

A photograph of a couple holding hands in a field at sunset. The woman is on the left, wearing a white top and blue jeans. The man is on the right, wearing a white shirt. The background shows a field with trees and a bright sunset sky. The text is overlaid on the image in black rounded rectangles.

***BERNARDIN
DE SAINT-PIERRE***

***PAUL AND
VIRGINIA FROM
THE FRENCH
OF J.B.H.
DE SAINT
PIERRE***

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre

Paul and Virginia from the French of J.B.H. de Saint Pierre

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The following translation of "Paul and Virginia," was written at Paris, amidst the horrors of Robespierre's tyranny. During that gloomy epocha it was difficult to find occupations which might cheat the days of calamity of their weary length. Society had vanished; and amidst the minute vexations of Jacobinical despotism, which, while it murdered in *mass*, persecuted in detail, the resources of writing, and even reading, were encompassed with danger. The researches of domiciliary visits had already compelled me to commit to the flames a manuscript volume, where I had traced the political scenes of which I had been a witness, with the colouring of their first impressions on my mind, with those fresh tints that fade from recollection; and since my pen, accustomed to follow the impulse of my feelings, could only have drawn, at that fatal period, those images of desolation and despair which haunted my imagination, and dwelt upon my heart, writing was forbidden employment. Even reading had its perils; for books had sometimes

aristocratical insignia, and sometimes counter revolutionary allusions; and when the administrators of police happened to think the writer a conspirator, they punished the reader as his accomplice.

In this situation I gave myself the task of employing a few hours every day in translating the charming little novel of Bernardin St. Pierre, entitled "Paul and Virginia;" and I found the most soothing relief in wandering from my own gloomy reflections to those enchanting scenes of the Mauritius, which he has so admirably described. I also composed a few Sonnets adapted to the peculiar productions of that part of the globe, which are interspersed in the work. Some, indeed, are lost, as well as a part of the translation, which I have since supplied, having been sent to the Municipality of Paris, in order to be examined as English papers; where they still remain, mingled with revolutionary placards, motions, and harangues; and are not likely to be restored to my possession.

With respect to the translation, I can only hope to deserve the humble merit of not having deformed the beauty of the original. I have, indeed, taken one liberty with my author, which it is fit I should acknowledge, that of omitting several pages of general observations, which, however excellent in themselves, would be passed over with impatience by the English reader, when they interrupt the pathetic narrative. In this respect, the two nations seem to change characters; and while the serious and reflecting Englishman requires, in novel writing, as well as on the theatre, a rapid succession of incidents, much bustle and stage effect, without suffering the author to appear himself,

and stop the progress of the story; the gay and restless Frenchman listens attentively to long philosophical reflections, while the catastrophe of the drama hangs in suspense.

My last poetical productions (the Sonnets which are interspersed in this work) may perhaps be found even more imperfect than my earlier compositions; since, after a long exile from England, I can scarcely flatter myself that my ear is become more attuned to the harmony of a language, with the sounds of which it is seldom gladdened; or that my poetical taste is improved by living in a country where arts have given place to arms. But the public will, perhaps, receive with indulgence a work written under such peculiar circumstances; not composed in the calm of literary leisure, or in pursuit of literary fame, but amidst the turbulence of the most cruel sensations, and in order to escape awhile from overwhelming misery.

H.M.W.

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On the eastern coast of the mountain which rises above Port Louis in the Mauritius, upon a piece of land bearing the

marks of former cultivation, are seen the ruins of two small cottages. Those ruins are situated near the centre of a valley, formed by immense rocks, and which opens only towards the north. On the left rises the mountain, called the Height of Discovery, from whence the eye marks the distant sail when it first touches the verge of the horizon, and whence the signal is given when a vessel approaches the island. At the foot of this mountain stands the town of Port Louis. On the right is formed the road, which stretches from Port Louis to the Shaddock Grove, where the church, bearing that name, lifts its head, surrounded by its avenues of bamboo, in the midst of a spacious plain; and the prospect terminates in a forest extending to the furthest bounds of the island. The front view presents the bay, denominated the Bay of the Tomb: a little on the right is seen the Cape of Misfortune; and beyond rolls the expanded ocean, on the surface of which appear a few uninhabited islands, and, among others, the Point of Endeavour, which resembles a bastion built upon the flood.

At the entrance of the valley which presents those various objects, the echoes of the mountain incessantly repeat the hollow murmurs of the winds that shake the neighbouring forests, and the tumultuous dashing of the waves which break at a distance upon the cliffs. But near the ruined cottages all is calm and still, and the only objects which there meet the eye are rude steep rocks, that rise like a surrounding rampart. Large clumps of trees grow at their base, on their rifted sides, and even on their majestic tops, where the clouds seem to repose. The showers, which their bold points attract, often paint the vivid colours of the

rainbow on their green and brown declivities, and swell the sources of the little river which flows at their feet, called the river of Fan-Palms.

Within this enclosure reigns the most profound silence. The waters, the air, all the elements are at peace. Scarcely does the echo repeat the whispers of the palm-trees spreading their broad leaves, the long points of which are gently balanced by the winds. A soft light illuminates the bottom of this deep valley, on which the sun only shines at noon. But even at break of day the rays of light are thrown on the surrounding rocks; and the sharp peaks, rising above the shadows of the mountain, appear like tints of gold and purple gleaming upon the azure sky.

To this scene I loved to resort, where I might enjoy at once the richness of the extensive landscape, and the charm of uninterrupted solitude. One day, when I was seated at the foot of the cottages, and contemplating their ruins, a man, advanced in years, passed near the spot. He was dressed in the ancient garb of the island, his feet were bare, and he leaned upon a staff of ebony: his hair was white, and the expression of his countenance was dignified and interesting. I bowed to him with respect; he returned the salutation: and, after looking at me with some earnestness, came and placed himself upon the hillock where I was seated. Encouraged by this mark of confidence, I thus addressed him:—

"Father, can you tell me to whom those cottages once belonged?" "My son," replied the old man, "those heaps of rubbish, and that unfilled land, were, twenty years ago, the property of two families, who then found happiness in this

solitude. Their history is affecting; but what European, pursuing his way to the Indies, will pause one moment to interest himself in the fate of a few obscure individuals? What European can picture happiness to his imagination amidst poverty and neglect? The curiosity of mankind is only attracted by the history of the great; and yet from that knowledge little use can be derived." "Father," I rejoined, "from your manners and your observations, I perceive that you have acquired much experience of human life. If you have leisure, relate to me, I beseech you, the history of the ancient inhabitants of this desert; and be assured, that even the men who are most perverted by the prejudices of the world, find a soothing pleasure in contemplating that happiness which belongs to simplicity and virtue." The old man, after a short silence, during which he leaned his face upon his hands, as if he were trying to recal the images of the past, thus began his narration:—

"Monsieur de la Tour, a young man who was a native of Normandy, after having in vain solicited a commission in the French Army, or some support from his own family, at length determined to seek his fortune in this island, where he arrived in 1726. He brought hither a young woman whom he loved tenderly, and by whom he was no less tenderly beloved. She belonged to a rich and ancient family of the same province; but he had married her without fortune, and in opposition to the will of her relations, who refused their consent, because he was found guilty of being descended from parents who had no claims to nobility. Monsieur de la Tour, leaving his wife at Port Louis, embarked for Madagascar, in order to purchase a few slaves to assist him

in forming a plantation in this island. He landed at that unhealthy season which commences about the middle of October: and soon after his arrival died of the pestilential fever, which prevails in that country six months of the year, and which will forever baffle the attempts of the European nations to form establishments on that fatal soil. His effects were seized upon by the rapacity of strangers; and his wife, who was pregnant, found herself a widow in a country where she had neither credit nor recommendation, and no earthly possession, or rather support, save one negro woman. Too delicate to solicit protection or relief from any other man after the death of him whom alone she loved, misfortune armed her with courage, and she resolved to cultivate with her slave a little spot of ground, and procure for herself the means of subsistence. In an island almost a desert, and where the ground was left to the choice of the settler, she avoided those spots which were most fertile and most favourable to commerce; and seeking some nook of the mountain, some secret asylum, where she might live solitary and unknown, she bent her way from the town towards those rocks, where she wished to shelter herself as in a nest. All suffering creatures, from a sort of common instinct, fly for refuge amidst their pains to haunts the most wild and desolate; as if rocks could form a rampart against misfortune; as if the calm of nature could hush the tumults of the soul. That Providence, which lends its support when we ask but the supply of our necessary wants, had a blessing in reserve for Madame de la Tour, which neither riches nor greatness can purchase; this blessing was a friend.

"The spot to which Madame de la Tour fled had already been inhabited a year by a young woman of a lively, good natured, and affectionate disposition. Margaret (for that was her name) was born in Britany, of a family of peasants, by whom she was cherished and beloved, and with whom she might have passed life in simple rustic happiness, if, misled by the weakness of a tender heart, she had not listened to the passion of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, who promised her marriage. He soon abandoned her, and adding inhumanity to seduction, refused to ensure a provision for the child of which she was pregnant. Margaret then determined to leave for ever her native village, and go, where her fault might be concealed, to some colony distant from that country where she had lost the only portion of a poor peasant girl—her reputation. With some borrowed money she purchased an old negro slave, with whom she cultivated a little spot of this canton. Here Madame de la Tour, followed by her negro woman, found Margaret suckling her child. Soothed by the sight of a person in a situation somewhat similar to her own, Madame de la Tour related, in a few words, her past condition and her present wants. Margaret was deeply affected by the recital; and, more anxious to excite confidence than esteem, she confessed, without disguise, the errors of which she had been guilty. 'As for me,' said she, 'I deserve my fate: but you, madam—you! at once virtuous and unhappy—' And, sobbing, she offered Madame de la Tour both her hut and her friendship. That lady, affected by this tender reception, pressed her in her arms, and exclaimed, 'Ah, surely Heaven will put an end to my misfortunes, since it inspires you, to whom I am a

stranger, with more goodness towards me than I have ever experienced from my own relations!'

"I knew Margaret; and, although my habitation is a league and a half from hence, in the woods behind that sloping mountain, I considered myself as her neighbour. In the cities of Europe a street, sometimes even a less distance, separates families whom nature had united; but in new colonies we consider those persons as neighbours from whom we are divided only by woods and mountains; and above all, at that period when this island had little intercourse with the Indies, neighbourhood alone gave a claim to friendship, and hospitality toward strangers seemed less a duty than a pleasure. No sooner was I informed that Margaret had found a companion, than I hastened thither, in hope of being useful to my neighbour and her guest.

"Madame de la Tour possessed all those melancholy graces which give beauty additional power, by blending sympathy with admiration. Her figure was interesting, and her countenance expressed at once dignity and dejection. She appeared to be in the last stage of her pregnancy. I told them that, for the future interests of their children, and to prevent the intrusion of any other settler, it was necessary they should divide between them the property of this wild sequestered valley, which is nearly twenty acres in extent. They confided that task to me, and I marked out two equal portions of land. One includes the higher part of this enclosure, from, the peak of that rock buried in clouds, whence springs the rapid river of Fan-Palms, to that wide cleft which you see on the summit of the mountain, and which is called the Cannon's Mouth, from the resemblance