Fragments from a Trip to the Alps / Fragments d’un voyage aux Alpes (Excerpts)

By Victor Hugo

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Excerpt from the end of the first part:

How insignificant the monuments of man appear alongside these marvelous edifices that a powerful hand raised upon the surface of the earth, and in which there is, for the soul, something like a new manifestation of God! Try though they may, as the years fly by, to change shape and aspect, their architecture, endlessly rejuvenated, forever honors its prototype. These crags which soar and wear away will be followed by other crags which will rip the very skies; new trees, though uncultivated, will grow where lie these trunks dead of old age; these torrents run dry, others will open up. For centuries now, the physiognomy of the Alps has not varied. Details come and go, the whole remains.

Happy the people who, like the sons of William Tell and Winckelried, can entrust to such monuments all its memories of glory, religion, and freedom! How could these holy traditions be erased when reminders never perish? These sublime edifices need not fear either the ignoble daubing that has sullied Notre-Dame de Reims, Notre-Dame de Paris, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the old Romanesque abbey, nor yet the scraper that mutilated the pediments of the courtyard of the Louvre; nor the sledgehammer that was to demolish Chambord after having destroyed the manors of Montmorency and Bayard; in no time, all these monuments of France will be no more than ruins; in no time, all these illustrious ruins will be no more than stones, and these stones will be no more than dust. Here, everything changes, nothing dies. The ruins of a mountain are still a mountain. The colossus has changed attitudes, that is all. There is in all parts of creation a breath of life. The works of God live, those of man last—and last they must.

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