

1992

A Genevan's Journey to the Hebrides in 1807: An Anti-Johnsonian Venture

Hans Utz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Utz, Hans (1992) "A Genevan's Journey to the Hebrides in 1807: An Anti-Johnsonian Venture," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 27: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol27/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

Hans Utz

A Genevan's Journey to the Hebrides in 1807: An Anti-Johnsonian Venture

The book *Voyage en Ecosse et aux Iles Hébrides* by Louis-Albert Necker de Saussure of Geneva is the basis for my report.¹ While he was studying in Edinburgh he began his private "discovery of Scotland" by recalling the links existing between the foreign country and his own: on one side, the Calvinist church and mentality had been imported from Geneva, while on the other, the topographic alternation between high mountains and low hills invited comparison with Switzerland. Necker's interest in geology first incited his second step in discovery, the exploration of the Highlands and Islands. Presently his ethnological curiosity was aroused to investigate a people who had been isolated for many centuries and who, after the abortive Jacobite Rebellion of 1745-1746, were confronted with the advanced civilization of Lowland Scotland, and of dominant England. He came to be deeply concerned to weigh the risks, the gains and losses of such a paradigmatic clash of cultures. All his life Necker endeavored to promote better understanding

¹The work was published in 3 vols. (Genève/Paris, 1821). The references to the pages of the book are inserted in brackets within my text, the number of the volume preceding in Roman type. The British Museum Library Catalogue cites an English version, which I have not seen: L. A. Necker de Saussure, *Travels in Scotland*, translated from the French (London, 1820) [*New voyages and travels*, vol. 6]. Some passages are quoted in Derek Cooper, *Road to the Isles* (London, 1992), pp. 54-7. Maurice Lindsay, *The Eye is Delighted: Some Romantic Travellers in Scotland* (London, 1971), does not mention Necker.

of the Scots and to correct their image, distorted, as he thought, by English prejudice.

It is, in particular, Dr. Samuel Johnson whom Necker accuses, in a long passage (II, 163ff), of having spread unjustified prejudice against Scotland and the Scots not only in England, but all over the continent. Johnson, who set out with Boswell on an expedition to the Hebrides in 1773, more than thirty years before Necker, was, as the latter writes, an ill-humored sourpuss of sixty-four, had scarcely travelled before, and was intent on accustomed amenities rather than on open-minded exploration. Instead of enjoying the generous hospitality offered to him, Johnson found fault with the unusual diet, an objection that he had anticipated long before in the sarcastic entry in his *Dictionary* (quoted by Necker): "oats, food for horses in England, for men in Scotland." Generally speaking, Johnson expected to find Scotland an aberrant version of his beloved England and tried hard to obtain confirmation of what he expected. Against such ignorance and prejudice Necker declares that his book will spread solid knowledge, "des idées justes," on Scotland, based on the study of nature, of history, of the character and the customs of the people, first-hand knowledge acquired during a long stay and through intense contacts (I, iif, xivf). Oddly enough, Necker came into some sort of indirect contact with Johnson: on the Isle of Skye he happened to be put up with an elderly couple who still remembered the visit of Dr. Johnson where he exhibited his boorishness ("rusticité"; III, 29f). Incidentally, the host, Colonel Macleod, had served in the Dutch army together with Swiss officers, and hailed Necker as "his brother mountaineer." It is evident that the mountains as well as alleged similarities of mountain peoples influenced Necker in favor of the Scots.

The differences between the two explorers, together with the time-lag, make for a contrast which was increased by further differences: Necker was a young student who stayed in Scotland for two years, which allowed deeper insight than Johnson's twelve-week visit as a tourist. Necker aimed at facts, was careful to curb his subjectivity and to respect the privacy of his interlocutors, while Johnson always held the center of the stage, in his own *Journey* as well as in Boswell's *Journal*.² The role he assumed was that of an omniscient authority who condescended to converse with the rest of mankind, particularly with Boswell, his Scots disciple, on whom he liked to pour his scorn. The reader, even today, can enjoy the focus in the two books by the fellow-travellers. Necker's report, on the contrary, lacks any literary charm, but provides a good many observations and reflections on the country visited.

²Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*; James Boswell, *The Journal of the Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. P. Levi (Harmondsworth, 1984). References are to this edition, with *JB* and page number.

It would be unfair, however, to discredit the reports of the two earlier explorers just on account of their egocentrism. No doubt theirs is a most valuable source, not altogether negative. I am referring to the three reports for the sake of comparison, not of denigration. I admit that it was easier for Necker as a continental, a long time after the Forty-Five, to assess the problems of the Highlands thoroughly, than for Johnson, who was rather naively convinced that the Union was an indubitable blessing, a signpost to a better future for Scotland. Necker was more cautious and balanced, although pervaded by his strong liking for Scotland (I, xii, xviif). Thus the differing personalities, their backgrounds and perspectives, account for the great differences in their views.

Before I discuss Necker's report, his personal background has to be presented. Louis-Albert Necker was born in 1786 into a family with a marked bias for natural science and with contacts with Britain.³ Since the Reformation Geneva had, as we know, close links with Britain (vide *The Geneva Bible* and John Knox); in the eighteenth century it had become a favorite resort for British students, tourists, and pensioners, being, together with adjacent Vaud and Neuchâtel, the only region where French could be learned and practised in a Protestant region.⁴ Necker's great-grandfather had immigrated from Küstrin, a town east of Berlin, and was naturalized in Geneva in 1725. His younger son, Jacques [1732-1804], was to become the famous minister of finance to Louis XVI of France on the brink of the Revolution, and father to Germaine, later Mme de Staël. The elder son, Louis [1730-1804], was a professor of mathematics and a banker; his son, Jacques [1757-1825], our Necker's father, was an officer in French service, politician in Geneva, eventually—professor of chemistry and botany in the Academy. Louis-Albert [1786-1861] had good reason for adding his mother's name de Saussure to his, as she was the daughter of that eminent geologist and explorer of the Alps, Horace-Bénédict de Saussure [1740-1799], who sponsored the first

³Materials for Necker's biography: A. de Montet, *Dictionnaire biographique des Genevois et des Vaudois*, 2 vols. (Lausanne, 1878). "Notice biographique sur l'auteur" (pp. 1-45), preceding L. A. Necker, *Mémoire sur les oiseaux des environs de Genève*, 2nd edn. (Genève/Paris, 1864). This was Necker's first book on natural science, originally published in 1823. Obituaries in *Mémoires de la Société de Physique et d'Histoire Naturelle de Genève*, XVI (1861), 452-55; *Journal de Genève* (28 Nov. 1861). Douglas W. Freshfield, *The Life of Horace Benedict de Saussure* (London, 1920).

⁴Cf. Adrien Chopard, "Genève et les Anglais (XVIe-XVIIIe Siècles)," *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Genève*, 7 (1940), 175-279; Ernest Giddey, *L'Angleterre dans la vie intellectuelle de la Suisse Romande au XVIIIe siècle* (Lausanne, 1974); Ian Campbell, "Correspondence between Scotland, England and Switzerland," *Scottish Studies*, 8 (1989), 237-56.

ascent of Mont Blanc and climbed it himself in 1787, and who wrote *Voyages dans les Alpes* (1779-1796), a classic for geologists and tourists. His daughter Albertine [1766-1839], Louis' mother, wrote a biography of her second cousin and friend, Mme de Staël, and *L'éducation progressive* (3 vols., 1828-1838), a manual for the modern education of girls, and translated texts by August Wilhelm Schlegel.

Necker followed in his grandfather de Saussure's footsteps in making geology, which was at that time constituting itself as a science of its own, the center of his interests. It was mainly to study geology that Necker went to Edinburgh in 1806, where the university counted a number of leading authorities in natural science and medicine on its staff.⁵ During his studies there he explored the Isle of Arran as a prelude to his tour of the Highlands and the Hebrides, which took place in 1807. His report, published in three volumes in 1821, also comprises his travels in the Lowlands.

When acquainting myself with the biography of the author, I wondered if his book was to be a manual for geologists only and had some misgivings. But Necker forestalled them: he admits that geology is in fact a major interest of his, but, for the convenience of the general reader, his observations on that head are kept apart in earmarked chapters (I, xxxiii), covering roughly one fifth of the total of some 1600 pages. He generously advises readers with less specified curiosity to skip them, advice which I have followed. In the remainder of the book he makes good his promise to deal amply and equally with geography, history, customs, language, poetry, and music. Such topics are treated by way of synthesis in separate chapters, which alternate with his travel diary. This method is liable to some repetition and tediousness, but his wide knowledge and his keen faculty of observation make reading rewarding. One critic praises his book as a worthy counterpart to his grandfather's *Voyages dans les Alpes*, another⁶ regrets the delay in publication for fourteen years; he thinks that it caused the book to pass almost unnoticed. My scrutiny of the book must needs be limited to a few select observations and reflections by Necker.

It is important to stress from the outset that Necker's perspective differs fundamentally from Johnson's. At the distance of one hundred years after the Union and sixty years after the Forty-Five, Necker still sharply distinguishes three peoples—the English, the Lowlanders, and the Highlanders—while Johnson had found all the Scotch in need of being educated

⁵Renowned professors mentioned (I, 23ff) are J. Black (natural science), J. Playfair (mathematics), Hope (chemistry), R. Jameson (geology), Coventry (agriculture), Dugald Stewart (philosophy, economics), H. Blair (literature), and nine professors of medicine.

⁶Mémoires, p. 453, Notice, p. 12.

by the English.⁷ Not for Necker the distinction between under-developed and fully-developed peoples. He puts the English and the Lowland Scots on an equal footing, the Highland Scots on another, but of equal value. It is just the otherness of the Highlanders that is his main concern to investigate and to explain to his readers.

Necker divides his three volumes into four parts:

- 1) Edinburgh and its neighborhood
- 2) The Lowlands and the Isle of Arran
- 3) The Tour through the Highlands
- 4) The Highlands before and after 1745⁸

I will respect Necker's emphasis on presenting the Highlands and postpone his view on the Lowlands.

* * *

By way of introduction, let me first sum up his ten-day visit to the Isle of Arran in May 1807 (I, 329-415). This island in the Firth of Clyde is, for him, Scotland in a nutshell, the southern half like the undulating hills of the Lowlands, with the cottagers living in comparative ease, the northern half his first vivid contact with Highland scenery and life. Here people live miserably in primitive huts, with pack walls, thatched with straw or heather, one room and the kitchen for people, with smoking peat-fire, one room for the animals, as an emergency shelter for the poor-looking sheep or cattle without horns. The dwellings are dwarfed by the landscape: steep crags, frightening torrents, gloomy glens, inferior pastures, bogs, and stretches of heather. In Glen Sannock ("horrible et sublime") Necker is seized with a terrible feeling of isolation; he is relieved to turn in at the solitary inn on Loch Ranza (I, 351-58), at the north end of the island. The innkeeper volunteers some amateur remarks on geology, but cannot offer any food. At last, a fish is caught and served. After the frugal meal "mine host" plays Highland tunes on the fiddle, "more forcefully than correctly," his daughters dance barefoot, and the landlord himself is full of glee and whisky.

⁷Johnson advanced that "they [the Scotch] had hardly any trade, any money, or any elegance, before the Union . . . they had not any of those conveniences and embellishments which are the fruit of industry, till they came in contact with a civilized people. 'We have taught you,' said he, 'and we'll do the same in time to all barbarous nations, to the Cherokees, and at last to the Ouran-Outangs!'" *JB* 308.

⁸Vol. I contains: Introduction, Part 1, Chapters 1-5, Part 2, 1-3; Vol. II: Part 2, 4-6, Part 3, 1-5; Vol. III: Part 3, 6-8, Part 4, 1-5.

Necker cannot understand why, on his long wanderings, a shadow of suspicion is cast on him, the foreigner. The cottagers suspect that he is a spy sent by the customs people to track down whisky contraband hidden away in a cave near the shore. Good understanding is presently re-established. There are 5179 inhabitants on Arran,⁹ all tenants to three proprietors: the Duke of Hamilton has the largest estate, centered around Brodick Castle, but he never stays there except for hunting. On Sundays people walk for long hours to the simple Calvinist services in either of the two plain church buildings without steeples. One sermon is in English, one in Gaelic, but most inhabitants use Gaelic only, a harsh-sounding language (I, 340). Necker not only observes carefully, but tries to get at the vital economic statistics: small farming, fishing, distilling, the surplus for export; imports of wood, clothes, tools. On the last morning, at four o'clock, he hurries up to the highest peak, Goat Fell, 3,000 ft. (Necker: "English Goatfield, a misunderstanding of Gaelic *Gaodhbhein*, pronounced *Geûvein*, meaning wind-mountain"), and returns just in time for the departure of the boat, which, weather and wind permitting, plies to the mainland once a week (I, 371ff).

If any encouragement were still needed, his tour to Arran whets Necker's spirit for discovery. He sets out on "the Road to the Isles" on 6 August, like Johnson and Boswell rather late in the year, thereby risking the autumn gales and contrary winds that will indeed frequently upset his schedule. While Johnson's party moved up the east coast to Inverness and across to Skye and back via Inveraray, Necker's route is clockwise: through the Trossachs, up Ben Lomond, then on to Oban and Mull where, together with some chance acquaintances, students from Cambridge, he hires the sailing-boat *Lily*, with two sailors (II, 384). The climax of his tour will be his two visits to Staffa, which attracts both the geologist and the naturalist. Johnson just mentions Staffa (JB, 136), but it possesses no allure; he highlights Iona, as the early luminary of the Christian faith among the barbarians, by Johnson's time, alas, in sore decay. Johnson's report is centered on Skye, where he stayed for a month. Necker gets to Skye only after visiting a number of Hebridean islands (more than Johnson): Coll, Tiree, Eigg, Rum, Canna, even Eriskay, Uist and Benbecula of the Outer Hebrides. He is, by then, in a hurry to cross inhospitable Ross-shire, a region which, as he asserts, has not as yet been explored by a foreigner. He continues down into Moray and across Atholl, to return, after seventy-two days, in time for the term to begin in Edinburgh.

⁹Necker compares Arran to the British colony of Barbados because Barbados is the same size, but numbers as many as 20,000 whites and 100,000 slaves.

Let us rewind the film to his first long stop, on the small island of Ulva (II, 260-70, 350-60), to the west of Mull. Here is the seat of the Clanranald branch of the Macdonald Clan, its chief owns Ulva and Staffa. Necker explicitly refrains from describing the house, out of respect for the private life of his host. He prefers to turn to the Highland scenery, "imposant et sauvage, solitaire," or to the futile attempts at planting trees against the furious winds. The chief had an inn built to put up visitors to Staffa who had come to see Fingal's Cave, discovered some forty years before by Sir Joseph Banks and made widely known by Thomas Pennant through the second edition of *A Tour in Scotland* (1773).¹⁰ Like so many visitors since, Pennant was prevented from landing by rough seas. At Necker's arrival on Ulva, violent winds and torrents of rain threaten his plan, too, but the third morning is bright, the sudden calm is made up for by sturdy oarsmen, who, encouraged by the skirl of the bagpipes, cover the fifteen miles to Staffa in two hours (II, 280ff).

An enthusiast about Highland music, Necker suggests that the tunes played on pipes are in strange accord with the landscape, [this music] "par sa mélodie triste et sauvage est en harmonie avec les âpres rochers, le mugissement des vents et la monotonie du roulement des flots sur les solitaires rivages qu'elle semble dépeindre" (II, 111). In special chapters (II, 108-23, III, 444-72), he analyzes the characteristics of Gaelic music; he finds out that its gamut lacks the fourth and the seventh intervals, which seems to account for the plaintive expression, "le mélange du désir et du regret que nos finales bien arrondies ne peuvent faire" (II, 120). I cannot judge whether Necker's assessment of Highland music is to the point, but I suppose that for him it is a clue to the 'otherness' of Highland existence. The Gaelic gamut is not deficient or deviant, but primeval, going back very far in what he calls the genealogy of nations, back to the times of Ossian or Homer when music and language were not divorced as yet, when music was not so much an art, but a natural part of everyday life. Whereas European music has evolved in the direction of refinement, harmony, uniformity, Gaelic music has preserved its identity of old. There were three ancient instruments, the harp, the cruth (a kind of guitar), but only the bagpipes survive in the Scottish Highlands.¹¹ Their tunes can be divided into pibrochs (war-songs), laments for the seamy

¹⁰Sir Joseph Banks [1743-1820], president of the Royal Society 1778-1820, visited Staffa en route to Iceland, in 1772. Thomas Pennant [1726-1798], *A Tour in Scotland*, first edition 1769; also author of *A Tour on the Continent* (1765).

¹¹Cf. I, 364f. The capital of a column in Roslin Chapel (Midlothian) of the fifteenth century is mentioned, decorated with angels making music, one of them on bagpipes (I, 114f).

side of life, reels for the bright one, and "music while you work": On the Islands there are still, as Necker confirms, girls singing at spinning, often with a precentor joined by the choir, and now his oarsmen are singing to the beat of the oars, under the lead of the piper, hastening towards Staffa.

Upon landing on Staffa (II, 283-305), near Fingal's Cave, Necker is prepared to face a marvelous sight, but he cannot easily find the words to cope with the grand impressions overwhelming his eyes, his ears, and his mind. He is filled with "un sentiment indéfinissable d'admiration. La grandeur, la majestueuse simplicité de cette vaste salle . . . l'obscurité augmente encore la couleur noire des colonnes basaltiques" (II, 296). An almost religious awe seizes him, the sound of the waves against the pillars recalls organ music in a cathedral, or is it the dream-music of Ossian or Fingal echoing in the vaults? He can imagine the surprise of Banks' party, who were the first foreigners to see this fantastic masterpiece of Nature at what looks like the end of the world. He thinks that the drawings printed by Banks and Faujas de St. Fond—a French geologist who had reached Staffa after great difficulties in 1784—are not adequate, nor can his own sketch really reproduce "le contraste de la régularité des matériaux qui composent la grotte, avec la belle irrégularité de l'ensemble, qui en est un des traits les plus frappants" (II, 303).¹² During Necker's second visit (II, 360-74), one week later, there is no surprise, of course, but his enthusiasm is by no means abated.

On their way back to Ulva they stop on Iona (II, 304-50). The history of this sacred place, the sepulchre of a long line of kings, is recalled. The ruins, people say, are haunted by hobgoblins and revenants, beliefs which Necker, unlike Johnson (III, 54), cannot take any interest in, he is too much of a rationalist. But, like Johnson, he regrets the desertion of that medieval seat of learning. What is left is a primary school (where English and Gaelic are taught), but there is not even a church on this formerly Holy Island. Few diversions relieve the sordid lives of the 1350 inhabitants: the landing of foreigners, the shipwrecks that provide wood for the treeless island, even at times hogsheads of French wine. More often whisky ("in full glasses") and toddy enliven the communal singsong and the fiery reel-dancing on the beach in which every age-group joins. A celebration is in full swing when they land; the Duke of Argyll, the proprietor, is visiting his island for the first time (II, 374f).

It is here that Necker compares the Duke to Captain Cook watching the dances of the natives on a South Sea island. This is a slip of his pen which

¹²The German composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, a visitor to Staffa in 1829, tried to recreate his impressions through music, in his overture *Fingal's Cave*; William Turner, in 1831, through painting.

seems to bring Necker into line with Johnson's contempt for the barbarians and to refute his admiration for the Highland Scots. Indeed his attitude is ambivalent; he has to admit the backwardness of Highland life, but is wavering in his judgment. On the one hand he is trying hard to justify the Highlanders' right to an existence all their own, grounded in inalterable pre-conditions of geography and history; on the other, as an enlightened citizen of the world, believing in the progress of civilization, he cannot help regretting their very slow emergence from a primitive state.

There are some hopeful prospects on Ulva in respect to kelp and fish. Kelp is produced from the ash of seaweed and shipped to Greenock or Liverpool as a base for soda and so for soap or glass, an important sideline on some islands (II, 356f, 421; III, 15). The catches of fish are plentiful in the Hebridean Sea, but of small use to the economy as long as the fish cannot be cured and sold elsewhere, the high tax on salt being an additional handicap (II, 351; III, 289). But Tobermory (II, 380-85), on the Sound of Mull, where Necker returns from Ulva to resume his boat-trip, is another promise of improvement, a village planned and built by the philanthropic British Fisheries Society, with neat two-storied stone houses with slate roofs, a shop, an inn, and a good harbor meant to become a base for deep-sea fishing and transport. Yet Tobermory has turned out a partial failure; each settler had been granted a plot of land to cultivate, to the effect that they preferred farming to the dangerous job of a fisherman. Nevertheless, Necker praises the new village for its cleanness and sets it up as a model; in fact, a number of such villages were laid out in the Highlands in those days.¹³

When Necker left Ulva the chief of Clanranald's brother accompanied him to introduce his party to other proprietors, and at the same time to inspect the clan's property on the Isle of Eigg (II, 440-87), then, like today, outside the stream of traffic. It will be Necker's next long stop; the intermediate stations have to be skipped over. After sailing through phosphorescent water under a starry sky, they touch land on Eigg at one o'clock, where they are welcomed by an old couple in a tiny hut—bread, cheese, and whisky are served, and clean beds prepared. At breakfast the incognito of the chief's brother being disclosed, the tenants' joy is boundless, they offer their guests whatever they have.

Le bon homme se hâta de venir lui rendre ses devoirs; sa femme vint le serrer dans ses bras, . . . les braves gens ne pouvoient se rassasier de regarder Mr Macdonald, et ils auront sûrement béni plus d'une fois l'heureux jour où il étoit entré dans leur cabane (II, 449).

¹³See T. C. Smout, "Model Villages," in *A Companion to Scottish Culture*, ed. David Daiches (London, 1981).

Such a sally of joy will welcome him later, on Benbecula (III, 13); this is another proof for Necker that the clansmen's attachment is sincere, evidence of that ancient clan-loyalty which was shattered, but not entirely destroyed, in the aftermath of the Forty-Five. Necker takes pains (III, 170-229) to contrast the social network of the Highland clans with the remnants of feudalism in the rest of Europe. The latter is a hierarchical system based on dominion and subjection, the vassal is looked down upon as the property of his lord. For the clansmen, on the contrary, the chief is at the same time their kinsman and father. He had better be careful "de cacher le maître sous les dehors de l'ami et du parent" (III, 215), because his authority is founded on consensus, and therefore limited. Every family is granted a farm in hereditary tenure, pays low taxes, which might be remitted in case of need. Thus the clan are knit in mutual dependence, proud of their past, jealous of their honor. It was wrong to accuse the clan heads of oppressing their dependents, as so many of their enemies, especially Englishmen, did. Necker concedes that it was a warrior ideology that conditioned Highland life of yore, with bravery, loyalty to one's chief, absolute fidelity to protect those in their charge, as the central virtues. This made for frequent feuds among the clans, of which some cruel incidents are still remembered.

On Eigg they are told a terrible story (II, 464-67): long ago, the Macleods from Skye invaded Eigg, the native Macdonalds escaped to a remote cave. When a spy discovered their hiding-place, the aggressors set fire to the entrance and smothered the natives. One refuses to believe such tales of atrocity, but the black smears on the rocks and the skulls and bones in the cave stand as a warning to sceptics. The past is omnipresent on the Islands. Their old host tells them that as a boy he carried his father's rifle to Cullo-den; later, as a soldier, he took part in the conquest of Quebec in 1759. Another heritage of the past is the fact that half of the population of 400 are Roman Catholics. The Reformation has not reached every corner of the Hebrides—Canna, for instance, is Catholic (II, 482, 511).

But it is not the contacts mentioned that keep them on Eigg for a whole week; the fact is, they are stormbound. When they first attempt to leave, the boat is nearly shattered on the cliffs, and after a five-hour fight against the storm, with lack of hands and seasick passengers, they have to turn back to Eigg. Four days later, in spite of warnings, they set out: "The wind and the waves hitting furiously the planks of our small boat, threatened to smash it to pieces. We heard the sheets of water sweeping across the deck above our heads. We could not help feeling some uneasiness" (II, 487).

The heavy seas cannot stop them from sailing some forty miles farther to reach the outmost island barrier of the Outer Hebrides, Long Island (III, 1-25), divided into several islands when the tide is in. Necker is thrilled by "la curiosité de voir cette île, la plus reculée des Hébrides, le plaisir de parcourir

une contrée qu'aucun voyageur n'avoit encore visitée" (III, 1). Though the scenery disappoints him a little, he is elated by the vision of "next parish, America." There seems to be a mysterious link with the coast opposite: he notes all the evidence obtainable on objects found—mahogany wood or coconuts (II, 352, 399f; III 22), which prove that there is a current across the Atlantic Ocean, later to be called the Gulf Stream.

There is just one further outpost, some sixty miles west, the island of St. Kilda, with 150 inhabitants (III, 17-20). Necker hears that a native, who had made a fortune in India, bought it and promised to promote the welfare of the islanders. The temptation of sailing even there has to be resisted; Necker only sets down some fabulous reports on the simple, naive life on that island, a distant and dubious paradise.

The hospitality of another Macdonald, on Eriskay (III, 7ff), creates an oasis of comfort and elegance, amid "un des pays les plus stériles et arides dans l'univers." Its marginal position is demonstrated by the fact that there is no regular boat-service with the mainland, the islanders may be without letters or visits for months. What Necker remembers reading in papers when he left Edinburgh six weeks before will now be the latest news in the Outer Hebrides. The peasant population only speak Gaelic. The women wear kilt-like short woolen skirts leaving knees and ankles bare, "not unlike those of Guggisberg" (a pre-Alpine region near Berne). Most Highland women have bright eyes, fair hair, protruding cheekbones; they look intelligent, they are rather small, but sinewy. Only those of Uist fall short of his praise, many are hideously ugly and dirty, with blackened skin (III, 11ff).

It was on Eriskay that Prince Charles Stewart set down from a French frigate in June 1745 and, with seven comrades-at-arms, began his astounding attempt at reconquering the crown for the Stewarts. Inevitably, Necker wonders at the foolhardy enterprise, its brilliant start, and its disastrous end at Culloden. He blames the Prince for accepting battle, instead of retreating and dispersing his followers amid the glens and moors, and so saving their lives. Moreover, the fact that he escaped from the rearguard makes his flight less glorious for him than for the loyal clansmen and clanswomen who rescued him (III, 6f, 85-90). But those Jacobite memories are fading. There cannot be any more flirtation with Flora Macdonald, as Johnson indulged in (JB, 80), when Necker moves on to Skye.

This island (III, 25-47) for him strongly evokes Ossian, the kings, heroes, and bards emerging from the mist hanging about the crags. He alleges that every place-name on Skye is connected with the Ossian legend; to give one example, the mountain range of the Cuillins is said to be derived from King Cuchullin. In fact, the quest for Ossian has been a sideline of his tour all along, not only in Fingal's Cave. Ever since Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Trans-*

lated from the *Gallic or Erse Language* (1760), Ossian, the bard, became an integral part of the image of Scotland abroad, but also the subject of controversy. Necker's contribution is his *Dissertation sur l'authenticité des Poèmes d'Ossian*, of 100 pages (III, 340-438), where he tries to give a fair historical survey and a cautious assessment, although he is conscious of his handicap as a foreigner with imperfect knowledge of Gaelic. Johnson, on the contrary, did not feel inhibited at all. When he left for the Hebrides, he declared that "all he needed was a good stick to chase the supporters of Macpherson" (III, 354), whom he accused of forgery and the Scots of lying, because they backed Macpherson as their countryman. So, from the beginning, Johnson sidetracked the controversy about whether Macpherson translated or wrote the poems he advertised as Ossian's, and made it a nationalistic issue of English versus Scots. One of Johnson's supporters even went so far as to pretend that the Scots claimed an ancient grand epic simply to compensate for the loss of identity through the Union. Necker's position is anti-Johnsonian; he refutes Johnson's arguments that there were no written texts in Gaelic, that oral tradition could not subsist long enough, and that Macpherson's poetry reflected a much higher civilization than the one he (Johnson) imagined barbarians to be capable of. Necker replies that the early Christian culture flourishing on Iona, which was admired by Johnson, could well have been the basis for Ossianic poetry. But Necker wants to advance stronger evidence still; whenever an opportunity opens up during his journey, he does his own research: he watches an old man reciting the fragment of a Gaelic poem on *Oscar's Death* before the minister of Tiree, who testifies that it is authentic and similar to texts in Macpherson; on Eigg Necker is shown a Gaelic manuscript in quaint old letters, like Saxon script, he says; further manuscripts and printed books are listed to disprove Johnson's rash verdict that there are none (II, 431f, 474; III, 335-40, 401f; cf. II, 240).

The conclusion which Necker adopts is influenced by the findings of the Highland Society, published in 1805, shortly before his arrival in Edinburgh.¹⁴ He is convinced that ancient poems of the Ossianic kind did exist, that they were handed down the long line of generations orally, because the memory of illiterates is remarkable; therefore they survived, as a matter of course, in various versions, some of which came to be written down. What Macpherson did was to select and to connect the poems, to smooth over their language, and to make them conform to his preconceived ideas of what Celtic poetry was like originally. Hence he was neither author nor translator, but adapter. Had he, from his first publication, used the term adaptation instead of translation for what he did to the fragments of ancient Celtic po-

¹⁴The Highland Society appointed a special committee in 1797. The report on its findings was edited by Henry Mackenzie (III, 393).

etry, he would have avoided most attacks. He was wrong, Necker says, to date Ossian too far back (to the 3rd century A.D.) and to deny the obvious connection with Irish poetry; he was often ambiguous and evasive in response to criticism, but he was no deliberate forger. As far as I can judge, Necker's position in the Ossianic controversy is compatible with the present consensus in literary criticism,¹⁵ except for the fact that Necker could not explicitly give up his belief in Ossian's, the bard's, existence.

Necker is aware that some knowledge of Gaelic is necessary for those who want to join in the controversy with authority. Not for him Johnson's easy escape, who said he had no "Erse" and didn't care (JB, 116). Necker must have tried, during his studies in Scotland, to acquire at least a theoretical knowledge of the language as seen in his chapter on Gaelic (III, 300-340). He illustrates by samples a number of idiosyncrasies, e. g. the initial mutation of consonants, the periphrastic forms of the verb, its position at the head of the clause, and some peculiarities of the vocabulary.¹⁶ He adds a list of some forty words in Gaelic, Latin, and French, whose likeness suggests his conclusions that both Latin and French derive from Celtic, which is a pardonable error due to his ignorance of common Indo-European roots. Parallels with Hebrew cause him even to claim a primeval Oriental origin for the Gaelic language and for the Gaels (I, xxviiif). The fabulous tale that originally the Scots were the followers of Scota, the Pharaoh's daughter, is another vague pointer to the Near East (III, 104ff). Poetry is a better argument. Was it not a favorite hypothesis in Pre-Romantic theory to posit a common archaic root in the poetry surviving from Homeric Greece, from the Old Testament, and maybe from Ossianic bards?¹⁷ The idealized existence

¹⁵Entry on "Macpherson and Ossian" by D. S. Thomson, in *Companion* (see Note 13). See also J. S. Smart, *James Macpherson. An Episode in Literature*, (London, 1905); Susan Manning, "Ossian, Scott and 19th-Century Scottish Literary Nationalism," *SSL*, XVII (1982), 39-54.

¹⁶Examples quoted by Necker: for mutation adj. m. *mor*, f. *mhor* [v]. No present-tense, in its stead a periphrasis corresponding to French "je suis frappant." The passive "j'ai été frappé" is rendered by either "je suis mon frappé" or "je suis après mon frappant." Parallels: *ubh* [ouv] - *ovum* - *oeuf*; *leabhar* [liavar] - *liber* - *livre*. But Necker realizes that some of these words were borrowed during Christianization. Peculiarities: 20 is used as a unit in numerals, as in French; *deas* = south, (on) the right hand (side), *jar* = west, at the back, after; this suggests that the speaker is turned towards the east—to pray (?).

¹⁷An early appreciation of the Bible qua poetry was made in the lectures by Bishop Robert Lowth, *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* in 1753. The German critic and writer J. G. Herder [1744-1803] was fascinated by the idea that "the spirit of Nature" had created the ancient poetry of the Hebrews, of the Greeks, and of Ossian. Friedrich Schlegel, an acquaint-

of those pastoral tribes seemed to confirm the concept of a mysterious past where language, poetry, music, even environment, were intertwined, and fed the source of untutored inspiration. This notion of one spring for all history attracts Necker (II, 126f). Disregarding his speculations about Eastern origin, we can state that what he says about the distribution of Celtic place-names in large parts of Europe and about the surviving Celtic languages is acceptable even today. At this time it was rare for continentals to study Gaelic, and Necker's approach was proof that he meant to probe deep into the roots of Highland identity.

When he crosses from Skye to the mainland, however, he cannot really talk Gaelic to the few men whose help he needs (III, 55). In a fisherman's boat he is taken across to Loch Carron. He sleeps, wrapped up in his plaid, in a smoky hovel, after a meal of herring, potatoes and milk. He hires an ostler with a horse to get across the Highland wasteland of Ross-shire (III, 56-69) to Moray Firth. Necker rides on horseback for eight hours without seeing more than two huts, built of peat and earth, thatched with heather; at times he walks, but does not get far through the rubble and heather. He is so wet and cold that his explorer's pride to be the first to leave a record of Ross, "le pays le plus triste, inculte, désert" (III, 59), offers little consolation. But in a paradigmatic vision he tries to describe this type of wilderness by contrasting it to that of the Hebrides and that of the Alps. What is so oppressive here is the monotony, the vagueness of the contours, the lack of variety and life, one mountain like the other—mist, bogs, heather, the rare huts like mole-hills. On the other hand, the coast and the islands he remembers make for a variety of crags, cliffs, boulders, beaches, in changing light; there is the movement of the waves, the surf breaking against the rocks, innumerable birds animating the scene. In the Alps—the third type of scenery which he considers—there is even more variety and movement; every turn of the path opens up a new vista: valleys, snow-capped peaks, glaciers, woods, streams, waterfalls, pastures. And there are animals: marmots, chamois, eagles move about while butterflies ply among flowers. "Ce sont là des déserts, mais l'homme n'est pas seul" (III, 62).

But as he descends toward the eastern coast, the scenery is changing: lower hills, meadows and fields, fir-trees, birches, bushes with birds singing in them, Lowland softness and beauty after six weeks of Highland sternness and wilderness. Loch Beauily reminds him of lakes on the Swiss plateau, like the Lake of Morat. He is put up in the comfortable Fraser Hotel at Inverness, enjoys the blessings of civilization, even in the modest form of bread, which he has not tasted for weeks (III, 69).

tance of Necker's mother, is mentioned by him as an expert in old Arabic poetry, said to be akin to Gaelic (III, 416).

Moray, like Arran, lies astride the Highland line, and shows striking contrasts between Highland and Lowland scenery and life. But here we close Necker's travel diary and let him find his way across the Pass of Drumochter, Blair Atholl, Dunkeld,¹⁸ to Perth and Edinburgh. We turn to his chapters dealing with the Lowlands, their contrast to the Highlands on one side, and to England on the other.

* * *

We remember that Necker insists on the separate identity of the three peoples, as it is fixed by history and geography. Nevertheless, history has involved the three in a tangle of interdependence. When, until a century earlier, the Highlanders made their raids into the Lowlands, they used to justify the robbery of crops and cattle with the argument that all Scotland had been theirs originally, and the Lowlands had been torn away from them by invaders (III, 202f). This antagonism, increased by the conflict between haves and have-nots, helped preserve the warrior mentality of the Highlanders. Their martial spirit accounts for the important fact underscored by Necker that until the eighteenth century the Highlanders had never been subdued. They had accepted the distant and loose overlordship of the Scottish kings rather as allies than as subjects (II, 94). Since early times, their identity had been completed by their mountain territory and their Gaelic language. Thus the geological Highland line coincided with the linguistic boundary, both of them barriers to preserve their otherness, their old heritage coming down from the remote Celtic past. A striking reminder of the ultimate hidden tie, binding all the Scots to their Celtic core, is, in Necker's opinion, the elementary fascination of any Lowland audience by pipers striking up Highland tunes. A Strathspey can pull the most sophisticated assembly from their seats, to join in the dance and to echo the cries of the musicians. Piping competitions, according to Necker, are still a memorable event in the Edinburgh season (I, 73-8).

In contrast to the fossilized block of Highland culture, the Lowlands have always been open to movements, political, economic and intellectual, stemming from the south. Actually, it was by invasion that some of their ancestors, most of them English, a few Norse, occupied the lower regions. Though more fertile than the Highlands, the Lowlands are rough enough in an adverse climate. So hard labor and a frugal lifestyle are demanded; "l'amour de l'ordre et du travail" (II, 139) dominates Lowland life. Nobody

¹⁸Here he finds another "Salle d'Ossian," a pavilion above a waterfall. A superb larch tree, some fifty years old, was imported from Switzerland; the climate proving agreeable, this first larch flourished and multiplied, the trees now cover large stretches of the country (III, 155f).

is exempt from hardship; therefore there is more equality and more solidarity. Social contacts are easier, as shown "in frank cordiality and generous hospitality" (I, 54), which make Necker feel at home.

But his easy access to Scots people of every class, is, as he thinks, also due to an affinity between the Scots and the Swiss (I, 58) that reaches beyond the catchword "brother mountaineer." The frugality in both countries forced thousands of surplus males into mercenary service, particularly under the French kings, where their military spirit earned them special privileges. France and Scotland were even "des alliés intimes" (known to the Scots as the Auld Alliance) before the Union. The close contacts also account for the widespread knowledge of the French language in both Scotland and Switzerland (I, 55f).

For the Protestant Swiss the Calvinist base of the Church of Scotland is a strong tie; Necker is in sympathy with its simplicity, even austerity (II, 137f, 145-55). He claims that the Lowland clergy are better educated than any other, they have a modest income (£150 p.a.), almost no power, and are obliged to reside in their parish; these points are made in explicit contrast to the Church of England.¹⁹ The parish is the center of church organization in Scotland; its republican basis, with remarkable lay participation, is a direct transfer from Geneva. This republican ingredient is apt to jar with the hierarchy in the state, topped by the monarch, as in the ongoing controversy in Necker's time on patronage. Nevertheless, within the parish the minister is responsible for the church, for social welfare and education. Necker emphasizes the high level of literacy, even in the villages, the result of the law establishing a primary school in every parish which was enacted by the Scottish Parliament before it was dissolved through the Union (II, 136f).

"L'amour de travail" in education and in economics gave rise, Necker argues, to astonishing progress in the Lowlands during the eighteenth century, a progress in prosperity and enlightenment without peer, achieved without impairing morality. Figures are quoted for production and for purity: agricultural produce has trebled within sixty years, the number of criminals is one in 20,000 in Scotland, as against one in 2,000 in England and Ireland (II, 139f)! Figures for the standard of education cannot be found so readily, but the names of scientists and philosophers are quoted to illustrate the level of enlightenment among the Lowland Scots. Add to them the learned societies and journals. Necker enjoys discussing with Henry Mackenzie and Walter Scott, a keen talker and wit.²⁰ In Scottish education,

¹⁹Johnson's antipathy to the Calvinist church is well known.

²⁰On professors (I, 23ff) vide footnote 5; on societies (I, 41, 80, 83f). Henry Mackenzie (I, 61) is introduced as editor of *The Mirror*, *The Lounger* and author of *The Man of*

secondary and higher, a bias for science and practicability is manifest, in contrast to the study of classical literature in English universities (II, 140f). Evidence for this is the Chair of Agriculture endowed in Edinburgh University (I, 17-42) by Lady Bath, the first such chair in the world, worth imitating. This university is also remarkable for the fact that the 1,700 undergraduates are not distinguished by gown and are lodged privately, so they mix with the townspeople and are immune to the academic caste arrogance rampant south of the Border. Another advantage, in Necker's opinion, is the comparative freedom of students to choose their courses, provided they can pass the severe exams.

The university is only one of the glories of Edinburgh (I, 1-49). Like so many visitors before and after him, Necker is enthusiastic about the city. Let me just single out what he says on the qualities of New Town, planned beforehand and in the building for some fifty years: "la parfaite régularité, la noblesse de l'ensemble, l'élégante simplicité des détails" (I, 44).

Necker's apotheosis of Lowland Scotland can be summed up in his phrase "a small country in tremendous evolution in both economics and enlightenment, now surpassing even England, the old rival" (II, 129). The frequent wars against the more powerful neighbor and internal troubles had hindered Scotland's evolution for centuries, until peace and order were secured in the eighteenth century. A consequence of the Union? No, says Necker—again in opposition to Johnson—Scotland prospers not owing to, but in spite of the Union (I, xiiif, II, 134ff). The loss of independence, and of fair representation in Parliament weighs heavily against it. But fortunately Scotland has preserved her institutions, her society, her religion, as well as the Scottish variety of English (II, 101-8). His description of the salient characteristics of the language is valid even today: words that dropped out from London English, direct borrowings from Norse or French, typical diminutive forms; Scots is recognized at once by a peculiar accent and harsh guttural consonants.²¹ "It is not a bastard jargon, but an English dialect" (II, 103).

History still keeps the Lowlanders and the English apart, but Necker thinks that they are on a par with regard to the momentous changes in eigh

Feeling, and, borrowing a phrase from Scott, "l'Addison de l'Ecosse."

²¹Examples quoted: *firth*, *fell* ("Danish"); *prigg*, *dour*, *bonnie* (French); *bittie*, *bairnie* (diminutives); *gh* (harsh consonant). Necker adds that the Scottish variety of English has been a written language for a long time. It was used for histories, for ballads, and of late by Ramsay and Burns, "prouvant que ce dialecte se prête également à l'expression poétique des sentimens tendres, et à l'enthousiasme d'une muse guerrière." At Bannockburn, Necker quotes Burns' poem in the original: "Scots, wha hae wi Wallace bled . . .", and maintains that it is still sung to the tune which was played by the pipers before the battle (II, 196ff).

teenth-century Britain, labelled in modern terms "agricultural, financial, industrial revolutions, and enlightenment." In tune with the Anglophiles on the continent, he praises the English for their model constitution, their patriotism, their balanced notion of liberty, and their efforts to preserve it at home, and abroad against Napoleon's imperialism.²² On the level of personal contact, however, he was disappointed while he stayed in England for one year. He found the English reserved, cold to foreigners as well as to their own countrymen. They throw brilliant parties, it is true, but not in order to mix with their guests, but to show off as hosts, to manifest their pride, their class, and their wealth (I, 51-5). In respect to sociability, therefore, the English are no match for the Scots.

This is trifling criticism in comparison with his heaviest charge against the English who dominate the British government, on account of their inhuman treatment of the rebellious Highlanders after Culloden. This grievance makes us return once again to the central topic of Necker's book: the Highlands and Islands. We will wind it up by looking into his own synthesis, entitled *Changes in the Highlands after the Rebellion of 1745* (III, 247-300).

After the Forty-Five the laws imposed on the Highlanders were intended to "denationalize" them; they were disarmed by force, forbidden to wear their national costume or to use their mother tongue. "By one stroke of the pen they [the English] planned to deprive this proud and brave people of its glorious memories," to make them "une peuplade absolument angloise" (III, 250ff). Their chiefs were divested of all authority except that of proprietors. Thus paradoxically, "the rule of law" was enforced through despotic measures. Unable to resist overtly, the Highlanders evaded oppression as best they could and clung even more to their traditions.

It was the Elder Pitt's merit, according to Necker, to repeal repressive legislation and to start reconciling the Highlanders with the Lowlanders, and eventually with the English and the House of Hanover. What he did, was "profiter des belles qualités de ce peuple belliqueux, pour servir la cause de sa patrie" (III, 253); he channelled their martial spirit into the service in the newly-founded Highland regiments, thereby succeeding in transmuting their inborn clan-loyalty into British patriotism. This transformation can be illustrated by that veteran on Eigg who was present at Culloden and later fought for the conquest of Canada. An obvious example is Fort George, which was built on Moray Firth in 1746 to daunt the rebels, and was in Necker's day garrisoned by a regiment of the Royal Highlanders in their traditional garb, a pledge for Necker that at length the two nations will be united (III, 90ff). But service in the armed forces cannot provide jobs for everyone. Only emi-

²²England's merits were duly praised by most famous writers, says Necker, e.g. by Mme de Staël, his kinswoman (I, xvii).

gration, that old safety-valve against overpopulation, seems to offer some opportunities. Pleas to hinder or even to forbid it disregard the economic and social data: there are too many people in the Highlands, but apparently plenty of jobs in the towns and factories of the Lowlands or in the colonies in America.²³

Emigration, however, is now getting out of control altogether, because of the recent disastrous change in Highland economy: proprietors of the land, the former clan-chiefs, have all of a sudden switched over from what is today called a subsistence economy to a modern market economy. They calculate that sheep are more profitable than men, crofts must make way for sheep-runs, because English capitalist entrepreneurs pay high prices for good wool. Necker accuses the proprietors of irresponsible greed for gain. He has heard of raised rents, of loss of holdings and jobs, even of some forcible evictions. Anticipating the protests against the Clearance, he condemns the trend of the landlords to spend the profits extorted from their dependants on high-society pleasures in the cities, far away from their ancestral homes, regardless of the human sufferings inflicted on their tenants. Of these Necker writes: "Their fathers defended the clan's domains at the risk of their lives, hence it is their children's natural right to have a secure share in their produce" (III, 274). He appeals to the moral obligation, inherited from the ancient fabric of society, to make good any damage consequent upon the inevitable and irreversible change in the economic system.

The remedy he suggests is in the hands of the proprietors: they ought to stick to or to revive their responsibility for the welfare of their clansmen, to live among them as formerly, and to seek, in mutual endeavor, to develop the natural resources of the region. He falls back on his favorite projects of promoting agriculture and fisheries. Agriculture could be improved by copying the reforms which have been a success in the Lowlands (III, 83, 118f) such as extending long-lease tenure, which increases the tenant's interest in the quality of the farmland, draining moorland, breaking up new ground; the landlord is to invest in better implements, in afforestation, in further model villages. The second promising venture is deep sea fisheries; the fish are there in plenty to be caught, cured, and sold; this presupposes better boats, cheaper salt, improved methods of preservation, and of trans-

²³The Highland Society tried to hinder emigration, some proprietors even wanted the Government to forbid it. Lord Selkirk (*On Emigration*) argues that it is inevitable, from a strictly economic angle (III, 266ff). Necker admits that Selkirk is right in preferring a settlement in Nova Scotia, a British colony, to one in the USA (III, 299). Necker has heard of emigrants being cheated and ill-treated by ship owners and speculators (III, 275f).

port to the consumers in the Lowlands.²⁴ If the two occupations could be made to prosper, sidelines in small-scale industry and trade would be encouraged, jobs not only be maintained, but increased. At long range, the initial sacrifices made by the landlords would be repaid in moderate profit. This solution, an alternative to large-scale emigration, might free the next generations from want, ignorance and superstition (III, 256).

This hope again betrays Necker's ambivalence about the future of the Highlands. On the one hand he, like a great many friends of the Highlands down to our days, cherishes the nostalgic image of nature and man uncorrupted by civilization, the Utopia of the Earthly Paradise or of *aetas aurea*, not invented, but revived by his countryman Rousseau. On the other hand, he admits that the Highlanders must be helped to diminish their backwardness and to integrate themselves into the rest of the Scottish nation. The difficulties and risks of this task of adaptation are foremost in his mind. He sets forth "the formidable contrast between one of the most civilized and enlightened peoples, and its uniform monarchy" on one side, and on the other side the independent tribes that have lived self-contained, outside the law, on the fringe of the world (III, 247f). Their lives have not changed for centuries, while in the Lowlands as in England civilization and the economy have progressed at high speed, of late achieving a process that in Western Europe has been going on since the Middle Ages. There, the "régime militaire" has gradually given way to the "régime commercial," two terms coined by Necker (III, 257)—acceptable if only we take them to indicate one aspect to stand for the whole. Outside the Highlands new patterns of economy and politics had evolved in the towns and the courts and improved the standard of living. The resulting "régime commercial," fed by the spirit of calculation, competition, and innovation, was bound to clash with the stagnant and outdated "régime militaire" of the isolated clans. Their adaptation to the dominant way of life was overdue, yet hampered by defeat and repression.

The confrontation between incompatible economic, political and social systems, of unequal efficiency, is a recurring and haunting theme in history; there is no need to refer back to "the Discovery of America," the present situation is fraught with an alarming number of such conflicts all over the world. The clash between the Highland and the Lowland and English way of life is noteworthy for its dramatic speed and the long odds against the losing side.

²⁴The Hebrideans used to sell fish to the Dutch before this was forbidden by the British government. Hence the Dutch fished the seas round the Hebrides, the Shetlands, and the Orkneys themselves, until war broke out. Thus Necker signals that there is now (1807) an excellent chance to regain full control of the British fishing-grounds (III, 285f).

The end of Necker's book (III, 472ff) sounds more optimistic about the solution for the Highlands than the arguments summed up above seem to justify. The difficulties of the marginal situation, of economic and social readjustment, are covered up by enthusiastic rhetoric. He imagines bridges from the past into the future: the transfer of loyalty from the clan to the Crown is a token of reconciliation. He believes in the progress of enlightenment: "Education based on religion and guided by the wisdom of the ministers . . . will produce excellent fruit" (III, 473). And, in tune with this Calvinist moral outlook, he even devises a new mission for the Highlanders: they are to uphold and to carry on the uncorrupted virtues of long ago (of the "régime militaire") into modern society and economics (the "régime commercial"), whose moral values are endangered by the disproportionate growth of the towns and the centers of industry (III, 292). It is the same view as that expressed in his advice to the Highland proprietors: preserve the old ties of loyalty in the new world of calculation. His hope is echoed in the final sentences:

Puisse ce peuple estimable savoir, comme ses voisins de l'Ecosse méridionale, prolonger longtemps l'espace de temps, où les lumières et les arts de la civilisation marchent encore de front avec les sentiments mâles, et les vertus énergiques d'un autre siècle (III, 474).

Hopes or fears, which will prevail in the end?

* * *

We can give some tentative answer to that question because eighteen letters addressed by Necker to his mother during another tour through Scotland in 1839 were printed in a Genevan journal.²⁵ From this source some of his experiences will be selected, for the sake of comparison with his book.

They will be preceded by a note on the thirty-two years of his life between the two tours. The student of 1806-08 had, by the time his book on Scotland was published in 1821, become Honorary Professor of Geology and Mineralogy in the Academy of Geneva, and, as the title-page reveals, a member of scientific societies in Geneva, London, and Edinburgh. He wrote further books—on the birds in the Geneva region, *Mémoire sur les oiseaux des environs de Genève*, 2nd edn. (Genève/Paris, 1864); on fundamentals of mineralogy, *Le règne minéral ramené aux méthodes de l'histoire naturelle*, 2 vols. (Paris/Strasbourg, 1835), and geological studies on the Alps, *Etudes géologiques dans les Alpes*, Vol. I (Strasbourg/Paris, 1841), planned as a se-

²⁵"Fragmens de Lettres de M. L.-A. Necker à sa Mère, communiqués par celle-ci à M. le prof. Auguste de la Rive," *Bibliothèque universelle de Genève*, Nouvelle série, 25 (1840), 323-53; 26 (1840), 119-42. References are to the page numbers.

quel to his grandfather de Saussure's work, but left unfinished. His University teaching was remembered mainly for his numerous excursions to the mountains, less for the rather irregular sequence of lectures. At about forty a breakdown occurred, the details of which are passed over by his biographers. "La seconde moitié de sa vie," one of them writes,²⁶ "forme avec la précédente un pénible contraste," as if the two periods hardly belonged to the same individual. Indeed, he resigned his professorship; but his letters of 1839 testify that he must have preserved or recovered his erudition, his faculty of keen observation and clear wording, and that his Scotophilia had survived unscathed.

"Me voici de nouveau dans la superbe île d'Arran, mon ancienne amie. Je trouve ici un climat plus doux, un printemps bien plus avancé qu'à Edimbourg" (p. 333). It is April 23, the flowers are in bloom and new foliage on the trees make him compute that spring is a fortnight earlier on the west than on the east coast. This is the regular cycle of change in nature; but man-made "marvels" have occurred since his visit in 1807 (p. 335). Then, Ardrossan was a ruined castle on a rock above the Firth of Clyde, now it is a pretty little town, built in orderly alignment, with superb inns, and a magnificent harbor full of merchant ships! From here a small steamer takes him across to Arran (pp. 333-53) in one and a half hours, braving contrary winds and a heavy sea. The first view of Brodick strikes him with admiration: the village is now clean, well built, the small inn excellent, laid out in a large garden and orchard with fruit-trees in bloom. Where there were peat-bogs and enormous stretches of gorse there is now cultivated land, "une espèce de petit paradis," bordered by woods with pines, firs, larches and beeches, the result of afforestation. Above, the crags and peaks covered with heather, or bare, are as "sublimely wild" as ever, but now in stark contrast with the civilized vegetation and housing below. Necker's imagination carries him away to exclaim that Brodick is "a sort of Scottish Montreux," the famous tourist center on Lake Geneva (p. 337). The moderate climate agrees with him, he feels revived, a healthy man, unlike the wreck he had been, suffering from the "excessive climate of Geneva."

Observing the weather on Arran is more than a hobby; Necker compares it to what he reads in the papers about the simultaneous weather situation on the mainland and on the continent—bright here, frost in London, a relapse into snowfalls in Geneva (pp. 344, 347). Is there, the scientist wonders, an overall mechanism determining the weather all over the ocean and Europe? Today we are so used to the weather charts obtained from satellites, with their high-pressure and low-pressure areas, that we can hardly imagine how

²⁶*Notice biographique sur l'auteur, d'après J.-D. Forbes [professeur à Edimbourg] preceding L. A. Necker's Mémoire sur les oiseaux, p. 20.*

difficult it was in those days to devise a synopsis, and to discover the rules governing the currents of the winds and the rains.

Nature in all its aspects—animal, vegetable, mineral—is the object of his studies. At the age of fifty-three he climbs the peaks as eagerly as he did as a young student. From one of the tops he can spot through a telescope some 300-500 (?) fishing-boats off the Kintyre Peninsula waiting for the herring shoals to appear (p. 352). This observation, in addition to the ameliorations of the soil and the new buildings on Arran, seems to confirm that the hopes of improvement expressed in his book have materialized.

This time he stays on Arran for ten weeks—it was ten days in 1807—and he regrets leaving the island, where he felt "marvelously well" (p. 353), to return to Edinburgh (pp. 324-32). He had spent the winter there before, enjoying in particular the splendid shop-windows and the joyous walkers on Princes Street. Who claims that the Scots are grave when the scene is as lively as in any street in Naples? The public cheer the numerous bands; Necker confesses that a piper can captivate him so strongly that he cannot help marching in step along with him for any length of time. For two months Necker rented a cottage alone at Portobello on the sea-front, close to the capital. He collects shells, watches the birds as well as the dragoons exercising their horses or the beautiful ladies taking the air on the beach. But he is equally thrilled by storms, by the furious billows beating against the shaky walls of his garden.

In mid-July, after his return from Arran, Necker decides to set off "Over the Sea to Skye." The regular Arran mail-steamer has shown him how fast and comfortable travelling has become in the meantime, "le vapeur abrège tout, c'est presque la rapidité de la pensée" (p. 119). This improvement in transport induces him to plan a long detour to the Northern Islands before he returns to the Hebrides. The "Sovereign" is in reality a three-master with an ancillary steam-engine, and cannot by any means compete with the speed of thought. She is forced to lay by in Aberdeen for fifteen hours and arrives long behind schedule on the Shetlands, "Lerwick, 60°6'N" (pp. 119-24). His drive to explore unknown islands is aroused again, he feels like an adventurer when he is rowed to the northernmost cape. After three weeks he moves on to the Orkneys (pp. 125-31), rides about on a pony, but seems to get tired; the monotony of the landscape is relieved only by patches of fox-gloves. Spring seems to begin here only in August, but the Gulf-Stream (now named as such) is even more noticeable than on the Hebrides.

On his journey back through the mainland, Necker crosses the domains of the Duchess of Sutherland (p. 135f), who, together with her English husband, had been strongly criticized by economists among others because of

her ruthless evictions—Necker mentions his Geneva countryman Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi.²⁷ What he is shown makes him stand up in defense of the Duchess. It is true, the tenants in the mountain regions had to be dispossessed of their crofts, but she did more than most large proprietors to settle them in farmsteads on the plain near the seaside. In this region agricultural reforms were introduced and villages, roads, and harbors built. Such improvements had been suggested in Necker's book as an alternative to depopulation and collapse, so he applauded them. If the evicted crofters preferred to emigrate to America, it was their own choice, he says. His observations on the spot, however, may have been hasty, biased by his admiration for Dunrobin Castle, the residence of the Sutherland family. In any case, the crucial problem of the Clearances is raised as a warning for Necker that the economic and social problems of the Highlands are far from being solved. If not then, he must have realized before long that his fears for their future were no less justified than his hopes.

His long detour ends at Inverness. His steamer-trip through the Caledonian Canal marks another achievement, built in the interval (p. 138; cf. III, 74-82). His route to Skye cannot be traced exactly; his first letter from Portree, of 31 August 1839, reports his arrival by steamer. For his family at home, Skye is characterized by "its grand and severe beauty, an island of mist and rain, haunted by phantoms of Ossianic heroes" (p. 136). His last letter describes the strange magnificent phenomenon of the Northern lights (p. 140), perhaps a fitting end to this series of letters—but, for him, not the last of Portree. He spent the winter there, bent on geological studies.

After a short return to Geneva, to his mother's fresh grave, he came back to Portree in 1841. Scotland, which he liked to call "his second home," now became this literally. He was never to leave Skye again and to be buried there twenty years later, at the age of seventy-five.

A staunch bachelor, his was a solitary but active life. He kept up his correspondence with friends in Edinburgh, and relatives in Geneva, some of whom even came to visit him at long intervals. He lodged all the time at John Cameron's, whose family looked after him with great care as he grew weaker.

²⁷On the Sutherland Clearances vide Bruce Lenman, *Scotland 1746-1832*, The New History of Scotland, vol. 6 (London, 1981), 123f; John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (Harmondsworth, 1969), passim. On p. 109 a quote from Sismondi's criticism is printed: "There is something so absurd and revolting in interpreting as a form of progress the destruction of the happiness, of the liberty, of the very existence of a race in the interests of wealth." Necker had approved of the earlier re-settlements organized by the Sutherland family (III, 283f).

The humble inhabitants of Portree, whose existence is often exposed to the perils of the sea, used to ask the learned foreigner, with full white beard, for his advice on the weather, with a respect mingled with a touch of superstitious fear.²⁸

The superficial reason for his "voluntary exile on Skye" was his belief that the moist and moderate climate kept him fit and active (p. 134). A deeper reason, we might infer, was his conviction, or whim, that the best way for a foreigner to show his sympathy with and his predilection for the Hebrideans was to share their harsh, simple lives. Thus, in contrast with Johnson's brief visit, culminated and ended Necker's life-long endeavor to promote a fair understanding of the Highland Scots, their originality and otherness. It was like a melancholic but mild sunset above the island labyrinth of the Hebrides.

Universität Bern

²⁸Mémoires, p. 454 f.