

**THE LETTERS OF VICTOR
HUGO: FROM
EXILE, AND AFTER
THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE**

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The Letters of Victor Hugo: From Exile, and After the Fall of the Empire by Victor Hugo & Paul Meurice

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VICTOR HUGO & PAUL MEURICE

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VICTOR HUGO

FROM EXILE, AND AFTER THE
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EDITED BY
PAUL MEURICE



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NOTE.

In this translation of the second volume of the Letters of Victor Hugo some letters of minor interest have been omitted, and a few notes have been given in addition to those supplied by the French editor.

THE LETTERS OF VICTOR HUGO.

I. LETTERS TO VARIOUS PERSONS. — JOURNEY ON
THE RHINE.

1836-1851.

I.

To Mlle. Louise Bertin, at *Les Roches*.

MONT SAINT-MICHEL, 27th June, 1836.

I AM writing to you, mademoiselle, from Mont Saint-Michel, which is really the most beautiful spot in the world, — next to Bièvre, of course. *Les Roches* is lovely and charming; a great advantage it possesses over the forbidding mass of dungeons, towers, and rocks which bears the name of Mont Saint-Michel.

It would not be easy to write from a more awe-inspiring place to a more delightful one. At this moment I am hemmed in by the sea which surrounds the mount. It must be horrible in winter, with its hurricanes, tempests, and shipwrecks. It is grand, all the same.

What a strange place Mont Saint-Michel is! Around, as far as the eye can reach, infinite space, the blue horizon of the sea, the green horizon of the land, clouds, air, liberty, birds in full flight, ships with all

nails set, and then all at once, on the top of an old wall above our heads, through a barred window, the pale face of a prisoner. I have never felt so strongly as here the cruel antithesis which man sometimes makes with nature.

You can have none of these sad thoughts. You are happy over there; happy with your excellent father, your kind relations; happy in the view of your beautiful valley from your window; happy in the prospect of your great success.

I shall be in Paris between the 10th and 15th of July, quite at your disposal, and ready for *Notre-Dame*,¹ a poor plaster statue of which I can see from the casement of my room, perched in a beautiful trefoil niche of the fifteenth century.

II.

To LOUIS DE MAYNARD, at Martinique.

24th May, 1837.

We are still expecting you. Your kind and charming letter told us you were soon returning; we were all looking forward to it, and you have not yet arrived!

We want you badly here; we want you for ourselves, because we love you, and for my part because your generous and loyal friendship was one of the real joys of my life; then we want you for your own sake, because here, I am sure, you would write us a fine book. We want you for the ideas which you would promote for art, which has so few followers like yourself; we want you because a noble, honest face like yours, erect

¹ *La Esmeralda*, for which Mlle. Bertin was composing the music.

amid so many drooping and sidelong glances, rests the eye and consoles the heart.

At any rate, I hope you are doing something over there. Make up for your absence by some fine work, your natural product. Instead of the great human stage which you had here, you have the grand spectacle of nature; instead of the strife of ideas, you have the placid harmony of things; if you have less of the world, you have more sunshine. As for me, I continue my task, waters much troubled, as you know, by the stones thrown into them; I work, I study, I have three plays in my head, — you shall see one some of these days, — and then occasionally I write poetry.

Our politics are still mean and petty, you remember; they have not improved since you left us. Small men working at a small idea, very little busy about nothing.

Altogether, there are times when I envy you, — you a poet exiled in a sunny land, an exile which Ovid would have loved, in that beautiful Martinique which you have described so admirably.

My fraternal love to you.

III.

TO A WORKINGMAN AND POET.

PARIS, 3d October, 1837.

Be proud of your title of workman. We are all workmen, God included, and in your case the brain works still more than the hands.

The generous class to which you belong has a great future in store for it, but it must give the fruit time to ripen. This class, so noble and so useful, should eschew what makes little and seek what makes great; it should