

On the 200th anniversary of Rousseau's death : 28th June 1712 - 2nd July 1778

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On the 200th anniversary of Rousseau's death 28th June 1712–2nd July 1778

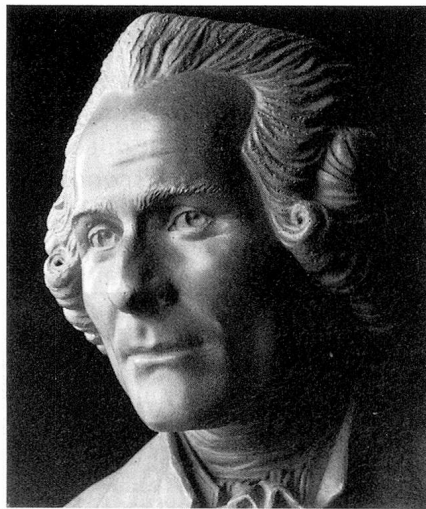
Universities and scientific associations in France (Paris and Nice), England (Oxford and Cambridge) and in Switzerland (Geneva and Neuchâtel) commemorated the 200th anniversary of the death of two great writers of the 18th century, Voltaire and Rousseau, by organizing numerous events, conferences, discussions, exhibitions, excursions to places lived in or visited by the two authors. Specialists from many different countries present the findings of their defined studies on certain themes to the public. This enables us to arrive at a truer evaluation of the range of thought of the two philosophers and to appraise the effect on our society confused by the miracles achieved by science and technology and the perspectives which arise from it.

But let us leave this aside. Our task is to recall the associations which tied our small country to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and to state our reasons why we honour his memory on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of his death on 2nd July 1778 at Ermenonville where he had been enjoying the hospitality of the Marquess of Girardin for a few months only.

The Citizen of Geneva lived among us. It was with us, at Môtiers in the Val-de-Travers that he found refuge during 3 years and 2 months, from 10th July 1762 to 9th September 1765. His stay there left lively memories.

It is true that it was not from choice that he became our guest, but he was compelled by events. In the course of May 1762, two works from his pen were published in Paris «Le Contrat social» and «Emile ou Traité d'éducation». The two books caused a scandal. The former amongst the people at court and the bourgeoisie, the

latter aroused indignation amongst the clergy and the devout, specially by the confessions of faith of the Savoyard vicar, part of the book «Emile». The Paris Court of Justice met on 9th June and, after the charges had been preferred by the Royal Prosecutor, the said books were condemned to be torn and burnt in the public square, and the author's arrest was ordered. The consternation amongst Jean-Jacques's friends was great. The Marshal of Luxembourg showed himself most alarmed and begged Rousseau to go into hiding or to escape. Out of consideration towards his protectress, the Marchioness of Créqui, he decided not to give himself up. After he had sorted part of his papers in great haste, he started out in the afternoon of 9th June, intending to go to Switzerland, the «Country of Liberty». It was with these words that he greeted our land on crossing the frontier. He had an idea that his native town would show no greater spiritual tolerance than the Paris Court of Justice. For this reason he abandoned his first idea to go to Geneva and he set out in the direction of Yverdon where he knew his old friend Daniel Roguin



would extend a warm welcome to him. There he would be able to get to know the country and the surroundings in peace and quiet, and in that he would find the necessary tranquility. He had forgotten that the small town was a Bernese bailiwick. And once again he had to suffer a fresh blow. Since the Government of Yverdon was even more intransigent than Paris and Geneva and not willing to support the introduction and the sale of the works in question, it prohibited the author's stay in the region, and that was done in the harshest terms.

Thanks to a happy coincidence, the niece of Daniel Roguin, Mrs Boy de la Tour from Lyons, was on a visit to her uncle. Immediately, she offered Jean-Jacques her little house she owned at Môtiers in the Val-de-Travers. This was most embarrassing to him. But the Geneva writer had no option. He accepted the offer immediately and left his friends at Yverdon on 9th July, in order to proceed on foot to Môtiers, accompanied by Colonel Augustin Roguin. He arrived there on 10th July, according to an entry in a thick note-book which has been preserved by the Municipal Library of Neuchâtel.

«Môtier-Travers»

«Begin my board and lodging at Mr Girardier's on 10th July 1762 at 6 *écus blancs* a month and at the wig-maker's on the same day at 2 new *écus* a year.»

In order not to have to face again the same experience as he had had with the gentlemen of Berne, he made haste to settle matters with the authorities. On the day of arrival, he solicited the protection of Governor George Keith, known as «Mylord Maréchal». George Keith, Count and Marshal of

Scotland, born 1686, entered the service of Frederick II of Prussia and became his Ambassador in Paris (1751–54) and Governor of Neuchâtel which was at that time in Prussian hands (1754–68).

«Vitam impendere vero»

«Mylord,

As a poor author exiled from his homeland, France, and from the Canton of Berne, because I said what I found right and proper, I have come here to beg for asylum in the states of the King ... Sir, I have deserved no mercy from you, nor do I ask for it. But since I am oppressed it would be noble of you and His Majesty not to refuse me warmth, bread and water of which one wants to deprive me everywhere. I believe I had to declare you my refuge and my name too well known through my misfortunes. You may seal my fate – I am in your hands. But if you, too, order me to leave, I could not obey you for I would not know where to go to. Accept, Mylord, the expression of my deepest respect.»

The Governor replied with benevolence already on the 12th.

Colombier, this 12th of July 1762

«Sir,

I am writing to the King in order to get his orders regarding your asylum in this country. In the meantime, go on living without worry. I should be happy to give you pleasure and to render service, for I admire your spirit and respect your attitude.

Marshal of Scotland»

«Should you like to come here, it would give me great pleasure. I would send a horse or sedan-chair for you, and you could stay with us unhesitatingly as long as you would wish to. You would find in me an old man bordering on a recluse, possibly spoiled somewhat by dealings with the police-like barbarians.»

Jean-Jacques who wanted to live

in peace with the pastor and his parishioners, approached him to express his wish to take part in Holy Communion. While he was taking these steps, he engaged in lively correspondence with his many friends. On 20th August, he had the joy of seeing his friend Thérèse Levasseur again. She was born in 1721 in Orleans, was his companion for many years and later became his wife.

Previously, Mrs de la Tour had thought it necessary to have some more seating accommodation for the Citizen, and had sent two arm-chairs and 12 straw-seated chairs. So now Jean-Jacques was established in the Val-de-Travers. It seemed that his stay there would progress under most favourable auspices. His affairs were in order with the civil and religious authorities. In Mylord Maréchal he had found a well-disposed old protector, a wise man of great experience in life and an original to whom he felt attracted, and he sensed that this was mutual. He already found a friend in the person of Mrs Marianne-Françoise De Luze-Warney, a relative of the Roguins, whom he had probably met at Yverdon. That charming woman was married to Jean-Jacques De Luze, manufacturer of painted materials, who showed himself as devoted a friend as his wife. Rousseau met notable personalities of the place, the lord of the manor, Frédéric Martinet, and the Attorney General, Charles-Guillaume d'Ivernois. His simple manner gained him the respect and sympathy of the inhabitants of Môtiers, of whom some let him know that they had read la «Nouvelle Héloïse». Thus reassured, the Citizen decided to wear the Armenian outfit he had had made in Paris some time before leaving France. (Armenian costume: long tunic, belt, fur hat). This novel attire was accepted by the population without comment or gibe.

It seemed that all things seemed nicely settled in the best of worlds, if only the sensitive Citizen had not had to suffer the attacks by his enemies or the unjust, even spiteful criticisms. He felt obliged to take up his pen once again, quelled with the venerable clergy and was defended by his friends with too much passion and clumsiness. He felt he was forced to leave our country in order to escape so-called persecution.

Claire Rosselet

Former Director of the Municipal Library of Neuchâtel

Book reviews (Continuation)

«Volkstümliche Handwerke in der Schweiz» – «Arts et traditions populaires en Suisse»

Text and pictures of this book enable the reader to acquaint himself with popular art and craft traditions in Switzerland. The book is composed of seven different chapters: Diversity of Switzerland, rustic painting, wood carving, glass and pottery, traditions and popular festivals, hand-made toys and national costumes, wrought iron and metal work and textiles. These various parts are followed by the authors' original ingenious ideas about manual work which can be carried out by the whole family. 144 pages illustrated by coloured photos. Obtainable in German or French. Format 20x27 cm. Price SFr. 29.90. Published by Ringier & Co AG, Book Department, 4801 Zofingen, Switzerland.

«Suisse»

This book on Switzerland by Louis-Albert Zbinden makes easy and entertaining reading. It gives an objective and realistic picture of the country. The author starts from the origins of Switzerland and then talks in the subsequent chapters of its history, its people and its customs; its economy without forgetting its culture and the varied and interesting aspects of its tourism. 190 pages with black-and-white photos. French text. Format 12x18 cm. Series: Petite Planète. Publishing company du Seuil, 27, rue Jacob, Paris 6.

Please note: all books mentioned here may be ordered through the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad.