

Corgemont, 10th August 1863

Letter from Edouard Gerdolquet, Albertine's fiancé, in which he makes his first contact with his Australian relatives, without knowing that one day their grandson Alan will take away from him his daughter Marguerite. This letter makes up the first page of a letter from Albertine

My very dear friends,

I must first of all justify the title which I take the liberty of giving you. You have no doubt already guessed by what right I send you these lines. My dear fiancée has already mentioned to me several times her relatives in Australia, and each time I felt something which attached me more and more closely to you. Could it be otherwise? No. Man's heart is so made, and I love you today all the more because I have not the fortune to be able to meet you personally. I certainly feel sad when I think that you are far from your relatives and from our dear Swiss motherland. The thought of a Swissman on foreign soil has always caused me sadness, why should it not be so for those who one day will be relatives of my family? What I have just said will excuse the liberty I have taken to write you these lines and will explain the title which I dare give you. At this moment I would like to be on the other side of the Ocean to express to you what I feel deep in my heart. The Lord has allowed me to spend a few days near my dear fiancée, and my heart rises up to Him with a feeling of adoration and gratitude for the benefits which He lavishes upon me. He does me the favour of uniting me with a family of which I am certainly entitled to be proud, and this is a precious token of His love. - I was pleased this morning to receive news of you, and your letter interested me extremely. I am particularly pleased to learn that the accident which happened to Mr. Just was not more serious; may the Lord relieve his suffering and grant him soon complete recovery. I bless God that Mrs Just and the little girl are well. Mr. Emile's plan to devote himself to teaching causes me real pleasure and I sincerely wish that his studies will finish as they have begun. He is here speaking of the future father of his future son-in-law. It seems that the same tastes can be found beyond the Ocean as on the continent of Europe. I could easily conclude that Mr. Emile is still Swiss since he is undertaking a teaching career; is not Switzerland the cradle of pedagogy? Allow me to bore you a little by telling you of my activities. As I believe you know, I am a master in a teachers' college in the canton of Neuchâtel, where I have been for two years. My vocation pleases me extremely, we have to teach young people of 16 to 22 or 23 who are to become primary teachers. In our motherland, the teaching profession is already being affected by the breath of rationalism and unbelief, and for this reason a good teacher of our country Mr. Faroz decided to found a teachers' college designed to combat this tendency. You can see from this, everything is not in harmony in our motherland: evil and sin accomplish their ravages here too. The Gospel of Christ is not placed above all else, and we are far from having reached the religious level of England and America. Our little Switzerland nevertheless nurtures children who strive to find God and who joyfully await those infinitely blessed times when the Lord will have converted all hearts to Him and when there will only be one flock and one shepherd. No joy for the Christian except in awaiting thus the fulfilment of the words of God. When these times come, mountains will be levelled and abysses filled, all men will have been made brothers by the strength of the Almighty. Dear friends, do you not foresee these things? Of course, we must say to ourselves in a tone of sadness: It has not yet come, this blessed time, and we shall no longer be of this world when these things come to pass, it is true; but yet we have something. If we are forced to separate, we nevertheless have a place where we can gather together, and this place is the altar of our God. Let us lift up our voices to Him, let us address our prayers to Him, and let us entrust Him each day with our cares. In this way we shall learn more and more how faithful God is to those who call upon Him and trust in Him. But I fear now that I am saying things which are too uninteresting, and I shall reserve room for my dear friend who will tell you about all your parents. I shall mention however that I have spent a week at Porrentruy with Mr. Jung the minister. He is very well, as is his dear wife; there is no need for me to say how pleased I was to make their acquaintance although I already knew Mr. Jung. They like Porrentruy;

[Cécile]

although their parish gives them a lot to do. I think it is fitting that I ~~xxxxxxx~~ say a word about a piece of advice which you give me in your letter, as my dear fiancee says to me. Certainly, it would be quite impossible for us to put off our wedding as long as we had thought at first, and so we have fixed it for July next year if the Lord so allows. ~~xxxxxxx~~ From this you can see that our opinions are not completely ~~xx~~ opposite. My holidays finish in a few days, so that I shall return to Neuchatel this week in order to begin teaching again on 17th August instant. It now only remains for ~~me~~ me to apologise for the liberty I have taken in writing you these poor lines. I also ask you to believe in the deep and sincere affection I have for you, and if I dared ask you, I would beg you to kindly count me among your true friends. Remember always that I shall not forget you in my prayers and that ~~xxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ very often too my mind will travel over the seas to ~~xxxxx~~ bring you fraternal and affectionate greetings. I greet with all the power of my heart each of the members of your family. May the Lord stay close to you to bless you and grant you all the riches of his grace and love. Such are the prayers and wishes of

Your very affectionate  
Ed. Germiquet

~~(xxxxxxx)~~

(Albertine's pages of the same letter follow)

Corgemont, 11th August 1868,

My dearest sister, my dear loved ones,

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the lovely letter I received yesterday morning. I had been waiting for it for a long time, and if I had not received it soon I would have written you all the same. I have no greater pleasure than to receive word from you for you must all feel that I love you with all my soul and carry you all in my heart. I am distressed at the accident which happened to my brother-in-law, but I nevertheless tell myself that everything that God does is for the good of his children. Do not become despondent, my dearest sister, when God places his hand on you and your family. "He who makes the wound est also he who bandages it." "He wounds and his hands heal". I am happy along with you, dear sister, that God has given you another little girl (Cecile). It seems to me that every newborn child is a joy for a family. Oh! I would like to have the pleasure of seeing you all for a moment, hugging you in my arms, looking into your eyes, uttering the sweet name of sister, brother, nephew and niece. According to expectations, this pleasure will be denied us, but one day, one day a thousand times blessed, we shall see one another again in Heaven and clasping hands we shall sing an eternal Alleluia to our God. This is what makes our joy, this is what gives us the strength not to murmur against the sometimes mysterious will of our heavenly Father. ~~xxx~~

It is 4 months since my fiance and I exchanges marriage rings and have had the announcement cards circulated in accordance with custom. Time flies with such rapidity that it seems to me almost impossible that in 11 months, if God wills, I shall have left my profession and shall be settled at Grandchamp as the companion of the man to whom God has given me. - If you only knew, dear sister, what reasons I have for blessing the Lord for the choice he has made me. The more I get to know my dear fiance, the more I see in him the one who is to be my happiness on earth. His character, his talents, above all his piety, make him a man who will be worthy of one day being the head of a family. God is good to have given me to him, and so I am happy and infinitely content. Besides, I am convinced that all of you will agree with what I tell you just from reading the first page of this sheet which he wrote yesterday while I was at school. I send you my photograph, which is much better than the one ~~xxxxxx~~ you already have. I have only one regret, that I have not been able to send one of my fiance's with it. He has not got one for the moment.... If Dad would give up the one he gave him... However, I hope that with another letter you will get to know better my friend who is also the friend of all of you. My position at Corgemont

is still just about the same, although since this Spring I am less happy in my school than previously. They have made a new class and at the same time carried out a re-organisation. The sexes have been put together, so that it is quite natural that the big boys and girls should be in the charge of men; so that now I no longer have girls from 13 to 16 years, but boys and girls from 10 to 11 years. I ~~xxxxxxx~~ find it rather boring for I prefer teaching girls to anything else. But patience... in a year I shall have laid down the rod and said goodbye to the profession I shall have practised for almost 7 years. My health is better this year than ever, and so I look forward into the future with more confidence than when I was ill. It is so strange, but when the body is well, the mind seems more peaceful. I am afraid however that it is sometimes a trap, and I recognise also that often God does not occupy the first place in the heart when everything is going according to our desires. He knows perfectly well then why he sometimes afflicts us.... it is in order to make us fit for the kingdom of God. ~~xxxxxxx~~ Let us then take advantage of everything He grants us so that all things may be done for His glory and to advance His reign on earth.

As for ~~xxxxx~~ Dad, he is fairly well. His hair is completely white, but he is still very lively. He goes on long walks without getting too tired. However for some time now he has complained of his chest and sometimes has a cough. But I think there is nothing to be alarmed about. Fritz is already fairly grey, he still has trouble making ends meet; he had a little girl who was always ill; the last time I saw her she had improved; I trust that now she is better. They have 5 children and as many have died, so that he has a large family. Marie lives in Dad's house. Philippe was not in London for long; he made no progress at all so that after 5 months he came back to St. Imier. He works with Oscar and manages a little better than previously. It is nevertheless sad to see our dear Marie work from morning to night to keep her family. ~~xxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ However they get on very well together.... they still have only 3 children; the last will be 3 in October. As I have said, they live in Dad's house, but the latter keeps house for himself. Hermann has forgotten us, I think; it will soon be 2 years since we have heard from him although I have written him one or two letters during this time. I do not know what to conclude from his silence. Is it pride or something else? I cannot judge him and do not wish to. Philippe was assured while he was in London that he already had 7 or 8 thousand francs put aside. I believe it is true for Hermann is a worker. But is it necessary in order to have a little more money to no longer write to your parents and be as silent as if you did not exist? I am certainly unable to understand this and am convinced that when one has the will to do it one always finds the time and the means. I cannot understand either Charles' long silence. We still write one another, but much less than before his marriage. He has a lot to do at Porrentruy; his wife is charming. They have no children yet, but I think, although they have said nothing to me, that they will have one soon. Charles is an excellent minister, and so he has plenty of adversaries among the rationalists. But he walks ~~xxxxx~~ straight ahead nevertheless, and, like St. Paul, he wishes to know only one thing: "Jesus-Christ and Jesus-Christ crucified." Which does not please the great number who follow the wide road of sin. As soon as I write him, I shall speak to him of you and I am sure that he will repair his neglect by writing you straight away. Oscar is fairly well, although his health is not perfect; I do not know the reason. I hope that it will be nothing and yet, if illness could be salutary to his soul, I would not fear it for him. It seems to me that he is better ~~xxxx~~ than he has been, and I ask God to work more and more in him. Anna is at Socle in the Institut des Billodes. Dear Anna, the Lord subjects her to many trials. Since she has been at ~~xxx~~ Socle, she has almost always been afflicted with eye trouble. I think that the Socle climate is too harsh for her sight. I believe that she will have to leave. It seems to me that her ~~xxx~~ life must be ~~xxxxxxx~~ dismal. She is so alone and ~~xxxx~~ she is not strong. But she is happy because she places her trust in Jesus and only in Him. There without doubt lies the source of happiness and strength; without Him, without Jesus, discouragement would often come over us, but when we entrust him with whatever may worry us we feel our strength reborn like that of the eagle and we look with joy into the future which is in the hands of a good Providence. I am not too sure how to go on, my letter is so long... ~~xxx~~ so long, and besides you will have such trouble

decyphering my scribble that I would be tempted to finish if the pleasure I feel in writing you did not embolden me to continue my verbiage. It is true that there is nothing under the heading of news and that accordingly I shall not interest you very much... I would like to thank Emile for the charming photograph he sent me. I love my dear nephew. Do you remember, dear sister, when he was 3 and the people in ST. Imier said he looked like me as if I were his sister? It is strange, but if the photograph of him is true, I am convinced as are a large number of people who have seen the photograph that there is quite a likeness between Emile and me. What is he doing? Is his education progressing? Does he still want to become a teacher? Will he soon have finished? I ask him all these questions, hoping thereby to receive a nice long letter from him. Dear, dear Emile, you will write me, will you not, about everything that may interest me, that is to say, what interests you, for I am sure we have the same tastes. Above all, my dear nephew, I want you to become a distinguished teacher, and for this one must first become a living Christian. What a noble task it is to educate young people, to shape hearts, to form ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ characters and bring up men! What a sublime vocation it is to be concerned with thinking, intelligent, immortal beings! This is what ~~xxxxxx~~ gives the teacher his nobility, this is what makes him a man in the great sense of the word! I do not doubt that you have understood the grandeur and nobility of the profession you have chosen, and that, wishing to be such as one wishes you to be, you daily ask God, the only wise one and the only mighty one, to give you his spirit of wisdom so that you may become one day a veritable champion of the truth. Say to God like Samuel: "Speak, Lord, your servant listens", and then, in all your paths, you will be guided by the almighty hand of our God.

What are Pauline and Bertha doing? Are they learning French? Now, my dear little nieces, you will encourage one another, won't you, and then you will write your aunt Albertine a little letter or rather a long one which will please her, and I shall love you ~~xxxxxx~~ a thousand times more even than today, although I cherish you already with all the power of my heart. And also you will encourage one another to help Mummy in her work, to knit your stockings, sew your dresses, and also you will help her with the cooking and you will become good little housewives. I have forgotten the name of the little boy. Arnold... I think, is it not, or Hermann? Bertha and Pauline must tell me in the next letter, [In reality it is Hermann, born in 1866, ~~and~~ the first boy James Arnold having been dead for 6 years] Ah! I was forgetting to tell them to pray a lot to the good Jesus so that their hearts may completely belong to him. But what is the little boy doing? What age is he? And is the little girl [Cecile, just born] well? How lovely your family seems to me! Ah! If I were a fairy I would often come and sit at your table to listen to the joyful babel of the children, and to witness the happiness of a tender mother and a good father. I think, good and tender sister, that you are now quite well and that your strength has also come back to you. If you only knew how ardent are the prayers I address to Heaven for ~~xxxxxx~~ the happiness and prosperity of all of you. May God be more and more your joy and your centre, your first and your last, and then you will not fail to be "joyful in hope, patient in affliction, persevering in prayer." Must I ~~xxxxxx~~ again tell you something about my fiancee, since the page is not finished? I do not think I shall be boring you for I know that you are interested in me and everything which closely concerns me. It is the 5th and last week of his holidays. To tell you how happy I have been during this time would be impossible. Each week he spent 2 or 3 days with me, and so I have learnt to know him better and love him more. I feel that I shall be lost when he leaves me on Friday to return to his work. He went to see his parents yesterday and will return on Thursday and will go to Grandchamp on Friday. Then I shall not see him for a few weeks. We shall both be 23 in November. He is young but his character is certainly very mature and accordingly older than mine. Furthermore, he has a fine position at Grandchamp, all the finer because he has pupils almost as old as himself. So you see, my beloved ones, I have been perfectly right in accepting his proposal instead of ~~xxxxxx~~ remaining single as I had almost ~~xxxxxx~~ vowed to do, 4 years ago. The ways of God are not our ways and I recognise His hand which has guided all things for the good of my soul and my body.

I believe that is all I have to tell you. Do you not find this

letter very...very long? It will take you some time to decipher it for the writing and the style are not very elegant.

I send to you all, to you my dearest sister, to you my good brother, to my dear Emile, to Pauline and Bertha, a million kisses and the tenderest greetings.

Believe in the sincerity of my affection.

All yours for always.

Albertine Jung

"All goes to the same place, all has been made from dust and all returns to dust." Ecclesiastes, 3,20.

"All flesh is as grass, but the word of the Lord endures forever."  
Peter I, 24,25.

We pass, we pass and the fleeting hour,  
In its rapid flight carries away,  
Glory, fortune, honours and fragile beauty.  
O foolish mortal! All is but dust and ashes,  
All ends in the ~~xxxxxx~~ grave to which all returns,  
But the spirit takes flight and for all eternity,  
Rises up and rejoins the God of love who had lent it.