que j'en sens l'insuffisance. Je ferai cela noblement mais clairement, sans m'annoncer pour ce que je ne suis pas, c'est-à-dire

(1) Benjamin Constant.
 (2) de Langallerie.

pour une personne qui vit selon sa conviction; mais (je) la donner(ai) au moins comme une lumière de mon esprit. Ne dites rien de ce que je vous mande là, excepté au chevalier. J'ai avant tout peur d'un air d'hypocrisie et comme je mène une vie dissipée, je ne puis parler religion que comme un vœu.

Adieu, priez pour moi, pensez à mon père, réservez-moi quelques instants cet été et croyez que si je deviens ce que je voudrais, c'est à vous que je le devrai."

It is impossible not to admire Mme de Staël's frankness and her sincere longing for conviction. In the following year, 1809, she wrote from Coppet to Gautier de Tournes on November 6: "J'ai tous les jours davantage le sentiment intime de la présence de Dieu. Cette conviction qui pour vous doit être essentiellement consolante est plutôt effrayante pour moi, tout alors devient plus sérieux; l'on se demande avec plus de sévérité et d'effroi le compte de sa vie et l'on ne se croit plus à l'abri des remords seulement parce qu'il ne s'y trouve pas précisément des crimes; ce n'est plus autant ce que nous faisons, mais ce que nous ne faisons pas, qui porte le trouble dans l'âme. Trop facilement nous nous croyons innocents au tribunal de la conscience si nous n'avons pas des crimes réels ou des fautes graves à nous reprocher (et cependant l'éducation, quelque mauvaise qu'elle soit, suffit à nous préserver de l'un et de l'autre: lutter contre l'opinion du monde est un trop grand supplice et celui qui s'efforce de sourire avec mépris à ses jugements n'est jamais qu'un hypocrite).

Il est réservé au petit nombre de faire un bien actif, il appartient à chaque individu de faire ce bien de tous les instants qui contribue au bonheur de ceux qui nous entourent et ce n'est jamais sans une douleur profonde et réelle que chaque jour je me demande pour quoi j'ai vécu.

Cependant je me sens moins découragée que je ne l'étais autre fois. Ne serait-ce pas mal connaître Dieu que de croire qu'il ne veuille pas nous régénérer si nous (nous) tournons vers lui avec humilité et confiance? Et si la correction de notre vie doit être le gage du pardon, qui serait assez téméraire pour oser demander du bonheur dans ce monde? - Je m'effraie de celui que Dieu m'accorde dans ce moment; il me semble trop réel, trop pur pour être d'un long durée (sic). Je crois à l'efficacité de la prière; n'est-ce pas permis aussi de croire qu'une reconnaissance religieuse peut aussi conserver les bienfaits de Dieu? L'importance des opinions religieuses est à présent trop intimement gravée dans mon coeur pour que rien ne puisse à l'avenir les ébranler. J'y trouve du calme. Peut-être était-ce pour nous attirer vers elle que la Providence dans sa divine bonté a voulu que la Religion, qui ne semble avoir d'autre but que le bonheur dans une vie à venir, soit notre plus douce consolation dans celle-ci."

This moving letter proves that Mme de Staël had made very considerable spiritual progress and that she no longer regarded personal happiness as her main goal in life.

Unlike de Maistre and Bonald, as Mme de Staël's religious

thought grew firmer, her mind became open to richer conceptions. She remained by temperament and persuasion a Protestant, but gradually she came to understand better the joyous fervour expressed in the pomp of Catholic ceremony. Corinne reveals this more sympathetic attitude. Where previously she had seen only hostility and contrast, she now discovered compensations. It is a mark of her intelligence to have been able to conciliate two facets of the same truth. Delphine had claimed the tolerance of society for moral superiority, Corinne claimed the tolerance of religions in favour of genius.

Mme de Staël's new enthusiasm is evident from the following passage which reveals also her need for the infinite and the absence of formal observances: "L'hommage de la poésie est religieux, et les ailes de la pensée servent à se rapprocher de vous. (Dieu). - Il n'y a rien d'étroit, rien d'asservi, rien de limité dans la religion. Elle est l'immense, l'infini, l'éternel; et loin que le génie puisse détourner d'elle, l'imagination, de son premier élan, dépasse les bornes de la vie, et le sublime en tout genre est un reflet de la Divinité." (1) She had fully understood that true religion is perfect freedom and that the religious sentiment untrammelled can draw all men together. "Le sentiment unit intimement les hommes entre eux, quand l'amour-propre et le fanatisme n'en font pas un objet de jalousie et de haine." (2)

(1) Corinne, book XX, ch.V.
 (2) Ibid, book I, p.316 ed. Flammarion.

Mme de Staël's thought and talent reach their maturity in De l'Allemagne which she completed in 1810. By now her moral convictions have changed utterly. In each new work we have seen her getting nearer a real understanding of the truth of Christianity. We do not know directly and in detail what were her religious beliefs in 1810, but the tenets of the Christian faith as revealed in the Gospels are implicit in this book. Now she extols religious virtues; she has travelled far since 1796.

In La Littérature, she had considered Christianity as second-best, inferior to philosophy. Now she realizes that religion helps the writer to know the human heart and she allows her theory of continual progress to lapse: "Les ouvrages composés dans le dix-septième siècle sont plus philosophiques, à beaucoup d'égards, que ceux qui ont été publiés depuis; car la philosophie consiste surtout dans l'étude et la connaissance de notre être intellectuel. Les philosophes du dix-huitième siècle se sont plus occupés de la politique sociale que de la nature de l'homme; les philosophes du dix-septième, par cela seul qu'ils étaient religieux, en savaient plus sur le fond du coeur." (1)

This is a complete reversal of her former ideas. Now she wants religion to be at the centre of everything: "Il me semble qu'une des causes de l'affaiblissement du respect pour la religion, c'est de l'avoir mise à part de toutes les sciences, comme si la philosophie, le raisonnement, enfin tout ce qui est estimé dans les affaires terrestres,

(1) De l'Allemagne, 3rd part, ch. lll.

ne pouvait s'appliquer à la religion: une vénération dérisoire l'écarte de tous les intérêts de la vie; c'est pour ainsi dire la reconduire hors du cercle de l'esprit humain à force de révérences. Dans tous les pays où règne une croyance religieuse, elle est le centre des idées, et la philosophie consiste à trouver l'interprétation raisonnée des vérités divines." (1)

She develops the idea that the moral^{law} is founded on religion: "Quelque effort qu'on fasse, il faut en revenir à reconnaître que la religion est le véritable fondement de la morale; c'est l'objet sensible et réel au dedans de nous, qui peut seul détourner nos regards des objets extérieurs. Si la piété ne causait pas des émotions sublimes, qui sacrifierait même des plaisirs, quelque vulgaires qu'ils fussent, à la froide dignité de la raison? Il faut commencer l'histoire intime de l'homme par la religion ou par la sensation, car il n'y a de vivant que l'une ou l'autre. La morale fondée sur l'intérêt personnel serait aussi évidente qu'une vérité mathématique, qu'elle n'en exercerait pas plus d'empire sur les passions, qui foulent aux pieds tous les calculs; il n'y a qu'un sentiment qui puisse triompher d'un sentiment, la nature violente ne saurait être dominée que par la nature exaltée. Le raisonnement, dans de certains cas, ressemble au maître d'école de La Fontaine; personne ne l'écoute, et tout le monde crie au secours." (2)

In deciding between the rights of sentiment and the

(1) De l'Allemagne, 3rd part, ch.111

(2) Ibid., ch.XIV.

exigencies of reason, she once attributed complete authority to sentiment, but now judges a similar doctrine in the German philosopher Frédéric-Henri Jacobi (1743-1819) as an extreme; "Entre ces deux classes de moralistes, celle qui, comme Kant et d'autres plus abstraits encore, veut rapporter toutes les actions de la morale à des préceptes immuables, et celle qui, comme Jacobi, proclame qu'il faut tout abandonner à la décision du sentiment, le christianisme semble indiquer le point merveilleux où la loi positive n'exclut pas l'inspiration du coeur, ni cette inspiration la loi positive. Jacobi, qui a tant de raisons de se confier dans la pureté de sa conscience, a eu tort de poser en principe qu'on doit s'en remettre ~~entièrement~~ à ce que le mouvement de l'âme peut nous conseiller; la sécheresse de quelques écrivains intolérants, qui n'admettent ni modification ni indulgence dans l'application de quelques préceptes, a jeté Jacobi dans l'excès contraire." (1)

The meditative spirit of German philosophers and theologians had inspired Mme de Staël to reconsider her views. Many of her German contemporaries sought the highest good in an effort of the will to harmonize with the injunctions of reason. She saw in Kant's theory of the categorical imperative, a theological idea: God within us dictating out duty, the voice of the heart, a perpetual Divine revelation, but she rejected the harsh and exclusive element in Kant's doctrine. In fact, hers is a kind of religious

(1) De L'Allemagne, 3rd part, ch. XVI.

eclecticism: she adopted such dogma as appealed to her religious sentiment and her conception of the truth and left the rest.

Her conclusion is all the more remarkable because she finally achieves a mid-way position between Rousseau and Voltaire, or Rousseau and Chateaubriand. Her deism has given way to a firmer, more positive faith, based on the inspiration of the heart, confirmed by intellectual investigation and free from all mechanical practices. "Une foi d'habitude" is her perpetual dread. She speaks of her faith in such general terms that it is difficult to say whether it was truly Christianity or not. She never once refers to the divinity of Jesus Christ. In fact, like de Maistre and Constant, she refrains from making Christ the central fact in Christianity. All these writers seem to lack the humility which recognizes the compelling power of Christ.

Nevertheless, Mme de Staël has evolved very considerably. She once viewed with despair the inevitable sufferings of this life and death filled her with horror. Now her attitude is one of calm and resignation, at least in her writing even if she never attained to resignation in practice. "Si l'on croit ... qu'il n'y a que deux choses importantes pour le bonheur, la pureté de l'intention et la résignation à l'événement, quel qu'il soit, lorsqu'il ne dépend plus de nous, sans doute beaucoup de circonstances nous feront encore cruellement souffrir, mais aucune ne rompra nos liens avec le ciel. Lutter contre l'impossible

est ce qui engendre en nous les sentiments les plus amers; et la colère de Satan n'est autre chose que la liberté aux prises avec la nécessité, et ne pouvant ni la dompter, ni s'y soumettre." (1)

Whereas once she turned to philosophy for help, she now finds supreme consolation in religion. The following passage merits quotation in full, illustrating as it does the comfort that she now derives from her religion: "Si l'on était parvenu à tarir la source de la religion sur la terre, que dirait-on à ceux qui voient tomber da plus pure des victimes? que dirait-on à ceux qui l'ont aimée? et de quel désespoir, de quel effroi du sort et de ses perfides secrets, l'âme ne serait-elle pas remplie!

Non seulement ce qu'on voit, mais ce qu'on se figure, foudroierait la pensée, s'il n'y avait rien en nous qui nous affranchît du hasard ... La mort, selon les incrédules, doit délivrer de tout, mais savent-ils ce qu'elle est? savent-ils si cette mort est le néant? et dans quel labyrinthe de terreur la réflexion sans guide ne peut-elle pas nous entraîner?

Si un homme honnête (et les circonstances d'une vie passionnée peuvent amener ce malheur), si un homme honnête, dis-je, avait fait un mal irréparable à un être innocent, comment, sans le secours de l'expiation religieuse, s'en consolerait-il jamais? ... Que ferions-nous alors, que ferions-nous ô mon Dieu! si nous ne pouvions nous jeter dans votre sein paternel! Celui qui, le premier, appela Dieu

(1) De l'Allemagne, 4th part, ch.V.

notre père, en savait plus sur le coeur humain que les plus profonds penseurs du siècle."

The accent is on God's power to help man, to alleviate his suffering, but Mme de Staël seems to overlook man's responsibility towards God. One must remember that she had passed through difficult days. Since October 1803, most of her life had been lived in exile and her book although finished by 23 September 1810, was seized on 25 September and not published again until October 1813 and then in London. Her personal life had been filled with tribulations of every kind and her nature, unsatisfied and frustrated, had driven her to seek consolation in religion.

Finally, nature itself seems to her no longer reassuring; hope in God leads her to suspect all else: "Il n'y a pas un beau jour qui ne puisse recéler la foudre, pas une fleur dont les sucs ne puissent être empoisonnés, pas un souffle de l'air qui ne puisse apporter avec lui une contagion funeste, et la nature semble une amante jalouse prête à percer le sein de l'homme, au moment même où il s'enivre de ses dons." (1)

At her death, Mme de Staël left one unfinished book which was published in 1818: Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française. Together with De l'Allemagne, this book is a masterpiece in which she once again discusses the nature of true religion. She praises Christianity as the doctrine which frees the individual and shows him his real worth: "Le christianisme a

(1) De l'Allemagne, 4th part, ch. IX.

véritablement apporté la vérité sur cette terre, la justice envers les opprimés, le respect pour les malheureux, enfin l'égalité devant Dieu, dont l'égalité devant la loi n'est qu'une image imparfaite. C'est par une confusion volontaire chez quelques-uns, aveugle chez quelques autres qu'on a voulu considérer les privilèges de la noblesse et le pouvoir absolu du trône comme des dogmes de la religion. Les formes de l'organisation sociale ne peuvent toucher à la religion que par leur influence sur le maintien de la justice envers tous et de la morale de chacun; le reste appartient à la science de ce monde." (1)

Mme de Staël reached few conclusions and apart from the system of La Littérature which she at least partially abandoned later, she did not construct a complete explanation of the universe as did de Maistre and Bonald. She loved truth and pursued it; indeed she loved it too much to care for paradox or to bind herself to a rigid system. Her ideas were flexible and she readily changed them when she discovered better ones. In this she was very different from de Maistre whose views never underwent such successive modifications. Mme de Staël never ceased to enrich her mind and right up to her death, her religious ideas evolved and gained in purity and conviction. Her doctrine of liberalism in politics and religion remained diametrically opposed to that of de Maistre. She thought chiefly as a moralist and believed with Necker that "la morale était dans la nature des choses." (2) She believed in a moral order, perfect

(1) Considérations, 6th part, ch. XII.

(2) Ibid, 2nd part, ch. XX.

and inviolable. Nevertheless, one is left with an impression of vagueness, of lofty aspirations, high ideals very sincerely held but lacking in solidity. They remained aspirations, literary and theoretical rather than practical, but it was an innovation at the time to have religious ideas of any kind. Mme de Staël, while representative of her age, was at the same time in advance of many of her contemporaries and the early nineteenth century with its vague yearning for spiritual compensations to offset the bitterness of life, finds expression in all her work.

Mme de Staël was very definitely of the eighteenth century in that she lacked the power of lyrical expression. It is true that her later works were more artistic than the earlier ones, but she never achieved truly great art. It is significant that she preferred the Romans to the Greeks. It seemed that the Protestant in her prevented her from seeing religions in terms of poetic beauty. She tended to neglect art in order to concentrate more on thought.

* * *

Very different in this respect was Charles Nodier who although less convinced than Mme de Staël and certainly a less profound thinker, popularised the religious sentiment through poetry and the novel. Nodier lacked originality and expounded eloquently theories which he did not sincerely believe. Despite the fact that he professed Christianity, he often wrote as if he were a sceptic and frequently his tone is incompatible with his rôle as a Christian artist.

He declared: "il n'y a rien de positif, rien d'essentielle-
ment vrai dans la morale et dans les moeurs,"(1) and once
he even went so far as to deny the existence of truth:
"Notre destination, c'est de trier entre nous les parcelles
de la vérité qui paraissent telles au plus grand nombre
... Ne contestez plus, et tâchez de vous aimer ... Dans le
sens général et absolu du mot, il n'y a point de vérité."(2)
After such a statement it is difficult to take seriously
his affirmations on the truth and beauty of Catholicism.
He admired the aesthetic element in religion, thus following
in Chateaubriand's footsteps but the moral aspect which
had appealed so much to Mme de Staël escaped him altogether.

Nodier adopted the theories of Chateaubriand on
religion and art and contributed to their popularisation.
"Chez les anciens," he wrote, "ce sont les poètes qui ont
fait la religion; chez les modernes, c'est la religion
qui crée enfin des poètes; et, comme aucun langage ne
s'adresse avec plus de pouvoir à l'intelligence, il serait
peut-être permis de dire que tant que la poésie n'a pas
été chrétienne, le grand ouvrage de cette nouvelle loi qui
a révélé à l'univers un ordre entier de pensées et de
sentiments, n'a pas été complet." (3)

Nodier enjoyed very considerable influence in his
time and was considered an equal by his famous contemporaries.
Although his name is scarcely remembered today and his books

(1) Rêveries: De l'amour.

(2) Ibid: Miscellanées.

(3) Preface by Nodier to the Méditations of Lamartine.

are little read, yet he had an abundance of sound ideas. Like Mme de Staël, he owed a great deal to German philosophers and poets. He adopted many of their theories in an exaggerated form, but in spite of his intermittent scepticism, he declared: "la poésie de l'âme, c'est le christianisme qui nous l'a faite, c'est la réforme et la philosophie qui l'ont tuée." (1) He believed in the superiority of Christian creeds over ancient mythology and held the Bible in great veneration, "la Bible, le seul corps d'ouvrage absolument indispensable qu'il connaisse, et il lui semble qu'en le donnant à l'homme, Dieu a tout fait pour les besoins de son intelligence." (2) Not surprisingly, he appreciates much more the delights of the Bible than its truth: "Mais la lecture de la Bible m'offre encore de plus délicieuses jouissances. Il n'est point de circonstances dans la vie de l'homme où elle ne mêle quelque douceur, point de revers qu'elle ne solennise, point de prospérité qu'elle n'embellisse: voilà le caractère que devait avoir un livre émané du ciel même." (3)

The austere element in religion had no attraction for Nodier. Like Mme de Staël, he feared the discipline of Christianity and exaggerated the ease and repose of belief. He remained superficial and even when he exalts the poetry of Christianity, he is not to be compared with Chateaubriand whom he sought to imitate.

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- (1) Souvenirs de jeunesse: Amélie.
 (2) Adèle.
 (3) Le peintre de Salzbourg, 1803.

He was a disciple of Rousseau and under the influence of Mme de Staël, he developed a great admiration for German literature. Unfortunately, he reproduced the less admirable qualities in it, chiefly an exaggerated sentimentality. His religiosity seems to have sprung from a love of nature and like Volney, he was of the opinion that ruins enhance natural beauty and inspire religious thoughts. Typical of the early nineteenth century trend, Nodier looked to God for consolation and alleviation of suffering: "O mon Dieu! m'écriai-je que la nature est belle! et que vous êtes bon dans les consolations que vous prodiguez aux malheureux! O mon Dieu! si j'ai assez vécu pour vous connaître et pour vous adorer, retirez mon âme à vous, je vous en prie! mon faible corps ne peut plus la contenir." (1) So many writers then appealed to religion almost exclusively as a balm for the troubled mind, that one cannot attribute this practice entirely to private sufferings: the state of France at the turn of the century when Nodier was only twenty, Chateaubriand thirty-two, Constant thirty-three, Mme de Staël thirty-four, drove the sensitive to seek a haven of rest in Christianity.

Nodier takes pleasure in the charm of religion and is content to prove God and the immortality of the soul by looking into the eyes of his beloved. (2) Elsewhere he admits that to be satisfied with such a proof, one needs: "toute l'effusion d'un coeur disposé à croire, et que l'idée de Dieu a toujours charmé, même dans ces moments d'amère déception

(1) Nouveaux souvenirs et portraits: Suites d'un mandat d'arrêt.

(2) Souvenirs de jeunesse: Amélie.

où elle ne l'a pas convaincu." (1)

Nodier rejects the traditional demonstrations of Christianity and is content to prove it by its beauty, its power of love and by utilitarian considerations: "Chevaliers de la foi à Rhodes et à Jérusalem; holocaustes de la foi chez les idolâtres, conservateurs des lumières dans toute l'Europe, et propagateurs de la morale sur les deux hémisphères; artistes et lettrés à La Chine, législateurs au Paraguay, instituteurs de la jeunesse dans les grandes villes, et patrons des pèlerins dans les bois; hospitaliers sur le mont Saint-Bernard, et rédempteurs des captifs sous le froc de la Merci, je ne sais si les torts qu'on leur reproche pourraient balancer leurs services; mais il m'est démontré qu'une institution parfaite serait contradictoire à notre essence." (2)

Nodier's Christianity amounts to little more than a feeling for religion, a vague theism not incompatible with doubt. One is reminded of Benjamin Constant who considered that the Christian religion did not necessarily exclude doubt. But it seems that Nodier's conclusions may not have been the result of the sincere thought and the heart-searchings that are characteristic of Constant. Nodier's religion of love did not prevent him from falling into a state of melancholy. Even his heroes find Heaven deaf to their lament: "Balancé depuis l'enfance entre le besoin et l'impossibilité de croire; dévoré de la soif d'une autre vie et de l'impatience de m'y élever, mais poursuivi de la

(1) Recherches sur l'éloquence révolutionnaire: La Montagne.
 (2) Méditations du Cloître.

conviction du néant, comme d'une furie attachée à mon existence, j'ai longtemps, souvent, partout cherché de Dieu que mon désespoir implore ... Combien de fois et avec quelle ferveur, ô ciel, je me suis prosterné devant cette création immense en lui redemandant son auteur! Combien j'ai versé de larmes de rage, lorsqu'en redescendant dans mon coeur, je n'y ai trouvé que le doute, l'ignorance et la mort! ... Croyez, Antonia! Votre Dieu existe, votre âme est immortelle, votre religion est vraie. Mais Dieu ... a donné la prescience de l'immortalité aux âmes pures, pour qui l'immortalité est faite. Aux âmes qu'il a dévouées d'avance au néant, il n'a montré que le néant."(1)

Nodier's attitude to religion is passive; his belief lacks the virile quality, the fervour without which religion is ineffective. He seems to have been affected by the apathy that followed the return to religion in France. By over-emphasizing the religious sentiment, he reduces the idea of God in religion to a mere accessory. He is more tolerant than de Maistre because less convinced; he follows in the footsteps of Ballanche with the accent which he places on sentiment. Nodier is a humanitarian rather than a Christian. He does not trust the voice of conscience as did Mme de Staël. He writes: "Dieu, qui peut retirer la vie de l'homme par un seul acte de volonté, n'a pas fait mourir Caïn qui avait fait mourir son frère; et vous, dont les lumières imparfaites suffisent à peine à distinguer le bien du mal, vous tuez." (2)

(1) Jean Sbogar, (1818), ch. IX.

(2) Nouveaux Souvenirs et Portraits: Charlotte Corday.

On the other hand, this passage from his novel Adèle, proves that he values the incomparable blessings bestowed by the Creator: "Il me semble que le Créateur, en produisant son univers si accompli en beauté, en jetant une magnificence si merveilleuse sur les ouvrages de ses mains, et en faisant contraster leurs richesses d'une manière si humiliante avec la misère de nos sentiments, a voulu nous révéler par un objet de comparaison sensible le néant de tous les plaisirs que nous plaçons hors de lui, et de tous les jugements que nous fondons sur la vaine opinion de la multitude." (1) He sees in the summits of the Jura an unearthly beauty which speaks to him of the divine origin of the universe: "à cet endroit il se manifeste tout à coup un spectacle si peu vulgaire qu'il fait comprendre au même instant la nécessité d'une volonté divine dans le mystère de la création." (2)

At times Nodier makes strange statements which reveal his complete lack of humility. He does not see in suicide an absolute negation of hope and therefore a fundamental distrust of Divine power. "Il y a," he writes, "des actions fortes (le suicide) qui sont au-dessus de la capacité des jugements de l'homme, mais que Dieu apprécie, et qui trouveront devant lui la grâce que la méprisable sagesse du vulgaire leur a refusée." (3) Mme de Staël had once thought similarly but with the years she altered her views. Nodier's thought is however not very clear on this

(1) Oeuvres complètes 11, Adèle, p.94.
 (2) Ibid.
 (3) Thérèse Aubert.

point. Later in the novel Thérèse Aubert, it is evident that Nodier made a distinction between voluntary death, the result of wilful neglect, and suicide, self-inflicted and violent death, for he writes: "le suicide auquel je (Adolphe de S...) n'avais pas encore pensé, devait être un grand crime devant Dieu, et ce crime pouvait m'interdire jusqu'au seul bien dont l'espérance reste au chrétien dans ses malheurs, celui de revoir dans un autre monde les êtres chéris qu'il a perdus." (1) Unquestionably, Nodier is only orthodox on the surface, if at all. His work demonstrates the way in which the return to religion in literature was leading to an emaciated conception of Christianity and was eventually to bring about a new wave of rationalism and materialism.

(1) Oeuvres complètes, II, Thérèse Aubert, p.194.

Chapter IV.Chateaubriand.

At the centre of the post-Revolutionary return to religion was Chateaubriand who represented all in it that is artistic, poetic and Catholic. In him can be seen the effect of the Revolution and the Empire which made the French reflect more seriously than ever and gave them an impetus to meditate philosophically on the nature of man and his destiny and on his relationship to God.

Chateaubriand subordinated reason to sensibility and imagination and continued the train of thought of his friend Ballanche.

He had received a typically eighteenth century education which detached him from the pious environment of his home and developed a scepticism which seemed second nature to him. In Paris, in 1790, he thought along the lines of his friends La Harpe, Ginguené and Chamfort, **but** by 1795, he had already evolved and had lost any illusions he might have had about eighteenth century philosophy with its dogmatic assertions and its emphasis on constant progress. Chateaubriand did not believe in human perfectibility any more than he believed then in the Christian religion, but he was an enthusiastic adept of Rousseau and a disciple of Bernardin de St. Pierre. When he published his Essai sur les Révolutions in 1797, it was evident that he had not got beyond the stage of the most elementary deism after the manner of Jean-Jacques. The following passage illustrates his uncertain belief: "Pardonne à ma faiblesse, Père des miséricordes! Non, je ne doute point de ton existence; et

soit que tu m'aies destiné une carrière immortelle, soit que je doive seulement passer et mourir, j'adore tes décrets en silence, et ton insecte confesse ta Divinité."(1) He was sceptical, but not fundamentally irreligious. Indeed, he saw in sincere religion the sole consolation for human misery: in this he was truly of the eighteenth century. We have seen the same tendency in Mme de Staël and in Nodier, and Constant too will be of a similar opinion.

Even in this first book which contains so many anti-Christian pages, Chateaubriand is not afraid to speak tenderly of "le divin Auteur des Évangiles, qui ne s'arrête point à prêcher vainement les infortunés, qui fait plus, qui bénit leurs larmes, et boit avec eux le calice jusqu'à la lie."(2) But the tone of his book is nevertheless pagan. He concludes that Christianity will die out and that no religion will replace it. He fails to appreciate the truth of Christianity, complacently repeating the familiar objections of the philosophers and when he speaks ostensibly in favour of religion, we are not blind to his real meaning: "Moi, qui suis très peu versé dans ces matières, je répéterai seulement aux incrédules, en ne me servant que de ma faible raison, ce que je leur ai déjà dit: Vous renversez la religion de votre pays, vous plongez le peuple dans l'impiété, et vous ne proposez aucun autre palladium de la morale. Cessez cette cruelle philosophie; ne ravissez point à l'infortuné sa dernière espérance: qu'importe qu'elle soit une illusion, si cette illusion le soulage d'une

(1) Essai sur les Révolutions, 2nd part, ch. XXXI

(2) Ibid, 2nd part, ch. XIII.

partie du fardeau de l'existence; si elle veille dans les longues nuits à son chevet solitaire et trempé de larmes; si enfin elle lui rend le dernier service de l'amitié, en fermant elle-même sa paupière, lorsque seul et abandonné sur la couche du misérable, il s'évanouit dans la mort."

(1) Another eighteenth century trait in Chateaubriand is his insistence on the utility of religion. Even if it is not true, it is useful and consoling and therefore should be tolerated. He is particularly sceptical of the motives of priests: "Il y a des hommes," he writes, "qui font le métier de vampires, qui vous sucent de l'argent, le sang et jusqu'à la pensée." (2) This is still the language of the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century is seen too in this remark which he wrote in the margin of his copy of the Essai: "Quelquefois je suis tenté de croire à l'immortalité de l'âme, mais ensuite la raison m'empêche de l'admettre."

Yet the gulf between the unbeliever of the Essai and the believer of Le Génie du Christianisme is less wide than one would think. The Chateaubriand of 1797 can speak sympathetically of sincere faith and the Chateaubriand of 1802 is more Christian in his imagination than in his spirit. He realizes this himself and reproduces in Le Génie certain passages of the Essai with scarcely any changes. The chapter in the Essai on the history of polytheism began: "Il est un Dieu. Les herbes de la vallée et les cèdres du Liban le bénissent, l'insecte bruit ses louanges, et l'éléphant le salue au lever du soleil; les oiseaux le chantent dans le feuillage, le vent le murmure dans les forêts, la foudre

(1) Essai sur les Révolutions, 2nd part, ch. XLVII.

(2) Ibid, 2nd part, ch. XLVIII.

tonne sa puissance, et l'Océan déclare son immensité:
l'homme seul a dit: Il n'y a point de Dieu.

Il n'a donc jamais celui-là, dans ses infortunes, levé les yeux vers le ciel? Ses regards n'ont donc jamais erré dans ces régions étoilées, où les mondes furent semés comme des sables." (1) In Le Génie, this passage opens the chapter called Spectacle général de l'Univers and reads:
"Il est un Dieu; les herbes de la vallée et les cèdres de la montagne le bénissent, l'insecte bourdonne ses louanges, l'éléphant le salue au lever du jour, l'oiseau le chante dans le feuillage, la foudre fait éclater sa puissance, et l'Océan déclare son immensité. L'homme seul a dit: Il n'y a point de Dieu.

Il n'a donc jamais, celui-là, dans ses infortunes, levé les yeux vers le ciel, ou dans son bonheur, abaissé ses regards vers la terre?" (2)

This proof of the existence of God by the order and beauty of the universe is far from being new. The ancient stoics and notably Seneca proved God in this way. Fénelon in his treatise on the existence of God used the same proof. It occurs in the Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard. Even Voltaire makes use of it and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre does not omit it from his Études de la Nature. Numerous eighteenth century theological works reproduced this doubtful argument. Chateaubriand was content with it, he was not a metaphysician and apparently did not see the inherent danger

(1) Essai sur les Révolutions, 2nd part, ch. XXXI.

(2) Le Génie de Christianisme, 1st part, book V, ch. 11.

of such an argument. It almost inevitably leads to pantheism or a vague deism. Pascal refrained from adopting it and wrote: "C'est une chose admirable que jamais auteur canonique ne s'est servi de la nature pour prouver Dieu ... Eh quoi! ne dites-vous pas vous-même que le ciel et les oiseaux prouvent Dieu? - Non. - Et votre religion ne le dit-elle pas? - Non. Car encore que cela est vraie en un sens pour quelques âmes à qui Dieu donne cette lumière, néanmoins cela est faux à l'égard de la plupart ..." (1)

From the beginning of his literary career, Chateaubriand was keenly sensitive to beauty in every form and it was the love of beauty that brought him back to the Catholic faith. He recognized it himself: "Mon esprit fait pour ne croire à rien, pas même à moi, fait pour dédaigner tout, grandeurs, misères, peuples et rois, a nonobstant été dominé par un instinct de raison qui lui commandait de se soumettre à tout ce qu'il y a de reconnu beau: religion, justice, humanité, égalité, liberté, gloire." (2)

A year after the publication of the Essai when it was still very unfashionable to profess Christianity, Chateaubriand, deeply affected by the death of his mother and his elder sister, experienced conversion. He blamed himself for the attacks he had made on religion in the Essai. "Mes sentiments religieux," he confesses, "n'ont pas toujours été ce qu'ils sont aujourd'hui, et en admirant le christianisme, j'en ai cependant méconnu plusieurs

(1) Pensées, éd. Brunshvigg, section IV, p.446.
 (2) Mémoires d'outre-tombe.

rapports. Frappé des abus de quelques institutions et des vices de quelques hommes, je suis tombé jadis dans les déclamations et les sophismes. Je pourrais en rejeter la faute sur ma jeunesse, sur le délire des temps, sur les sociétés que je fréquentais. Mais j'aime mieux me condamner; je ne sais point excuser ce qui n'est point excusable. Je dirai seulement de quel moyen la Providence s'est servi pour me rappeler à mes devoirs." He refers to "ces deux voix sorties du tombeau." "Je suis devenu chrétien" he adds. "Je n'ai pas cédé, j'en conviens, à de grandes lumières surnaturelles; ma conviction est sortie du coeur: j'ai pleuré, et j'ai cru." (1) It would be unjust to doubt the sincerity of this declaration. Despite the ease and the apparent suddenness with which Chateaubriand abandons his former ideas, there is a ring of sincerity in the account of his conversion. After all it need not be a dramatic and stupendous volte-face as in the case of St. Paul, nor need it necessarily be accompanied or preceded by severe intellectual struggles. The probability is that in spite of the Essai, Chateaubriand had never really ceased to believe: he had made his first communion with deep religious emotion and he was a Breton. La Harpe, the former disciple of Voltaire is another striking example of apparently easy conversion. While in prison during the Terror, he read the Imitation of Jesus Christ, believed and subsequently defended the religious ideas which he had once attacked with such vehemence.

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(1) Le Génie, preface to the edition of 1802.

Mme de Chateaubriand had died on 31 May 1798. It was undoubtedly her death that led to the spiritual re-awakening of Chateaubriand and to the religious crisis that occasioned the writing of Le Génie du Christianisme. At the death of Mme de Farcy, his sister (22 July 1799), the work was already advanced since the London edition was printing in August 1799. A letter from Chateaubriand to Fontanes, discovered by Sainte-Beuve leaves no doubt as to the sincerity of Chateaubriand's conviction: "Dieu, qui voyait que mon coeur ne marchait point dans les voies iniques de l'ambition, ni dans les abominations de l'or, a bien su trouver l'endroit où il fallait le frapper, puisque c'était lui qui en avait pétri l'argile et qu'il connaissait le fort et le faible de son ouvrage. Il savait que j'aimais mes parents et que là était ma vanité: il m'en a privé afin que j'élevasse les yeux vers lui. Il aura désormais avec vous toutes mes pensées. Je dirigerai le peu de forces qu'il m'a données vers sa gloire."

It must not be forgotten that the alternative title of Le Génie was originally Beautés de la Religion chrétienne. Chateaubriand was converted to Christianity through his artistic temperament and to see beauty in the Christian religion was when he wrote, an innovation. The eighteenth century had declared it ridiculous, crude and lacking in elegance. Chateaubriand set out to demonstrate, not the truth of Christianity, but its charm, not its reasonableness, but its radiance. The hostility aroused in the beginning of 1799 by La Guerre des Dieux, an irreligious poem of Parny,

one of Chateaubriand's former friends, had stirred up the indignation of the exiles in London. Chateaubriand was struck by the force of the hostility aroused by a text which ten years earlier would scarcely have shocked its readers. He realized that Fontanes who had prepared his conversion indirectly was right: his compatriots were ready for a return to Christianity. Chateaubriand imagined himself as the poet and philosopher of a Christian reawakening. He chose as the epigraph of his book this extract from l'Esprit des Lois: "Chose admirable! la religion chrétienne qui ne semble avoir d'objet que la félicité de l'autre vie, fait encore notre bonheur dans celle-ci." (1) True to the teaching of the Gospel, Chateaubriand wanted to point out that Christianity does not only promise joy in eternity, but true happiness on earth.

Such were Chateaubriand's aims. Let us now consider the origins of his book, the sources of his ideas and the reading that contributed to their development. The humiliation and wretchedness of his exile were important factors in inducing a more receptive state of mind; the sad condition of France served to convince him of the general need not just for religion, but for the religion of Christ. The scepticism of the Essai, "livre de douleur et de doute" (2) as he called it, was unhelpful and betrayed a need for a positive belief. Influenced by the religion of Dulau, his London publisher and by the sincere convictions of his friend

(1) Esprit des Lois, XXIV, 3.

(2) Mémoires d'outre-tombe, 1st part, book IX, (t.11 éd. Garnier p.128).

Joubert, drawn by the atavism of a pious heritage and by the memories of his childhood, his vague ideas crystallised and gradually began to take shape. His documentation was vast, his religious culture considerable. From an early age, he had read Fénelon (Traité de l'existence de Dieu), and Massillon; he delighted in the Lettres édifiantes of the missionaries. He had even learnt a little Hebrew and was attracted to the Bible and especially the book of Job because of its sadness. While in England he read many of the books published in abundance round 1800 in defence of Christianity against the Revolution. His preoccupation with apologetics was evident even in the Essai in which he quoted, in disapproval, it is true, the apologists Abbadie, Houteville, Bergier and Warburton. He read Alcuin, Grégoire de Tours and possibly the Fathers, although it is probable that his knowledge of them was chiefly second-hand through Rollin (Traité des Etudes; Sur l'éloquence de l'écriture sainte) and the abbé Fleury (Des poésies sacrées). He consulted Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), the English philosopher and divine who enjoyed a considerable vogue in France and he read Montaigne and Saint François de Sales with eager appreciation. More strictly Christian authors appealed to him too: Pascal and Bossuet whose De grandiloquentia et suavitate psalmodum inspired Chateaubriand's ideas of Christian poetry.

When reading Les Provinciales, Chateaubriand came across this remark which made him wish to write the book that Pascal had not lived long enough to achieve: "Il y a

deux choses dans les vérités de notre religion, une beauté qui les rend aimables et une sainte majesté qui les rend vénérables."(1) He found in La Bruyère similar ideas.

Bossuet was his model where history is concerned.

Chateaubriand considered history as a branch of philosophy, thus taking the opposite view to that of his century, in which Voltaire's conception of progress replaced that of Providence which had been the keynote of Discours sur l'histoire universelle. The passage on Christianity in the writing of history (2) is visibly inspired by Bossuet.

The essential themes of Le Génie had been at least outlined in the eighteenth century. Monseigneur de la Luzerne, bishop of Langres had tried to prove religion by its beauty. L'abbé Pluche found God in Le Spectacle de la Nature (1732), Nieuwentyt taught Le Véritable usage de la contemplation de l'univers pour la conviction des athées et des incrédules (1715) which appeared in a French translation in 1725. Chateaubriand read Lowth (De sacra poesi Hebraeorum, 1753) on the Bible and A. Vitré (Bible polyglotte 1628-1642). In 1798 La Harpe had published the Psalter in French preceded by Discours sur l'esprit des livres saints et le style des prophètes and in 1801 Sylvain Maréchal had completed his Pour et contre la Bible. Chateaubriand had read St. Jerome's commentary on the gospel of St. Luke and used Le Maistre de Sacy's translation of the Bible. L'abbé de Gourcy's manuel, La Suite des anciens apologistes de la religion chrétienne (1785) had helped him to understand the

(1) Quoted in Défense du Génie.

(2) Le Génie, 3rd part, book III, ch.1.

Fathers.

Chateaubriand had found valuable arguments for his cause even in the enemies of religion. He quotes Voltaire and Diderot very aptly, using statements taken out of their context to support the contrary of what their authors had intended. Possibly he had seen in Paris by Peltier in 1795 this reply of Voltaire "à un jeune poète qui le consultait sur le parti qu'il devait prendre dans son ouvrage sur Dieu: Le parti de Dieu, c'est le plus poétique." (1) Chateaubriand did not neglect the supporters of religion, Louis Racine, Fréron and Lefrancø de Pompignan whose achievements were not great but who provided useful information.

Finally, although diffused, the influence of Rousseau is profound, completing that of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre whose Etudes de la Nature (1784) are a Génie du Christianisme in miniature. Added to these literary sources, no doubt conversation and discussion brought Chateaubriand into contact with many ideas and repercussions invaluable to his theme. It is difficult to assess whether Chateaubriand borrowed ideas from Théorie du Pouvoir (1796) by Bonald, from de Maistre's Considérations sur la France (1797), from De la Littérature (1800) or from Ballanche's treatise on Sentiment (1801) and so consideration of this question has been left to the last. Le Génie was being contemplated and written during those years and similarities of thought can be accounted for by the fact that superior minds were

(1) Quoted by P. Moreau: Chateaubriand, p.85.

tormented by the same burning problem. Different minds treated it in different ways and Chateaubriand may have been helped to clarify his own ideas by agreement or disagreement with his contemporaries. In any case, his borrowings and his reminiscences whether acknowledged, hidden or unsuspected are welded into a whole that is creative writing of consistency and originality.

Le Génie is made up of four parts. Part I deals with Christian dogma, part II with the poetic genius of Christianity, part III with the fine arts and literature, part IV with worship. It is characteristic of the eighteenth century in that it lacks composition: the superabundant erudition overflows from chapter to chapter in the absence of a precise plan. One is reminded of the confusion in l'Esprit des Lois and Le Siècle de Louis XIV, but nevertheless the work is consistent in so far as a moving current of thought bears the reader to the triumphant conclusion. In part I, the various subdivisions treat the mysteries and sacraments, the moral law, the truth of the Scriptures, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. The aesthetics of the Christian religion in part II are reviewed in a discussion of poems in which the miraculous element in Christianity replaces pagan mythology: the section concludes with a parallel between the Bible and Homer. The part devoted to the fine arts and literature treats of music, painting, sculpture and architecture and is one of the less solid parts of the work, although the chapter on Gothic churches had an immense influence on the Romantics.

Chateaubriand studies Christian inspiration in philosophical, historical and oratorical literature in this section.

Finally part IV ranges from bells to Christian politics and sacred rites. It examines works of Christian mercy and the influence of Christianity on laws and institutions. After a chapter on Jesus Christ and His life, it concludes with a chapter in which Chateaubriand conjectures what would be the state of society of Christianity had not existed on earth.

The books of Le Génie devoted to apologetics are the weakest of the whole work. Today the arguments are contestable although in 1802 they were more valuable than their detractors would claim. Sainte-Beuve reproached Chateaubriand with trying to demonstrate dogma with the help of images. Chateaubriand did not deny it. His aim was to show the touching beauty of doctrine and sacrament and thus win the imaginations and the hearts of men to the cause of Christianity. He was nevertheless confused in his aims and methods. He wrote in his introduction: "Il est temps qu'on sache enfin à quoi se réduisent ces reproches d'absurdité, de grossièreté, de petitesse, qu'on fait tous les jours du christianisme; il est temps de montrer que, loin de rapetisser la pensée, il se prête merveilleusement aux élans de l'âme, et peut enchanter l'esprit aussi divinement que les dieux de Virgile et d'Homère. Nos raisons auront du moins cet avantage, qu'elles seront à la portée de tout le monde, et qu'il ne faudra qu'un bon sens pour en juger.

On néglige peut-être un peu trop, dans les ouvrages de ce genre, de parler la langue de ses lecteurs: il faut être docteur avec le docteur, et poète avec le poète. Dieu ne déferme pas les routes fleuries quand elles servent à revenir à lui, et ce n'est pas toujours par les sentiers rudes et sublimes de la montagne que la brebis égarée retourne au bercail ... quand notre sujet nous force de parler du dogme de l'existence de Dieu, nous cherchons seulement nos preuves dans les merveilles de la nature, enfin nous essayons de frapper au coeur de l'incrédule de toutes les manières." (1) Chateaubriand is cautious on the subject of dogma because he is fully aware that he is a poet, not a theologian, but he does after all mention reasons and proofs and too often the apologetics spoil the poetics of his book. In spite of his assertions, he does not seem to have made up his mind as to his true purpose in writing Le Génie. He perpetually vacillates from one theme to another, often deviating in mid-argument so that a sentence begun in one intention ends in another. Had Chateaubriand been as profound a Christian as Milton and as great a thinker, he would have been able to link aesthetic and theological argument to better purpose.

Chateaubriand is at his best when he is extolling the beauty of religion. He precludes his study of the mysteries and sacraments with an analysis of the nature of mystery which gives scope to his imagination. True, he extends the meaning of the word mystery, thus prompting Sainte-Beuve to

(1) Le Génie, book I, introduction.

remark slyly: "L'auteur confond le mystère qui est vague et les Mystères au sens chrétien, qui sont une chose fort positive." (1) The passage is none the less pleasing in its simplicity: "Il n'est rien de beau, de doux, de grand dans la vie, que les choses mystérieuses. Les sentiments les plus merveilleux sont ceux qui nous agitent un peu confusément: la pudeur, l'amour chaste, l'amitié vertueuse sont pleines de secrets. On dirait que les coeurs qui s'aiment s'entendent à demi-mot, et qu'ils ne sont que comme entr'ouverts. L'innocence, à son tour, qui n'est qu'une sainte ignorance, n'est-elle pas le plus ineffable des mystères? L'enfance n'est si heureuse que parce qu'elle ne sait rien, la vieillesse si misérable, que parce qu'elle sait tout; heureusement pour elle, quand les mystères de la vie finissent, ceux de la mort commencent.

S'il en est ainsi des sentiments, il en est ainsi des vertus: les plus angéliques sont celles qui, découlant immédiatement de Dieu, telles que la charité, aiment à se cacher aux regards, comme leur source." (2) Chateaubriand possesses a sense of the mysterious which the rationalism of the eighteenth century had destroyed. This rehabilitation of the irrational and the inexplicable in the mind and the emotions, this acknowledgment of human ignorance is a sign of the times. It had been emerging since Bernardin de Saint-Pierre wrote Plaisir du mystère and Plaisir de l'Ignorance in his Etudes de la Nature. The contrary attitude had been seen in Voltaire's article Ignorance in the

(1) Sainte-Beuve: Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire, XII, 299.

(2) Le Génie du Christianisme.

Dictionnaire philosophique in which his intellectual disquiet is manifest.

When Chateaubriand examines the moral aspect of Christianity, he covers up his lack of true understanding with eloquent phrases. He is not a great moralist: it is in this respect that he differs most from Mme de Staël. He is not a profound thinker, nor a philosopher, nor is he a great Christian. He is unquestionably sincere but his Christianity does not go deep enough for him to be penetrated by it. The relative weakness of his argument in defence of Christianity caused his critics to doubt the genuineness of his conviction. Chateaubriand was not a Bossuet: his ideas were less profound than his feelings, but they were equally sincere. He allowed the zeal which he might have put into his religion to be dispersed among his many activities: religion was not the pivot of his life, it remained there in the background, cherished and comforting, but it was not the vital mainspring of his existence. The book on the immortality of the soul does, however, contain fine ideas and some solid arguments although some are only ingenious and others illogical. On the cosmogony of the Scriptures, Chateaubriand is weaker, but his demonstration of the existence of God in part 1, book V is a fine piece of writing if judged solely on its artistic merits. This book is of cardinal importance in Le Génie which explicitly sets out to bring men back to God through poetry and the sentiment. Chateaubriand sees in the song of the birds a further proof

of God's providential care for man. The philosophical value of such a proof is debatable but it confirms the author's intention to appeal to his readers by evoking poetic images.

He exalts the majesty of ocean and sky in lyrical prose: "Dieu des chrétiens! c'est surtout dans les eaux de l'abîme et dans les profondeurs des cieux que tu as gravé bien fortement les traits de la toute-puissance! Des millions d'étoiles rayonnant dans le sombre azur du dôme céleste, la lune au milieu du firmament, une mer sans rivage, l'infini dans le ciel et sur les flots! Jamais tu ne m'as plus troublé de ta grandeur que dans ces nuits où, suspendu entre les astres et l'Océan, j'avais l'immensité sur ma tête et l'immensité sous mes pieds."(1) Chateaubriand sees in retrospect the grandeur of the scene in which he had revelled on his voyage to America. The immensity of sea and sky reminds him of his own insignificance: "Je ne suis rien; je ne suis qu'un simple solitaire; j'ai souvent entendu les savants disputer sur le premier Etre, et je ne les ai point compris; mais j'ai toujours remarqué que c'est à la vue des grandes scènes de la nature que cet Etre inconnu se manifeste au coeur de l'homme."(2) One thinks instinctively of the Profession de foi: "N'attendez de moi ni des discours savants ni de profonds raisonnements. Je ne suis pas un grand philosophe, et je ne me soucie pas de l'être...."(3) Chateaubriand has a humility that Mme

(1) Le Génie du Christianisme, 1st part, ch.XII

(2) Ibid.

(3) Rousseau: Émile, book IV, Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard.

de Staël did not possess. Whereas she sought to understand, he willingly admits his inability to comprehend and simply states his belief and the need of his heart which demands no metaphysical satisfaction. The vocabulary he uses here betrays the influence of Rousseau: le premier Etre and l'Etre inconnu are typical of the vague synonyms for God adopted by Jean-Jacques.

The second part of Le Génie is Chateaubriand's real subject. Here he unfolds his system and illustrates the way in which Christianity has enriched literature and the arts with new and exclusive beauties. He is on surer ground and his argument is solid and closely knit. He pleads the aesthetic and literary superiority of Christian literature over ancient pagan works. His analyses are judicious and penetrating, although there are occasional exaggerations for the sake of his cause. Occasional contradictions also occur, indicating the curious difference between his system and his classical education.

He considers that the supernatural element in Christianity should never be more than an accessory in a poem: "Ainsi, tout poème où une religion est employée comme sujet et non comme accessoire, où le merveilleux est le fond et non l'accident du tableau, pêche essentiellement par la base!"

(1) This remark leads one to suspect that Chateaubriand is afraid of too much religion in literature. Yet in spite of some hesitancy, it is clear that he advocates the infusion of Christianity into the consciences of literary characters. He points out that the gods of polytheism

(1) Le Génie du Christianisme, 2nd part, book 1, ch.11.

were merely supernatural human beings but that the divine beings of Christianity are more symbolical and more mysterious, therefore more appealing to the imagination. He praises the rich sonorosity of Hebrew poetry. This is all less original than Chateaubriand imagined. The impious eighteenth century had discovered the greatness of Milton and Dante. Rollin had valued the inimitable passages of the Bible more highly than the poems of Virgil and Homer. Bonald had stated that art reflects society and is dependent for perfection upon the elevation of man. He had concluded that a Christian people could only produce a Christian art. Ballanche had outlined many a theme developed in this part of Le Génie, but Chateaubriand outstripped all these forerunners with the sheer magnificence of his prose. Listen to this description of Christian humility in a criticism of Andromaque: "L'humilité, dans notre religion ... est aussi noble qu'elle est touchante. Le chrétien se soumet aux conditions les plus dures de la vie: mais on sent qu'il ne cède que par un principe de vertu; qu'il ne s'abaisse que sous la main de Dieu, et non sous celle des hommes; il conserve sa dignité dans les fers fidèle à son maître sans lâcheté, il méprise des chaînes qu'il ne doit porter qu'un moment, et dont la mort viendra bientôt le délivrer; il n'estime les choses de la vie que comme des songes, et supporte sa condition sans se plaindre parce que la liberté et la servitude, la prospérité et le malheur, le diadème et le bonnet de l'esclave, sont peu différents à ses yeux."(1)

(1) Le Génie du Christianisme, 2nd part, book 11, ch.VI

The third book of part 11 concludes with a chapter on the poetic state of mind that will lead eventually to the "mal du siècle". Chateaubriand calls it le vague des passions and affirms that Christianity encourages this frame of mind. "Enfin, les Grecs, et les Romains, n'étendant guère leurs regards au delà de la vie, et ne soupçonant point des plaisirs plus parfaits que ceux de ce monde, n'étaient point portés, comme nous, aux méditations et aux désirs par le caractère de leur culte. Formée pour nos misères et pour nos besoins, la religion chrétienne nous offre sans cesse le double tableau des chagrins de la terre et des joies célestes; et, par ce moyen, elle fait dans le coeur une source de maux présents et d'espérances lointaines, d'où découlent d'inépuisables rêveries. Le chrétien se regarde toujours comme un voyageur qui passe ici-bas dans une vallée de larmes, et qui ne se repose qu'au tombeau. Le monde n'est point l'objet de ses vœux, car il sait que l'homme vit peu de jours, et que cet objet lui échapperait vite."(1) It is true that Christianity gives to man an idea of the infinite, but it is false to assume that this leads to melancholy. On the contrary, the fervent Christian has great hope in his faith and his unworldliness prevents him slipping into the vague disquiet which Chateaubriand describes. Christianity is not intended to make a man unfit to grapple with the difficulties of life on earth; indeed, it is intended to instil the power to extract good from every circumstance and to raise men above despair.

(1) Le Génie du Christianisme, 2nd part, book 11, ch. IX

Chateaubriand's idea of comparing pagan literature with that inspired by Christianity called forth severe criticism from many of his contemporaries. Le Comte Daru objected to Christianity being recommended simply on the grounds that it endows literature with added charms: "peut-on", he wrote, "en recevant les lois éternelles, compter pour quelque chose les avantages qu'elles prêtent à un art créé pour notre vanité, pour le plaisir d'un instant et la gloire d'un jour? Je ne sais si ceux à qui leurs lumières permettent de défendre une cause aussi grave avec des armes dignes d'elle, ont pensé que c'était servir la religion avec tout le respect qui lui est dû, que de la présenter sous des rapports purement humains et même frivoles." (1) The judgment is harsh, but not altogether unjustified. Other believers adopted a similar austere view at the time. A Protestant, Gonthier, while appreciating the good points of Le Génie, wrote: "Quel que soit le triomphe des Écritures dans cette comparaison profane, elle nous paraît indigne de la religion de vérité; elle nous semblerait l'avilir, si elle pouvait être avilie, et nous croyons que cette doctrine sainte n'est pas descendue des cieux pleine de majesté et de pureté, pour entrer en lice avec les imaginations bizarres et corrompues des hommes." (2)

The third part of Le Génie contains many memorable passages. The sixth chapter of Book II is devoted to a

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- (1) Report on Le Génie du Christianisme by M. le comte Daru, 30 Jan. 1811, quoted by Vinet: *op.cit.*
 (2) La Voix de la Religion au XIXe siècle. Lausanne 1802 vol. III, p. 117.

eulogy of Pascal inspired by Vie de Blaise Pascal by his sister Gilberte Périer. Book III opens with a chapter in which the influence of Bossuet is apparent. He applied the dogma of Providence to the great facts of history.(1) With Bossuet no doubt in mind, Chateaubriand writes: "En effet, celui-là connaîtra mieux les hommes, qui aura longtemps médité les desseins de la Providence; celui-là pourra démasquer la sagesse humaine, qui aura pénétré les ruses de la sagesse divine. Les desseins des rois; les abominations des cités, les voix iniques et détournées de la politique, le remuement des coeurs par le fil secret des passions, ces inquiétudes qui saisissent parfois les peuples, ces transmutations de puissance du roi au sujet, du noble au plébéien, du riche au pauvre: tous ces ressorts resteront inexplicables pour vous, si vous n'avez, pour ainsi dire, assisté au conseil du Très-Haut, avec ces divers esprits de force, de prudence, de faiblesse et d'erreur, qu'il envoie aux nations qu'il veut ou sauver ou perdre.

Mettons donc l'éternité au fond de l'histoire des temps; rapportons tout à Dieu, comme à la cause universelle."

(2) The passage is reminiscent of the style of the prophets and its sober eloquence is convincing.

In the same chapter, Chateaubriand attributes to religion the explanation of the most incomprehensible facts of history. Yet in his opinion, with the exception of

(1) Bossuet: Histoire universelle, part 3.
 (2) Le Génie du Christianisme, 3rd part, book III, ch.1.

Bossuet, the French were inferior to their forbears in the writing of history. In a chapter that lacks clarity of thought, he endeavours to explain this.(1) He refuses to recognize the merits of Voltaire as a historian and yet Voltaire was undeniably the only great historian of the eighteenth century. Chateaubriand says of him: "il eût excellé en histoire, s'il avait été religieux."(2) This is surely an error of judgment.

The fourth and final part of Le Génie consists of six books with the minimum of theology. It rests on a strange assertion, namely that Catholicism alone has a true form of worship. Chateaubriand reaches this point after a discussion on sacrifices: "Il y a un argument si simple et si naturel, en faveur des cérémonies de la messe, que l'on ne conçoit pas comment il est échappé aux catholiques dans leurs disputes avec les protestants. Qu'est-ce qui constitue le culte dans une religion quelconque? C'est le sacrifice. Une religion qui n'a pas de sacrifice, n'a pas de culte proprement dit. Cette vérité est incontestable, puisque chez les divers peuples de la terre les cérémonies religieuses sont nées du sacrifice, et que ce n'est pas le sacrifice qui est sorti des cérémonies religieuses. D'où il faut conclure que le seul peuple chrétien qui ait un culte est celui qui conserve une immolation."(3)

Book 111 whose subject is the clergy begins with a chapter on Jesus Christ and His life. Chateaubriand took

(1) Le Génie du Christianisme, 3rd part, book 111, ch.IV.

(2) Ibid, ch.VI.

(3) Ibid, 4th part, book 1, ch.V.

particular care in writing this chapter; it has a Biblical flavour and testifies to the fact that he knew and loved the Scriptures. He insists on the humanity of Christ: "Si le Fils de l'Homme était sorti du ciel avec toute sa force, il eût eu sans doute peu de peine à pratiquer tant de vertus, à supporter tant de maux; mais c'est ici la gloire du mystère: le Christ ressentait des douleurs; son coeur se brisait comme celui d'un homme." (1) He stresses equally His divinity: "Ah! si la morale la plus pure et le coeur le plus tendre, si une vie passée à combattre l'erreur et à soulager les maux des hommes, sont les attributs de la divinité, qui peut nier celle de Jésus-Christ?" (2)

Le Génie ends on a note which illustrates how far its author had travelled since the Essai whose last chapter but one asked the question: "Quelle sera la religion qui remplacera le christianisme?" Now Chateaubriand imagines the state of society if there had been no Christian religion. Christianity came at a time when the ancient world was corrupt. It gathered up "les débris de la civilisation et des arts, rétablissant les bases morales." Christ was therefore the Saviour of the world in a material as well as in the spiritual sense. He points out that the philosophers ought to have realized how Christianity gave man an immense impetus towards perfection. The book closes with a quotation from Pascal: "A ceux qui ont de la répugnance pour la

(1) Le Génie du Christianisme, 4th part, book III, ch.1.

(2) Ibid.

religion, il faut commencer par leur montrer qu'elle n'est pas contraire à la raison; ensuite qu'elle est vénérable, et en donner respect; après, la rendre aimable et faire souhaiter qu'elle fût vraie; et puis montrer par des preuves incontestables qu'elle est vraie; faire voir son antiquité et sa sainteté par sa grandeur et son élévation."

Unlike Bonald and to a certain extent de Maistre and other Catholic writers, Comteaubriand considered it right to examine the tenets of his creed and not to accept them blindly. He summarised the influence of Le Génie in Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe: "L'action du Génie du Christianisme sur les opinions ne se borna pas à une résurrection momentanée d'une religion qu'on prétendait au tombeau: une métamorphose plus durable s'opéra ... l'athéisme et le matérialisme ne furent plus la base de la croyance ou de l'incroyance des jeunes esprits, l'idée de Dieu et de l'immortalité de l'âme reprit son empire ... On ne fut plus cloué dans sa place par un préjugé antireligieux; on ne se crut plus obligé de rester momie du néant, entourée de bandelettes philosophiques; on se permit d'examiner tout système; si absurde qu'on le trouvât, fût-il même chrétien."

(1)

Le Génie owed its immense success at least in part to the favourable setting in which it appeared. It coincided with the official reconciliation of Church and State. As Bonald said: "Le Génie du Christianisme est du petit nombre des heureuses productions qui joignent à tous les

(1) Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe, éd. Garnier, vol. 11, p. 204.

genres de mérites celui de l'à-propos, qui sont à la fois des ouvrages de tous les temps et des ouvrages de circonstance." (1) Chateaubriand did not exaggerate when he wrote: "Le heurt que le Génie du Christianisme donna aux esprits fit sortir le dix-huitième siècle de l'ornière, et le jeta pour jamais hors de sa voie; on recommença, ou plutôt on commença à étudier les sources du christianisme!" (2)

The absence of controversy in Le Génie contributed to its success. Fontanes wrote of it: "Son entreprise doit plaire à tous et n'alarmer personne, car il s'occupe encore plus d'attacher l'âme que de forcer la conviction ... Il sent et ne discute pas; il veut unir tous les cœurs par le charme des mêmes émotions, et non séparer les esprits par des controverses interminables." (3) Sainte-Beuve recognizes the need to consider Le Génie in its setting: "Séparer le Génie du Christianisme de cet ensemble de circonstances sociales auxquelles il se lie et de cet à propos unique et grandiose, c'est vouloir être injuste et ne le plus comprendre ... Ce que cette oeuvre fut véritablement, nous le voyons déjà: ce fut un coup soudain, un coup de théâtre et d'autel, une machine merveilleuse et promptement jouant au moment décisif et faisant fonction d'auxiliaire dans une restauration sociale d'où nous datons." (4) Faguet points out the difference in aim between Chateaubriand and

(1) Quoted by Pierre Moreau: *op. cit.*, p.98.

(2) Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe, éd. Garnier, vol.11, p.204

(3) Fontanes: Moniteur (28 germinal, an X)

(4) Sainte-Beuve: Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire, vol.1, p.271.

Bossuet or Pascal: "C'est le vrai du christianisme que Bossuet s'applique à montrer et il ne le fait pas voir comme poétique et tendrement romantique, c'est la nécessité du christianisme que Pascal prétend prouver; et tous deux méprisent les hommes de lettres et les poètes, qui sont pour Chateaubriand les confesseurs et les témoins de la foi."(1)

More recent critics have defended Chateaubriand against those who would question his Christianity: "Qu'on n'aille pas, par un excès de sévérité janséniste ou d'injuste puritanisme, reprocher à l'auteur du Génie d'avoir méconnu et défiguré l'idéal chrétien. "Il y a plusieurs demeures dans la maison de mon Père." Le christianisme de Chateaubriand n'est pas celui de Pascal, c'est entendu; mais il est plus proche de celui de saint François de Sales, et même de saint François d'Assise que celui de Calvin. A tout prendre, est-ce là une si mauvaise marque?"(2) One is nevertheless disappointed to find at times in Le Génie the light, almost bantering tone which characterized so many of the eighteenth century attacks on religion. There is an absence of seriousness and gravity that betrays the lack of depth in Chateaubriand's belief. Then there are the heterogeneous elements in the work. It is true that Chateaubriand separated René from Le Génie in 1807 but other incongruities remained: the proof of the Trinity by

(1) Faguet: Dix-neuvième siècle, p.23

(2) Victor Giraud: Le Christianisme de Chateaubriand, vol.11, pp.145-146.

analogy with the three graces, the divinity of the Cross by the constellation of the Southern cross. Chateaubriand was not unaware of these jarring notes and at each successive edition, he rid his book of some of them. But despite such changes, Le Génie is not a wholly Christian work: it is both pagan and Christian. M. Pierre Moreau quotes a remark of Veuillot: "Chateaubriand avait la sensation chrétienne; il n'avait pas le sens chrétien." He continues: "C'est-à-dire, je pense, que le paganisme n'était pas mort dans son coeur, que dans le christianisme, c'était encore son cher paganisme qu'il aimait: il aimait, en effet, le christianisme pour son "génie" et sa beauté; il l'aimait comme une chose très vieille, presque mourante, comme il aimait les ruines et les tombeaux, pour la tristesse qui lui semblait le caractère de cette religion, pour les passions vagues qu'il respire dans les parfums de l'encens. Plus tard, dans de nouvelles éditions, il s'efforcera d'atténuer ces touches; il effacera cette phrase: "C'est dans le génie du christianisme qu'il faut surtout chercher la raison de ce vague des passions répandu chez les peuples modernes"; il proscrit, en maints endroits, le mot même de mélancolie. Mais suffisait-il de changer les mots? Ce qu'il évoquait, sous le nom de christianisme, c'était Phèdre, Héloïse, la passion, le désordre, de l'âme, l'immortel paganisme." (1)

(1) Moreau: Chateaubriand, p.93.

In another work (1), M. Moreau points out that Chateaubriand does not separate his apology of Christianity from that of the classics. He is an unrepentant humanist. His explicit theme in Le Génie - the superiority of Christianity over pagan antiquity - is perhaps not any dearer to him than a less apparent theme, that of the superiority of the seventeenth century over the eighteenth.

Chateaubriand tended to confuse truth and beauty. Often the two are synonymous although truth is better thought of in terms of light, the light that is given to man to illuminate his path. Chateaubriand offered his readers less than the best and he excused himself by saying that "une apologétique comme le Génie du Christianisme était celle que demandait l'époque et la seule qu'elle pût accepter." (2) The excuse is facile. Naturally man is content with less than the truth, especially when he realizes that the truth may have inconvenient consequences for him. Yet the truth of religion is of vital importance to all generations. Chateaubriand had no reason to fear the truth of Christianity as of merely academic interest. In one sense, the apprehension of truth is an end in itself, for the illumination of the mind has its own intrinsic value, but Chateaubriand knew that Christian truth has also a pragmatic significance: indeed, he frequently over-stressed the usefulness of Christianity in the social life of the

(1) Classicisme des romantiques, p.90

(2) Vinet: op.cit., p.257.

nation but he seemed to overlook the challenge of Christian truth to the individual. He scarcely alludes to the true significance of the cross and the resurrection. The doctrine of redemption receives but scant attention. It is probable that all that concerns natural religion in Le Génie, all that deals with teleology, the exposition of the social benefits of Christianity and its poetic attributes helped to dispel ignorance and prejudice, but it is doubtful whether the cause of Christianity gained in a positive way.

* * *

Seven years after Le Génie, Chateaubriand published Les Martyrs which he had been meditating probably since 1802. Immediately the cry of heresy went up. On this point, Chateaubriand wrote to Guizot: "Je ne saurais vous accorder que les Martyrs soient fondés sur une hérésie. Il ne s'agit point, si je ne me trompe, d'une rédemption, ce qui serait absurde, mais d'une expiation, ce qui est tout à fait conforme à la foi. Dans tous les temps, l'Église a cru que le sang d'un martyr pourrait effacer les péchés du peuple et le délivrer de ses maux."(1) Chateaubriand was ostensibly relating the triumph of the Christian religion.

(1) Correspondance, éd. Louis Thomas, 1, 30 mai 1809.

The subject of Les Martyrs, the birth of Christianity in opposition to the moribund polytheism of the declining Roman Empire, had often been treated even in Chateaubriand's time. In 1817, some years after the publication of Les Martyrs, when ill-feeling had had time to die down, Benjamin Constant criticized the anachronisms in the novel: "Cette lutte du théisme, non pas contre le polythéisme, car le polythéisme n'existait plus en réalité, mais contre des formes vieilles, qui ne commandaient aucun respect, et que l'autorité, bien qu'elle eût pour but de les maintenir, ne pouvait s'astreindre à ménager, cette lutte, dis-je, serait le sujet d'un ouvrage, dont rien encore, à ma connaissance, ne donne l'idée.

J'ai toujours été surpris que l'illustre auteur des Martyrs ne l'eût pas conçue. Si, au lieu de revêtir de couleurs poétiques ce qui n'était pas, il eût appliqué son beau talent à peindre ce qui était, il eût tiré de son sujet un bien autre parti, même sous le rapport de la poésie. Il ne fallait pas opposer la religion d'Homère, religion qui avait disparu depuis bien des siècles, au catholicisme de Bossuet; c'était commettre un anachronisme de quatre mille ans, et présenter comme simultanées deux choses dont l'une n'existait plus, et l'autre pas encore." (1)

Chateaubriand undoubtedly rendered a real service to Catholicism by showing that it was neither ridiculous nor inelegant, but by stressing certain aspects of religion,

(1) Mercure de France, 31 May 1817

he helped to found the religion of love which was to endanger the Christian faith in French literature during the Romantic period.

Chateaubriand's personal faith vacillated to the end, although the flame never seems to have flickered out. Moments of doubt followed moments of exaltation: "Je crois en Dieu aussi fermement qu'en ma propre existence," he declared. "Je crois au christianisme comme grande vérité toujours, comme religion tant que je puis. J'y crois vingt-quatre heures, mais le diable revient, qui me plonge dans un grand doute, que je suis tout occupé à débrouiller à l'approche de la mort." He spoke constantly of his faith: "Une longue expérience m'a prouvé que la religion est la seule chose vraie sur la terre." - "Je ne puis plus renâitre à la foi politique; je ne crois plus qu'à l'avenir chrétien, c'est-à-dire à l'avenir du ciel." It is, I think, unlikely that anything but confidence and serenity prompted the last sentence of his Mémoires: "Il ne me reste qu'à m'asseoir au bord de ma fosse; après quoi je descendrai hardiment, le crucifix à la main, dans l'éternité."

Chapter 5.Benjamin Constant's religious evolution and the composition of De la Religion and Du Polythéisme Romain.

Constant was born in Lausanne on 25 October 1767. His mother died a fortnight after his birth leaving him to be brought up by his father, Juste Constant, a man of difficult temperament, nominally a Protestant but a sceptic by disposition. Young Benjamin did not however entirely escape the influence of the religious traditions of his family. His grandmother, Rose de Constant watched over his religious education with great care during his early years. When he was nine years old, he told her in a letter (1) that every day he lifted his heart to God, but it is doubtful whether Constant continued in this vein during boyhood. He does not seem to have had any deep religious experience as is sometimes the case in adolescence. He records no experience comparable with Chateaubriand's first communion at the collège de Dol. If he believed in God, it is probable that his belief was founded on an intellectual basis.

Constant's letters lead one to suppose that he was a very thoughtful child, astonishingly mature in many respects, but lacking confidence in his father and in the relatives who were responsible for his upbringing. He seems to have been unable from the beginning to trust in them wholly. It is then hardly surprising that transferring the father image to God, Constant as a boy, could not

(1) Lettres à sa famille: J.H. Menos, 31 Sept. 1776, p.79.

fully trust in Him. The relationship between father and son in the Constant household was never easy and throughout his life, Constant never felt he could count on his father for understanding or guidance.

Many mistakes were made in his education which isolated him from other boys and developed his intellectual powers to the detriment of his character. A succession of more or less dissolute tutors was not calculated to inspire in him respect or admiration for noble qualities. Indeed his scale of values, if not perverted, was at least not in accordance with Christian ideals. At eight years old, he writes, "on avait mis à ma disposition un cabinet littéraire du voisinage dans lequel il y avait tous les romans du monde et tous les ouvrages irréligieux alors à la mode. Je lisais huit à dix heures par jour tout ce qui me tombait sous la main, depuis les ouvrages de La Mettrie jusqu'aux romans de Crébillon". (1) It is likely that soon after he read the works of Racine, Rousseau, Helvétius, Holbach and Voltaire. He hardly mentions Voltaire in the Cahier Rouge, so it is difficult to assess his influence, but undoubtedly Constant whether consciously or not, was imbued with the spirit of Voltaire. Soon he was an enthusiastic supporter of the ideas in the Encyclopedia; the ironical, sceptical streak in his character developed rapidly, he learnt to hate fanaticism, to criticize religious institutions and before long he outstripped Voltaire and denied the existence of God.

(1) Cahier Rouge, éd. Mistler, p.4.

Of his classical studies he preferred Homer and he became relatively early, a good Greek scholar, a fact which was to stand him in good stead later in his study of Greek religion. It is significant that at nine years of age, he wrote to his grandmother: "Je lis Homère ... c'est le père de la religion des anciens." (1). Already the religious problem interested him. Ovid and Cicero were favourite authors too. In the autumn of 1780, Juste Constant took his son to Oxford where he hoped he would be able to enter the University. On learning that Benjamin was too young, he decided that he should remain in England for a time in order to learn the language. After two and a half months, the two returned to Geertruydenberg in the Netherlands with yet another tutor, an Englishman this time. The latter soon annoyed Juste who dismissed him and appointed a Monsieur Bridel in his place. This experiment was no more successful than the others and having dismissed Monsieur Bridel, Juste sent his son now aged fourteen, to Erlangen University (Feb. 1782-June 1783). There he read voraciously and was introduced to German literature. It was then that he probably read Goethe: Werther had been published in 1774. This studious adolescence was unfortunately marred by extravagant behaviour which frequently amounted to dissipation. Juste Constant was informed of Benjamin's waywardness and angrily ordered him to return to

(1) Menos, p.30, 30 Sept. 1776.

Geertruydenberg without delay. He left Erlangen on June 18, 1783. On reaching Holland, he learnt that he was to leave for Scotland immediately with his father. By July 8, they were in Edinburgh where as a student at the University, Constant learnt how to work seriously. His fellow-students were keen and hardworking and in the Speculative Society they debated moral and philosophical questions which appealed strongly to Constant's academic mind. Ought universal toleration to be allowed? was a question which Constant himself proposed for debate. He had no doubt read Helvétius on the subject in his book De l'Homme. Constant throughout his life remained devoted to the ideal of religious liberty. On 23 November 1784, he read a paper on The influence of pagan mythology on morals and character, a study which was to take its place in his book on religion. Ancient history was his great preoccupation, especially the history of religious ideas. He read with the utmost interest such books as The history of ancient Greece, its colonies and conquests by John Gillies. He was now a very cultured young man, widely read in Latin, Greek, English, German and French authors. His critical powers were developing rapidly and he had an exalted idea of intelligence, the result perhaps of his reading of Seneca. At the end of his year in Edinburgh, Constant incurred gaming debts and his father sent for him immediately.

In March 1785, he went to lodge with Suard in Paris. He speedily made the acquaintance of La Harpe, Lacroix, and Lacroix.

d'Alembert, Condorcet and Marmontel, and his admiration for eighteenth century philosophy was confirmed and increased by contact with these brilliant minds. Gradually Constant was becoming more and more irreligious: he was no longer indifferent to religion but openly hostile to it. In November 1785 he returned to Switzerland and began working on an idea which had occurred to him in Brussels earlier that year and which, he wrote: "n'a cessé d'avoir un grand attrait pour moi: c'était une histoire du polythéisme. Je n'avais alors aucune des connaissances nécessaires pour écrire quatre lignes raisonnables sur un tel sujet et nourri des ouvrages d'Helvétius, je n'avais d'autre pensée que de contribuer pour ma part à la destruction de ce que j'appelais les préjugés. Je m'étais emparé d'une assertion de l'auteur de l'Esprit (1) qui prétend que la religion païenne était de beaucoup préférable au christianisme; et je voulais appuyer cette assertion que je n'avais ni approfondie, ni examinée, de quelques faits pris au hasard et de beaucoup d'épigrammes et de déclamations que je croyais neuves."(2)

It is interesting that both Constant and Chateaubriand began by disparaging Christianity, but Constant did not get as far as committing all his ideas to paper. He says that laziness prevented his writing the book he had in mind. This hardly seems exact, as by 1794, Constant had written a full-length treatise on the subject. In any case, he was

(1) There is no such assertion in De l'Esprit, but the general philosophy is expressed in the book De l'Homme.

(2) Cahier Rouge, éd. Mistler, p.10.

frankly irreligious whereas Chateaubriand in the Essai did admit the necessity of religion. At nineteen then, Constant was an atheist and a materialist, far removed from the strict Protestantism of his cousins Rosalie and Lisette de Constant who from their Geneva home disapproved of Benjamin's advanced opinions. It was in this spirit that Constant first contemplated his book on religion which was to be published forty years later written from a completely different angle presenting the religious sentiment as a natural, innate emotion to be taken seriously and respected. As M. Rudler says: 'Si l'on parvenait à restituer les formes successives de ce livre tant de fois remanié, on saisirait sur le vif l'évolution religieuse, morale et même littéraire non seulement de Constant, mais du siècle, on suivrait l'une des voies multiples par lesquelles le dix-neuvième siècle a pris peu à peu le contrepied du dix-huitième, comme Benjamin Constant l'a pris de lui-même.' (1) This is not altogether possible, unfortunately, because the manuscripts have not all been preserved and although a huge collection of them is in existence, they have not been carefully filed or even reasonably well looked after and consequently it is very difficult to separate the various versions of the book.

From 1786, Benjamin Constant began in earnest to collect material for his great work. It is possible to determine approximately how much he wrote in his initial intention: it amounted to a considerable volume since he

(1) Rudler: Jeunesse de Benjamin Constant, p.178.

referred to six or seven hundred pages in a letter of July 1794(1) and later complained that it was not easy to convert this to his new point of view. The facts remained the same, but his opinion on those facts had changed utterly. He started with a history of Polytheism, although finally his Polythéisme romain was published posthumously as a completion of the five volumes of De la Religion, considérée dans sa source, ses formes et ses développements. A manuscript summary of one version of the study of polytheism in forty-four books is to be found on page 39 of a register bound in full green sheepskin which Constant called his Registre universel. (2) The summary is entitled: Grande copie bleue in 4^o de l'ouvrage sur la religion, but it is impossible to tell from these headings which version this is.

In March 1787 Constant met Mme de Charrière for the first time. She was his senior by twenty-seven years and by her pessimism she confirmed the pessimism of Constant. She had abandoned her religion at the age of eighteen and her conversations and discussions with Constant only served to convince him that he was right in renouncing his traditional faith. From December 1786 till June 1787, Constant stayed a second time in the Suard household, following the lectures of La Harpe and steeping himself still further in eighteenth century philosophy. At this

(1) Rudler: Jeunesse de Benjamin Constant, p.470.

(2) This manuscript is in the possession of M. Jean Mistler who kindly allowed me to consult it.

time he stated a translation for his father of the second chapter of Gillies' book on Greece, a chapter on the religion, government, arts, customs and characters of the ancient Greeks. Gillies in his study of religion concluded that religion has its origin in sensibility, in a religious sentiment innate in man. This was later to become the key idea in Constant's religious philosophy. He clearly absorbed Gillies' idea although at the time, he did not accept it. Constant unconsciously owed his subsequent transformation in some measure to Gillies. This work was only intended to be a preliminary to a translation of Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Gibbon had completed this work in Lausanne where he lived.

In June 1787, when Juste Constant had discovered that his son was leading a dissolute life in Paris, Benjamin on a sudden impulse fled to England. While he wandered about the country for nine weeks from Dover to London (June 25-26), thence to Chesterford (July 22), through Newmarket, Brandon, Stoke, Lynn, Wisbech, Thrapston, Wadenhoe, Stamford, back to Thrapston, on to Kettering and Leicester, through Derby, Buxton and Chorley and thence via Kendal to Edinburgh where he arrived on August 12, he carried on a long correspondence with Mme de Charrière. On his return journey, leaving Edinburgh on August 29, he rode through Moffat, Carlisle, and Keswick to Patterdale whence he departed on August 30 to reach Lancaster on September 1 via Ambleside and Kendal. By the 3rd, he was at Disley having continued his route through Garstang and Bolton. He arrived at Market

Harborough by September 5, was back in Wadenhoe on September 7, reached Kimbolton on the 11th and went straight from there to London and on to Dover. He landed at Calais and made his way from the coast through Antwerp to Hertogenbosch where his father was then stationed. During these weeks he frequently gave expression to his unbelief in his correspondence with Mme de Charrière. For the next seven years he was to continue in his unbelief, more or less a pessimist, unsatisfied, perpetually yearning for a purpose in his life.

After spending three days in Hertogenbosch, puzzled and hurt at his father's mild reception of him after his escapade, he returned to Switzerland where he arrived at Colombier on October 3, 1787. On the 6th, he walked to Lausanne to stay at his father's wish at Beausoleil with Jeanne Suzanne Magnin known as Marianne who was later to become Juste's second wife. During October, Juste discussed his son's future with the Duke of Brunswick who was then in command of the Prussian army in Holland. The Duke agreed to appoint Benjamin as a chamberlain at his court in Brunswick, but before Constant took up his post in March 1788, he spent eight weeks at Colombier, Mme de Charrière's home near Neuchâtel, recovering from a disease contracted either in England or at Lausanne. There he continued his conversations with Mme de Charrière and experienced one of the rare moments of delight in his life. He left for Brunswick in February with little enthusiasm for his new life.

However, his duties were light and left him abundant time to read in the libraries which he so much enjoyed. He re-read the classics, and planned to confute Necker's book published that same year. He researched into Greek civilization and this brought him consolation at a time when life seemed to him particularly empty. In a letter of 20 March 1788, he expresses his intention to write a history of the part played by Egyptian colonies in the civilization of the Greeks. Later a chapter in La Religion (1) was to deal with this subject.

On 5 April 1788, Constant wrote a letter to Mme de Charrière in which these lines occur illustrating his desire to become a moralist: "La lecture de la plupart des historiens des différents siècles et des différents pays m'a laissé un nombre d'idées confuses, d'aperçus vagues, de raisonnements imparfaits. Je voudrais les développer et les mettre en ordre. Je voudrais savoir enfin ce que je pense et ce que je dois penser de l'homme, de ses facultés, du degré de bonheur qu'il peut atteindre et de l'influence qu'ont sur lui les circonstances et les institutions." (2) Moralists since Montaigne had been principally concerned with man and his faculties and these were Constant's cherished pre-occupations

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(1) Vol. 11, book V, ch. 4.
 (2) Rudler, op. cit., p. 319.

Between 1788 and 1789 domestic events prevented Constant from doing any serious literary work. He was unhappy and restless. The winter of 1789-90 brought further crises. His father's lawsuit had left him in a state of nervous exhaustion and in blank despair, he wrote to Mme de Charrière on 4 June 1790: "Je sens plus que jamais le néant de tout, combien tout promet et rien ne tient." (1) Self-pity characterized this stage in his development. He shrank from suffering in any form and failed to see that it could be used constructively. His life was tragically devoid of meaning, he refused to believe in a merciful Providence and yet he was constantly preoccupied with the fact of religion. It had a magnetic effect upon him. Atavism perhaps explains this partially, but it was mainly a deep need that forced him to think constantly about religion if it was only to abuse it. He was violently anti-Christian. His disillusionment is apparent in the letter which he addressed to Mme de Charrière on Christmas eve of 1790: "Ma subsistance ... paraît aussi assurée que peut l'être quelque chose dans cette sottise qu'on appelle le monde. Plus on y pense, plus on est at a loss **de** deviner le cui bono de cette sottise. Je ne comprends ni le but, ni l'architecte, ni le but, ni l'architecte, ni le peintre, ni les figures de cette lanterne magique dont j'ai l'honneur de faire partie." (2)

(1) Rudler, op.cit., p.376.

(2) Ibid, p.382.

Unlike Voltaire and most of the philosophers whose lives were governed by a positive belief, Constant had nothing with which to replace Christianity. His letter of 21 May 1791 to Mme de Charrière marks the lowest depths of his unbelief: "Ne pouvant croire aux promesses saugrenues et mystérieuses d'une religion absurde à beaucoup d'égards, et ne voyant aucune présomption en faveur des espérances d'une philosophie qui ne consiste qu'en mots, je ne vois ici que beaucoup de peines inévitables parce qu'elles tourmentent ceux que j'aime ou ont sur moi une influence physique, très peu de plaisirs et fort insipides, parce que j'ai perdu pour jamais l'espérance qui les embellit ou plutôt les crée, et au bout de cela, plus tôt ou plus tard, le néant."

(1) It would be difficult to find a more barren outlook. The emphasis on self is most striking and not unrelated to Constant's arid state of mind.

The year 1792 brought a slight change in his pessimism. It seems that human nature must eventually react against any powerful philosophy. Constant could not remain forever in the depths of despair: the vacuum in his heart had to be filled with something and gradually he came to wish for the existence of a God so that his life should have some aim. The motive is perhaps not very lofty, but that was typical of the period. Chateaubriand returned to Catholicism partly for the consolation it offered in times of trouble and hardship. Constant explained himself in another letter to Mme de Charrière: "Je ne suis du reste ni crédule

(1) Rudler, *op.cit.*, pp.385-386.

ni incrédule, ni moral ni immoral. Je ne vois aucune preuve, aucune probabilité qu'il y ait un Dieu, quoique je vous jure que je désirerais bien qu'il y en eût un. Cela changerait toute mon existence et me donnerait des vues et un but."(1)

Between November 1792 and August 1794 a real transformation was slowly brought about in Constant's ideas. First he began to have pity for others on account of his own sufferings. His happier frame of mind allowed him to resume his research, but his thoughts were still sombre at times, as indicated by this remark in a letter: "Ma raison a tué pour moi tout avenir (espoir?) d'une autre vie."(2) By this time he had left Germany: he returned to Switzerland at the end of May 1793. He was then reading Kant and undoubtedly knew his Fondements de la Métaphysique des Moeurs and Critique de la Raison Pratique. He adopted eagerly his doctrine of duty, concluding that an ethic based on a desire for personal happiness has no solid foundation. In December 1793 he wrote to Mme de Charrière about this point and said: "Le devoir ou le bien moral doit être absolument étranger aux circonstances et aux calculs."(3) Later however he revised this view and allowed the theory of relativity to tone down the rigidity of the categorical imperative. Mme de Staël was partly responsible for his change of opinion.

A letter to his aunt, Mme de Nassau, dated 5 Feb. 1794,

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- (1) Rudler, *op.cit.*, p.390, 6 July 1792.
 (2) Melegari: Journal intime de B.C. et Lettres à sa famille et à ses amis, p.486, December 1793.
 (3) *Ibid*, *op.cit.*, p.489.

revealed that he was still far from being convinced of the truth of religion, but that he sincerely longed to believe. "Je donnerais, je vous l'ai déjà marqué, plus que je ne puis dire pour être intimement convaincu. Mais j'avoue que les mots âme, esprit, substance, matière, Dieu, me paraissent être les négations d'idées, et que tous les efforts que j'ai faits, ou vu faire pour tirer de ces abstractions des moyens d'argument, m'ont mené au sentiment toujours croissant de la profonde ignorance où nous sommes, pauvres condamnés!"(1) This statement marks the transition of Constant from hostile godlessness to genuine agnosticism and is the first step on the way to an abandonment of the eighteenth century and everything it stands for.

His book on religion was progressing steadily. "Mon ouvrage avance," he writes. "Il forme déjà un important volume de 6 à 700 pages, et ce n'est que la première partie. Je compte l'achever d'ici à un an, et le publier pour pressentir le goût de mon public, qui consiste en quelques philosophes épars, amis de la tolérance et de la liberté. Oh! quel bonheur! quelle jouissance constante et paisible! quel délice que l'étude!"(2) No doubt this volume was written from a sceptical point of view, although probably it was far less dogmatic in tone than it would have been if he had carried out his first intention at the age of eighteen before he had acquired a thorough command of his subject. His taste for erudition led him to spend long hours in the rich German libraries reading Montaigne, Fénelon,

(1) Melegari: op.cit., p.217.
 (2) Rudler: op.cit., p.470, 21 July 1794.

Bossuet, Wieland, Klopstock, Lessing, Goethe and Schiller. In English he read Hume, Thomas Payne and Godwin. His mind dwelt once more on the theory of perfectibility in Godwin's Enquiry concerning political justice and its influence on general virtue and happiness (published in February 1793). He disliked the extreme dogmatic rigidity of the philosopher's tenets and was sceptical of his planned Utopia which was to be the product of omnipotent reason. To Godwin, reason was not positive common sense, nor even complete scepticism towards all phenomena which he encountered, but a form of purely abstract sophistry so totally removed from all external experience that it rejected every hypothesis which it might suggest, if it threatened his main theses of moral and intellectual perfectibility. In his effort to construct a better world free from the "tissue of falsehood" which Christianity, as he thought, had imposed upon the human mind for 1800 years, he attacked prayer as "injurious and enfeebling". His pragmatism vitiated the ethical value of his whole system. Constant liked in him his appeal to all men to think for themselves and his conviction that moral regeneration must precede social and political adjustments. But Constant preferred German philosophers and moralists.

His new ardour for his work testified to an inner change in his life, illustrated by this remark in a letter to his aunt Mme de Nassau: "Reviens donc, confiance que je m'applaudissais de ne pas avoir, revenez donc passions que j'ai amorties, plaisirs simples et doux que j'ai

repoussés, vertus obscures et journalières que je me suis fait un mérite de mépriser; sentiments d'amour, d'amitié, de bienveillance, heureuse crédulité qu'on m'a arrachée par de précoces et fastueuses leçons, revenez!" (1) Here at last is an enthusiastic aspiration and this is four months before the first meeting with Mme de Staël which took place on September 28, 1794. Constant rapidly grew away from Mme de Charrière's negative, soulless philosophy and was soon under the spell of Mme de Staël's exuberance. His scorn of positive beliefs and his rationalism gradually vanished although till the end of his days, he refused to accept the authority of any dogma. During the autumn of 1794 and the following winter he stayed frequently with Mme de Staël at the Château de Mézéry which she had rented. In Mme de Staël's company, Constant's work was neglected but his mind was enriched by the impact of hers and by the brilliance of her many guests. By May 1795, Mme de Staël had returned to Coppet, taking Constant with her. In April of that year she had obtained a passport allowing her to return to Paris. The two left together for the capital on May 22 and now Constant's public life left him too little leisure to pursue his research. In a letter of 1795 referring to the completion of a work by Mme de Staël (2) he added: "Le mien sur la religion n'avance que lentement: nos achats et les affaires publiques l'ont interrompu, et

(1) Melegari, op.cit., p.248, 24 May 1794.
 (2) Possibly Réflexions sur la paix intérieure.

plusieurs livres dont j'ai besoin sont en Suisse." (1)
 Between May 1795 and the end of 1799, Constant followed Mme de Staël in her perpetual journeyings from Coppet to Paris and then back into exile at Coppet.

Excessive introspection at the beginning of 1796 nourished his persistent obsession with the ideas of death and the conflict and isolation of each human soul. "Chaque individu a au-dedans de soi une coalition," he wrote, "c'est-à-dire une guerre civile. La mort est le grand pacificateur." (2)

In August 1797, he complained: "Je voudrais avoir le temps de travailler. Le peu d'idées que j'avais s'évapore dans l'agitation". (3) From Paris in 1798 he wrote: "J'espère avoir retrouvé à la fois la force et les moyens de travail." (4)

Until 1802, we learn little more of Constant's progress. Then on 15 July 1802, he wrote to his friend Claude Fauriel: "Pour la quatrième fois, j'ai recommencé mon ouvrage. Je crois qu'il gagnera à la refonte à laquelle je me suis déterminé." (5) He was moving with the times away from the excessive intellectualism of the eighteenth century. Towards the end of that year we see the religious sentiment in him gaining supremacy over reason. In a letter to Fauriel on 24 November 1802, he wrote: "il y a

(1) Menos, op.cit., p.143.

(2) Melegari, op.cit., p.287 - to Mme de Nassau, 1 Feb.1796

(3) Menos, l, 155.

(4) Melegari, op.cit., p.324.

(5) Glachant: B.C. sous l'oeil du guet, p.63

une partie mystérieuse de la nature, que j'aime à conserver comme le domaine de mes conjectures, de mes espérances ..."

(1) He was more and more willing to abdicate reason in favour of intuition; he had at last found the key idea of his book. The publication of Le Génie du Christianisme, despite the scorn with which Constant greeted it, was not without its effect. Chateaubriand had echoed the feelings of a large section of contemporary society, Mme de Staël had given her reply in Delphine, now Constant was anxious to make his voice heard.

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After his elimination from the Tribunat in 1802, Constant resumed his literary work, first at Coppet where he made a detailed study of India and Buddhism, then at Weimar during the winter of 1803-1804. He was unhappy again and needed the tranquillity of great libraries in which to regain composure. As he worked at his history of religions, his agnosticism was gradually attenuated. It was replaced by a kind of moral theism. Every trace of mockery had disappeared and even his pessimism slowly gave place to a confession of hope. His huguenot lineage was asserting its influence over him but the general return to religion in France had a great deal to do with Constant's gradual conversion. With his return to some sort of belief,

(1) Glachant, op.cit., p.95 - Glachant dates this letter 24 November 1803, although in the manuscript it is "ce 3 frimaire an XI" which is clearly 1802 and not 1803.

Constant, like Mme de Staël, remained rabidly anticlerical and passionately anti-Catholic. He was powerfully attracted by German ideas on religion, he liked the intuitive character of their insight into ultimate realities. They had realized that reason poses a problem whose nature reason cannot answer, pointing to a transcendent, supra-rational reality. Constant wrote: "Chaque jour la religion protestante devient en Allemagne plus une chose de sentiment qu'une institution. Point de formes, point de symboles, rien d'obligatoire, presque pas de cérémonies: des idées douces et une morale sensible!"(1) His book now demanded a change of direction and he wanted to finish it speedily. He took refuge in it and worked at it with desperate concentration for a time. The necessity of religion had been borne in upon him by his own suffering and unsatisfaction. His meditations on religion meant everything to him and he spoke of his book as "l'ouvrage qui fait l'unique intérêt, l'unique consolation de ma vie."(2)

It was during his winter in Germany that influenced by Schlegel and Goethe and reciprocally by Mme de Staël, Constant was spiritually transformed. Proof is afforded by his remark of 18 February 1804: "Commencé à copier mon Introduction d'après le nouvel ordre d'idées."(3) He now allowed his religious sentiment to assert itself and wrote in his diary: "Il y a dans l'irréligion quelque chose de grossier et d'usé qui me répugne. J'ai ma religion, mais

(1) Journal Intime, éd. Mistler, p.158 (2 Feb.1804)
 (2) Ibid., p.172.
 (3) Ibid., p.161.

elle est toute en sentiments et en émotions souvent vagues qu'on ne peut réduire en système."(1) It was a vague religion, not based on any precise dogma, but it was religion and genuine faith, although as in the case of Chateaubriand, Constant's new-found faith had no apparent effect on the conduct of his life. It remained theoretical, a consoling element in the background rather than a source of guidance. He had at length discovered the importance of spiritual values and they continued to absorb his interest. In May 1804, Constant left Weimar and by August he was writing to his friend Böttiger, a German scholar and director of the gymnasium at Weimar, that he longed to return to Germany. "Ce n'est que là," he said, "qu'on trouve une masse d'hommes que les intérêts d'ambition et de fortune n'absorbent pas exclusivement, et qui a encore un peu de temps à donner à la recherche de la vérité."(2) He had already completed the eighth book of his work.

Other events contributed to this decisive period in his religious life, particularly the death of Julie Talma, the actor's wife on 8 May 1805. Her death convinced him of the immortality of the soul. As she lay dying he saw that "l'instrument faussé et demi-brisé la laisse intérieurement telle qu'elle était." This made him ask himself the question: "Pourquoi l'instrument complètement brisé ne laisserait-il pas cet intérieur intact?"(3) Eternal life seemed to him to be probable and from then onwards

(1) Journal Intime, p.196.

(2) Revue Bleue, Lettres à Böttiger, publ. par F. Baldensperger, 18 avril 1908 (15 août 1804).

(3) Journal Intime, 8-9 mai 1805, p.237.

his hope was centred in eternity. Once more his dislike of organized religion, especially Catholicism, was expressed in an angry outburst after Julie's funeral: "J'assiste à l'enterrement de Mme Talma avec un petit nombre d'amis profondément émus et affectés ... La cérémonie seule était une vaine pompe où chacun jouait son rôle, où les prêtres psalmodiaient pour de l'argent et où tout était mécanique."

(1) La Religion was to develop and extend this anger.

Between 1805 and 1811 when Constant finally threw off Mme de Staël's tyrannical grip upon him, he spent most of his time between Coppet and the outskirts of Paris, working fitfully. In May 1806, he wrote from Lausanne to his friend Barante: "J'ai énormément travaillé ici, et mon ouvrage devient vraiment respectable par la masse: il aura deux volumes, ce qui est le plus que le public puisse aujourd'hui supporter." (2)

In 1807, driven by unhappiness and frustration in his attempt to break with Mme de Staël, Constant wrote Adolphe. A fortnight saw his first and only novel completed. (12 Jan.-27 Jan. 1807). It illustrates the way in which he regarded religion as a straw to be clutched at by man in distress. Towards the end of the book, we find this ejaculation: "Ma surprise n'est pas que l'homme ait besoin d'une religion; ce qui m'étonne, c'est qu'il se croie jamais assez fort, assez à l'abri du malheur pour oser en rejeter une: il devrait, ce me semble, être porté, dans sa faiblesse, à les invoquer toutes; dans la nuit épaisse qui

(1) Journal Intime, p.237.

(2) Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 juillet 1906, p.243.

nous entoure, est-il une lueur que nous puissions repousser? Au milieu du torrent qui nous entraîne, est-il une branche à laquelle nous osons refuser de nous retenir?"(1)

Later that year, Constant began to be interested in les Ames Intérieures, the mystical sect already mentioned, to which his cousin Lisette and her husband belonged. He liked their tolerance and their theory of universal redemption preceded by purgatory appealed to him. He envied his cousins their serene certainty, but mysticism was not for him. He was too deeply influenced by rationalism to become a mystic.

However, Charles de Langallerie most certainly had some influence upon him although it is less apparent than in the case of Mme de Staël. Beneath his caustic, sardonic wit, Constant hid a tormented spirit which longed for serenity. From time to time, he abandoned all irony and tried genuinely to find the calm he needed, but as soon as the crisis was over, he forgot his mystic relatives of Lausame until he required their help again.

In Cécile, the autobiographical fragment published recently (2), Constant speaks of the part played in his life by his cousin, the chevalier de Langallerie whom he refers to as "l'homme qui le premier m'avait inspiré des idées religieuses."(3) The passage in the Sixième Epoque

(1) Adolphe, ch.X, éd. Mistler, p.130.

(2) Cécile, published in May 1951 (N.R.F., Gallimard) with notes by Alfred Roulin honorary director of the Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire de Lausanne.

(3) Ibid., p.145.

merits quotation in full, in spite of its length: it is of vital importance to the comprehension of Constant's spiritual evolution. "Il y a à Lausanne", he writes, "une secte religieuse, composée d'un assez grand nombre de personnes de conditions différentes, et qui, connues sous le nom de Piétistes et fort calomniées, professent les opinions de Fénelon et de Mme Guyon. Plusieurs de mes parents appartenant à cette secte avaient, à diverses époques, essayé de m'y faire entrer. J'avais été très irréligieux dans ma jeunesse, par imitation des principes philosophiques plus encore que par inclination personnelle. Mais, depuis quelque temps, j'avais au fond du coeur un besoin de croire, soit que ce besoin soit naturel à tous les hommes, soit que ma situation, d'autant plus douloureuse que je ne pouvais m'en prendre qu'à moi de ce qu'elle avait de désagréable et de bizarre, me disposât graduellement à chercher dans la religion des ressources contre mes agitations intérieures.

Durant un voyage précédent à Lausanne, j'avais en conséquence plutôt accueilli que repoussé les avances de cette secte. J'avais eu plusieurs conversations avec l'un de ses membres les plus marquants. (1) Sans le mettre dans la confiance de mes pensées secrètes, je ne lui avais point caché que j'étais fort malheureux, et je m'étais offert à lui, non comme croyant, mais comme disposé à lui laisser essayer sur mon esprit et sur mon âme toutes les expériences qu'il voudrait faire.

(1) Le chevalier de Langallerie.

Cet homme, de l'esprit duquel je ne puis douter et dont la bonne foi, encore aujourd'hui, ne m'est point suspecte, m'avait parlé précisément le langage qui convenait à mes opinions vacillantes et à mes circonstances difficiles. Il avait écarté de ses discours tout ce qui n'aurait eu rapport qu'à des dogmes qui eussent appelé un examen dangereux. Le mot même de Dieu n'avait pas été prononcé.

"Vous ne pouvez nier, m'avait-il dit, qu'il n'y ait hors de vous une puissance plus forte que vous-même. Eh bien! je vous dis que le seul moyen de bonheur sur cette terre est de se mettre en harmonie avec cette puissance, quelle qu'elle soit, et que pour se mettre en harmonie avec cette puissance, il ne faut que deux choses: prier et renoncer à sa propre volonté. Comment prier, m'objecterez-vous, quand on ne croit pas? Je ne puis vous faire qu'une réponse: essayez et vous verrez, demandez et vous obtiendrez. Mais ce n'est pas en demandant des choses déterminées que vous serez exaucé; c'est en demandant de vouloir ce qui est. Le changement ne se fera pas sur les circonstances extérieures, mais sur la disposition de votre âme. Et que vous importe? N'est-il pas égal qu'il arrive ce que vous voulez, ou que vous vouliez ce qui arrive. Ce qu'il vous faut, c'est que votre volonté et les événements soient d'accord."

Ces réflexions me frappèrent. La lecture de plusieurs ouvrages de Mme Guyon produisit en moi une sorte de calme

inusité quⁱ me fit du bien. J'essayai la prière, autant que cela se peut sans conviction préalable. J'écartai toute recherche sur la nature de la puissance inconnue que je sentais au-dessus de moi. Je ne m'adressai qu'à sa bonté. Je ne lui demandai que de me donner la force de me résigner à ses décrets. J'éprouvai un soulagement manifeste. Ce qui m'avait paru dur à supporter tant que je m'étais arrogé le droit de la résistance et de la plainte, perdit la plus grande partie de son amertume dès que je me fis un devoir de m'y soumettre. Ce premier adoucissement de mes longues souffrances m'encouragea. J'allai toujours plus loin dans le même sens. Je me dis que, puisque j'étais déjà récompensé de l'abnégation à ma propre volonté, cette abnégation était le meilleur moyen de plaire à la puissance qui présidait à nos destinées; et je m'efforçai de pousser cette abnégation au plus haut degré. J'arrivai bientôt à ne plus former de projets, à considérer l'avenir comme hors du domaine de la prudence, et la prudence elle-même comme un empiètement sur les voies de Dieu; et j'adoptai pour règle de vivre au jour le jour, sans m'occuper ni (de) ce qui était arrivé, comme étant sans remède, ni de ce qui allait arriver, comme devant être laissé sans réserve à la disposition de celui qui dispose de tout.

Ce fut alors que pour la première fois je respirai sans douleur. Je me sentis comme débarrassé du poids de la vie. Ce qui avait fait mon tourment depuis maintes années, c'était l'effort continuel que j'avais fait pour me

diriger moi-même. Que d'heures j'avais passées me répétant que sur telle ou telle circonstance il fallait prendre un parti, me détaillant tous ceux entre lesquels je devais choisir, m'agitant entre les incertitudes, tantôt craignant que ma raison ne fût pas assez éclairée pour apprécier les divers inconvénients, tantôt ayant la triste prescience que ma force ne serait pas suffisante pour suivre les conseils de ma raison! Je me trouvais délivré de toutes ces peines et de cette fièvre qui m'avait dévoré. Je me regardai comme un enfant conduit par un guide invisible. J'isolai chaque événement, chaque heure, chaque minute, convaincu qu'une volonté supérieure et inscrutable, que nous ne pouvions ni combattre ni deviner, arrangeait tout pour le mieux. Mes prières finissaient toutes par ces mots: "Je fais abnégation complète de toute faculté, de toute connaissance, de toute raison, de tout jugement." Et quelquefois, au milieu de ces prières, un sentiment profond de confiance, une conviction intime que j'étais protégé, et que je n'avais aucun besoin de me mêler de mon sort, s'emparaient de moi, et je restais insouciant de tous les embarras qui m'environnaient, comptant sur un miracle pour m'en tirer et perdu dans une méditation pleine de douceur.

Cette révolution s'étendit bientôt, comme cela était naturel, de mon âme jusqu'à mon esprit. La plupart des dogmes que j'avais rejetés, l'existence de Dieu, l'immortalité de l'âme, me parurent non pas démontrés par la logique, mais prouvés par une sorte d'expérience

intérieure. Je n'appliquais point à ces dogmes l'instrument toujours inexact du raisonnement, mais je les éprouvais vrais et incontestables. Je n'examinais point s'ils imposaient des devoirs de culte, je n'en remplissais aucun. "Si Dieu veut, me disais-je, des adorations pareilles, il me le fera connaître, car je ne veux que ce qu'il veut, et ce qu'il ne me fait pas vouloir, c'est qu'il ne le veut pas." Je dormais ainsi d'une espèce de sommeil moral, sous l'aile d'un être infini qui veillait sur moi." (1)

It must be remembered that at this time, towards the end of 1807, Constant was struggling desperately to disentangle himself from Mme de Staël in order to marry "Cécile" by her real name, Charlotte de Hardenberg. His efforts were not successful and he needed religion to calm his ravaged heart. He continues: "Je ne cachais point à Mme de Malbée (2) l'influence que mes nouvelles idées religieuses avaient sur moi; et bien que rien ne fût plus antipathique à son caractère que la résignation passive et aveugle que j'avais adoptée, cependant, souvent fatiguée d'elle-même et de l'activité qui la consumait, elle était tentée de m'imiter pour trouver quelque repos. Mais bientôt sa nature reprenait le dessus. Sa volonté reparaisait impatiente et rebelle. Sa raison se révoltait contre son propre renoncement; et tout ce que nous gagnions l'un et l'autre à ces disputes théologiques, c'était que le temps s'écoulait, et qu'occupés d'idées générales, nous

(1) Cécile, pp.120-126.

(2) Mme de Staël.

suspendions les querelles que notre situation réciproque aurait fait naître, et nous ne nous dévorions plus mutuellement."(1)

His resignation served a useful purpose and although others blamed his attitude, he did not regret it: he wrote: "aujourd'hui même, je ne sais si cet abandon complet à la Providence n'est pas, au milieu de la nuit qui nous entoure, et avec l'insuffisance d'une raison douteuse et superbe, la plus sûre ressource de l'homme."(2)

* * *

At the beginning of 1808, he was still perplexed. In a letter to Barante, he spoke of those devout persons who believe that doubt is a crime and religion is something positive and fixed "de formes bien tracées d'avance, et dont on ne peut s'écarter". He went on to ask where one could find one's place if one were averse to joining "un de ces bataillons qui portent des uniformes."(3) Constant refused to join any Church, he seemed to be afraid of committing himself. In March 1808, he told his aunt in a letter(4) that he had once again resumed work on his book. From Coppet, on 22 July 1808, he wrote to Fauriel, "J'ai fini de mettre en ordre tous les matériaux de mon ouvrage sur le Polythéisme. Il ne me reste plus qu'à rédiger les

(1) *Cécile*, pp.128-129

(2) *Ibid*, pp.131-132.

(3) *Revue des Deux Mondes* (25 Feb.1808, written from Paris)

(4) *Mémoires*, op.cit., p.243

dernières sections ... "(1) During this month, he came to realize fully that true happiness lies in the renunciation of self-will. He deliberately turned his back on the eighteenth century and surrendered himself to a merciful Providence. He did not distinguish between theism and pantheism: he spoke of "une force intelligente, dont nous sommes ou les créatures ou une partie."(2) His opinion on this point was to change; in La Religion, he shows how the moral sentiment saves the religious sentiment from inclining towards pantheism. The idea of moral obligation defines the relationship between creature and Creator. Constant had learnt from his bitter experience in the past that he needed to trust in a supernatural power. Moral considerations that arose out of his reading and his contact with German thinkers confirmed this need. His observation taught him that reason is impotent to solve the great problems of life. He understood now that in the sphere of religion, reason was not enough. Kant had convinced him that reason can be applied to the concrete, "elle est donc tout à fait inapplicable quant aux objets qui sortent de sa sphère." This was a violent reaction against the favourite ideas of his youth. He concluded that the soul and the senses are "les parties constitutives et naturelles de l'homme. La raison est un intrus, venu après coup." (3)

Once again, certain aspects of his book required

(1) Revue des Deux Mondes, vol. XXXIV 1906, p. 530.
 (2) Ibid, p. 262. 27 juillet 1808
 (3) Ibid, p. 266 (written in Geneva, 18 Sept. 1808).

modification. He spoke of this in a letter to Barante of 21 October 1808: "sans rien changer à mes assertions sur la progression, je finirai tout différemment de ce que mes premières intentions encyclopédistes semblaient l'annoncer, ce qui m'oblige à modifier une quantité de petites phrases, écrites dans le dix-huitième siècle et pour lui, et qui ne doivent pas lui survivre."(1)

On 23 November 1808, Constant explained his personal religion in a letter to Barante: "Je suis bien moins éloigné que vous ne le pensez de votre manière de sentir sur la religion. Ce ne sont pas les pratiques que je blâme, au contraire je les aime, et elles me font du bien. Je ne blâme que la volonté de les imposer aux autres. Chacun a ses pratiques, ses croyances, son genre de rapport avec Dieu. Nul ne peut faire entrer un autre dans sa route, parce que nul ne peut rendre un autre soi. La religion consiste en deux points: vouloir ce que Dieu veut, c'est-à-dire lui faire l'hommage de notre coeur; ne rien nier, c'est-à-dire lui faire l'hommage de notre esprit. Ces deux points donnés, la route est établie de la terre au ciel, et chacun pour soi trouve cette route pleine de protection, de consolation intérieure, et d'une providence particulière que nul ne peut prouver mais qui se fait sentir à chacun à chaque pas." (2) This is unquestionably true religion, the

(1) Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 juillet 1906, p.267.

(2) Ibid, p.269.

adoration of God with heart and mind. It had taken Constant a long time to reach this point. Again he returned to his book and told Barante in August 1809 that "la totalité de l'ouvrage, à la dernière partie et à l'introduction près, est écrite." (1) Yet another fifteen years were to elapse before the first volume appeared.

The reason for this delay was that a stay in Göttingen was to reveal an abundance of new material and after 1814, he was to resume his political activity which was further increased on his return from England in 1816. On his way to Germany in 1811, he wrote to his old friend Hochet from Frankfurt on 4 July that he was working at his Polythéisme "en courant la poste, et en changeant de chevaux." (2) In a famous letter to Hochet from Göttingen, written on 11 October 1811, he recapitulates the stages of his progress: "J'ai continué à travailler du mieux que j'ai pu au milieu de tant d'idées tristes. Pour la première fois, je verrai, j'espère, dans peu de jours la totalité de mon histoire du Polythéisme rédigée. J'en ai refait tout le plan, et plus des trois quarts des chapitres. Il l'a fallu pour arriver à l'ordre que j'avais dans la tête et que je crois avoir atteint. Il l'a fallu encore, parce que, comme vous savez, je ne suis plus ce philosophe intrépide, sûr qu'il n'y a rien après ce monde, et tellement content de ce monde (this must apply to his early youth) qu'il se réjouit de ce qu'il n'y en a pas d'autre.

(1) Revue des Deux Mondes, vol. XXXIV, 1906, p. 530.

(2) Mistler: Lettres à un ami, p. 183.

Mon ouvrage est une singulière preuve de ce que dit Bacon, qu'un peu de science mène à l'athéisme, et plus de science à la religion. C'est positivement en approfondissant les faits, en en recueillant de toutes parts, et en me heurtant contre les difficultés sans nombre qu'ils opposent à l'incrédulité, que je me suis vu forcé de reculer dans les idées religieuses. Je l'ai fait certainement de bien bonne foi: car chaque pas rétrograde m'a coûté. Encore à présent, toutes mes habitudes et tous mes souvenirs sont philosophiques, et je défends poste après poste tout ce que la religion reconquiert sur moi. Il y a même un sacrifice d'amour-propre, car il est difficile, je le pense, de trouver une logique plus serrée que celle dont je m'étais servi pour attaquer toutes les opinions de ce genre. Mon livre n'avait absolument que le défaut d'aller dans le sens opposé à ce qui à présent me paraît vrai et bon, et j'aurais pu même avoir encore un autre succès. Car avec de très légères inclinaisons, j'en aurais fait ce qu'on aimerait le mieux à présent, un système d'athéisme pour les gens comme il faut, un manifeste contre les prêtres, et le tout combiné avec l'aveu qu'il faut pour le peuple de certaines fables, aveu qui satisfait à la fois le pouvoir et la vanité."(1) This is a fine letter which does Constant credit and it is essential to a comprehension of the change that took place in his life.

Now the theme of his book presented itself to him more clearly: "Depuis que je me suis franchement avoué ces

(1) Lettres à un ami, p.193.

vérités," he wrote to Barante, "je ne sais quelle simplicité merveilleuse s'est répandue sur mon ouvrage. Ma route si incertaine pendant tant d'années, s'est tout à coup présentée à moi, claire et unie. J'ai vu toutes mes idées se ranger dans un ordre que tous mes efforts n'avaient jusqu'alors pu découvrir. J'ai vu les grandes énigmes se résoudre." (1) He saw something good in every religion, a spark of the divine. He did not advocate leaving the religious sentiment to manifest itself at will; he thought that a firm belief was essential as a support for the sentiment. All these new ideas were to find expression in La Religion, in a highly intellectual form because Constant remained a scholar who through long practice had acquired the scientific, analytical method. His eighteenth century training and his temperament prevented him from reaching conclusions by intuition alone: he combined the two methods although the emphasis was always upon reasoned argument.

Occasionally the immensity of his task overwhelmed him, but he was thankful that he had not completed it earlier before his opinions had changed. "Je ne sais que trop" he wrote to Böttiger (5 August 1812), "combien immense est le sujet que j'ai choisi, et qui m'occupe depuis si longtemps, puisque j'en ai conçu la première idée en 1785. Heureusement que la difficulté, les distractions politiques et autre, enfin toutes les circonstances, qui dans ces

(1) Revue des Deux Mondes, 1er août 1906, p.549 (letter written from Göttingen, 2 Dec. 1811)

tristes temps ont secoué toutes les existences, m'ont empêché de porter mon travail à un point qui m'eût permis de le publier. J'aurais bien dit des choses que je désavouerais à présent." (1)

Despite his deep interest in his research, Constant grew bored with life in Göttingen and on 3 November 1813, partly to avoid the troops which surrounded the town, he left for Hanover. After the fall of Napoleon in 1814, he returned to Paris where his infatuation for Juliette Récamier began. This episode throws further light on Constant's religious psychology. His despair led him to dabble once more in a kind of superstitious mysticism, or "opium moral" as Constant's cousin Rosalie called it. It was Mme de Krüdener this time who persuaded him to forget his troubles in a mysticism which was a strange mixture of piety, worldliness and intrigue. Chateaubriand described these mystic rites as "sorcelleries célestes"; they were in vogue in France about the time of Waterloo. Comparatively little importance need be attached to Constant's excursions into this kind of mysticism. They were merely passing phases occasioned by some disappointment or by the general turmoil of his life, although they bear witness to a side of his character that was not satisfied by logic.

During this time, Constant worked very spasmodically at his book. After Waterloo, he left France for London and returned to Paris via Belgium in the autumn of 1816. His political interests and his work were all that remained to

(1) Revue Bleue, 18 avril 1908.

him in life and his political activity was scarcely beneficial to his writing. Indeed from 1815 until 1821, his book hardly progressed at all. In 1821 (19 April), he wrote to Fauriel saying: "J'ai perdu de vue, durant six années d'interruption, tout ce qui a paru sur la même matière, tant en Allemagne qu'ailleurs, et surtout en Angleterre pour ce qui regarde l'Inde. Vous vous êtes livré depuis longtemps avec tant d'ardeur à cette partie de la littérature que vous saurez tout ce que j'ignore. Il doit avoir paru beaucoup de volumes des Asiatic researches, dont je n'ai lu que huit ou neuf. Il a été publié, de plus, un ouvrage de Mill (1) et plusieurs autres. Serez-vous assez bon pour me dire où je pourrai et les connaître et les trouver?" (2) Once more, he returned to his task of manipulating the ten thousand facts in his card index.

In May 1823, he reiterated his profession of faith in a letter to a young medical student of twenty-six, Charles Coquerel who was later to become a publicist and historian, interested in theology, the founder and director of Annales protestantes, la Revue protestante, and le Lien which were all liberal in tendency: "Dans l'état de décrépitude où nous a conduit (sic) l'excès de la civilisation, ma conviction intime est que, sans le sentiment religieux, il n'y aura pas de régénération de l'espèce

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- (1) James Mill (1773-1836), philosopher and historian, a brilliant humanist and distinguished Hellenist, published in 1818 his History of India which enjoyed considerable success.
- (2) Glachant: op.cit., p.137.

humaine. Mais les formes usées qu'on lui impose ont le double inconvénient de gêner ses développements et de fournir des armes à ses ennemis. Il est consolant de voir la génération qui s'avance éviter à la fois la sécheresse de l'incrédulité et l'esclavage des croyances dogmatiques. Dans l'état où nous sommes, les espérances de l'avenir sont les seules qui nous restent." (1)

* * *

At last in 1824, the first volume of La Religion was published. Constant intended to divide his time from then onwards between the Chamber and his book which he urgently wished to finish. An illness at the end of 1824 forced him to postpone the publication of the second volume which did not appear until October 1825. Again circumstances delayed the completion of volume 3. Finally it was ready in 1827.

Volume 4, Constant hoped, would complete the series, but as he worked at it, he realized that yet another would be necessary to conclude his subject and leave room for an analytical table of the whole work. By the beginning of 1830 he had still not finished. He was too preoccupied: "Ce livre vaudrait mieux", he wrote in February 1830, "si je n'étais pas accablé d'autres affaires." (2) In the end the last two volumes were published posthumously in 1831.

(1) Benjamin Constant sous l'oeil du guet: page 152.
 (2) Mémoires, op.cit., p.584.

Constant had passed them for press the day before his death on 8 December 1830.

He left his work on the decline and fall of polytheism incomplete. When he was preparing his fourth volume of La Religion, he knew that a second publication was necessary: "Je n'ai pu," he wrote, "dans ces quatre volumes, aller aussi loin que j'aurais voulu. J'ai tracé la route et c'était mon but. J'y marcherai dans une seconde publication, si je vis et si je ne suis pas devancé, par d'autres, ce que je ne crains guère." (1)

The two volumes: Du polythéisme romain considéré dans ses rapports avec la philosophie grecque et la religion chrétienne, were published in 1833, preceded by a long introduction by J.J. Matter in which he summarized Constant's two works. Matter insisted that Le Polythéisme was ready for publication at the time of Constant's death. "Le texte," he said, "était non seulement écrit, il était même revu par l'auteur." (2) Certain indications lead one to be sceptical of this. Not only are the notes sparse in comparison with those of La Religion, but also many of them are inaccurate. A number of passages are identical with La Religion, a fact which Constant would most certainly not have allowed. Obviously he used the original Polythéisme revised to accord with his religious beliefs, as a sort of pool from which he took the parts that were relevant to La Religion. He no doubt intended to strip the remainder of any references which he had already used.

(1) Menos, *op.cit.*, p.576.

(2) Polythéisme, préface, p.1

The manuscripts prove to us that Constant rarely destroyed any of his writings. There are indications of at least five different stages in the composition of his work; first, the chronological history of Greek and Roman polytheism not all of which has been preserved. Then there are the blue manuscripts written in his own hand and containing a version which is nearer to the Polythéisme in its published form than to La Religion. Next there is a copy written probably by his secretary, then the manuscript which was used in the press and finally all the numbered index cards.

The whole work, Polythéisme included, is in hopeless disorder. It could hardly be otherwise considering that the material had been amassed over forty years and the book written and rewritten a dozen times. It is faulty in composition, which as has already been said, was typical of the eighteenth century. The book progresses jerkily, hampered for the general reader by excessive documentation, although insufficiently scientific for the specialist. Then too it was out of date long before it appeared and the time was no longer ripe for such a book. The religious awakening in France had been followed by an anti-climax and the public was not interested in Constant's somewhat arid treatise. Hence its cool reception and comparatively limited influence.

Chapter VI.

An outline of Constant's religious philosophy.

As we have seen, the religious problem dominated the thought of Benjamin Constant throughout most of his life. The five volumes of La Religion with the two of Polythéisme romain testify to the immensity of the work which he carried on with such dogged perseverance that by following the stages of its composition we have been able to write a short account of his life. To attempt to comment adequately here on the whole diffuse work would be impossible. Let us then consider the book in one of its aspects, that of sacrifice. This will reveal the main ideas of Constant on religion and at the same time will throw further light on his intellectual and moral personality and his position with regard to his contemporaries. Loisy wrote of sacrifice that it is the act in which: "(l'homme) réalise éminemment sa religion ... Une histoire complète du sacrifice serait presque une histoire du culte religieux de l'humanité." Constant made much the same statement when he said: "Le sacrifice est l'acte religieux par excellence."

Constant distinguishes fundamentally between the inner religious sentiment and the outward forms it assumes, forms which are ephemeral and destined to be successively replaced by other and better forms. The history of religion is precisely the succession of these religious forms. The importance which Constant attributes to the individual

sentiment illustrates his relationship with German Protestants of his time. Lessing and Ottfried Müller whose writings he had studied in detail, expressed similar ideas on this point. Constant begins by showing how the religious sentiment expresses itself in a visible form even in the religion of the savage. There he pauses to ask a question: does the savage state represent the first that humanity has known? Constant refrains from giving a direct answer to this problem of origins. He adopts the savage state as his point of departure, as being "l'état le plus grossier qu'on puisse concevoir" to indicate the way in which "la religion se relève et parvient graduellement à des notions plus pures." (1) Constant makes it clear from the beginning that he believes in progress. He did not owe the idea of perfectibility wholly to eighteenth century French literature; it was partly under the influence of Herder that he adopted the theory. The successive forms of religions are in themselves progressive, affirms Constant. After the fetishism of the savage comes polytheism and here there arises an obstacle in the way of progress. Polytheistic peoples generally fall under the domination of a caste of priests who take command of their religion for selfish ends, prevent it from progressing normally, falsify and pervert it. The Greeks alone escaped this fate and their religion being free to develop, evolved healthily.

Sacrifice follows a similar course. As it is a universal tendency, it occurs even in the savage state of humanity. From the earliest times, religion develops under

the triple action of the religious sentiment, intelligence and self-interest. The sentiment inspires in man the need to worship, intelligence shows him that there are good and evil forces in the world and self-interest urges him to conciliate these forces for his own benefit, to earn their favour or disarm their anger. Therefore the savage makes presents to his gods. At first they are spontaneous offerings in which the savage takes pleasure; they are disinterested and not prompted by any motive of gain. He begins by renouncing some part of his property in favour of his idols, then by virtue of the natural tendency which goads a man "à raffiner toujours sur les sacrifices", not content with material gifts, he macerates himself and condemns himself to fasting and continence and every kind of austerity. Soon the motive of self-interest intervenes to degrade the first unselfish act of uncivilized man. He sets out to win the invisible forces over to his side and his sacrifice degenerates into an ignoble traffic between himself and his fetish. Constant makes plain by his detailed account that sacrifice has its source in two opposing sentiments - exalted enthusiasm and mercenary egoism.

Even in savage tribes, priests known as jongleurs, who by reason of superior intelligence, had acquired sufficient knowledge to dominate their fellows, soon used these two sentiments in order to increase their own authority. Constant stresses that before civilization

there was no powerfully organized sacerdotal class, but he does not explain in detail how they acquired knowledge that was not available to all. Already they exercised their evil influence on the savages under their domination and vitiated their notions of sacrifice. They exploited their worst instincts and diverted from their natural path the good tendencies which made the offering a pure act of adoration. The results of the good tendencies "sont admirables quand le sentiment est livré à lui-même;" but "peuvent devenir terribles quand l'imposture et le calcul s'en fait un instrument." (1) The priests then led these men "dans une série sans terme d'exagérations, d'erreurs, d'extravagances et de barbaries," (2) favouring and developing abominable practices such as human sacrifice and particularly the sacrifice of near relatives which was considered more meritorious since it was more painful. Modesty and respect for chastity made the savage wish to sacrifice the pleasures of the senses to his idols, but the priests taught him that his idols would be still more pleased by obscene and voluptuous rites thus proving the readiness of the worshipper to sacrifice what he valued most highly. Yet the baneful influence of priestly authority upon the savage was not too formidable, it was still limited at that stage and the good he could do among these primitive

(1) De la Religion, 1, 346.

(2) Ibid.

peoples outweighed the evil. His presence was mainly beneficial and he often acted as a ferment among the people making them aspire to effort and progress and aiding the slow process of civilization. During the polytheistic epoch, on the other hand, corporations of priests retarded the progress of humanity. Their action was more than harmful.

With his study of polytheism, Constant affirms and clarifies the central idea of his book, the idea round which his account of historical facts is developed and by the light of which he draws from these facts their philosophical implications. This idea is namely that religion will only progress normally if it follows its natural path in a free society. Constant draws a parallel between the two types of polytheism, that of the Greeks which he affirms was free from the yoke of a priestly caste and that of other peoples who were under the domination of a priesthood. This does not mean that the Greek religion had straightway risen above fetishism, or even that it had no priests at all. Constant repeats several times that the religion of the Greeks was practically untrammelled by a priesthood and so little affected by it, that it could be treated as being non-sacerdotal. But traces of fetishism remained in Greek religion: the homeric gods granted their favours to those who bought them through sacrifices; moral notions only developed very gradually. However, they did develop since there was freedom and they

came to the point where the gods punished evil-doers and no longer rewarded those who offered the costliest sacrifices, but those who were most virtuous. The idea of sacrifice had by then been transformed and purified; a higher stage of civilization had been reached. The gods no longer needed the material gifts brought by worshippers and sacrifice was no longer "méritoire par la valeur intrinsèque des offrandes; il ne saurait l'être, que comme témoignage de soumission, de dévouement et de respect."

(1) Men slowly realized that the gods preferred to any victim the homage of a pure heart striving towards virtue and the mastery of its passions. Such was the normal and healthy consequence of this new conception of sacrifice; ceremonies lost their importance and the inner sentiment and moral perfection benefited by the redirected energy. Freedom had led to progress.

In the priestly religions also, the idea of sacrifice, although purely material at first when the gods ate with avidity the same food as men, became more spiritual, but much more gradually than in the Greek religion, till it was a disinterested homage addressed to the divinity. Having reached this same point, the two kinds of polytheism diverge. The peoples who are led by a priestly caste evolve in much the same way as the uncivilized fetishists guided by their jongleurs. Because the gods no longer need the offerings of men and because the value of sacrifice

(1) De la Religion, IV, 203.

lies only in the renunciation on the part of the faithful, the priests "n'infèrent point que les cérémonies sont superflues et que les vertus suffisent." (1) On the contrary, they conclude that the more suffering is caused by the sacrifice, the more meritorious it is. Paradox though it may seem, this new notion of sacrifice although it has evolved, takes men back to the cruel practices of savagery. The priests with their absolute, tyrannical power encourage human sacrifices, exaggerated continence, licentious rites. Once men have begun such practices, they cannot stop: they believe that they have never suffered enough to please their gods. The infliction of pain for its own sake becomes a merit in itself; indeed pain thus sanctified is for the sacerdotal nations endowed with a mysterious efficaciousness.

At times the divinity itself was imagined as a voluntary victim. The worshipper reasoned in this way; if a man's offering of pain can be of positive value, what incomparable value there will be in the voluntary immolation of a god on his own altar. In the hypothesis of a primitive fall of man, this victim will be the mediating power which will expiate by its agony the sin inherent in man's nature and will purify the fallen human race.

Such was the outcome of this doctrine. It complicated ritual instead of liberating man and far from perfecting morals, it increased demands that were contrary to nature with a ferocity worthy only of primitive savagery. Greece, it is true, knew certain of these practices in the mysteries

(1) De la Religion, IV, 205.

of her religion, but, affirms Constant, the mysteries which bore the mark of a priesthood were foreign importations. Constant treats them as being outside Greek polytheism which did not admit of such excess or else freed itself promptly of it and "certes jamais exemple plus frappant ne fut présenté des conséquences toutes contraires qu'entraîne le même principe, quand c'est l'intelligence qui le découvre et le développe en liberté, et quand c'est une caste qui s'en empare et s'en fait un instrument de pouvoir." (1)

* * *

From this demonstration founded on a study of ancient religions, those of Greece, of Egypt or of India, Constant draws a conclusion which is valid for all times and all religions and capable of arousing the passions of his contemporaries. Although he claims that his book is not of a polemical nature, he is obliged to take up his position in the discussions of the time. Nourished at first on eighteenth century philosophy, like Chateaubriand converted from rationalism, Constant had begun by contemplating a book against religion. Then evolving with his generation, with the men who hailed Le Génie enthusiastically, he shared the need of religion which became manifest in France with Romanticism. Constant passes in fact as a Christian, but his religion made up of aspirations rather

(1) De la Religion, IV, p.206

than a precise faith, is not bound by any dogma. As a Protestant, he sees so little difference between the moral problem and the religious problem that he attributes to the former an almost preponderant value. As a liberal Protestant, he judged religion independently, not admitting either the exaggerations of Christians or of pagans in the matter of sacrifice.

No doubt, suffering is good in itself, it improves character, but "toutes les exagérations, les abstinences, les macérations excessives" are contrary to the true spirit of Christianity. The proof is that "elles ont été désapprouvées dans les premiers siècles par les chrétiens encore dociles à la direction de leur divin chef." (1) Constant by disapproving of the desire for suffering of Saint Ignatius or the maceration which a German princess inflicted upon herself on an iron bed covered with spikes, condemns the principle of asceticism.

In his view, it was the priests who had encouraged such ascetic inclinations: "La fidélité au principe de la sainteté de la douleur caractérise le sacerdoce à toutes les époques." (2) This principle has led to aberrations of conduct of every kind. Constant quotes the case of a contemporary, l'abbé Boudon, who held up as a model soeur Angélique who wishing to discipline her exaggerated inclination to cleanliness, deliberately scattered sweepings about the house. Her biographer judged her to be infallibly on the road to salvation. Constant expressly chooses an

(1) Dela Religion, IV, 252.

(2) Ibid., 273

absurd example in order to ridicule his eternal enemy, the priesthood. He includes Christian priests in his hatred of all sacerdotal castes. He will no more countenance possible abuse of power on the part of the Catholic clergy than approve of the tyranny of the priests of Memphis

Constant goes a little far in his condemnation of asceticism. He overlooks the true value of discipline in religion because he thinks that it is contrary to freedom. It can be, of course, if it is discipline imposed from above and if the individual has no choice, but Constant is antagonistic to discipline in any form, self-discipline included. He fails to realize that the service of God is perfect freedom and that discipline is necessary before service can be possible.

His position then is clear with regard to those contemporaries "qui se pâment encore, quand on leur parle des prêtres de l'Égypte, ou des Brames, ou des Mages"(1), and dream of re-establishing theocracy on the lines of the past. No doubt they do not wish to restore human sacrifices, but they excuse them even if they do not admire them. These men are first of all the German symbolists, not Creuzer and Görres to whom despite the accusations of Voss, Constant refuses to attribute such dire projects, but he is less satisfied about "les intentions de plusieurs écrivains qui marchent sur leurs traces"(2). They are above all the French traditionalists and among them Joseph de Maistre whom he quotes on several occasions and especially from his

(1) *De la Religion*, IV, Avertissement 11.
 (2) *Ibid.*, 11, 474 note.

Eclaircissement sur les sacrifices. "Il y a dans le système de M. de Maistre sur les sacrifices des choses très curieuses," he writes, "et qui font connaître parfaitement la théorie sacerdotale que nous décrivons ici."(1) De Maistre has indeed a predilection for the shedding of blood and particularly of innocent blood, which is upheld by his fidelity to the old ideas of the priests of the past and relates him to them. The traditionalists believe in the dogma of the Fall and in the doctrine of reversibility, the sacrifice of the innocent for the salvation of the guilty. They will not acknowledge a rupture between paganism which no doubt had falsified essential truths, but which nevertheless, they affirm, possessed the truth and the Christian religion which was founded, not to innovate, but to rectify and purify.

Constant who quotes the Eclaircissement precisely on the subject of the Fall, certainly does not include this dogma which he regards as one of the causes that favoured human sacrifices, among the articles of his faith. On the contrary, by his attitude in direct opposition to the traditionalists, he seems to relegate this dogma to the distant past. In a similar way, he dispenses with the belief in the efficacy of the sacrifice of a mediating God purifying the fallen creature through His agony. In a word, he does not

(1) De la Religion, IV, 202. ■

accept the dogma of Christian redemption which is even more repugnant to him. It is described in the works of de Maistre who stresses the physical aspect of the Cross, the blood and the suffering. Such ferociousness seems to him to be incompatible with Christian doctrine. Here for some reason which he does not explain, Constant ignores the plain facts in the Bible. He is inconsistent in his interpretation of Scripture. When it suits his cause to quote the Gospels he does so with alacrity as when he proves the progressiveness of religious forms by referring to Galatians 4, 3 and Ephesians 2, 15 (1).

De Maistre's ideas on communion establish the same connection between paganism and Christianity. The complacency with which de Maistre speaks of the significance of blood in the sacrament of communion is profoundly distasteful to Constant. Constant only mentions incidentally the rites of communion which do not interest him as such, but as a manifestation of "la série de subtilités à l'aide desquelles on a substitué aux sacrifices offerts à Dieu le sacrifice de Dieu lui-même." (2) The little that he says of them gives one to think that he considers these, too, as merely a survival of old pagan rites.

On the whole he is very free with the fundamental dogmas and rites of Christianity which nevertheless he refrains from attacking, thinking on the other hand that he is serving "cette doctrine céleste en la délivrant des auxiliaires qui lui donnent une ressemblance trompeuse avec

(1) In the article Christianisme written for the Encyclopédie Moderne in 1825.

(2) De la Religion, IV, 290.

les religions imposées aux peuples de l'antiquité par des corporations ambitieuses."(1) We have here in short the distinction between the religion of Christ and the Christian religion defamed by generations of so-called Christians: the distinction is already apparent in the works of Lessing.

The antagonism between Constant and the traditionalists is invincible. By contesting de Maistre's theory of sacrifice, he is breaking with what he considers to be old superstitions wrongly perpetuated and at the same time with the priestly oppressors whom some would like to restore. There lies the whole significance of his dispute with the upholders of tradition.

* * *

Not less invincible would seem at first sight the antagonism between the traditionalists and the philosophers of the eighteenth century. Constant remarks with surprise that these two groups of thinkers join in their common enthusiasm for the old sacerdotal religions. The admiration of the unbelievers is founded, it is true, on their anti-Christian zeal and if these cults obtained their favour, it was because they differed from Christianity. However, the effect is the same, and "de cette absurde alliance entre deux fanatismes opposés, est résultée une prévention générale" in favour of theocracies, prepossession which one

(1) De la Religion, IV, 293.

would be wrong to consider as nothing more than "une simple erreur historique,"(1) for it could result in the re-establishment of the sacerdotal yoke in modern Europe. The remedy for this danger is the religious sentiment 'qui peut seul nous sauver. Seul en rehaussant le prix de la vie ... il fait que cette vie elle-même peut être un objet de sacrifice." With the religious sentiment "la persécution, l'injustice et la mort ne sont que des échelons qui nous rapprochent de la source de tout bien."(2)

In Greek polytheism, so admired by Constant, the idea of sacrifice had been made spiritual and moral, thanks to the free play of intelligence with which the ancient Greeks alone were endowed and which allowed the soul "ses élans les plus sublimes, à l'esprit ses plus nobles développements."(3) Consequently, virtue, inner purity and self-mastery had become the finest offering and the surest means of obtaining celestial favour. That is Constant's last word on sacrifice. It is the gift of the man who devotes himself unreservedly to just and noble causes. Considered in this way, sacrifice, stripped of all materialism, can be offered outside all ceremony and ritual in the exaltation of the religious sentiment, the offering by the individual of his own person, inspired by the noblest moral aims. That is Constant's conception. It reveals once more the individualist in love with liberty who satisfies his aspirations in a sentiment distinct from outward forms and superior to them. It shows us the

(1) De la Religion, II, 482-3.

(2) Ibid, 485.

(3) Ibid, 468.

Protestant in whom moral preoccupations are so closely associated with religious ideas that they eclipse the latter.

The systematic character of this theory of sacrifice is manifest. It is due in part to Constant's own nature, in part to the eighteenth century taste for vast systems. An assiduous reader of Herder, admirer of Crozer, adversary of the traditionalists, how could he fail to express his personal ideas concerning the religious problem? It was fashionable to do so; others besides Constant did not hesitate to treat this profound question without the equipment needed for the task. Constant was not a trained theologian: it is true that the lay mind is entitled to its opinions, indeed it should have opinions on religious matters, but to incorporate them in a lengthy treatise seems hazardous if not presumptuous. Constant lived in an age that was free from the present day mania for specialization. Any cultured man of letters then considered himself competent to judge questions of religion and philosophy and not till the 1830's did the chase after documents seriously begin. Constant's research, vast as it is, is frequently inadequate; many facts essential to a work of comparative religion were simply not available in his day. Then too he is guilty of interpreting facts with partiality, of grouping them too imperiously round his own ideas. Impartiality in a historian is difficult to achieve, but one feels that Constant might have made a more serious attempt to avoid a biased view. Yet on occasions we find him jeopardizing his own theories for the sake of an historian's scruples.

Let us examine an instance of this. Preoccupied with assigning causes to the facts which he advances, he notes the preponderant influence of climate on religions: the gentle warmth of the Southern climate explains the existence among the Indians of the dogma of the efficacy of penitence through maceration: "pour s'empresendre profondément dans la religion," writes Constant, "le dogme de la sainteté de la douleur eut toujours besoin d'être secondé par le climat".(1) Thus the scrupulous historian in Constant takes care to present this fact as peculiar to certain peoples, while considering it essential to explain the evolution of sacrifice in sacerdotal religions in general. It is as if he wishes to underline the arbitrary nature of his own generalization.

Salomon Reinach (2) sees in Constant's book the first of its kind in France in which there is an indication of the spirit of history. Others may see the first glimmers of a true historical sense in the works of Voltaire. That is perhaps a matter of opinion. It is a fact that Constant is conscientious in seeking the true causes, both psychological and external, of religious phenomena. He takes great care to distinguish between periods of history, a scruple that might strike us as elementary, but at the time it was not usual to work with the scientific method which Constant employed. Not that his method would satisfy present day requirements of academic research, but it was certainly in advance of his time.

(1) De la Religion, IV, 27.

(2) Manuel de philologie classique, 1883, p.365.

On the sacrificial rites of diverse religions, Constant possessed a very wide knowledge to which in his turn he applied a method already outlined, but only outlined, in the eighteenth century by Lafitau and de Brosses and destined to such a great future: the comparative method. Constant was acquainted with the latest findings of contemporary research workers in many different fields. Among them he quotes with the utmost respect, the Egyptologist Champollion; but one wonders if Constant could then estimate the immense importance of these discoveries for the study of archaeology and psychology. In Constant's lifetime, the science of religions was only in process of formation. There remained much to be done to constitute the comparative study of religions with all its varied methods, its incredible wealth of information which has renewed and extended our knowledge of the East, of the Greek and Roman religions and of America, and which has created prehistory. If the work of Benjamin Constant shows immense progress in relation to the superficial and fanatical productions of the eighteenth century, compared with modern science, it is nevertheless no more than the herald of such amazing studies as Frazer's Golden Bough.

Despite the abundance of Constant's documentation, his knowledge of savages is insufficient and lacking in objectivity, but his chief fault is his tendency ^{to} preconceived ideas. He does not always examine facts with an open mind; as we have seen, he twists them sometimes to fit

his argument. A factor which was strikingly new in his study of sacrifice was the psychological viewpoint from which he started: he identified himself with the savage about to offer a sacrifice and discovered the motives which urged him to perform an act of self-abnegation.

It is illuminating to note what Constant does not say in his many writings on religion. The absence of certain traditional lines which one would expect to find in such writings is perhaps more eloquent than anything else. In his study of Christianity, written in 1825 for the Encyclopédie Moderne and included later in the collection Mélanges de Littérature et de Politique (1), there are many surprising omissions, all the more surprising because this article was a reply to the attacks of those who on the publication of the first volume of La Religion in 1824 had accused Constant of not being a Christian. In these circumstances it would not be unreasonable to look for certain bold assertions, definite articles of faith that would convince any adversaries of the author's right to profess Christianity. Instead we find an article, as the new title in Mélanges states explicitly, on the human causes which brought about the establishment of Christianity. Constant's critics had insisted that by distinguishing between the religious sentiment and religious forms, he had shown indifference to all cults, Christianity included. Constant was so affronted by such criticism that he paused in his great work to retaliate: "m'étant occupé durant toute ma vie de ce sujet important," he wrote in a preamble, "je puis

(1) Ch. XVI, p. 354 Des causes humaines qui ont concouru à l'établissement du christianisme.

avoir conçu à cet égard quelques idées qui diffèrent des opinions les plus universellement répandues ... La période que je vais traiter est fort éloignée de celle où je suis arrivé dans mon ouvrage sur la Religion." (1)

He records the benefits of the Christian religion: the absence of sensuality, of love of riches and ignoble passions; the promise of eternal life transcending all the felicity of this earth, the advantage of immediate revelation, of direct communion with God, the comfort obtained through faith and prayer. He states that reason is satisfied by the substitution of simple ceremonies for the revolting practices of pagan times. Christianity brings help to the poor, justice to the oppressed, liberty to the enslaved. It proclaims one fact, offers one supreme hope. It is in Christianity that true tolerance first became possible: "C'est là seulement," writes Constant, "que le Dieu suprême, père de tous les hommes, tout amour, toute bonté, ne reproche point à ses créatures les efforts qu'elles font pour le servir avec plus de zèle." (2) He continues, "Tous les hommes lui sont également agréables, quand les intentions sont également pures." (3) But apart from these statements, there is no positive account of his creed, no explanation of the hope that is in him. The person of Christ is not even mentioned. In the second, third and fourth volumes of La Religion, Constant returns to the attack. He explains that Christianity appeals to him particularly

(1) Ch. XVI, p. 354, Des causes humaines qui ont concouru à l'établissement du christianisme.

(2) Encyclopédie Moderne: Christianisme.

(3) Ibid.

because of its emphasis on moral excellence. For him "le christianisme est un progrès, le plus important, ~~le plus important~~, le plus décisif des progrès que l'espèce humaine ait fait jusqu'à ce jour."(1) It is the purest form of religion known: "Tel que l'enseignait son divin auteur, il apaise toutes les douleurs de l'âme; il respecte toutes les libertés de l'intelligence, en la délivrant néanmoins de l'angoisse du doute; et depuis le palais jusqu'à la chaumière, dans sa sympathie ingénieuse et variée, il offre à tous les consolations dont tous ont besoin."(2) Constant seems in this passage to admit the divinity of Jesus Christ. He had already referred to "le divin auteur de la religion chrétienne"(3) in the same volume but one feels that this is mere lip-service because in fact, Constant does not make the divinity of Christ a central theme in his book. He appears to subscribe to current views so as not to be placed among the philosophers whom he disliked. His remark at the end of a chapter on the Jews leads one to suspect that some of his statements are not wholly sincere: "Après cette explication, qu'on ne saurait, à ce qu'il nous semble, accuser de réticences ni d'arrière-pensées, nous osons croire qu'on ne verra, dans notre opinion sur le judaïsme, rien qui nous sépare de la communion chrétienne à laquelle nous appartenons."(4) At all costs, he wanted to avoid being labelled a philosopher and an unbeliever.

(1) De la Religion, IV, 209, note 1.
 (2) Ibid, 11, 485.
 (3) Ibid, 250.
 (4) Ibid, 251, note 1.

His assertions are not exempt from contradictions. In the passage already quoted (1), Constant says of Christianity that "il respecte toutes les libertés de l'intelligence, en la délivrant néanmoins de l'angoisse du doute." In volume 5 of La Religion, his opinion seems to have changed. He writes: "Nous concevons le doute autant et plus que personne; mais le doute n'exclut point le sentiment religieux." (2) and in support of this, he quotes Byron:

"For me I know naught, nothing I deny,

Affirm, reject, contend, and, what know you?"

He goes on to say that it is doubt that is nevertheless hopeful "qui du sein de l'obscurité qui l'enveloppe, voit s'échapper des rayons lumineux, se livre à des pressentiments qui le raniment et le consolent. Loin de repousser, il invoque." (3) Was the first passage sincere or was Constant merely pandering to popular belief? It is probable that both passages were written in deep sincerity. They serve to illustrate the variations in Constant's beliefs. The vacillation that characterized Chateaubriand's faith was equally true of Constant's. One moment he believed and his mind was free of torturing doubts, the next moment, all his doubts had come crowding in again. It is the old conflict between intellect and emotion. Unquestionably this doubt typifies Constant's religious thought and it conciliates

(1) De la Religion, II, 485.

(2) Ibid., V, 172;

(3) Ibid.

the sincerity of his intelligence with the noblest aspirations of his heart.

* * *

What then is the central thought in Constant's book? It is namely this, that the religious sentiment is a social and psychological fact, the element of greatness in mankind. It is a sentiment of a spiritual order which raises man above the universe and sheds light and harmony in his soul. It provides man with hopes which help him to endure the blows of fate. The religious sentiment affords him complete confidence in the unknown which would otherwise fill him with gloomy forebodings. From the depths of his distress and disillusionment, he can invoke heaven and be sure of comfort. Nothing can destroy this sentiment; persecution will only serve to strengthen it since it is an emotion of the same kind as all our natural emotions and it demands fulfilment. Constant attaches great importance to this idea and supports it with various proofs, strengthening it with the authority of Montesquieu, for it is from Montesquieu that he borrows the concept of laws inherent in every species which decide their mode of existence. This innate sentiment leads man to a better and fuller life than that in which self-interest is the ruling principle. It makes the noblest aspirations possible. The soul can under its guidance wing its way through unknown tracts to the infinite. This conception reminds us inevitably of Rousseau and Mme de Staël who were

so attracted by the boundless.

The danger of pantheism inherent in this conception is mitigated by the fact that the religious sentiment is dependent upon divine protection and experiences an ardent need to worship. Thus although there exists between us and nature in all its manifestations a mysterious correspondence which seems to indicate that we are ultimately all parts of one and the same being, yet the distinction between Creator and creature is evident.

The religious sentiment, while it is a constituent part of man, is not the whole of man. It leads him ever higher, beyond earthly realities but at the same time his other faculties unite to serve his selfish interests and constantly try to bring him back to egoistic preoccupations, for man is a complex enigmatic being. He conquers the universe, dominates physical nature, creates for himself a civilization which protects him from need and even learns to discipline his passions in the interest of the community. Reason drives him to self-mastery in order to adapt himself better to life on earth and reason can take him far, but "malheur alors à l'être religieux qui veut lutter par le raisonnement seul." (1) Reason gives man consciousness of his strength and constitutes his superiority over other living beings but, asks Constant, what is reason after all and with what right does it claim to dominate the religious sentiment? Bossuet himself towards the end of his life distrusted Cartesianism which gives dangerous rights to reason. He did, however, resort to reason to convince men by lucid

(1) De la Religion, 111, 25.

ideas and he was very far from preaching the direct conviction of the heart. Constant came to see in reason an excellent instrument for detecting immediate reality. He did not deny it this rôle, but he saw that it was dangerous if allowed to usurp the rôle of the heart. In the sphere of the knowable it was good and useful but it was unfitted to perceive the supernatural and the sublime. Constant was no doubt influenced by Vinet in arriving at this conclusion: in his Mémoire en faveur de la liberté des cultes (1826) Vinet had developed the theory of the impossibility of proving religion by reason. The religious sentiment, Constant repeats, cannot be proved. Men know that it exists, just as they know whom they love although they cannot prove their love. "Tout symptôme indique une cause," he writes, "toute cause produit son effet . . . Nous sentons nos corps entraînés vers la tombe: la tombe s'ouvre pour eux. Nous sentons une autre partie de nous, une partie plus intime, quoique moins bien connue, attirée vers une autre sphère: qui osera dire que cette sphère n'existe pas, ou nous reste fermée?"(1)

For Constant the religious sentiment takes the place of revelation. He refused to admit the idea of a revelation imposed upon man from without; that would be incompatible with freedom. Instead he imagined the sentiment reaching out to eternal truths. The result is much the same in the end: the intuition of the inner sentiment becomes a mode of revelation. It excludes no man: this revelation is

(1) De la Religion, I, 36-37.

"universelle, elle est permanente, elle a sa source dans le coeur humain."(1) It is "the light that lightens every man coming into the world". This concept was to have its place in the writings of Lamennais and it was a cherished belief of the traditionalists. Constant clung to it since this revelation is not the monopoly of the Church, but is available without intermediaries to the individual. It allows man to raise himself gradually to the consciousness of his celestial origin.

Constant was not opposed to the idea of a particular and supernatural revelation, of a number of truths bestowed at a given moment on a people, so long as this revelation is not forcibly imposed. If it is continuous with the inner revelation which each possesses, far from working against this impulse, it helps it to grow and bear fruit. "La tendance existait, et le secours additionnel ne s'est exercé que conformément à cette tendance."(2) It in no way hinders the aspirations of the individual; it instils in him the truths which are beneficial at a given time, leaving him the responsibility of applying them and not diminishing his free will.

In La Religion, volume 1, chapter 1, Constant declares that he does not deny revelation which serves as a basis for belief. He does not contest that religious forms may be presented supernaturally when the religious sentiment accepts them and that the sentiment may be emancipated supernaturally, when it discards such forms for better ones. He quotes the

(1) De la Religion, 1, 16.

(2) Ibid, V, 206.

example of the Jewish law. Thus the two kinds of revelation are not contradictory but complementary. They are the two parts of one whole: man bears within him a germ which the teaching of God develops.

Constant's thought on this subject is not always free from paradox. At times he seems to be making a concession to accepted ideas and to feel that for him no external revelation really exists. This seems evident from his remarks on Jewish theism: "ensuite," he concludes, "ce que nous nommons révélation, enseignement de la Providence, lumière due à sa sagesse et à sa bonté, d'autres l'appellent sentiment intime, développement d'un germe déposé dans l'âme humaine, peu nous importe." (1) Indeed, to Constant it is immaterial since in the last resort everything is the gift of God and whatever the source of revelation, it always tends towards the moral and spiritual progress of man. This is Constant's conclusion on this question: "Pour qui croit en Dieu, toute lumière vient de lui, comme tout ce qu'il y a en nous de bon et de noble: et la révélation est partout où il y a quelque chose de vrai, de noble et de bon." (2).

Constant's ideas on the problem of evil, by which he usually means suffering, which he does not seem to distinguish from moral evil, are in strict accordance with his views on the religious sentiment. The link which he forges between the sentiment and all our noble aspirations makes our improvement the aim of this life and not merely our happiness. Thus

(1) *De la Religion*, II, 221.
 (2) *Ibid*, 221-222.

suffering is a means of grace to contribute towards our perfecting. It is through his personal experience that Constant arrives at this belief that pain can deepen a man's character and bring him to spiritual maturity.

He resolves the problem of destiny in the same way. We are free beings and capable to a certain extent of shaping our destiny. What seem to be the blows of fate are calculated to make us better people if they are used in the way intended. Thus evil is a means to good and the hazards of our destiny do not obstruct our liberty, but give us the opportunity to grow spiritually: "Nous nous unissons à la cause inconnue, non pour satisfaire nos caprices d'un jour, mais pour atteindre un plus haut degré de perfectionnement moral, en nous élevant au-dessus de tout ce qui n'est qu'éphémère et personnel."(1)

Constant analyses these problems with his mind, but his conclusions cannot be proved. If his analysis is not always perfectly clear, the fault lies perhaps in the nature of his subject, for the feelings are always difficult to define. He believed confidently in the immediate perception of conscience, although he was always on his guard against hasty conclusions. His highly developed intellect disposed him to agnosticism, but his experience led him to believe.

(1) De la Religion, 111, 366.

Chapter VII

The sources of Benjamin Constant's ideas. The style of La Religion compared with that of Le Génie du Christianisme. The value and originality of the two works. Conclusion.

We have seen that Constant's research was spread over many years and brought him into contact with immense resources. It seems almost certain that he read more than two thousand German books, he made an abstract of all the Asiatic Researches(1) and re-read the whole of Greek and Latin literature, besides consulting French, Persian, Scandinavian and Indian books.

It is impossible in this short study to write a detailed account of Constant's sources, but a few general indications can be given. He looked to German writers for ideas rather than facts and Herder's Philosophy of the History of Humanity helped to confirm his conception of a profound and mystical religious sentiment. The idea of Providence inspired the whole of Herder's work and was enthusiastically adopted by Constant although the latter was incapable of the religious zeal of Herder. Herder's

(1) These were the publications of the Bengal Asiatic Society which was founded in January 1784 by the British orientalist and jurist, Sir William Jones (1746-1794). He remained president of the society till his death. As a pioneer in Sanskrit learning, he made the language and literature of the ancient Hindus accessible to European scholars and thus made possible further achievements in the field of Sanskrit and comparative philology. His eleven annual presidential addresses and his numerous contributions to Asiatic Researches marked an era in the study of the Indian languages, literature and philosophy. Henry Thomas Colebrook (1765-1837), another eminent Sanskrit scholar, also contributed stimulating articles. He became later president of the Society.

idea of evolution, man's upward movement towards a more perfect state which is the realization of his true "humanity" was already familiar to Constant. This conception is closely related to the theory of indefinite progress dear to the philosophers and later to their successors, the ideologues, although Constant and Herder applied it particularly to the religious and moral development of man. Herder stressed the action of climate on the determination of religious forms. Constant may have derived this idea from him or from Montesquieu who had demonstrated its importance in modifying religious and other institutions.

Creuzer's work is among the German productions which Constant used most. The Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker in Vorträgen und Entwürfen, published in 1810 was only hailed in France ten years later when a second edition appeared. The book was translated, partly recast, developed and completed by Joseph-Daniel Guigniaut.(1) Constant not only read the original, but he also consulted this adaptation in manuscript. The best of the Symbolik penetrated into France through Constant's book. Creuzer, a Christian and a Protestant, had no such prejudices as Chateaubriand and Mme de Staël against mythology. He formulated a system in which he declared that Greek myths symbolized religious teachings. Constant agreed, but discarded the exaggerations of Creuzer's system in favour of Hermann's definition: "La mythologie est la science qui nous fait connaître quelles notions et **quelles idées** tel ou tel peuple conçoit et

(1) Les Religions de l'Antiquité considérées principalement dans leurs formes symboliques et mythologiques. 11 vol. (1825-1851.

représente par tels ou tels symboles, images ou fables."(1) Constant vigorously opposed Creuzer's idea that priests were the teachers of primitive man who founded symbolism to bring the highest truths within his comprehension. Constant believed in a spontaneous origin of symbolism; his theory coincided about 1820 with that of Victor Cousin and later with that of Ernest Renan. In one respect, Creuzer's system erred in the same way as that of contemporary French scholars: it considered religion as if it were a science composed of the speculations of the mind, instead of being a spontaneous and living creation. Constant in his fervent admiration of Friedrich Creuzer was far from being a servile disciple.

He consulted Christophe Meiners, professor of philosophy at Göttingen University, but disagreed with his theory that fetishism is the adoration of vices, virtues, maladies and other fictions of the human mind. Constant opposed the rationalist spirit of Meiners. He found the philosophical system of Schelling a strange mixture of Spinozism and authority, but he willingly adopted all that concerned metaphysics and moral science.

The philologist Frédéric-Auguste Wolf inspired Constant with some ideas which have an important place in his book and especially the idea that the Iliad and the Odyssey

(1) De la Religion, lll, 308.

were probably composed of poetic fragments put together under Pisistrates. Constant's conclusion which assumes the non-existence of Homer is in full agreement with Wolf's ideas. The latter's influence on Constant is clearly seen in that Constant very skilfully links mythology with philology.

J.H. Voss who wrote the Antisymbolique, a work directed against Creuzer's allegorizing exegesis, provided Constant with invaluable information on Greek religion. The rationalist spirit of the eighteenth century survived in Voss and made Constant reproach him with disregarding all but the materialist side in mythology.

One of Constant's most important sources is Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), an intimate friend of Friedrich Schlegel. He was a product of the Romantic movement and has some claim to be regarded as the first modern theologian. The characteristic notes of Romanticism are plainly seen in his doctrine: the revolt against rationalism and the emphasis on experience. This does not mean that there is no hard thinking behind his theology: ~~his~~ Glaubenslehre gives ample proof of his profound thought. The master-word in Schleiermacher's theology is "God-consciousness". He firmly believed that God-consciousness is an original endowment of human beings, no less a necessary element in all human experience than self-consciousness. He emphasized that there are of course degrees of God-consciousness, just as there are of self-consciousness and in many men it is dim and **confused**; in fact it is so in all except the

redeemed. On the basis of this God-consciousness, Schleiermacher built his doctrine of the Person of Christ. The essential idea of this doctrine can be stated in one sentence: in Jesus Christ the God-consciousness is absolutely powerful. The decisive elements in Schleiermacher's theology were philosophy and mystical experience. Constant delighted in Schleiermacher's doctrine, but he called God-consciousness by another name: it became the religious sentiment. He adopted Schleiermacher's final definition of religion when the latter had attenuated the pantheistic element borrowed from Spinoza and Schelling: religion is the absolute sentiment of our dependence upon God. Constant also took from Schleiermacher the view that doubt is compatible with the religious sentiment. He appreciated Schleiermacher chiefly because he substituted the principle of liberty for the principle of authority: he founded in theology the principle of Christian individualism. Constant owed to many other German authors facts and ideas which served him in the forming of his own opinions, but he owed at least as much to French writers.

His main debt was to Charles de Brosses who wrote Culte des Dieux fétiches (1760) from which Constant derived his notions of fetishism. De Brosses studied contemporary savages, in travel books and not first-hand, and compared their religion of fetishism with that of ancient, uncivilized peoples. He was one of the first precursors of the anthropological school and he inspired Constant with the idea that belief in the supernatural develops in much the same

way in all races and climates. Constant, however, did not believe with de Brosses that the principle of religion lies in "la crainte et la folie dont l'esprit humain est susceptible, et la facilité qu'il a dans de telles dispositions à enfanter des superstitions de toute espèce."

(1) He attributed religion to a deep human need to worship. De Brosses was reserved with regard to the Jewish religion. He intimated somewhat perfunctorily that humanity had "fallen" and that originally man had a completely pure idea of God which sin and corruption had clouded. Constant adopted similar precautions for fear of stating too audacious opinions, although he leaves us with the impression that the barbaric state is man's original condition.

English authors, particularly those who contributed to Asiatic Researches afforded Constant abundant information about the religions of the East. In Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, Hume, Gibbon, Godwin and Payne, Constant found little to praise. They showed either hostility or lack of sympathy and enthusiasm for religion and once Constant had abandoned his ultra-rationalist ideas, he no longer found their works interesting.

It is very important not to forget that many of Constant's ideas were formed through conversation with poets and philosophers, theologians and metaphysicians. From his adolescence, he was in contact with many of the greatest thinkers of the day mainly German and French and he

(1) Culte des dieux fétiches, sect.111, 183 and Introduction, p.14.

meditated their ideas, after mature reflection adopting some and rejecting others.

To sum up: he owed to the Germans his ideas on the progression of religious forms and the perfectibility of religion without prejudice to individual liberty. He was indebted to them also for the principle of Christianity without dogma and for the idea of climatic action. He borrowed from Germany with certain modifications his mythological system and his theories on Greek pantheism. The relationship between philology and mythology was clarified for him by his reading of German authors and his ideas on Greek literature were moulded under their influence. His great theme embodying the differences between priestly and non-priestly religions was of German origin, but above all, they helped to inspire him to write a history of the religious sentiment in defence of Christianity. The tone of his book is distinctly Protestant and German, the emphasis on a profound and mystical religious sentiment, on the absolute duty of tolerance and on individual liberty in all spiritual matters.

The French brought him mainly ideas on psychology and sociology, the conception of the human spirit gradually developing from gross ignorance to sublime religious maturity. He found in them the confirmation of his idea of a universal religious sentiment and he read with profit their accounts of missionary journeys among uncivilized peoples.

English writers provided information about Eastern

religions and classical authors suggested theories on the mythology and philosophy of the ancients. His principal sources were French and German, although it must be emphasized that Constant was a profound and original thinker capable of conceiving ideas of his own. Often they were strengthened and confirmed by the study of countless books and documents, but the germ existed in his own mind.

* * *

There is one striking difference between the use which Constant made of his many and varied sources and the use made by Chateaubriand of his almost equally abundant and diverse documentation. Each sought information in books, Chateaubriand often being contented with second-hand material, each benefited from the oral discussions of minds in a state of ferment, each delved into obscure gazettes, read anonymous articles and grafted living documentation on to the product of patient research. Yet the results are vastly different. Constant incorporated his findings into a somewhat arid, disappointing whole, whereas Chateaubriand moulded his into a rich, harmonious, original creation, disappointing too in some ways, but infinitely more moving although less powerful in thought than the work of Constant.

One reason for this is the difference of style in the two books. Constant's style reflects the incisiveness of his intelligence, full of light but lacking in warmth.

It is an eighteenth century style, while Chateaubriand's style in the Génie announces modern art. Constant remains impersonal and scholarly most of the time; Chateaubriand's greatness as a poet and artist lies in the fact that his personality pervades all he writes. Constant is sometimes moved to write with fervour which burns only because it is ice cold, while Chateaubriand's writing glows with a generous ardour.

Constant analyses religion in a style which is admirable for its clarity (with a few exceptions) and precision, its sober quality and its perfect balance. He excels in expressing epigrammatical thoughts such as this: "Les avantages du théisme appartiennent à sa nature, les inconvénients aux circonstances; les avantages que le polythéisme pouvait avoir appartiennent au contraire aux circonstances, les inconvénients à sa nature."(1) It is a compact style, suitable for a scientific work, austere in tone and stripped of ornamentation. It would seem to reflect his Protestant and dissenting outlook.

Chateaubriand's style is more varied because it is personal. It could not be confused with that of any other writer, "chose, aussi rare," said Bonald of the Génie, "quand tout le monde écrit bien qu'un caractère d'homme est rare quand tout le monde est poli."(2) His conversion had brought more order and clarity into his writing; he admired the energy and simplicity of the Bible and transferred something of its directness into his own style.

(1) Du Polythéisme, 11, p.311

(2) Bonald in Le Publiciste, 14 floréal an X, quoted by Moreau, op.cit., 136.

Constant's intellectual rectitude accounts for the deep sincerity of his writing. He builds up his arguments step by step with unerring logic, avoiding the colourful expression which so often exaggerates. His style is rarely picturesque like that of his Catholic contemporary. It is forceful and subtly penetrating, eloquent, grave and at times truly inspired, but it lacks the power of the Génie. It has depth, but not the fulness that characterizes Chateaubriand's work. It is measured, calm and elegant, but lacks the harmony of the Génie. At times, it is heavy, verbose and complicated after the manner of the German authors whose style he did not admire, but which he unconsciously imitated. Constant's art is nevertheless worthy of his noble subject: it is elevated in tone, lucid in style and can, although rarely, compare with the lyrical quality of Rousseau's finest pages. His description of the religious sentiment, source of all his hopes is one such passage: "Les causes de nos douleurs sont nombreuses. L'autorité peut nous poursuivre, le mensonge nous calomnier. Les liens d'une société toute factice nous blessent. La destinée nous frappe dans ce que nous chérissons. La vieillesse s'avance vers nous, époque sombre et solennelle, où les objets s'obscurcissent et semblent se retirer, et où je ne sais quoi de froid et de terne se répand sur tout ce qui nous entoure. Nous cherchons partout des consolations, et presque toutes nos consolations sont religieuses. Lorsque le monde nous abandonne, nous formons une alliance au-delà du monde. Lorsque les hommes nous persécutent,

nous nous créons un appel par-delà les hommes. Lorsque nous voyons s'évanouir nos illusions les plus chéries, la justice, la liberté, la patrie, nous nous flattons qu'il existe quelque part un être qui nous saura gré d'avoir été fidèles, malgré notre siècle, à la justice, à la liberté, à la patrie. Quand nous regrettons un objet aimé, nous jetons un pont sur l'abîme, et le traversons par la pensée. Enfin, lorsque la vie nous échappe, nous nous élançons vers une autre vie. Ainsi, la religion est la compagne fidèle, l'ingénieuse et infatigable amie de l'infortuné. Celui qui regarde comme des erreurs toutes ses espérances, devrait, ce nous semble, être plus profondément ému que tout autre, de ce concours universel de tous les êtres souffrants, de ces demandes de la douleur, s'élevant vers un ciel d'airain de tous les points de la terre, pour rester sans réponse, et de l'illusion secourable qui nous transmet comme une réponse le bruit confus de tant de prières, répétées au loin dans les airs."(1)

Chateaubriand's style is far richer in description than that of Constant. He was capable of aesthetic impressions which left Constant unmoved. The beauty of the sunset set him thinking of God: "La conscience de notre petitesse à la vue de l'infini, nos chants s'étendant au loin sur les vagues, la nuit s'approchant avec ses embûches, la merveille de notre vaisseau au milieu de tant de merveilles, un équipage religieux saisi d'admiration et de crainte, un prêtre auguste en prières, Dieu penché sur

(1) De la Religion, 1, 8.

l'abîme, d'une main retenant le soleil aux portes de l'occident, de l'autre élevant la lune dans l'orient, et prêtant, à travers l'immensité, une oreille attentive à la voix de sa créature: voilà ce qu'on ne saurait peindre, et ce que tout le cœur de l'homme suffit à peine pour sentir."(1) Poetic enthusiasm marks all Chateaubriand's writing. It does not prevent certain defects, an occasional pompous periphrase, an extravagant piling up of epithets here and there, but the general effect is of music, cadenced and harmonious, smooth-flowing and deeply moving.

A mixed reception awaited Le Génie on its publication in 1802. Contemporary criticism judged it as a political event rather than a literary landmark. The official and Catholic press, le Moniteur, les Débats, le Publiciste, le Mercure de France praised it unreservedly. The attack came from the disciples of the philosophers, M.-J. Chénier, Morellet and Népomucène Lemercier. In the Décade philosophique, Ginguené, Chateaubriand's former friend, criticized le Génie with scathing irony. Chateaubriand took up the cudgels and published his Défense du "Génie du Christianisme" in 1803, but the large sales of Le Génie were an even better defence and proved that the book had won immense success among the reading public.

Twenty-two years later, Constant's book made much less stir. It was not taken very seriously, partly because the incongruous facts of his private life were too widely known. Even cousin Rosalie found parts of the book very

(1) Le Génie du Christianisme, 1st part, ch. XII.

dull. Stendhal thought likewise (1), although his criticism was based on a complete lack of comprehension of the religious problem. Some well-informed people appreciated Constant's effort to present religion as a serious factor in life. Delécluze wrote in his Journal on 8 May 1825 that he had heard Stendhal criticize Constant's book with great severity. He himself disagreed and wrote: "Beyle était seul de son avis. Pour moi, je crois qu'il est dans une grande erreur à cet égard." He saw in Constant's conception: "Le seul moyen d'expliquer à la fois l'influence successive des religions et des superstitions dans le même individu, dans le même peuple." (2)

Three anonymous articles in the Revue Encyclopédique (1824, 1826) criticized the over-ingeniousness of some of Constant's ideas. Sismondi appreciated the solid value of the work. He thought it contained "plus de vérités neuves et mères qu'aucune des trois écoles opposées de Lamennais, de Cousin et de Tracy." (3)

The lyrical quality of Le Génie, its verbal magnificence account in part for its immense influence. It contributed to the development of a Romanticism of Christianity in which poetry prevailed over dogma and religious emotion was substituted for true conviction. It helped to remove hostility and prejudice against religion, it created a new mentality which was interested in the things of the spirit and respected them. It provided ample inspiration for the first Romantic generation. Lamartine remembered the

(1) Courrier anglais, vol. IV, p. 258.
 (2) Journal de Delécluze, éd. 1948, pp. 190-192.
 (3) Letter to Melle Eulalie Saint-Aulaire, 13 Dec. 1830 in Fragments de son Journal et Correspondance, p. 123.

Génie when he composed the Méditations, Harmonies and Jocelyn; Hugo, from his Odes to La Légende des siècles drew upon Chateaubriand; Vigny's Poèmes bibliques and Eloa are impregnated with the spirit of Le Génie; Michelet in spite of himself, received the flame of Le Génie through Quinet's lectures on Le Génie des Religions. The essentials of Romanticism are present in Le Génie together with the best elements of tradition. This piquant combination made for its originality.

The originality of Constant's book lies elsewhere. When he wrote La Religion, there were two ways of speaking about religion, either to ridicule it in the eighteenth century fashion or to extol its aesthetic appeal after the manner of Chateaubriand. Constant studied religion from a new angle, as a scientific phenomenon and a sociological fact. If the philosophers took religion seriously at all, it was merely to praise its usefulness as a sop for the people. Constant took a nobler view and exclaimed irritably that even Chateaubriand had yielded to the "manie d'utilité."

(1)

Out of a solid phalanx of facts, Constant conceived the idea of the relationship between the social and religious instincts. In this he was a precursor of the anthropological school. He felt that Chateaubriand's ideas were slight by comparison and termed Le Génie, "galimatias double." Constant was one of the great founders of a new study: the comparative history of societies and religions. He demon-

(1) De la Religion, I, ch.VI.

strated the importance of minute observation, of attention to facts instead of the wild conjectures made in the past. His conclusions provided a starting point for further research in archaeology and sociology.

His rôle of precursor is seen also in the fact that he was the first French writer to use and popularize the ideas of Creuzer and other German philosophers and theologians. Constant prepared the French to accept German ideas. Only fifteen years later were German ideas truly known and appreciated in France. In these ways, Constant had an undeniable although limited influence. He was essentially an initiator; his ideas were not all original but he made a judicious choice of the ideas of others, made them his own and spread them through France. Then too he introduced a Protestant spirit into French thought by emphasizing the relationship between the moral law and the religious instinct. Although some of his conclusions are debatable Constant did religion a service by stressing the value of religion as an inner support of the heart rather than a delight of the imagination or a discipline imposed from above.

* * *

We have seen that during Constant's lifetime there were two main movements in France: the philosophical and the Catholic movements. Bonald and de Maistre fit into

the latter category, Mme de Staël leaving the former has a place of her own, Chateaubriand also is a rebel and can hardly be considered among the traditionalists and Nodier helped to create the new movement of humanitarianism.

Constant with his fervent individualism defies classification. He believed to the end in the theory of unlimited progress thus preserving a link with the philosophical group, but he refused to adopt their dogmatic attitude of mind which allowed no freedom to the religious sentiment. Moreover, his was a modified belief in progress. He saw Christianity as an improvement on Judaism but he did not foresee any other religion replacing Christianity. Instead he predicted that Christianity would express itself gradually in new and better forms of worship. He stated expressly that the spirit of Christianity being already perfect could never be transcended. "Inaltérable, et cependant flexible," he wrote, "il grave dans les coeurs les vérités essentielles, et il accueille les tributs des siècles et les perfectionnements qu'ils lui apportent. Et que les hommes ne s'offensent point de ce que nous parlons des perfectionnements du christianisme. Dans sa doctrine morale, dans ses préceptes, dans toute la portion émanée de son auteur, le christianisme n'est pas perfectible, car il est parfait: mais dans ses formes, et surtout dans les opinions partielles que ses sectateurs ont adoptées, il peut y avoir lieu à perfectionnement." (1) This view has its confirmation in the New Testament where it is stated that true worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. (2)

(1) De la Religion, 11, p.486

(2) John, 4, 23.

It very definitely excludes Constant from the philosophical fraternity. Their anti-religious attitude was expressed in such a dogmatic form that it was doubly repugnant to Constant. At one time he thought them the enlightened advocates of truth. "They were," he writes, "éclairés, instruits, amis de la vérité ... jusqu'au moment où la lutte, irritant leur amour-propre, eut soumis leur impartialité à une épreuve qu'elle a mal soutenue."(1) He accused them of superficiality and partisanship and liked neither their tone nor their methods. "Ils veulent que la religion leur serve tout de suite, comme une espèce de gendarmerie," exostulates Constant, "qu'elle garantisse leurs propriétés, assure leur vie, discipline leurs enfants, maintienne l'ordre dans leur ménage. On dirait qu'ils ont en quelque sorte, peur de croire pour rien."(2) Strangely enough, he saw in their fierce condemnation of Christianity, a resemblance to the theocrats who admittedly did not condemn Christianity but who, like the philosophers, professed an enthusiastic admiration for the sacerdotal peoples of Egypt and India. "Appuyant de témoignages douteux et d'écrits apocryphes leur érudition superficielle et leurs déclamations passionnées, nos philosophes voulaient humilier les prêtres chrétiens par des éloges prodigués aux brames, et rabaisser l'Évangile, qu'ils comprenaient mal, en exaltant les Vèdes qu'ils ne connaissaient pas."(3)

Constant disagreed fundamentally with the philosophers and yet he retained some of their most cherished theories,

(1) De la Religion, II, p.238.

(2) Ibid, I, 113.

(3) Ibid, II, 479-481.

notably their belief in the unlimited perfectibility of mankind. One might think Constant could be included among the ideologues, especially as they too believed in progress, hated dogmatism and respected facts. His friend Fauriel was of their number, Cabanis and Mme de Condorcet, old friends of his, subscribed to their beliefs, but Constant did not find them wholly satisfying. The ideologues idealized reason and ignored intuition and feeling: Constant could not therefore be considered as an ideologue.

He was even further away from the traditionalists whose orthodox Catholic ideas he hated. He tried to judge them impartially and praised de Maistre for his "grande force de tête." He considered him "de beaucoup l'homme le plus distingué de cette école ... M. de Lamennais vient après lui, seul disciple digne de son maître, mais inconséquent, jouet des vents qui soufflent tour à tour sur son esprit, et craignant trop peu de se contredire." (1) Constant had confuted Lamennais in book 1 of La Religion and had shown how ill founded were some of his assertions, pointing out several instances where he contradicts himself. As for the other writers of this group: Bonald, Ferrand and Baron d'Eckstein, Constant treated them with the utmost scorn; he said of their work: "c'est du galimatias sans verve, de l'agitation sans chaleur." He accused Bonald of "ignorance présomptueuse" and "absurdité sans talent" - a harsh judgment but justified to some extent. D'Eckstein, the learned Sanskrit scholar, had in Constant's opinion merely "une

(1) De la Religion, IV, 143-144 note.

(2) Ibid.

érudition superficielle et un talent faussé par le désir d'être imposant et par le besoin d'être agréable."(1)

In all these men Constant detested the principle of authority, the admiration for priestly religions, the extravagance of their idea of sacrifice (2) and the absence of tolerance.

Lamennais proclaimed in his book De l'indifférence en matière de religion (1817-1823) that: "dans un pays où plusieurs cultes existent simultanément sous la sanction des lois ... aucune religion ne peut subsister qu'en repoussant toutes les autres." Constant, in pained astonishment, retorted: "On ne peut s'empêcher de gémir en voyant un des membres les plus distingués de cette église reproduire, avec une sorte de fureur dont la France avait heureusement perdu l'habitude, des anathèmes puérils s'ils sont impuissants, et bien condamnables s'ils ont quelque force. On en croit à peine ses yeux, lorsqu'on lit au commencement du XIXe siècle, que ceux qui n'admettent pas tel ou tel dogme, sont coupables parce que, s'il ne dépend pas de la raison de comprendre, il dépend toujours de la volonté de croire ce qui est attesté par un témoignage d'une autorité suffisante!"

(3) What could be more contrary to the freedom of conscience which Constant vehemently defended? His adversaries' arguments always tended in that direction: "Voyez combien l'indépendance de la pensée, la liberté de la discussion, tout ce qui peut répandre les lumières hors de l'enceinte privilégiée, les blesse et les courrouce."(4) The very existence of the Censure and the Index confirmed Constant's

(1) De la Religion, IV, 143-144 note.

(2) He abhorred this kind of statement, taken from de Maistre's Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, 7e entretien: "La terre entière, continuellement imbibée de sang, n'est qu'un

remarks.

It was perhaps Lamennais who incurred Constant's fiercest wrath for his attempt "à frapper d'anathème le sentiment religieux." "Il l'a peint d'abord comme n'existant pas," writes Constant indignantly, "ensuite comme précipitant l'homme dans les excès les plus déplorables." (1) The contradiction is manifest but Constant takes care to refute Lamennais' assertions because his own system is based upon the religious sentiment. There can therefore be no agreement between him and the traditionalist school. Liberal Protestant that he was and tending towards agnosticism, Constant was destined to oppose this dogmatic, authoritarian Catholicism which he disliked in Bossuet but detested in his contemporaries.

* * *

Where then is Constant to be placed? He was representative of his age, he took part in the religious awakening of France and his gradual change from rationalism to a belief in the religious sentiment was a sign of the times. He was indeed, if the comparison is permissible, a Protestant Chateaubriand without poetic gifts. They were both offspring of a period of transition, a period which Constant defined

autel immense où tout ce qui vit doit être immolé sans fin, sans mesure, sans relâche, jusqu'à la consommation des choses, jusqu'à l'extinction du mal, jusqu'à la mort de la mort."

(3) De la Religion, I, 106 note.

(4) Ibid, V, 196.

(1) De la Religion, I, 66 note.

thus: "Remarquez comment l'instinct de cette rénovation saisit nos prosateurs et nos poètes. A qui demandent-ils des effets? à l'ironie, aux apophtegmes philosophiques, comme Voltaire? Non: à la méditation vague, à la rêverie, dont les regards se tourment toujours vers l'avenir sans bornes et vers l'infini. Beaucoup se perdent dans les nuages: mais leur élan vers les nuages est une tentative pour approcher des cieux. Ils sentent que c'est ainsi que s'établira leur correspondance avec un public nouveau, public que l'incrédulité fatigue, et qui veut autre chose, sans savoir peut-être encore ce qu'il veut."(1) It is true to say that Constant was too Protestant to appeal to Catholics, too much inclined to mysticism to appeal to rationalists and yet too much a rationalist himself to be accounted a Romantic. He was even perhaps too Swiss to be truly French. Although he lived for so long in France, worked there, enjoyed French society so much, went to great pains to prove his French citizenship and took a leading part in French affairs, yet at heart, he was not completely French. Charles Burnier, a professor at the University of Lausanne, in a study of the canton of Vaud, speaks of Constant as: "un homme qui fut, peut-être beaucoup plus des nôtres qu'on ne le croit, ... un illustre inconnu, si j'ose dire, qui eut au plus haut degré quelques-unes de nos qualités et beaucoup de nos défauts."(2) Indeed Constant's Swiss heritage and his liberal Protestantism bring him nearer

(1) De la Religion, V, 171-172.

(2) Charles Burnier: La vie vaudoise et la Révolution, p.17

to Rousseau than to his French contemporaries. He differs from Rousseau in that he lacks his intensity of feeling and his lyrical gifts and has greater intellectual powers coupled with a certain aridity; but both believed in immediate revelation, attaching no importance to ritual and both were concerned with moral questions even more than with religion. Yet Constant makes little reference to Rousseau and is far from recognizing him as his master. He admits that he has "un sentiment religieux, pur, désintéressé, sans alliage de motifs terrestres," but he reproaches him with having indulged in destructive criticism: "Il a dans sa force prodigieuse, arraché de leurs fondements antiques les colonnes sur lesquelles reposait, tant bien que mal, l'existence humaine; mais architecte aveugle, il n'a pu de ces matériaux épars, construire un nouvel édifice."(1)

Constant was an individual in the most absolute sense of the term: any attempt to place him in a category with others is in vain. His book on religion is worthy of study not only as a means to a deeper understanding of the man and his time but as an end in itself for it is full of noble ideas. Some of Constant's conclusions are highly contestable, but the tone of the work is serious and sincere. No one would read it for information today, it has long been surpassed in that field, but it has the distinction of treating with due gravity and respect a subject that has always been and will always be of the utmost importance and interest to mankind.

(1) De la Religion, 1, 116.

Chapter VIII.Lamennais: conclusion.

Among the writers who supported Catholic tradition, we have seen that Constant was particularly scathing in his criticism of Lamennais. We know that he regarded him as the only disciple worthy of de Maistre, but he accused him of inconsistency and was irritated by his denial of the religious sentiment.

Félicité Robert de Lamennais, like his distinguished contemporary, was born at Saint-Malo in 1782. He was ordained a priest at the age of thirty-four and sought a social and religious doctrine which would ensure the happiness of mankind. Lamennais was by temperament a Romantic, the disciple of Rousseau and Chateaubriand. It was not until the age of twenty-two that he made his first communion and he was ordained a priest, under pressure, by his director of conscience and his brother. At the time, he felt deep anguish about the step he had taken.

His great work, the Essai sur l'indifférence (1817-1823) revealed the first ideas of his manhood and gave him immediately a place in line with Chateaubriand and de Maistre. In this book, Lamennais opposed political atheism, developing his arguments with eloquence, logic and Romantic imagination and enthusiasm. He condemned deism and Protestantism, the latter because recognizing a Divine revelation, it considers it has the right to choose among existing dogma and only retain those doctrines which do not war against the individual.

conscience. It was indeed individualism that Lamennais attacked and the principle of cartesian evidence on which it rests. For him, truth lay in universal consent, the result of revelation, manifested through tradition. Lamennais began by being a theocrat, believing in the Church as the depository of tradition and the Pope as its interpreter and guardian. Lamennais was a Catholic through and through, absolutely sincere in his belief. Throughout his life with all its variations of opinion, he never once lacked sincerity. He was always convinced of the ideas he held and willing to suffer the consequences. Unfortunately, in spite of his wide reading and his vast erudition, he was not prevented from facile enthusiasms and unreasoned intransigence. Bonald was his first master who inculcated in Lamennais his turn of mind, but Lamennais was more imaginative; in fact, he seemed incapable of restraining his imagination. In his overwhelming enthusiasm for contemporary writers, he neglected the great classics who might have helped him to adopt more sober ideas. He knew and reproduced from Fénelon and Bossuet the passages which apologists always reproduce, but he does not seem to have assimilated them. He knew Pascal better and was probably inspired by him with his hatred of indifference. From him, Lamennais took a part of the traditionalism on which he founded his doctrine: "Ce n'est donc pas pour le combattre que nous parlons ici de Pascal; mais au contraire pour faire voir la parfaite conformité de sa doctrine avec

la nôtre sur les points où celle-ci a été attaquée." (1)

He continues: "il ne faut pas croire cependant que nous le suivions en tout, ni qu'il n'y ait aucune différence entre ses idées et les nôtres ... Il est allé trop loin, en plaçant l'homme entre un doute absolu et la foi en la révélation, ce qui nous semble infirmer les preuves de cette révélation même ..." (2)

Lamennais was powerfully influenced by Rousseau, but not always positively: in fact, he opposed many of his theories and much of his Essai sur l'indifférence is devoted to refuting Rousseau's ideas. He points out the contradictions in them: this is amusing as Lamennais was very apt to contradict himself! At first, in 1808, he is of Bonald's opinion that Rousseau's sentiments are better than his ideas: "Il me semble, que pour être chrétien, il suffise d'être sensible; car Rousseau lui-même est chrétien toutes les fois qu'il s'abandonne au sentiment, et il ne cesse de l'être que lorsqu'il commence à raisonner." (3) By the time he wrote the Essai, Lamennais' opinion had veered round to exactly the contrary. He then believed that pride and voluptuousness were the principle of irreligion, that Rousseau's passions prevented him from being a Christian: "La raison de cet homme et son coeur l'entraînaient vers le Christianisme, que son seul orgueil repoussait ... Mais

(1) Défense de l'Essai sur l'Indifférence, ch.VII, Pascal, p.87.

(2) Ibid, p.99

(3) Réflexions sur l'Etat de l'Eglise, p.38.

sitôt que ses passions se calment, la vérité reprend son empire sur son esprit." (1) Lamennais nevertheless recognized the elements of truth in Rousseau's philosophy and as he grew older, he realized that Rousseau had discovered more of the truth than he had at first thought. Lamennais was much influenced by his contemporaries in his estimate of Rousseau: he saw Rousseau through the works of Chateaubriand and Bonald who tended to make him appear more Christian than he was in reality.

When Bonald's influence was waning, Lamennais came under the influence of de Maistre, but he continued meanwhile to be strongly influenced by Chateaubriand. The Essai sur l'Indifférence is largely the development of the moral ideas of Le Génie. Chateaubriand remained for Lamennais during his whole life time "l'homme de génie." In 1819, he defended him passionately against the attacks of the Gallican, de Pradt; "M. de Chateaubriand a peint," he wrote, "dans un style plein de charme, les beautés et les bienfaits de cette religion tant calomniée: son ouvrage, qui n'avait point de modèle, et qui n'a pas à redouter les imitateurs, réprime les sarcasmes de l'impiété, la désarme du mépris et ne lui laisse que sa haine ... C'en est trop, il faut que M. de Pradt poursuive de ses outrages l'écrivain dont le génie a opéré ce prodige; mais il ne saurait l'atteindre, il est déjà trop loin dans la gloire."(2)

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence II, Ch. IV, p. 381

(2) Premiers Mélanges, XXII

Lamennais was clearly inspired by Chateaubriand in all that he said about the benefits of the Christian religion. The series of propositions which resumes chapter XVI of Part IV of the Essai is directly in the spirit of Le Génie: "Tout le nord de l'Europe lui dut (au christianisme), avec la vraie civilisation, la connaissance des lettres ... (1) Le christianisme, en second lieu, a perfectionné l'ordre social (2) ... Nous lui devons encore, de l'aveu universel, des moeurs plus pures et plus douces ... (3) Mais si la religion chrétienne combat plus efficacement qu'aucune autre le principe du mal, si elle rend les hommes meilleurs, donc elle est de Dieu." (4) It is not impossible, of course, that Lamennais would have conceived these ideas without having read Chateaubriand. In the early nineteenth century men were beginning to realize more fully the immense part played by Christianity in the civilization of the world. Like Chateaubriand, Lamennais speaks of the virtues of the first Christians, and of the beauties of the Bible. Indeed, for him the poetry of the Scriptures proves their divine origin: "Nul autre livre que l'Écriture ne nous apprend à parler à Dieu, à le prier; et cela seul prouverait que l'Écriture est divine." (5) Like Chateaubriand, he compares some Catholic dogmas with certain pagan beliefs and the very turn of his sentences recalls the comparisons in Le Génie: "Il n'est pas nécessaire de recourir aux Livres saints pour

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- (1) Essai sur l'indifférence, IVe partie, ch.XVI, p.438
 (2) Ibid, p.442.
 (3) Ibid, p.444
 (4) Ibid, p.444
 (5) Ibid, ch.XII, p.202.

pouvoir se convaincre que la véritable religion était originellement celle du genre humain. Les anciens peuples, quoique livrés à des superstitions extravagantes, conservaient des traces sensibles de l'ancienne tradition, et les semences précieuses des vérités les plus importantes!

(1) Lamennais follows Chateaubriand so closely that he even attributes an equivocal meaning to mystery which is indeed astonishing in a priest: "Tout et l'homme même," he declares, "est mystère pour l'homme. Que croirais-je si je ne croyais que ce que ma raison conçoit? Le ciel, la terre, la vie, la mort, le grain de sable que je foule aux pieds, la paille que le vent emporte me sont éternellement incompréhensibles, et je prétendrais connaître Dieu, sa nature, ses attributs, son essence! ... Une religion sans mystère serait une religion fausse, puisqu'elle ne nous donnerait ni l'idée ni le sentiment de l'infini."(2)

Lamennais' evolution was similar in many respects to that of Chateaubriand. That is perhaps why Chateaubriand's influence was strong enough to outweigh that of Bonald despite the fact that Bonald's influence was itself very marked. Lamennais referred to Bonald as "le philosophe le plus profond qui ait paru en Europe depuis Malebranche"(3) and "dans ce siècle de désordre et de ténèbres, le fondateur des dernières espérances qui restent peut-être aux nations,

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part IV, ch. IX, p. 7, note 1.

(2) Deuxièmes mélanges: Sur la foi.

(3) Essai sur l'indifférence, part II, ch. 1, p. 246.

et le bon génie de la société."(1) He adopted Bonald's system even to the point of ignoring the contingent, he too founded his religion on immutable relations. He speaks of "la religion, qui ne craint que de n'être pas connue, et qui ne le sera parfaitement que lorsqu'on aura aperçu la liaison de toutes les vérités dont elle se compose. Sans doute ces vérités, qui rentrent de tous côtés dans l'infini, seront éternellement inconcevables à l'esprit de l'homme: mais si, comme on l'a dit, il ne lui est pas possible d'en imaginer le comment et le pourquoi, il peut du moins, et cela lui suffit, en concevoir la nécessité; et je ne crains point d'avancer qu'il n'est pas dans la religion chrétienne un seul mystère qui ne puisse ainsi être démontré par la raison. Déjà un homme de génie a pénétré avec succès dans cette nouvelle route ouverte aux défenseurs du christianisme; et ses ouvrages immortels, que la postérité appréciera, feront un jour révolution dans la philosophie comme dans la politique."(2)

Lamennais, paradoxically enough, scorned reason for the same reasons as Bonald. He did not hesitate to express the absurd opinion that "les grandes erreurs de l'esprit étaient à peu près inconnues dans le monde avant la philosophie grecque. C'est elle qui les fit naître, ou qui au moins les développa ..." (3) It is sufficient to think, said Lamennais, to fall into error, for "la raison individuelle,

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part III, ch.11, p.179 note.

(2) Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise, p.78

(3) Essai sur l'indifférence, part IV, ch.IV, p.62

abandonnée à elle-même, va nécessairement s'éteindre dans le scepticisme absolu; les plus forts esprits ont, dans tous les siècles, unanimement reconnu son impuissance, et l'impossibilité d'arriver par elle à aucune certitude sur les objets qui nous intéressent le plus; ... ceux mêmes qui soumettent la religion à son jugement avouent qu'elle n'est propre qu'à créer des doutes ..."(1) Thought is pride and "c'est de l'orgueil que sortent les ténèbres." (2) "Quiconque ayant cru, cesse de croire, cède à un intérêt d'orgueil ou de volupté."(3) This last statement was frequently used later on against Lamennais himself by his detractors. The tendency to intransigence, perhaps inherited from Bonald, was to remain characteristic of Lamennais even after he had repudiated Bonald's opinions. Like Bonald, he always thought of humanity as divided into two camps: the good and the wicked, with no intermediate category. He never admitted that one could be mistaken in some points while being right in others.

De Maistre's influence on Lamennais came mainly later than the Essai. Certain passages of the Essai which seem to be imitated from Considérations sur la France are the result probably of coincidence. An example is to be found in this statement: "la raison ne comprend rien pleinement. Une faible et vacillante lueur marque à peine quelques contours, quelques légers traits des objets qu'elle considère.

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part III, ch.VII, p.324.
 (2) Ibid, part IV, ch.1, p.10.
 (3) Ibid, part II, ch.11.

Sitôt qu'elle en veut pénétrer la nature intime, d'épaisses ombres arrêtent ses regards, et la repoussent dans l'ignorance dont elle tâchait de sortir ... Qui viendra donc au secours de cette intelligence débile? ... Ce sera la Religion: et comment? ... Elle suppléera par la foi à la faiblesse de l'intelligence."(1) De Maistre did not even contribute to Lamennais' anti-Gallican polemic. When le Pape appeared, the battle was already engaged. De Maistre was above all a legitimist, but Lamennais was above all a Catholic. True, he was at first horrified by Gallicanism, he thought of the State Church as merely a manifestation of political atheism. Later, however, when he realized that Ultramontanism also served power, that the Pope acted as a temporal sovereign and linked his cause to that of kings, when he saw the clergy all over Europe making itself the guardian of legitimist principles rather than evangelical principles, then Lamennais ceased to be a legitimist and became a liberal.

So long as he remained a legitimist, Lamennais recognized with great satisfaction that his feelings "ne diffèrent en rien d'important de ceux de M. de Maistre"(2), but he quoted him as an authority in support of his ideas rather than as a disciple honouring his master. Unlike Chateaubriand and Bonald who were essentially Romantics in their outlook, de Maistre was one of the last representatives of

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part II, ch.V, p.467.
 (2) Deuxièmes Mélanges: Sur le livre Du Pape.

the classical spirit and that spirit was alien to Lamennais. Despite the fact that once he sought to reproduce and exaggerate the doctrines of Du Pape and that he resembled de Maistre in the vivacity of his argument and his biting sarcasm, he thought de Maistre rather too exclusively witty and rational and lacking in the enthusiasm that Mme de Staël had made so popular. It was precisely Lamennais' enthusiasm that made him adopt successively the most contradictory ideas. He was a truly Christian Romantic, utterly sincere in his fervour, but destined to pass over quickly to the most violent negation of all that Catholic authority stood for.

It is clear from this brief account of influences, that the Essai, although praised for its originality, is mainly based on the theories of Bonald and Chateaubriand. The style, somewhat flamboyant in its eloquence, reminds one of the less good passages in Rousseau's works. Yet, there is originality in the Essai: Lamennais had written down, for the first time, systematically the doctrines and tendencies of the younger generation. The plan of the work, he borrowed from Bonald. Lamennais like the author of La Théorie du Pouvoir, wanted to establish religion on authority, depriving man's reasoning faculty of any right to guide his life. Like Bonald, he regarded philosophy as the source of error and disorder. Even more than Bonald, he wanted to stifle the critical faculty and substitute faith.

Lamennais attacked Descartes with great virulence, for

he considered him as the great advocate of free investigation. In his view, Descartes was responsible for the renewal of opinions and the reawakening of reasoning which had slumbered during the era of Scholasticism. Lamennais stripped the word reason of its equivocal aspect. Bonald had used the term in a variety of ways. This is how Lamennais approached the problem: "Ôtons d'abord", he wrote, "l'équivoque de ce mot de raison, par lequel on désigne deux facultés totalement distinctes, et qu'il est dangereux de confondre: la faculté de connaître, et la faculté de raisonner."(1) He made a distinction between reasoning and reason, between the faculty of knowing the truth and the means of acquiring it. The means struck him as inappropriate to the end and occasioned another diatribe against philosophy. "Pour commencer par la philosophie, quelles sont les vérités qu'elle nous révèle? quels sont les biens, qu'elle nous offre...? Hélas! plus impuissante encore que présomptueuse, elle trompe ou dégrade toutes nos facultés. Notre esprit lui demande la vérité infinie, seule proportionnée à ses désirs, et elle ne lui présente que des doutes, de vaines conjectures, de palpables absurdités. Toutes les croyances fuient devant elle ... Autant de philosophes, autant de systèmes, aussi vagues, aussi fugitifs que les rêves de la nuit ... Que d'obscurités! que d'incertitudes! que de contradictions!"(2) Lamennais confused philosophy with false reasoning and blamed it quite erroneously

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part III, ch.1, p.99.

(2) Ibid, part II, ch.11, pp.233-234.

for every kind of wrong. The only philosopher he spared was Malebranche whose doctrines happened to have certain affinities with his own. Like Bonald, Lamennais blindly confused philosophy with the philosophers and made philosophy in general responsible for all their errors. "J'ai montré que la philosophie détruit le pouvoir," he wrote, "détruit le droit des gens, détruit les lois, ou la règle des actions publiques; il me reste à prouver qu'elle détruit également la morale, ou la règle des actions privées."(1)

Our reasoning faculty is therefore not our chief faculty. For Lamennais, our most important faculty is not even sentiment as Chateaubriand thought. Yet, he is not always very firm on this point. There is only one categorical condemnation of sentiment in his work. Lamennais expresses it in these terms: "On s'est imaginé qu'il existait des vérités indépendantes de la raison, des vérités senties avant d'être conçues, et qu'à cause de cela l'on nomme vérités de sentiment. On ne pouvait confondre plus dangereusement des facultés distinctes."(2) Elsewhere, he equivocates and is ⁱⁿconclusive: "Il y a des vérités et des erreurs de sentiment, " (3) and further on: "Il y a donc des vérités ou une loi morale écrite dans le coeur; vérités qu'on appelle de sentiment, non qu'il en soit le principe, mais parce qu'il en est l'effet, parce qu'elles sont tout ensemble, et par une sorte d'union substantielle, lumière dans l'esprit et amour dans le coeur."(4) Here Lamennais

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part II, ch.III, p.300

(2) Ibid, vol.II, preface to pts.III & IV, p.56.

(3) Ibid, pt.III, ch.II, p.107. (4) Ibid, pt.III, ch.III, p.149

confuses the truth of sentiment and the truth of our sentiments. In any case, these truths of sentiment depend on a higher authority: "j'ai montré," he says, "que la certitude des vérités de sentiment repose, aussi bien que la certitude des vérités de sensation, sur l'autorité générale ou le consentement commun. Qui donc oserait nier une vérité de sentiment universel, devrait douter de tout ce qu'il sent ou s'imagine sentir."(1) Later on, sentiment seemed to him more and more the sovereign faculty in man. In Paroles d'un Croyant (1834) alluding to Protestantism, he wrote this sentence which Bonald himself would not have disowned. "Je vois au Septentrion des hommes qui n'ont plus qu'un reste de chaleur concentrée dans leur tête, et qui l'enivre; mais le Christ les touche de sa croix, et le coeur commence à battre."(2)

Lamennais, unlike Constant, was afraid of doubt. He considered that man is on earth to know, to act and consequently to believe: "malheur à qui le doute ouvre les portes du tombeau!"(3) All his life, he loved action and hated pure speculation. All his life, like de Maistre and Chateaubriand, he judged doctrines and facts according to their present utility. His pragmatism led him to write in order to act, never merely to divert: "Si les questions traitées dans l'Essai n'étaient que des questions de pure curiosité, si elles ne tenaient pas aux plus grands intérêts de l'homme, jamais nous n'aurions écrit cette Défense; car

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part III, ch. 11, p. 117.

(2) Paroles d'un Croyant, II, p. 8.

(3) Essai sur l'indifférence, part II, ch. 11, p. 234.

qui voudrait perdre un quart d'heure de repos pour une simple opinion philosophique?" (1) Lamennais was certainly of his century: his pragmatism alone is sufficient proof.

Although, even after leaving the Roman Church, Lamennais persisted in believing in the necessity for a religion, it was chiefly because of the fatal consequences which would follow on its disappearance: "Jamais, l'irréligion ne s'enracine au sein du peuple, sans quoi la société se dissoudrait immédiatement. De tous ses besoins, le besoin de croire est le plus invincible." (2) He believed in the efficacy of the will to induce belief. In the Essai, it is to the will of unbelievers that he appeals, not to their reason, nor even to their heart: "Voilà la mission du Verbe fait chair. Or, est-ce à la raison qu'il s'adressera?" he asked. "Non, mais à la volonté; car il ne dépend pas de la raison de comprendre, mais il dépend toujours de la volonté de croire ce qui est attesté par un témoignage d'une autorité suffisante; il dépend de la volonté d'aimer le bien, d'obéir aux lois de l'ordre: Paix aux hommes de bonne volonté." (3) This is the passage which so incensed Constant. The will is then according to Lamennais our primordial faculty. Our will must be humbled; our reason must yield to the universal reason of mankind, represented by the authority of the Church. "Ou la raison humaine n'est qu'une chimère," he argued, "ou elle dérive d'une raison supérieure, éternelle, immuable; car la vérité, si elle existe, a nécessairement existé toujours,

(1) Défense de l'Essai, ch. XII, p. 264.

(2) Des Maux de l'Eglise et de la Société, ch. I. Published in Affaires de Rome, although written earlier.

(3) Essai sur l'indifférence, pt. II, ch. V, p. 414

et toujours la même. Aucune raison créée ne peut donc être qu'un écoulement, une participation de cette raison première et souveraine, mère et maîtresse de tous les esprits. Vivre, pour eux, c'est l'écouter, c'est lui obéir, et la plus parfaite obéissance constitue le plus haut degré de raison."(1) This doctrine, far from destroying intelligence, gives it new life: "Tout ce qui est en nous doit obéir, tout ce qui est en nous doit être soumis à quelque chose hors de nous: c'est ce que Jésus-Christ est venu nous apprendre, c'est par cette doctrine qu'il nous a sauvés, et qu'il nous régénère. La foi est la vie de l'intelligence: et croire c'est obéir, c'est être soumis à une volonté supérieure, à une autorité qui commande. L'amour est la vie du coeur, et aimer ce qui l'ordre nous commande d'aimer, c'est obéir."(2) The sentiment, just as much as reason, must recognize the authority of common sense: reason and sentiment would disappear without this total submission: "le premier acte de la raison est nécessairement un acte de foi."(3) Lamennais thinks he is giving to reason its true place when he says: "Si nous insistons sur la faiblesse de la raison particulière, c'est pour établir ensuite la raison générale ... Ainsi, loin de détruire la raison, nous la plaçons au contraire sur une base inébranlable."(4) Reason in general is then our guiding principle in life. It is in other words,

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- (1) Essai sur l'indifférence, vol.11, preface, p.52.
 (2) Ibid, part IV, ch.XV, p.98.
 (3) Ibid, part III, ch.III, p.152.
 (4) Ibid, vol.11, preface, p.59.

authority which first Lamennais accepted as the authority of the Church and later replaced by the authority of public opinion. It is difficult to prove that "tout ce qui était de croyance universelle dans les temps qui ont précédé la naissance du Sauveur, est encore et sera toujours cru dans la société chrétienne universelle ou catholique."(1) Once again Lamennais refers to Chateaubriand and the first chapters of Le Génie. He goes even further and says that "l'idolâtrie ne fut jamais que le culte des esprits bons et mauvais, et le culte des hommes distingués par des qualités éclatantes ou vénérés pour leurs bienfaits; c'est-à-dire, au fond, le culte des anges et celui des saints."(2)

(2) In the same arbitrary fashion, he claims to prove the authenticity of the Scriptures by saying that: "jamais la tradition n'a varié sur leurs auteurs."(3)

Lamennais does not penetrate sufficiently into his subject; for him, any argument is valid: "en toutes choses et toujours, ce qui est conforme au sens commun est vrai, ce qui lui est opposé est faux."(4) Lamennais considers the Catholic Church as the organ of common sense: "L'Église catholique," he writes, "seule société religieuse constituée, est aussi la seule qui lie le présent au passé sur lequel elle s'appuie, la seule qui ait succédé et n'ait point commencé, la seule qui n'ait jamais varié, la seule qui ait un symbole, ou qui exerce le droit ^{de} commandement sur les esprits, la seule qui promette la certitude, puisqu'elle

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- (1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part IV, ch.V, p.404.
 (2) Ibid, part IV, ch.IV, p.343.
 (3) Ibid, part IV, ch.XII, p.306.
 (4) Défense de l'Essai, preface, p.156.

seule réclame l'infailibilité. Que pourriez-vous demander de plus? La voilà, oui, la voilà, l'autorité que nous cherchons ..." (1) This summarizes Lamennais' thought in the first stage of his career. Its resemblance with that of Bonald and Chateaubriand is manifest. Till then, he had not developed his individuality.

From 1817, he began to take an interest in the political struggles of the Church. Even before de Maistre, he had attacked Gallicanism and by so doing, had brought his talent to maturity and at the same time modified his views. In 1823, Lamennais described the theory of the sovereignty of the people as a monstrous folly. Ten years later, he was to be an ardent supporter of this theory. By then, he had come to think that it was impossible to bring in the reign of God through authority: instead he advocated liberty as an infallible means. He conceived the bold idea of a democratic Catholicism because his Ultramontanist faith had declined in his very struggle against Gallicanism. Seeing the efforts of power against religion, he ceased to extol this power. Lamennais only knew extremes; unlike de Maistre, he was unable to take into account every aspect of a question.

In 1817, Lamennais had said: "la religion est l'unique fondement des devoirs, comme, à leur tour, les devoirs sont l'unique loi de la société." (2) Then he thought that religious authority should reign supreme over

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, part IV, ch.II, p.290.

(2) Ibid.

civil institutions: the government should be the humble servant of the Church. Later he claimed that they should be independent, that Church and State should be separate. Joseph de Maistre believed all his life in the supremacy of the Church over the State. Lamennais went from the most absolute theocracy to the most extreme liberalism.

In 1823, he was still writing: "les délits contre la religion, la morale et le gouvernement ne sauraient être tolérés dans aucune société." (1) In his eyes, this doctrine justified despotism. In the Essai, he had called tolerance "un nouveau genre de persécution et d'épreuves ... que le Christianisme doit subir." (2) It was little wonder after such an assertion that Constant greeted the book so scathingly. Then in his Troisièmes Mélanges, he wrote: "l'ordre spirituel doit être en dehors de l'ordre temporel" and "nul ne doit compte de sa foi au pouvoir humain." (3) What is the link between these contradictory statements? True, Lamennais was not long a theocrat and even then his theocracy was more like Bonald's than de Maistre's. All his life, even while he was a theocrat, liberal affirmations are to be found in his writings. Till 1826, he hoped to see the State adopt Ultramontanism, but after that date, his opinions changed and instead he fought for the separation of Church and State. From the beginning he had demanded freedom for Catholicism; gradually, he claimed freedom for any doctrine. "Personne n'est plus convaincu que nous," he wrote, "qu'on ne ramène point les hommes à la vérité par la

(1) Deuxièmes Mélanges: De la tolérance
 (2) Essai sur l'indifférence, introduction, p.28.
 (3) Troisièmes Mélanges, III

violence."(1) He was convinced that truth could defend itself and indeed triumph through discussion. He had grown to believe that tolerance of all opinions was possible and that it ought to be the basis of all future progress in Catholicism. This is the natural transition between Lamennais' absolutism of 1820 and his liberalism of 1830 and after.

In 1830, with Montalembert and Lacordaire, Lamennais founded a paper, l'Avenir, to defend Catholicism according to the formula of the Essai, against a bourgeois materialistic and atheistic monarchy. Unfortunately, the Church failed to understand Lamennais' aim and after his visit to Rome, Pope Gregory XVI condemned him in 1832. In 1834, he wrote his Paroles d'un Croyant, an apocalyptic book written in verses, in which no positive doctrine was formulated, but which gave expression to all the democratic and socialist tendencies of the evangelical spirit, a passionate and sorrowful charity in revolt against the State and the Church, the oppressors of the weak. Lamennais demanded as well as the total separation of Church and State, freedom of conscience, freedom in education, freedom of the press and the abolition of centralization. His conversion to secular ideas and his rupture with the Catholic Church dated from at least 1828, perhaps even earlier, indeed, relatively soon after the publication of the Essai. After his spectacular volte-face, Lamennais still thought, in his Romantic enthusiasm,

(1) Essai sur l'indifférence, vol. 11, preface, p.30.

that he was working for the evangelization of the world. He thought that he was following the doctrine of Christ better than the Roman Church. Gradually, he grew more and more anticlerical and with his Affaires de Rome in 1836, his rupture with the Church was complete. Nevertheless, he retained his faith to the end, although it was no longer acceptable in the eyes of the Church. His inflexible attitude kept him estranged from the Church even at his death. He had remarkable qualities; he was undeniably a great poet, artist and prophet. He combined depth of thought with the flame of enthusiasm, conviction with fervour and he was an astonishing visionary.

* * *

By 1830, France was swept once more by a wave of doubt, a general disturbance in the beliefs of the masses, a sort of moral crisis. Once again political events were not unconnected with this new change of moral and religious atmosphere. Romanticism was affecting religious ideas. The religious question was being discussed anew and the anxiety of doubt tormented the minds of many. Musset and Hugo expressed the feelings of many, Hugo, especially, when he declared "En moi je porte un ennemi, le doute." (1)

Apart from political considerations, the reason for this return of doubt and religious crisis lay in the fact

(1) Chants du Crépuscule: Que nous avons le doute en nous.

that the renewal of religious ideas after the Revolution of 1789 had not been the reaction that people had thought, but merely a negative result of eighteenth century philosophy, and in the return to a religion with the accent on individualism and humanitarianism as seen in Mme de Staël, Nodier and Constant, there was a grave danger for the future. The striking absence of acknowledgment of Christ as the centre of the Christian religion which we have seen in every writer treated in this brief study, the absence of true Christian love, the over-emphasis of the religious sentiment in the case of Mme de Staël, Nodier and Constant were bound to lead to a conception of Christianity which could not save the generation of 1830 from doubt and bewilderment. Between 1830 and 1835, French literature, which had till then claimed to be Christian, abandoned all efforts to remain Christian. The idea of God had only played an accessory part in the literature of the 1820's and Christian vitality had been sapped.

Nevertheless, one must not misjudge the work of the authors discussed here. It is essential to judge their writings according to their expressed intentions. Their aims differed and each in his own sphere achieved his aim and contributed to some extent to the moral and spiritual regeneration of France after the cataclysm of 1789, even if perhaps their influence for good did not endure. De Maistre infused a spirit of Catholic universality and

counter-balanced the exaggerated tendency towards individualism. He and Bonald reintroduced the austere element in religion. Mme de Staël stimulated interest in man as a moral being, of infinite value actually and potentially, thereby restoring a sense of individual worth and respect for human life. She and Nodier and Constant showed the necessity and the reasonableness of tolerance. Chateaubriand revealed the charm of Christianity. The sum of their efforts was worthy of praise because each one was sincere and even though each may have laid stress on less important aspects of Christianity, yet they made a valiant attempt to rescue their contemporaries from the despair of irreligion.

Appendix

Four letters from Mme de Staël to François Gautier de Tournes.

Although these letters are not signed, there can be no doubt of their origin. The last one seems to have been dictated by Mme de Staël and only the post-script of the manuscript is in her handwriting. This last letter alone bears a date in full, the three others only mention the day and the month, but their contents make it easy to date them accurately. All four are reproduced textually here with the spelling and punctuation modernized and a few omissions inserted between brackets.

1.

Ce 5 février (1807), Acosta par Meulan,
dép. de Seine-et-Oise.

Croyez-moi quand je vous atteste que je n'ai pas cessé de penser à vous et que j'ai constamment su de vos nouvelles; mais j'étais si triste que je ne vous ai point écrit à vous qui êtes cependant la consolation des tristes; mais je voulais vous dire, je suis digne de vous. Quelquefois je l'espérais, quelquefois je croyais entendre la voix de mon père au fond de mon coeur et je me sentais deux. D'autrefois je retombais dans ma solitude, - le monde visible est longtemps tout puissant.

Je vous remercie d'avoir pensé à moi pour le

respectable M. Célérier et je tiens à honneur de remplir à cet égard ce qu'aurait fait sûrement mon père. Dites-moi donc quand et comment vous voulez que je signe et recevez dès à présent mon engagement.

Je veux aussi vous demander une négociation qui m'intéresse. Auguste (1), comme vous le savez, est plein d'intelligence et d'honnêteté; je voudrais l'envoyer ou l'amener à Coppet ou à Genève le 1er de Mai à fin qu'il puisse faire sa première communion au mois de 7bre. Pouvez-vous obtenir pour moi que M. Célérier (2) le dirige? Une heure ou deux par semaine suffiraient parfaitement et Auguste irait à cheval chez lui de Coppet ou de Genève. Dans tous les cas mon intention est d'arriver deux mois avant sa première communion. En faut-il quatre pour se préparer?

Voilà le premier intérêt; passons aux affaires du monde. Je voudrais, si c'est à Genève qu'Auguste va, qu'il allât chez un banquier pour apprendre un peu les affaires avant de partir pour ses voyages. Approuvez-vous que je l'envoie chez Mrs. Hentsh? C'est parce que l'argent que j'y ai m'y donne des droits que je le préférerais. Voyez comme je compte sur votre bonté. Elle me semble toute angélique; mon Dieu, que c'est beau de souffrir ainsi si patiemment!

Moi, j'ai une bonne santé, la fortune que je dois à mon père, de jolis enfants, et mon âme ne sait pas se calmer.

(1) He was then about fifteen years old.

(2) J.-Z. Samuel Célérier, minister at Saligny until 1814.

Pourquoi êtes-vous inquiet de mon roman?(1) Je l'ai montré à Matthieu qui n'y a rien trouvé qui lui fît de la peine. Racontez-moi donc votre anecdote. C'est sûrement ce que j'ai fait de mieux, et comme je suis plus religieuse que quand j'ai écrit Delphine, j'espère qu'on s'en apercevra. Nous en parlerons cette année plus tôt ou plus tard. L'acquisition que je voulais faire de cette terre-ci ne me convient pas, je suis en marché pour une autre un peu plus près(2); mais je ne sais pas encore si de tout cet ennui que je souffre, il résultera fin de l'exil et paiement.(3)

Adieu, mon respectable ami, permettez-moi de vous appeler ainsi. Reservez-moi vos forces pour venir à Coppet; et croyez que vous exercez un grand empire sur mon âme et par vos vertus, et par mon attachement pour vous. Rappelez-moi au souvenir de tout ce qui vous entoure et à M. Polier(4) en particulier. J'étais bien dans votre petite chambre et ma pensée m'y transporte en ce moment. J'ai écrit à Matthieu pour lui demander St. François de Sales. Il a marié sa fille hier avec une grande émotion; il était dur pour moi de n'y pouvoir être; il me l'a amenée il y a huit jours, elle est belle et simple - Adieu, adieu.

(1) Corinne.

(2) Nearer Paris, it was in the valley of Montmorency.

(3) cf. Kohler, 355 - of the two million francs lent by her father.

(4) Henri Polier, prefect of the canton of Léman since April 1798.

II

Ce 27 février (1807)

Meulan.

Je suis profondément touchée de vos lettres, mon respectable ami, mais ne me dites pas que vous voudriez les finir comme lui(1) : je mourrai sans r'entendre ces sons-là, et mon coeur se brise en pensant qu'ils ont existé pour moi, et qu'alors je me plaignais encore. Et vous qui êtes si patient, si vous aviez mes forces physiques, vous seriez heureux. Ah sûrement tout est arrangé pour un passage, mais l'esprit se confond dans les réflexions. Il y a des jours où, comme je le dis dans Corinne, il me semble qu'il y a une voix intérieure qui me répond et fait deux âmes d'une seule âme ; d'autrefois tout se brouille à mes yeux intellectuels. Enfin je puis vous dire que j'ai une qualité chrétienne, c'est l'humilité. Je l'ai achetée par beaucoup de sottises, mais je n'ai pas la moindre idée de moi relativement à moi.

Revenons aux affaires dont vous voulez bien vous charger. Je crois que vous avez raison pour M. Hentsch, mon fils ira chez Cornuand. Mais ce n'est pas de l'arithmétique dont (sic) il a besoin, lui qui a été reçu à l'école polytechnique, mais de la connaissance des changes et des formes des affaires et des précautions à prendre pour les ventes, hypothèques, etc., enfin tout ce qui sert à bien gérer la fortune et me soulager en cela.

Je remercie mille fois M. Célérier d'accepter que mon

(1) Benjamin Constant.

fils aille à cheval le voir deux fois par semaine. Ces deux heures seront pour lui les plus utiles et les meilleures. Je lui ai dit de lire l'Histoire Universelle de Bossuet, et je lui fais lire tous les dimanches ou l'Évangile ou les discours de mon père, mais je vous avouerai que je voudrais qu'on ne lui fît pas lire d'ouvrages catholiques.(1) Je tiens à notre religion, à celle de mon père et de ma mère, et mon fils ne doit pas s'en écarter. Qu'il soit pieux et vertueux comme ces respectables personnes et mon voeu est rempli merveilleusement. - J'espère que vous déterminerez M.Célérier à accepter ce que vous faites pour lui. Il me semble qu'il ne doit voir dans cette petite somme qu'un moyen de remplir ses devoirs; le plus respectable des ecclésiastiques catholiques accepterait cent fois plus que cela et pourrait faire ainsi cent fois plus de bien.

Ecrivez-moi, je vous prie, à l'adresse de Mrs. de Lessert, jusqu'à ce que mon déménagement soit stable. Le lieu où je suis ne me convenait pas, j'en ai acheté un plus agréable et plus stable dans la vallée de Montmorency; quand j'y serai nichée, je vous donnerai mon adresse. Mon fils (si rien n'est dérangé dans mes plans) partira le 1er de Mai et moi le 15 de juin. Dans ce beau temps, j'espère que vous serez mieux, et que je vous verrai souvent.

(1) She means works in the tradition of Fénelon and Mme Guyon, since she herself makes him read Bossuet!

Vienne, ce 28 avril (1808)

Pourquoi ne m'avez-vous pas donné un signe de vie, mon cher ami? M'avez-vous cru si perdue dans la distraction qu'il ne fût plus possible de m'atteindre? Le tourbillon où j'ai vécu n'a point approché de mon coeur et je n'ai rien dit ni pensé qui ne pût vous être offert. Donnez-moi de vos nouvelles à Weimar, Saxe, poste restante. Hélas, souvenez-vous que c'est là que j'avais reçu une lettre de vous sur le plus affreux malheur de ma vie. Dans deux mois juste, si Dieu le permet, je vous reverrai, et vous viendrez me voir et vous essayerez encore si vous pouvez faire quelque chose de moi. J'ai passé quatre mois ici sans plaisir ni peine, j'ai étourdi la vie pour ne pas sentir ce qui m'afflige; il vaudrait mieux l'examiner en face mais je n'en ai pas le courage, peut-être me le donnerez-vous?

Racontez-moi en détail comment est votre santé. Dieu vous fera la grâce de vous rétablir, je l'espère: vous faites tant de bien dans ce monde car vous avez le don de la persuasion; je voudrais bien que mon ami (1) en sentît les effets. Je l'ai espéré un moment et ses lettres après avoir vu le chevalier (2) semblaient me le permettre, mais depuis qu'il est à Paris, il me semble que ces impressions s'effacent. Parlez de moi au chevalier; dites-lui, je vous

(1) Benjamin Constant
(2) de Langallerie.

prie, que je l'aime et que j'ai besoin de lui. Je le verrai sûrement en passant par Lausanne. Nous avons au moins un rapport ensemble, c'est qu'une personne qui ne l'aime pas (1) me persécute de toutes les manières; mais il le souffre avec plus de patience que moi. Il y a un calme religieux dans le fond de vos âmes que j'implore en vain du ciel jusqu'à présent.

Mais au moins il y a une chose de moi que vous désirez et que je ferai: j'écrirai des lettres sur l'Allemagne et j'y dirai que j'ai eu tort dans les opinions philosophiques que j'ai exprimées autrefois, et que j'en sens l'insuffisance. Je ferai cela noblement mais clairement, sans m'annoncer pour ce que je ne suis pas, c'est-à-dire pour une personne qui vit selon sa conviction; mais (je) la donner(ai) au moins comme une lumière de mon esprit. Ne dites rien de ce que je vous mande là, excepté au chevalier. J'ai avant tout peur d'un air d'hypocrisie et comme je mène une vie dissipée, je ne puis parler religion que comme un voeu.

Adieu, priez pour moi, pensez à mon père, réservez-moi quelques instants cet été et croyez que si je deviens ce que je voudrais, c'est à vous que je le devrai.

Mille amitiés. Rappelez-moi au souvenir de tout ce qui vous entoure.

(1) Napoléon.

IV

Coppet, lundi (6 nov. 1809)

Votre silence m'inquiète, vos conseils, votre amitié me sont nécessaires et vous m'abandonnez tout à fait. Si vous êtes mécontent de moi, est-ce trop présumer de votre affection de croire que vous me le diriez?

J'ai tous les jours davantage le sentiment intime de la présence de Dieu. Cette conviction qui pour vous doit être essentiellement consolante est plutôt effrayante pour moi, tout alors devient plus sérieux; l'on se demande avec plus de sévérité et d'effroi le compte de sa vie et l'on ne se croit plus à l'abri des remords seulement parce qu'il ne s'y trouve pas précisément des crimes; ce n'est plus autant ce que nous faisons, mais ce que nous ne faisons pas, qui porte le trouble dans l'âme. Trop facilement nous nous croyons innocents au tribunal de la conscience si nous n'avons pas des crimes réels ou des fautes graves à nous reprocher (et cependant l'éducation, quelque mauvaise qu'elle soit, suffit à nous préserver de l'un et de l'autre: lutter contre l'opinion du monde est un trop grand supplice et celui qui s'efforce de sourire avec mépris à ses jugements n'est jamais qu'un hypocrite). Il est réservé au petit nombre de faire un bien actif, il appartient à chaque individu de faire ce bien de tous les instants qui contribue au bonheur de ceux qui nous entourent et ce n'est jamais sans une douleur profonde

et réelle que chaque jour je me demande pour quoi j'ai vécu.

Cependant je me sens moins découragée que je ne l'étais autre fois. Ne serait-ce pas mal connaître Dieu que de croire qu'il ne veuille pas nous régénérer si nous (nous) tournons vers lui avec humilité et confiance? Et si la correction de notre vie doit être le gage du pardon, qui serait assez téméraire pour oser demander du bonheur dans ce monde? - Je m'effraie de celui que Dieu m'accorde dans ce moment; il me semble trop réel, trop pur pour être d'un long durée (sic). Je crois à l'efficacité de la prière; n'est-ce pas permis aussi de croire qu'une reconnaissance religieuse peut aussi conserver les bienfaits de Dieu? L'importance des opinions religieuses est à présent trop intimement gravée dans mon coeur pour que rien ne puisse à l'avenir les ébranler. J'y trouve du calme. Peut-être était-ce pour nous attirer vers elle que la Providence dans sa divine bonté a voulu que la Religion, qui ne semble avoir d'autre but que le bonheur dans une vie à venir, soit notre plus douce consolation dans celle-ci.

Coppet, 6 nov. 1809

J'ai le projet d'aller à Lausanne cette semaine. Je vous dis mille tendresses. Albertine vous écrira.

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