

Baron Jean-Baptiste Mosneron de Launay: *The Aerial Valley*

(1810)

Editor's Preface

The discovery by Monsieur de Montgolfier, the most extraordinary of the discoveries of the eighteenth century, has not had any useful result. The research of scientists and the expectation of the public have been equally disappointed; aerostatics, which ought to have procured enlightenment regarding the higher regions of the atmosphere, assistance to commerce and services to military art has only offered an astonishing spectacle, and the ascension of a balloon only seems appropriate henceforth to figure in fêtes, as a very singular, very curious but utterly sterile showpiece.

Such, at least, has been the general opinion of balloons for some time. The scientists, despairing of extracting veritable fruit from their endeavors, have renounced their use, and Monsieur Blanchard, parading his spectacle from one capital to another, enjoys his glory with regard to the public purse without competition.¹ In the depths of Gascony, however, living in the greatest obscurity, there is a skillful aeronaut who had found perhaps the only means of rendering his ascensions useful. Monsieur de Montagnac floated in a balloon over the Pyrenean chain, making a map of the mountains, sometimes stopping on summits inaccessible to Ramond, Humboldt and Saussure,² and made profound observations relative to geology, mineralogy and botany.

He studied the gradations of temperature of the atmosphere, relative to altitude, and had even recognized regular air currents and periodic monsoons. But that modest man and veritable scientist did not want to make the public party to his discoveries until he was perfectly certain of their reliability. Departing from Perpignan and heading toward Bayonne, he had only traveled over half the chain in the space of eight years, because he repeated the same observations several times and was often obliged to wait a long time for the light air current favorable to his direction.

When he had completed his excursions and Aerial studies over the Pyrenees, he planned to repeat them over the Alps; it was at the end of those difficult endeavors that the public was to collect their fruit. The work that would have resulted from them would doubtless have been epoch-making in the history of nineteenth-century discovery, but death took that estimable scientist by surprise in the little village of Saumède in the middle of the Pyrenees, where he had come down after a third ascension over Maladetta.

I was then on holiday in those mountains, and had made the acquaintance of Monsieur de Montagnac there. The conformity of our tastes for the same study, which is the most powerful as well as the most agreeable of bonds, had brought us together from our very first meeting. The extreme amiability of his society had tightened our friendship, and if the death of that man of genius is an irreparable loss for the sciences, it will be a subject of eternal regret for my heart. He bequeathed me all his papers, giving me the freedom to dispose of them as I thought appropriate, but he recommended to me particularly the account of his voyage to the Aerial Valley. That voyage continually came back to his memory; it was the object of his most tender affections. I am, therefore, merely acquitting a sacred debt in publishing this account. I have left out everything pertaining to mineralogy and botany, because the scientific endeavor of which those studies are a part will form the subject matter of a separate work, which I hope to publish after this one.

¹ The pioneering aeronaut Jean-Pierre Blanchard was killed in March 1809, so Mosneron's text was presumably written prior to that date.

² The references are to the Pyrenean explorers Louis Ramond de Carbonnières (1755-1827), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) and Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740-1799).

Relation of my voyage to the Aerial Valley

I had perceived in one of my recent ascensions a group of mountains arranged in a circle, in the middle of which I suspected the existence of a plain of considerable extent. Before rising up over that part of the Pyrenean chain, I wanted to know the name that had been given to the place, and whether it was inhabited. I therefore went to the foot of the mountains and sought enlightenment from the shepherds who came to establish themselves there in the summer with their flocks.

They told me that the interior of the enclosure was as deep as the mountains were high, that nobody had ever been able to penetrate it, because all around the exterior there was a perpendicular rampart, as smooth as ice, but that everyone knew that the enclosure was the dwelling of a company of sorcerers who, if they were not true devils, at least had a close relationship with Hell. It had been observed that every time that hail fell, a frost or some other baneful accident, some of those sorcerers were seen laughing uproariously on the ramparts of the enclosure, which made it evident that they had sent the scourge.

That was the only information that I could get out of those poor herdsmen. It would have been pointless to try to disabuse them: “Man is ice to verity, but fire to lies.”³ Those lines have a universal application, and it seems, given the interest that such fictions inspire in all classes of society, that they are necessary to the human mind; it often by invention alone that it can prove its thought, and the greater part of the human race would be reduced to the state of imbecility if truth were the only source from which he could extract his ideas.

I concluded from the opinion of my shepherds, shared by all the inhabitants of the region, that the interior of that group of mountains merited examination. On the tenth of July I took advantage of an almost absolute calm to rise up to their height. Floating at a height of several hundred toises⁴ above that basin, it was easy for me to see humans with the naked eye, but as soon as they saw me they fled and disappeared—which would have been quite sufficient, had I had any doubt in that regard, to persuade me that those people had no relationship with the infernal empire. However, when I descended to the ground after having opened the valve to let a part of the gas out of my balloon, I armed myself against any eventuality before emerging from my nacelle, with two pistols and my saber.

All the objects surrounding me presented the image of civilization; at my feet were cultivated fields planted with various species of grains; on the hillsides there were herds of various animals, bushes, followers and a garden. Toward the middle there was an aggregation of cabins aligned in a regular order. Amid that apparent population, however, there was the most profound solitude; even the pastors guarding the flocks had disappeared, and nothing remained in the fields under cultivation but a few agricultural implements that attested the presence of humans.

Following the path that led toward the cabins, I felt gripped by a violent anxiety. Who were the inhabitants of this place, unknown to the rest of the world? Brigands, perhaps, or murderers, who had only been able to find that refuge in order to hide from the law. What was going to become of me in the midst of them, alone, without help or protection? Those peaceful flocks, however, and those innocent crops announced mild mores. Agricultural peoples are sociable and good; only those bloodthirsty men who live by hunting and carnage are ferocious.

Meditating these various thoughts, I arrived in the village. All the doors were closed and I could not hear the slightest sound. Among the cabins I distinguished one that was larger and more ornate than the others. I thought that if there was any humanity in the place, it might be found preferentially in the home of the individual who seemed to have the most wealth, and consequently the most enlightenment. I therefore went to knock on that door, which, like all the others, was only closed by a simple wooden latch.

³ The quotation comes from Jean de La Fontaine’s fable “Le Statuaire et la statue de Jupiter” (tr. as “The Sculptor and the Statue of Jupiter”).

⁴ Prior to 1812, a toise was six feet; it was redefined at two meters when France adopted the metric system, but that was after the publication of the present text.

It opened, and I felt penetrated by confidence and veneration at the sight of a tall and handsome man wearing a long beard, who said to me, with an affectionate smile: "My brother, you have run a great danger, and we were very fearful ourselves of that huge monstrous animal that held you in its claws. It is doubtless dead, since you are alive."

After these words, and without waiting for a reply, the patriarch took me by the arm and drew me outside the house. His wife and two children followed him.

When he was to the steps in front of his dwelling he sounded a horn, which was suspended by his side, three times. At that signal, all the inhabitants emerged from their cabins and arranged themselves in a semicircle around the perron. Meanwhile, they often turned their heads to look in the direction of the balloon, showing evident signs of fear.

"Speak now," said my guide, who appeared to be the chief of the people. "Tell your friends whether you are quite certain of having killed the monster that carried you here, and whether there is anything more to fear from it."

I tried to make them understand that my balloon was only an insensible machine, absolutely incapable of doing any harm to anyone, but, perceiving that a great deal of anxiety still remained, I implored them to follow me in order to reassure themselves with their own eyes.

When I had returned to the machine and I had touched it and had the boldest among them touch it on all sides, they passed from an excess of fear to an excess of license. They all strove competitively to get inside in order to trample it. I hastened to prevent the consequences of such bravado, by making the chief understand how important it was to me that the machine should not be damaged.

Then he described a great circle around it, at a distance of three paces, and forbade everyone to step over it, instructing the mothers to keep watch on their children.

When all subject of fear and disquiet had disappeared on either side, I devoted myself to an examination of my new hosts. All the men seemed to resemble Apollo and all the women Venus, by virtue of their beautiful form and noble stature; but the bounty painted on the faces of the former replaced the pride of the serpent-vanquishing god, and all the features of the latter expressed innocence and candor, instead of the cunning and coquetry of the goddess who was the lover of Mars.

That external beauty, so general among the two sexes, had to have a common cause, and the aftermath of my observations convinced me that it was principally the result of internal perfection. Others have remarked, as I have, that good families distinguished by a long filiation of hereditary virtues are mostly characterized by a beautiful face, and at the very least by a benevolent face. If there are exceptions to the rule, they only relate to a few individuals, and not to the races that conserve, so long as the marked influence of the moral over the physical, the harmony between the soul and the body, does not degenerate.

The population I had before me was redolent of something ancient and patriarchal. I seemed to be looking at the first descendants of Adam grouped around their chief, before the fall, before Cain had troubled the innocence and peace of the earth.

They only comprise a single family; they call one another by the affectionate names of "brother" and "sister," as in the earliest times. The chief has the authority of virtue over them, which, only deployed for the happiness of the people who are submissive to it, draws so much strength from the love that it inspires. He is, in consequence, their common father; all his decisions are sacred laws, because he never wants anything except to make them happy.

The power of the chief is sanctioned by God himself. He is His representative on earth; it is in the name of the Supreme Being that he announces his decisions. Thus, it is from God himself that all laws emanate; He is present in all thoughts and all actions. In a word, it is theocratic government, but very different from that of Moses, for it commands neither the sacrifice of animals nor the massacre of humans, and is as gentle as the other was terrible.

One thing even more astonishing than the purity of morals in that corner of the Pyrenees is the education: the accuracy of intelligence and the correction of the language common to all the inhabitants. What an incredible phenomenon! In the middle of a country that seems to be three centuries behind the civilization of the rest of France, where men who are still savage only speak a coarse patois limited, like

their ideas, solely to the expression of physical needs;⁵ in the most rustic region of the country, which one would have thought on seeing its enclosure to be only appropriate to serve as a refuge for eagles and bears, people exist who are mild, virtuous and amiable, to an extent that none similar is any longer found on earth.

In order to form an idea of them it is necessary to have recourse to what is most marvelous in history and fable. Imagine a select society from the beautiful century of Louis XIV, having escaped the contagion of the following century, in which mature reason has replaced the politeness of the lips with that of the heart, and flashes of wit with the ever-even light of common sense. Such is the people of the Aerial Valley.

Although it is difficult to avoid a hint of enthusiasm in making the description of such a people, it is nevertheless faithfully traced from nature. The imagination might well seek to embellish a few strokes of a painting when one copies it, but none have been added here that are not in the model. I cannot be accused of exaggeration when I am restricting myself to the literal expression of what I have seen, and that is what I am doing, religiously, and I will consent to the application of *mentiris impudentissime*, if my colleagues, the aeronauts who make the same voyage, do not confirm this account.

After what I have just said about the degree of civilization of that people, it is not a great marvel that every individual knows how to read and write. If I were writing a romance I would add that there is a paper factory in the country, a printing press and authors, but, as a faithful voice of the simple truth, I will say that for want of paper, of which they make no use, given that they do not manufacture it, they make use of parchment to write, and that the entire library of the country is composed of a hundred volumes printed in Paris between a hundred and thirty and a hundred and fifty years ago, that none of those of the eighteenth century⁶ are known, and that the only new books are manuscripts that have been composed in the place.

Those books are a political and moral catechism of which there are as many examples as inhabitants over the age of twenty, for everyone is obliged to make a copy as soon as he has reached the age of reason. That catechism contains rules of conduct for everyone, which, not being inspired by nature, relate to the conventions and proprieties of the society. Thus the reciprocal obligations between fathers and

⁵ Author's note: "The inhabitants of the Pyrenees, very different from the Swiss, the Auvergnats and the Savoyards, are constantly attached to their ingrate mountains. One does not see them, like other mountain folk, emigrating at certain times of year to procure a more abundant substance. Accustomed to a meager and hard life, they prefer the deprivation of poverty to the ease that they might obtain by excursions outside their territory. Whence comes that character peculiar to the inhabitant of the Pyrenees? It seems to me that it is the result of its isolation. For eight months of the year, the greater part of the mountains is devoid of communication with Spain for want of practicable roads, and with no other relation to France than that which its mineral waters can procure, so that the mountain folk are almost perpetually separated from the whole world. The means of putting the region in society with France would be to give birth to a branch of commerce, and I think a rich one might be found in the establishment of a few factories. Running water falls everywhere, and several mountainsides contain mines of different metals that were once exploited successfully. Recently, the Germans have established at Bagnères de Luchon a cobalt factory that might have become very precious; it was directed by the Comte de Beust, now ambassador to a German court. The Revolution wrecked that establishment, but it would be all the easier to reactivate it because some of the necessary buildings still survive. Communication with Spain would be practical all year round if a few of the gaps in the mountains that serve as limits to France, which are usually closed by snow and ice for eight or nine months, were flattened. The construction of a few roads in that part of our frontier might be obtained without it costing the public treasury a sou. It would only require the income from the mountain forests and mineral water to be applied to it for a few years, and the taxation of the privilege of gaming casinos that are established during the watering season, if the Government sees fit to let those sources of corruption and death subsist near the salutary springs of the Pyrenees. The use that would be made of them would then serve as an antidote to the poison of gaming." The cobalt mine to which the author refers was established in 1784.

⁶ Author's note: "It is quite probable that after the threat issued by the chief of the colony, which will be found at the end of this account, no other aeronaut will expose himself to the risk of a voyage into the Aerial Valley."

children are not included therein, because they emanate from sentiment and it would be to misunderstand sentiment to make it a duty.

Religion furnishes the text of the first and principal chapter of that catechism. That religion is, as I have said, essentially theocratic. The chief, being the representative of God, combines the two powers, temporal and spiritual. He it is who, every morning, intones the canticle of praise and homage to the Supreme Being, which all the people repeat after him. He then prescribes the different tasks to which each one must devote himself in the course of the day.

In every place that a man might be, and whatever his thoughts and actions might be, he is continually under the gaze of God. The chief may, when he pleases, sound the horn that he alone has the right to bear; at that signal, all the people, without exception, quit their tasks and addressing their homage to Heaven in common. That homage is renewed before the commencement and after the end of every meal, and after the end of the working day. Sundays, the annual feasts instituted for different causes, birth, marriages and funerals are all celebrated by hymns, religious songs analogous to the subject of the ceremony.

That is the only worship, the only external action of the religion of the people; and I would add that none more pious has ever appeared on earth. The Roman Church has no saints purer, and their virtues seem, like their abode, to be situated between heaven and earth placing them while still alive at the rank of the angels.

Such is the summary of the first chapter.

The second chapter deals with the authority of the chief, the obedience of the people and the reciprocal obligations of each to the other.

In the other chapters, the mode of elevation to the rank of chief is fixed. It is hereditary for men alone, and by order of primogeniture.

There is a council of elders, which assembles twice a week, and without which the chief can order nothing new or deviate from the habitual rule. The same council is responsible for making an examination of the life of an individual who has just died and of drafting, in conformity with that examination, the inscription that is engraved on his tomb. It is the council that, conjointly with the chief, fixes every year the extent of the lands to be cultivated and the kinds of grain to be sown there, for there is no distinct property; everything is common, with the sole exception of persons, lodgings and clothing.

But the people are not the only ones whose conduct is regulated; a strict law also applied to that of the chief. Since the archangel Satan abused his power, everything demonstrates that there is no creature, however perfect it might be, that is not able to exceed the measure of its power, if that power does not have limits and overseers who can make them respected. All instances of usurpation of authority and despotism are foreseen in the catechism, and reprehension thereof is confided to the council of elders.

Furthermore, one can say of that people, with much more reason than Tacitus said of the Germans, that mores take the place of laws there. The isolation of that fortunate refuge of virtue guarantees it against the contagion of vice, and if a few faults have slipped in there inseparable from humanity, slight corrections suffice to repress them.⁷

⁷ Author's note: "I doubt that there has ever been a time when humans existed in isolation, wandering the earth without family, domicile of fatherland. A celebrated Writer has made the history or romance of the human species in the first period of its creation; he found many virtues therein that were really only the absence of vices, and said: 'Man is good, only men are wicked,' As no monument exists that establishes that humans such as he conceives them ever existed, one can neither affirm nor deny that presumed bounty; but that men are wicked, that passions, vices and crimes are born in the bosom of societies, nothing is more certain; and I also think, like J.-J., that those passions and vices become more energetic as societies become more civilized. An admirable problem, therefore, would be to find a social organization such that humans enjoy the advantages of a perfectly civilized society without experiencing its inconveniences. Now, it is that problem that I find completely resolved in *The Aerial Valley*. The great passion that kills the societies of the world, ambition, is not found in that one. All the individuals are perfectly equal and have no motive to aspire to any distinction, for there are no riches, no honors and no powers to distribute. All are equal and always will be, whatever the difference in personal merit might be; the governor is the only one who enjoys any authority. Consequent to J.'J.'s principle, all men here, like his man *par excellence*, are good and excellent. [Note by M. de Montagnac]" "J.-J." is Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

I am limiting myself to this summary because I have brought away a copy of that singular catechism, which I shall have printed separately in its entirety, if that is desired.⁸

The other book, also in manuscript, contains the annals of that people from the origin of its establishment to the present day. That one is not as widespread as the first; the chief and the members of the council are the only ones who have a copy of it. They were kind enough to give me one, which I shall transcribe after this relation.⁹

I shall resume the description of my new discovery.

That canton of the Pyrenees was once known by the name of the Valley of Mambre; it is now the Aerial Valley. The population that inhabits it has almost doubled in the hundred and thirty years since it settled there and has been living there entirely unknown to the rest of the world. Men wear full length beards; their hair, similarly long, is gathered and attached behind. Their clothing consists of a straw bonnet or hat, gaiters, culottes and a waistcoat, and in winter an overcoat. Those garments are in wool woven in the valley. The clothing of women consists of a skirt, a corset and a mantilla in winter. Their long hair is plaited into braids beneath a straw hat similar to that of the men. The shoes of both sexes are rope sandals like those worn on all high mountains.

They have two meals a day, one at eleven o'clock in the morning and the other at seven o'clock in the evening. For aliments they have excellent bread, very well baked, trout, eggs, vegetables and meat only twice a week, but their favorite food, of which they make their principal nourishment, is the dairy produce that is so delicious in the mountains. Their beverage of choice is water, or a small beer that they succeed in making very good. Raspberries and strawberries, so perfumed in the Pyrenees, grow abundantly in the valley, but our other fruits do not do as well there, including the grape, which I only saw in small quantity, either because they were unable to or did not want to multiply the production of vines sufficiently to make wine their habitual beverage.

They take their meals together, in groups of about a dozen, without distinction between relatives and others. A similar confusion was commonplace among the Spartans in their public tables, but the objective was not the same. Lycurgus wanted by that means to weaken the love of fathers for their children and children for their fathers, in order to harden the hearts of both and render them impassive, and consequently more appropriate to the harsh *métier* of war. The legislator of the Aerial Valley proposed, on the contrary, to extend to the whole population the attachment of family members to one another, in such a fashion as really to make a single great family; and, if one judges by appearances, he has succeeded perfectly, for it seemed to me that all the inhabitants were brothers and sisters in sentiment as they were by name.

All those mountain folk appeared to me to combine with their beautiful forms a healthy and robust constitution. I saw several octogenarians in a condition to support the fatigues of agriculture every day. The only malady that I judged liable to make considerable ravages in the new colony is smallpox. The majority of faces were scarred by it, and I learned that there had been periods of malignity when the scourge had harvested a quarter of the population.

I then informed the governor about the recent discovery of vaccine;¹⁰ I explained the numerous advantages to him, and as I always carried fresh vaccine with me, I offered to employ it on a few children of the colony, informing them at the same time of the means of multiplying the remedy and extending it to all the young. I tried in vain, however, to persuade him of the bounty of that preservative; I would not

⁸ Author's note: "That work would certainly be very curious to know, but Monsieur de Montagnac must be mistaken, for it was not found among his papers. [Note by the Editor]"

⁹ Author's note: "These annals are printed here in the order that Monsieur de Montagnac designed, but only in fragments. A few notes will explain why the work has not been printed in its entirety. I have divided it into chapters in order to render the reading easier. [Note by the Editor]"

¹⁰ The smallpox vaccine was developed by Edward Jenner in 1798; the discovery was publicized throughout Europe by 1800 but remained controversial for some years thereafter.

have been able obtain permission to make any application of it if several fathers who had lost some of their children to smallpox, still fearing for those that remained, had not strongly supported my request.

I am far from criticizing the obstinacy of the governor in rejecting the vaccine, when I think about the long difficulties that inoculation experienced in becoming established in Europe. The first impulse of nature is to reject a certain evil, whatever hope there might be that the evil might procure good. Only experience can educate in that regard, but it requires a thousand facts to destroy an accredited prejudice. The remedy that I introduced will soon become known; its good effects will be too evident not to ensure its triumph, and I enjoy in advance the deep satisfaction of having extirpated the principal scourge of that beautiful abode.

Although my curiosity was very pressing, and I asked a host of questions, the good mountain folk did not appear importuned; they replied with a great deal of mildness and clarity—but to my great astonishment, that curiosity was not reciprocal. Not only, contrary to my expectation, were they quite insouciant regarding the country from which I came, but they even avoided talking about it.

I attributed that indifference to the inferior world, which sometimes went as far as aversion, to the memory of the misfortunes that their ancestors had suffered. There were still several individuals in the Aerial Valley whose fathers had lived in that world. They had painted it in colors so black that they had made it into a kind of Hell. Such was the tradition of the Valley, which will become even stronger as it grows old, with the result that, in a century or two, the entire world will be inhabited, according to them, but nothing but devils. The Valley will be the sole refuge preserved from the infernal flames, where a few elect can live peacefully while awaiting their passage to the immortal life of the celestial empire.

All the intellectual faculties, raised to the high degree of elevation that I observed among the people, however, supposed a great depth of curiosity, for science can only be born of a desire to know; but what would have been difficult for me to define is that the principal object of the curiosity of the Valley's inhabitants was the knowledge of the stars. Indifferent to everything that was happening on earth, they were avid to read what happens in the sky; they knew its map quite well; they distinguished the planets; they followed their movements; they had calculated with the greatest precision the apparent revolution of the sun, and their year corresponded exactly with ours.

The same study was common to those ancient nomadic people, such as the Chaldeans, who, living in peace with the entire earth, only sought to make conquests in the vast field of the stars.

One can also remark that all the great astronomers have had the same peace and quietude: Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and our Lalande. The latter, in spite of his opinion of creation, surely very immoral, was the best of men.

The telescope that they used for observation was very imperfect. Since the time of its construction optics had made great progress. I offered them an excellent telescope that I carried with me on all my Aerial voyages. They accepted it with great pleasure; they were amazed by the new astronomical discoveries to which I introduced them.

They were also occupied with the study of agriculture, and the part of botany that has for its object the knowledge of plants salutary in different maladies. That branch of medical knowledge, the only one that nature has indicated to the animals, and which suffices for them to ward off or cure their ills, also suffices for those people, who live a simple and frugal life exempt from any species of passion, only subject to maladies common to all beings that receive existence, and the seed of death therewith.

Only the arts might have been capable of reconciling the inhabitants of the Aerial Valley with the earth. The kinds of art that had been transmitted to them by their ancestors were mostly as in the time of their invention. A few others had been discovered since. The improvement of the former and the invention of others excited their admiration.

They showed me the watches of the founders of the colony, which had stopped a hundred and forty years ago,¹¹ entirely broken down and without movement, and asked me whether we now had anything

¹¹ We subsequently learn that the valley was settled after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, so this figure of 140 years is clearly mistaken. The chronology of the story contains several other significant anomalies.

better. By way of reply I showed them the two that I carried; one of them was a Berthoud marine watch, the other a Breguet, a repeater indicating the day of the month, fitted with a second hand, etc.¹²

The governor could not contain his joy at the sight of those precious effects; he immediately took them from my hands and suspended them in his room. He also appropriated my barometer, my thermometer, my compass and a few other instruments useful to my voyages. In acting thus he was only following the received custom of the Aerial Valley, where everything, in general, is common and no distinct property is recognized. However, my gaze, fixed with astonishment on his, recalled to his mind that our customs were very different from his; then he wanted to return everything to me, a little confused by his action, but I hastened to restore his tranquility by making him a present of them.

The time for the evening meal having arrived, I sat down at table with the governor, his family and a few inhabitants of the Valley, who were all invited successively in their turn, unless some fault excluded them for a time from the chief's table—and that punishment was the most sensible that could be inflicted.

Fish, vegetables, dairy products and strawberries composed the supper. The dishes and other utensils of that kind were made of a clay very convenient for that usage, found in a gorge in one of the mountains. The beverage was a rather agreeable small beer. I had a few liqueurs in my nacelle but I carefully refrained from offering them; that is the sole wealth of our world that would have been a misfortune for that one. If their reason would not have been troubled by it for the moment, the privation of that tender beverage would at least have prepared for them a future of impotent regrets.

Some time after the end of the supper, the air was filled with the most beautiful concert that I had ever heard in my life. It was the evening canticle, sung in chorus by all the inhabitants gathered together. A celestial modulation married the voices of the mountain men, naturally strong and harmonious, with the soft and fresh voices of their wives. An accident augmented the solemnity of the religious song even further; the evening had been stormy and the thunder rumbling in the distance came closer by degrees; it seemed to be the voice of the Divinity, applauding the homage of His beloved children.

Nothing disposes one better to peaceful sleep than beautiful music. Before separating in order to enjoy it, we entertained ourselves for some time with the majestic storm that had provided such a beautiful bass to their concert. I told them that, thanks to new discoveries, that meteor was no longer redoubtable on our earth. They heard with a great deal of interest the history of the celebrated Franklin's lightning conductors. That instrument would have been absolutely useless in their Valley, for it was unknown for lightning ever to cause the slightest damage there. All the phenomena of electricity, or galvanism, in general, and of physics, that I recounted to them captured their imagination and admiration no less vividly.

¹² Although both names are misrendered in the original the intended references are obviously to the watchmakers Ferdinand Berthoud (1727-1807) and Abraham-Louis Breguet (1747-1823).