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978-1-107-63516-6 - Lamartine: Pages Choiesies

Selection made, with Exercises, by Arthur Wilson-Green

Frontmatter

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The Cambridge Modern French Series

Senior Group

GENERAL EDITOR: A. WILSON-GREEN, M.A.

L A M A R T I N E

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PREFACE

IN these pages, Alphonse de Lamartine tells with some fulness the story of his early years, and, in outline, he gives a record of his later life. Among the talents of this versatile man was a power of describing with singular vividness personages who played a part in his own life or on the larger stage of politics. Many of these portraits find a place in this book. Further, his rich and ardent spirit enabled him, in the words of Alexandre Dumas, “to raise history to the dignity of the novel,” and, from others of these pages, the reader may gain acquaintance with the historian. Lastly, some of the poems, which are, perhaps, the chief jewels of his crown, find their due place here. Above all there should emerge, from a reading of the text, a picture of Lamartine himself, of that remarkable hero, of whom M. Doumic, one of his many biographers, has written: “In the presence of so great a genius, such power both in meditation and in action,—the character of the man on the same lofty plane as his merit as a writer,—one does not hesitate to acclaim in Lamartine not only one of the most fruitful initiators in our literature, but also one of those shining exemplars who do most honour to our race and to human kind.”

The exercises follow in the main the lines of those of the other volumes of this Series. They are intended, it may be repeated, not only as an aid towards greater accuracy in written work, but also they have in view facility and fluency in speaking. Their aim is to add by association and analogy to the reader’s vocabulary; to enable him to make use of newly acquired words and to make sure of the meaning of others, which may not be new but which are only vague and half-known; to carry away from the volume something

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

P R E F A C E

definite, something of its spirit, and, on the utilitarian plane, something of its rhythm and language.

A new feature is the inclusion of passages for learning by heart. This practice of learning by heart has, we believe, much to commend it, if only as helping towards a verbal memory, in itself, surely, a useful possession, even though it may not be “a primary and fundamental faculty, without which none other can work!” The passages chosen are relevant and help to illuminate the text. Some of them may well remain for all time as lovely images in the mind. Again, seen from a lowly, almost sordid, standpoint, the learning of such passages offers a noble way of absorbing grammar. Consider just the first line of the first of our jewels, rather more than five words long:

“Il est de clairs matins, de roses se coiffant.....”

See, radiant within it, three rules of grammar.

A. W.-G.

8 *September* 1931

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Selection made, with Exercises, by Arthur Wilson-Green

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TABLE

PREFACE	<i>page v</i>
I. Préface des <i>Confidences</i>	1
II. La famille de Lamartine	1
III. Son père	2
IV. La mère de Lamartine	3
V. Berceau de mon enfance!	5
VI. Mes jours de berger	6
VII. Son éducation jusqu'à l'âge de dix ans	10
VIII. Une école en plein champ	11
IX. Un épisode regrettable à l'institution Puppier	13
X. L'évasion manquée	15
XI. Lauréat du collège de Belley	16
XII. L'adieu au foyer	17
XIII. Sa première visite à Rome	19
XIV. Le Lézard	21
XV. Un métier qui rend le cœur content	22
XVI. Saint François, notre patron	24
XVII. Un repas de pêcheurs	25
XVIII. Les Saisons	26
XIX. Une soirée de lecture	27
XX. Les cinq sœurs du poète	30
XXI. Le premier mai au village	34
XXII. Quelques amis de cette période: l'abbé Dumont	35

Cambridge University Press

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Selection made, with Exercises, by Arthur Wilson-Green

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

TABLE

XXIII.	Mon maître d'écriture	<i>page</i> 37
XXIV.	Le chevalier de Sennecey	38
XXV.	Mon chien	40
XXVI.	Les Cent-Jours.	41
XXVII.	La fuite du roi Louis XVIII	42
XXVIII.	Lamartine se réfugie en Suisse	43
XXIX.	Le génie et la beauté	45
XXX.	Le Lac	47
XXXI.	Première tentative de faire publier les <i>Méditations</i>	49
XXXII.	Études, dîner, et costume en 1817.	51
XXXIII.	Lecture et déjeuner chez Talma	53
XXXIV.	Chant d'amour.	56
XXXV.	Chateaubriand chez M ^{me} Récamier	57
XXXVI.	Adieu!	59
XXXVII.	Les ruines du Parthénon	61
XXXVIII.	Lady Hester Stanhope	62
XXXIX.	Jérusalem en 1832	64
XL.	Les Bazars de Damas	65
XLI.	Le pain quotidien	66
XLII.	L'orateur	68
XLIII.	Le moulin de Milly	70
XLIV.	La fuite à Varennes	73
XLV.	Marie-Joseph Mottier, marquis de La Fayette	77
XLVI.	Hommage aux restes de Voltaire	79
XLVII.	Le Laboureur	81

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-63516-6 - Lamartine: Pages Choiesies

Selection made, with Exercises, by Arthur Wilson-Green

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TABLE		ix
XLVIII.	Charlotte Corday	<i>page</i> 83
XLIX.	L'origine de la <i>Marseillaise</i>	88
	L. La gloire des armes	91
	LI. Bonaparte	92
	LII. On monte sur le trône, on en descend	94
LIII.	Pourquoi j'écris encore	96
LIV.	Utopie	96
	LV. Adieux à la poésie	97
EXERCICES	98
MORCEAUX A APPRENDRE PAR CŒUR	112