

Madame de Charmois,

THE "PHILOTHÉE" OF *The Introduction to the Devout Life*.

IN studying the life of St. Francis de Sales we are irresistibly reminded of the sacred words of Scripture which place before us the value of true friendship. Amidst the glories of his sanctity and genius, and the proofs of his charity and kindness, his devotion and loyalty to his friends shine out pre-eminently. Let us hear his own words on the subject,

I am in all the rest of my soul [he says] weak and poor, but I have a tenacious and almost immovable affection for those who give me the honour of their friendship. He who challenges me in a combat of friendship must be very strong, for I will not spare him. No one in this world has a more tender or affectionate heart for his friends, nor suffers more acutely from separations than I.¹

We know perhaps more about St. Francis' friends than about those of any other Saint. This, of course, is owing in great measure to his correspondence—immense for his time—of which many hundreds of letters remain to us. It would be a fascinating task to try to follow the history of these correspondents of our Saint, and to unravel the slight clues we find here and elsewhere in reference to other chosen souls in whom he took an interest: here we shall venture to treat only of one whose personality is less familiar to us, and whose history is yet of very general interest, Mme. de Charmois, the "Philothée" of the Saint's incomparable book, *The Introduction to the Devout Life*. Her identity seems to have been latterly somewhat obscured, although it must have been known to many of her contemporaries, and the evidence that she is the person to whom we are indebted for, at least, the first edition of the book appears so clear as to cause surprise that critics should have differed on the subject.

In relating her story we will follow "Philothée's" latest

¹ *Letters of St. Francis*.

biographer, M. Bordeaux,¹ who, if he does not enter into all the details given by M. de Vüy in his earlier *Vie de Mme. de Charmois*, presents her history and the results of the latest historical researches regarding her with great skill and charm.

M. Bordeaux tells us very delightfully how he was first led to the study of her life: how as a child he lived near the village of Charmois, and of his naïve astonishment when he heard this name applied to a lady of former days. He overheard as a child a conversation in which his own home at Thonon was being discussed, and which concluded with these words: "Yes, this must be Mme. de Charmois's house; before that it belonged to a Mme. de Maney, and St. Francis of Sales came here. Towards the end of her life Mme. de Charmois gave it to the Visitation Order, and Ste. Chantal, in her turn, came here to establish her daughters."

The priest who evoked these memories of the illustrious past [continues M. Bordeaux], was not aware of the presence of the small listener. Saints had been in my home! I knew about saints! Mme. de Chantal did not impress me so much, but St. Francis de Sales! The whole Chablais is full of his memory; little boys and girls know him long before they have read his Life; they meet him continually, so to speak, and insist on knowing about the Bishop with the long beard who makes many signs to attract them, for he had ever a special love for these innocent souls.

But who then was the lady whose name was associated with the memory of St. Francis de Sales? M. Bordeaux in company with many others asks himself this question, and we rejoice that he is now able to answer it so agreeably.

The family of de Charmois represented the junior branch of the Vidâmes of Chaumont, whose feudal castle, now in ruins, stands at the foot of Mont Vuache, in Savoy. The de Charmois possessed large properties in the Faucigny, the Genevois, and the Chablais, comprising a town house in the rue de l'Île at Annecy, the Châteaux de Folliet, de Villy, and de Marclaz near Thonon. Of the house at Annecy, with its many memories of Philothée and of St. Francis, nothing now remains but an archway, surmounted by a mutilated coat-of-arms and a tower. In this house was signed the marriage-contract of the parents of St. Francis, for the de Charmois were relations of

¹ *Portraits de Femmes et d'Enfants*. Henri Bordeaux. Paris: Plon-Nourrit. 1909.

the family. Folliet, Villy, and Marclaz all still exist; the latter only as a farm-house, but it has retained its doorway, round tower, and mullioned windows. Villy, with its Donjon of the tenth century, has been ably restored, and the Oratory in the keep in which St. Francis used to say Mass is still shown. Among the family possessions was a vineyard at Presle, not far from Menthon-Saint-Bernard, which may very well be that referred to by the Saint in his admirable letter entitled, *Reflections on the Vintage* [of October 12, 1608].

This enumeration of places will help us to understand the life led by the noble families of Savoy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The soil was poor, and the proprietors spent a large part of the year in the country superintending their labourers, "going from one property to another, cultivating corn here, vineyards there, and elsewhere chestnut trees;" and as we shall see, Mme. de Charmoisy took her full share in such duties, and in those towards the tenants and peasants of the estates, who owed much to their masters' care and protection.

As we have mentioned, the de Charmoisys were related to the de Sales, and Claude de Charmoisy, the future husband of "Philothée," was the same age as St. Francis. Their intimate friendship dates from the time of the Saint's mission to the Chablais, when his father, M. de Boisy, begged the elder M. de Charmoisy to watch over his safety. After this the friendship between the cousins grew year by year, and when Francis was consecrated Bishop of Geneva, Claude was present at the ceremony. The chateaux we have mentioned were often visited by St. Francis, and the house in Annecy was chosen by him as the place in which to hear and judge the quarrels and discussions often brought to him to decide, "for he inspired such confidence that people preferred him to the judges." Claude de Charmoisy was attached to the service of Prince Henry of Savoy, Duke of the Genevois and of Nemours, and, owing to his good judgment and tact, was often sent on special embassies to other countries. His duties took him frequently to Paris, where he became intimate with another of St. Francis' friends, M. Deshayes, one of Henry IV.'s most trusted counsellors. The King, hearing the latter speak favourably of de Charmoisy, tried to attach him to his service, as he endeavoured also to persuade Francis himself to dwell in his kingdom.

It was during one of these visits to Paris that de Charmoisy met his future wife, Mdle. Louise Duchatel, maid of honour to

Catherine of Cleves, Duchess de Guise, the widow of Henri Duc de Guise, who was murdered at Blois. The mother of Louise, Mme. Duchatel, lived in Normandy at the Chateau de Bois-Hérault, where probably her daughter passed her childhood, but little is known of her early history. M. de Vüy believes that Louise was beautiful, but M. Bordeaux thinks it more probable that she had a "distinguished and delicate appearance, and a frank and candid expression of countenance, united to great reserve of manner;" and this description fits in well with our impressions of the character of "Philothée," and of her delicate health. In spite, however, of her cold manner and the severe notes she at first sent to her *fiancé*, it was a love-match on both sides. Louise would speak to her sister of her "dear and beautiful love-story," and presently she allowed herself to write more tenderly to M. de Charmoisy. "My love is yours for ever, until death," she says on one occasion. The marriage took place in Paris in the July of 1600; M. de Charmoisy being then about thirty, and his bride a little over twenty. They returned to Savoy immediately, and the change was great for Mme. de Charmoisy, from the splendours and gaiety of the Court to the quiet country life we have described, full of small domestic cares and anxieties, and above all very lonely, for Claude was often obliged to be absent on his other duties, and to leave his wife "without distractions or support."

In 1601 "Philothée's" first child was born at Marclaz, the Henri who was in after years to cause his mother much sorrow. One of Claude's friends, M. de la Bretonnière, who visited Louise at Folliet in the autumn of this same year, was distressed at her solitude, and wrote as follows to her husband:

I have been to see Mme. de Charmoisy at Folliet, where she is not well, and I assure you that I fear she will become depressed in a way which it will be difficult to cure easily, for it is really a little desert: for this reason I have implored her to come as you desired to this town of Annecy, which she has promised to do.

Annecy at this date was the centre of a social and intellectual life well suited to cheer Mme. de Charmoisy and even to remind her of Paris. St. Francis of Sales, President Favre, Mgr. Ferneillet, the Savoyard poet de Buttet, Honoré d'Urfé, author of *l'Astrée*, all dwelt in the little town, where the Saint and M. Favre had by now founded the Académie Florimontane, to which the present French Academy owes its inspiration.

This first Academy, which numbered forty members, had for emblem an orange tree charged with flowers and fruit, and this motto from the pen of the Saint: *Flores fructusque perennes*. Apart from this learned and literary society Mme. de Charmoisy must have found congenial friends among the ladies of the town, many of whom we meet in the pages of the Saint's Life and letters, and she made friends in particular, we learn, with Mme. de la Flechère and with the de Lulin who lived in the neighbourhood of Thonon.

Evidently this pleasant intercourse was of benefit to Louise, and we hear that she began to take fresh interest in country matters—the vintage at Presle, the corn, the woods. In her husband's absences during the following years she managed the various properties, except on occasions when he was able to take her with him to Paris, and so time went on until 1607, and "Philothée," passing thus from the dulness of her country life to the brightness of the Court, often lonely and missing her husband, "her heart always *en fête* for his return," might have spent the same sort of existence led by many other women, never entirely happy, and only half-hearted in their self-sacrifice, had she not had the supreme good fortune to meet with St. Francis at the moment she most needed help. No doubt she had known the Saint slightly ever since her marriage, but as we have seen, Louise was very reserved, and had brought her Court manners to the country, to the bewilderment of some of her new friends. President Favre himself complains later on that after many years of friendship she considered herself still obliged to use "all sorts of ceremonies" towards him.

On his side, the Saint with his great tact would have made no advance unless she herself desired his assistance. Already amidst the heavy charges of his diocese only too many souls had offered him "the key of their hearts," and he acknowledges in one of his letters that it is no easy task to direct individual souls, adding, however, in his charming way that "it is a trouble which consoles, like that of harvesters and vintners, who are never so happy as when they are overwhelmed with work."

It is from January 24, 1607, that we may date the beginning of a more special intimacy between Louise and the Saint; setting aside at the same time the legend of the so-called "conversion" of the former. St. Francis' words regarding her show us plainly that if "Philothée" now began to lead a more perfect life, she had always been good and pious. She was

"all gold," and "infinitely suited for the service of our Lord, in which if she continues she will progress most efficaciously," he tells Ste. Chantal. In 1606 she had already made a little appeal to his friendship, and his reply, dated Annecy, May 20th, is preserved.

You cannot, Madame and dear cousin [he writes], communicate your troubles, whether small or great, or your joys to any soul more sincerely interested in yours or more devoted to yours than is mine, and do not doubt that I will most faithfully observe the secrecy to which the common law and the confidence you feel in me obliges me absolutely. . . . It is certain that if I cannot help speaking to you of these holy exercises of heart and soul, it is because I not only love yours but I cherish it tenderly in God's sight, who, in my opinion, desires much devotion from it.

It was, however, a sermon which Louise heard St. Francis preach at Annecy, January 24, 1607, that made so deep an impression upon her that she felt herself drawn to a more fervent life. Instead of "letting herself live" merely, she will act. Instead of abandoning herself to uneasiness and anxiety, she will abandon herself joyously to the will of God. She will guard against sadness in her loneliness, as against dissipation in her Paris life, as she is obliged to pass incessantly from one to the other. And now, according to the custom of the day, and like Ste. Chantal, she made a solemn protestation, drawn up for her by St. Francis, in which she affirmed her new resolutions. In it she begs Almighty God to forgive her "ingritudes, disloyalties, and infidelities," and declares her irrevocable resolve to love and serve Him for ever, sacrificing and immolating herself to His Sovereign Majesty, and imploring Him to give her strength and grace to accomplish her sacrifice. From this time Mme. de Charmoisy's correspondence with the Saint began to be more frequent, and the first chapters of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* "write themselves," as her biographer says.

In the Saint's letters of this year to Ste. Chantal, who was still a stranger to "Philothée," we find charming glimpses of her good progress. We learn that "she does wonders," and she gives him "great consolation." In 1608 the Saint laments that she is ill and alone, and wishes he could see her oftener; and on March 4, 1608, writing from Rumilly, where he was visiting Mme. de la Flechère, he makes this remark about

Louise, which shows she had been long in opening her heart fully to him by letter: "She is a good soul, and admirable in not letting herself get worried. *She had never written to me about her soul till within the last few days.*" The date of this letter is of importance to us in the history of the publication of the *Introduction*. Most of the biographers of St. Francis and Mme. de Charmoisy agree that the latter spent six months of 1607 at Chambéry to follow a famous and interminable family lawsuit, and that it was at this time that she showed the letters which she had already received from St. Francis to Père Fourier, who wrote to urge the Saint to publish them for the good of other souls. Yet the first edition did not appear until 1609. How can we account for the delay, for St. Francis, once convinced that the letters might be useful, "revised them himself hurriedly for publication, adding a few little improvements only," unless we think with M. Bordeaux that the stay at Chambéry was in 1608, that the first chapters comprise the more general advice given to "Philothée" when she first asked for help, and that the second part represents the correspondence dating from 1608, after she had "written about her soul" to her director.

St. Francis' biographers give us some interesting details on the subject. Mme. de Charmoisy, it seems, kept notes of all the counsels given to her by the Saint in person, or by letter, and had arranged them according to their subjects. While she was at Chambéry she showed these precious papers to Père Fourier, the Rector of the Jesuit College there and her spiritual adviser, who had also in earlier years been St. Francis' own director. The Father was so struck by them that he asked leave to have copies made, and soon these copies were in request among the other Fathers, who found in them "an inestimable treasure." Père Fourier now wrote to St. Francis to implore him to publish these treatises on true devotion, which, as he said, were so capable of enlightening souls seeking for perfection. At first the Saint did not understand to what papers Père Fourier alluded. The good Father then explained that he referred to the invaluable advice given to Mme. de Charmoisy. St. Francis, immersed in work, remembered so little of the help he had given that he still did not comprehend the matter; he therefore sent for Mme. de Charmoisy and asked her to enlighten him.

"Monseigneur," was her reply, "this matter refers to the instruc-

tions which you have given me for my direction." "But what instructions?" "Ah! and have you already forgotten all the holy counsels you have given me on various pious subjects?" "But what could be done with such poor little notes?" "There are more of them than you think, Monseigneur. I showed them to the Father, who had them copied, and this copy forms a volume." "What! the good Father has had the patience to read all those miserable notes made *au courant* for your use?" "Yes, Monseigneur, and he found them so beautiful that he assured me that he had never read anything more useful and more edifying; this is also the feeling of all the Fathers of the College to whom he showed them. They took copies, and are resolved to publish the book if you do not do it yourself!" "It is a singular thing," replied Francis, "that according to these good Fathers I have composed a book without having the slightest intention of doing so."

When Mme. de Charmoisy brought the notes he was surprised at their number, and more surprised still at the care with which she had arranged them. He wrote to Père Fourier to beg him earnestly not to publish these disjointed papers, promising him that as he was of opinion that what had been written down for the benefit of one soul might help others also, he would put the papers in order and re-touch them for publication. The Saint, who was ever ready to think the opinions of others of far greater worth than his own, was encouraged also by the wishes of the King of France. Henry IV. felt that no one understood true devotion better than Francis, and possibly he had heard rumours of the manuscript, for he caused M. Deshayes to write to the Saint to say that he desired to see a book written by him

in which religion should be shown in all its native beauty, stripped of all superstition and scruple, practical for all classes of society—at Court, in camp, compatible with the agitations of the world and the bustle of business—equally opposed to the laxity which flatters sinners and the severity which discourages them. Such a book was wanting [said the King], and no one was better able to write it than the Bishop of Geneva.¹

Francis, encouraged by these different advisers, hesitated no longer. He revised and arranged the notes, cut short some passages, and added to others, assisted by other spiritual letters which he had written to his mother, Mme. de Boisy, and in spite of his heavy diocesan work and constant labours for souls,

¹ De Cambis, t. ii. p. 80.

the book was published at Lyons in 1609 under the well-known and humble title of *The Introduction to the Devout Life*. For four hundred years this small book has been loved and admired in all countries, and has helped, as St. Francis wished, to make true piety known and practised in every circumstance in life. As he himself says: "Devotion, far from preventing us from doing our ordinary duties, helps us to perform them better." By it "the care of one's family is rendered easier; the mutual love of husband and wife is increased; the service due to the king is more faithful; and all sorts of occupations become pleasanter and more agreeable." When the book appeared Henry IV. said that it was far beyond what he had asked for, and his Queen sent a copy set with diamonds to James I. of England, who, it is said, always carried it on his person, and declared that it was rather the work of an angel than of a man.

No doubt the publication of the *Introduction* marks the most interesting point in Mme. de Charmoisy's life for the world in general. She had now "played her part," as M. Bordeaux expresses it, but there is still much to interest us in her story, and we must return to Chambéry, where in 1608 she watched the hereditary family law-suit known as that of St. Alban. We find St. Francis encouraging her to patience under this trial in the words which fill the well-known chapter of the *Introduction* entitled, "That we must see to our business with care, but without anxiety or haste;" words which are as useful to us all now as they were to "Philothée." Under date of August 21st of 1608 we find a letter from the Saint to Mme. de Charmoisy, written from Rambert, in which occur the following words:

Live always, my dear cousin, my daughter, with the courage to increase ever in the love of God. . . . I beg of you to visit by letter good Madame L'Ancienne, to whom your encouragement will be helpful, as for the moment I have only time to write you these few words.

In a postscript the Saint adds:

To-day I finish my forty-first year. Beg our Lord to render the remainder of my life useful to His glory and to my salvation. May God be ever in the midst of your heart.

The lady alluded to under the title of Madame l'Ancienne was the Abbess of St. Catherine's Convent, who, with four of

the nuns and four pupils, stayed with Mme. de Charmoisy at her house in Annecy about that time, one of the pupils being Marie Aimée de Blonay, afterwards known as the "cream" of the Daughters of the Visitation.

On August 30, 1610, St. Francis became godfather to the de Charmoisys' youngest child, to whom he gave his own name. The little Francis lived less than a year, and we may feel assured that the Bishop helped to console the poor mother at the time of his death. On the feast of All Saints following he wrote to her: "We are moving continually towards the country where are our dead, in two or three moments we shall be there. Let us think only of walking well and of imitating all the good we have seen in them." Three years later another kind of trouble came to Louise, which she felt keenly; this was the temporary disgrace and imprisonment of her husband, who was unjustly accused of being implicated in an attack on an unworthy favourite of the Duc de Nemours, called Berthelot. This person, who was hated in Annecy, was set upon one evening in the dark and beaten. He accused Claude de Charmoisy, and even the Saint's brother, Louis de Sales, among others, of this attack, and without any inquiry, or even a shadow of real suspicion, M. de Charmoisy was exiled to his property of Marclaz and there imprisoned. In this matter we see how St. Francis could work for his friends. He did everything in his power to undeceive the Duke, and wrote several times to implore him to release M. de Charmoisy. At last, after months of useless appeals, "Philothée's" husband was set free. During this trial Louise received one of the most beautiful of St. Francis' letters, written from Annecy on March 28, 1613, which we must give here.

My very dear daughter [he writes], it is now when you are in affliction that you should show our Lord the love which you have so often promised Him and made protestation of to me. It will be an extreme consolation for me to hear that your heart is behaving well in this respect. Recommend yourself to the prayers of St. Louis,¹ who, after having for long assisted and nursed those afflicted with infectious diseases in his army, esteemed himself very happy to die of the same complaint, his last words being the prayer: "I will enter the house of my God. I will adore in His temple and will confess His name." Abandon yourself to the Divine will, which will direct you for your welfare during the imprisonment of your husband. I would much

¹ Mme. de Charmoisy's patron Saint.

wish to send you some sort of comfort and consolation on this occasion, but I have none to give. Therefore I beg our Lord to be your consolation and to help you to understand thoroughly that "by divers labours and tribulations you must enter into the Kingdom of God," and that crosses and afflictions are more delightful than joys and pleasures, because our Lord chose them for Himself and for all His true servants. Be of good courage, my dear daughter, and have firm confidence in Him to whose service you have dedicated and abandoned yourself, and meanwhile I will endeavour with all my heart to help your husband's cause with all those who I think have power to obtain his freedom, and who I know are ready to do something to please me. I have already begun to do this since the day before yesterday, as I care for you as my true daughter and all dear to you, also for the love of our Lord to whom you belong, whose will be done for ever and ever.

FRANCIS. E. DE GENÈVE.

At last in the month of October of this year, 1613, M. de Charmois was restored to liberty, and afterwards received renewed marks of favour, but he was not destined long to enjoy them, for on October 28, 1618, when he had just been designated to accompany the Prince of Savoy to Paris, the dearly-loved husband of "Philothée" died suddenly at Chambéry, alone, at an inn. He died as he had lived, a fervent Catholic, and his last thoughts were occupied with care for Louise, as we learn by his will. She herself was then ill at Marclaz—so ill indeed, that it was a month before she could reach Annecy, where M. de Charmois had been buried on November 2nd. Here documents fail us again, but we can guess what this grief was to one so wholly devoted to her husband, and we feel sure that the saintly Bishop to whom probably fell the duty of breaking the terrible news to her, must have surpassed himself in his kindness and sympathy in her desolation.

Six months after this sad event we find Mother de Chantal writing to console Louise for a grief her own similar sorrow so well helped her to fathom.

Courage, my very dear sister [she says]. I say this with deepest sympathy and with tears in my eyes, so tenderly do I cherish your dear heart; but courage nevertheless; keep command of your feelings, and with a holy generosity and a cordial love for Providence live in the holy joy and hope of eternity, where we shall see again all our dear ones, but above all our Sovereign Good and theirs, whom through His divine mercy we shall enjoy for ever without interruption.

At the end of the year St. Francis assisted at his friend's

anniversary Requiem. One more reference to the de Charmois which occurs in his correspondence of 1621, when he recommends to the Duke of Savoy the youthful Henri, whom he says he had "known as a child and had often caressed in his Episcopal Palace," closes what we know of the Saint's connection with "Philothée" and her family. A year later St. Francis himself died at Lyons on December 28th, and on January 10th Mme. de Charmois left Marclaz for Annecy to assist at the burial of this incomparable friend. She survived him twenty years—years spent in piety and in devotion to her children's interests. Henri was a disappointment to her and to his best friends, and at one time showed great ingratitude to his mother. Later on, however, he became sensible of his errors, and in a deed drawn up in 1632 thanks her for "all her liberalities," and hopes that "she will continue in her love and good affection towards him." Her daughter Françoise gave her greater consolation, and she had the pleasure of seeing her married to M. de Ballon, who was of good family, and "one of the best and richest gentlemen of the country." This M. de Ballon was the same who had aspired at one time to the hand of Françoise de Chantal, and is mentioned in the correspondence between Ste. Chantal and St. Francis.

Presently we find Mother de Chantal and Mme. de Charmois uniting in the foundation of a convent of the Visitation at Evian, but after a short time this convent was moved to Thonon, where Mme. de Charmois in 1627 made over to the Order for a small sum her house in the Rue de Vallon, which was "beautiful and quite new." This is the house referred to by M. de Bordeaux, and here she was permitted to live when she wished, and edified the nuns, we are told, by her "angelic piety." M. de Bordeaux tells us that in his youth he knew a Savoyard lady who seemed to him to represent Mme. de Charmois as he imagines her in the days of her widowhood, and he vividly portrays the old lady.

She had five or six châteaux in Savoy, and went from one to the other in her coach at different seasons; to the hills in the summer, to the vineyards in autumn, and during the winter to the neighbourhood of a town. . . . One day she was upset in a ditch, and while her servants were running about, as she could do nothing to help, she went on saying her Rosary. She would "tutoyer" the farmers, who adored her, although she reproved them sharply and bade them attend to their religious duties authoritatively. Her excessive thinness gave

to her face and hands a transparent appearance, but when she spoke of God, a colour shone in her withered cheeks, and this was an index of the warmth of her heart, which she took great care to conceal, as she equally hated familiarity or weakness.

Such a one we may respectfully imagine "Philothée" to have been, and we may thus picture her to ourselves in her old age.

At length, after many sorrows and crowned with good works, she died on June 1, 1645, but no details of her last moments have come down to us. The date of her death, even, was only found in her farmers' account book, and this appears to be the only register of the event. She was interred by the side of her husband at Annecy, not far from the shrine of the great Saint, whose friendship and guidance had been their most precious possession in this life.

Such are the outlines of "Philothée's" life, and they enable us to recognize the gifts of soul which won for her and for ourselves the invaluable counsels contained in the *Introduction*, while leaving many gaps in the history of a life of which we would willingly learn more. There are several letters extant from St. Francis to "Philothée," and no doubt some of those which bear no address may have been written to her. It would not be very difficult to guess at these now that we have followed her life with its trials and joys; and this fact may lend an additional interest to such of the Saint's correspondence as has for our consolation been preserved to us.

M. M. MAXWELL-SCOTT.

The Poetry of William Cullen Bryant.

ALONG the middle heights of Parnassus there are not a few poets whose failure to have reached the summit gives us occasional surprise. Prominent in this goodly company is the stately figure of William Cullen Bryant, one of the select band of American writers whose fame has extended far beyond the limits of his own country. He might be termed the father of American poetry, for, born in 1798, and living to the ripe age of eighty-four, he witnessed the rise, growth, and development of that body of literature of which the United States is so proud to-day. The ethical quality of his poetry can easily be inferred from his ancestry, for he came of old Puritan stock, and on his mother's side was descended from the famous John Alden, whose vicarious courtship of Priscilla Mullins, Longfellow has immortalized.

The free, open life of the woods and the fields in which his early years were passed made him the ardent lover of nature revealed in his poetry. Much depends on environment in youth, and the early flowering of Bryant's poetical gifts is distinctly traceable to the impressions of his home surroundings. Although he might be said to have lisped in numbers (he was guilty of verse at the age of eight, and at ten had appeared in local print), his *début* as a poet was made with the poem *Thanatopsis*, published in 1817. The theme, the contemplation of death, was a remarkable one for a young man, but more remarkable still were the perfection of form and the felicity of diction in which the poet gave us the fruit of some years of thought. From the dignified opening to the stately close he showed himself a thorough craftsman who could handle blank verse with all the ease of a master of his art. The effect of its publication was electric. Like Byron, he awoke to find himself famous; and that the fame was merited can easily be seen from the concluding lines of his poem:

So live that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that moves