

To Marc-Auguste Pictet
From Dr Belcombe, Jan. 20, 1791

Translated by SRIocain 2020

Paris 20 January 1791

I thank you a thousand thanks, my dear sir, for your last letter, much less for the pretty compliment you pay me there than for the expressions of friendship with which you honor me, I who have no other claims. to this flattering distinction that the desire to be able to deserve it, and the conviction to love you very sincerely. You would frighten me by telling me that you will appear in your Society with my letter, if I did not know how skillful you are in taking advantage of what goodwill, more than the sagacity of your friends, sends you, without compromising them. If my first letter gave you some useful information, what follows will be, I fear, very fruitless. Everything is stagnant here. For several weeks now I have visited the Literature and Science Societies, without finding anything that could be of interest to you. They are all busy making a constitution. Mr. Lavoisier is absorbed in finance, Mr. Monge does nothing, Mr. Berthollet has become a justice of the peace, but he will be working soon. At the Société des Annales de Chymie, nothing interested me, except the very honorable mention of your work on fire by M. Lavoisier and the order to buy it for the Library of the Society. But no one knew where to find him. It is very singular that Mr Bard, Manget did not know how to give a little more publicity to their publications. 20 people asked me the same thing. Tell me, please, in your next one, where it is found in Paris. If it is little known here it is better in Windsor. You only have to read the long dissertations of M. De Luc in the Journaux de Physique for the past 6 months, you will find yourself there on each page several times. The Academy of Sciences has done nothing good since the aggregation of M. de Saussure. I had a terrible fear that the news I had announced would be denied. However, it is confirmed, and on Saturday the king approved the choice of the Academy. At first he had refused to deal with her. Here's why I have already told you that everyone is making a constitution. The Academy had taken care of it too, and without consulting the King had made a small regulation. During the presentation of MM. de Saussure and Maskelin, the Lord King sent them out for a walk, saying that he would no longer interfere. You feel that it made a noise and even a lot. Lively discussions, some were ready to break with the Executive power and to put themselves under the auspices of the Sovereign power. However, the wisest resisted, and by dint of prayers the King was bowed down, and he signed. He must be fearing his victory, for I believe it is the only laurel spray that vegetates near his Crown. I'm afraid I misled you with regard to Mr. Lavoisier's machine, I was myself. This is what it is. It is a copper helmet which opens and closes with screws on both sides so as to be able to separate the part which covers the face. From the mouth come two metal pipes, which pass through two bottles of elastic rubber, in which are two valves, which move with the aid of two stirrups, which descend almost to the ground. To these two bottles are attached two other pipes, which pass through a pneumato-chemical machine, and one communicates with a receptacle of vital air, the other with a receptacle which contains pure ammonia. This helmet fits on Mr. Seguin's head, is chewed around the collar, and is fixed with the screws on the side, so as not to let any air pass. Then by means of these stirrups in which he passes his feet, he opens the communication with the vital air for inspiration, closes it, and opens the communication of the volatile alkali for the expiration, and and so on. It is therefore in this Machine, and not in an automaton that M. Lavoisier's experiments on respiration were made, in which he

accounts for the proportions of all decompositions and recompositions that take place in the lungs; but it seems that it lacks a portion of vital air. Mr. Seguin will publish them shortly. Chym problem. A shipment of London Myrtle essential oil recently arrived at a Chymist I know. [By] accident a pint bottle got broken and the oil spilled [in] the bosom of the package. Wanting to take advantage of what was left in the [...] [he] put it to infuse for several days in water. While observing a movement of fermentation he put it in a retort and distilled at a gentle heat: he obtained 3 to 4 ounces of very pure oil of citrine color. This oil has the property of crystallizing in long and thin streams, even at 3 ° or 4 ° + zero cold. The oil which remains liquid has lost none of these sensible qualities, and there everything becomes liquid at 8 ° or 10 °. Where did this change come from, and how can we have the same effect on ordinary essential oils? The order of your course seems very natural to me and made me very happy. However, it seems to me that your membership will be a bit on the sidelines of the attraction, which you will no doubt reserve for Dissolutions. We'll talk about that: at the same time don't forget to give me your chemistry plan. I have a word to say to you on that of M. de Fourcroy. I would be grateful if you could get me a somewhat exact notice of this coal mine that Mr. Wild found on the Diableray, and if you would like to add two words on the height and direction of our Tournette, also of the Chalet. the highest and pasture above; I remember that the observation gave about a thousand toises for the latter. I do not know whether you [remember] the experiments of M. Berthollet on the mixture of oxygenated muriatic acid and ammoniacal gas, which he recorded in the *Annales de Chymie*. You know this mixture breaks down and produces a lot of nitrogen gas. M. Fourcroy makes use of this means to easily procure this gas. So he obtains it by adding to the container with 3 necks, which he uses to have the muriatic acid oxygenated by the distillation of muriatic acid on manganese, a tube which passes through the pneumat-chemical machine in a bell filled with ammonia gas. The oxygenated m [uriatic] acid which does not condense in the container passes and mixes with the gas there, decomposes and you have more or less pure nitrogen gas. It is very possible that you know, my dear Professor, this process, which is not inconvenient. But as our knowledge is far from being up to standard, you will forgive me if what seems new or interesting to me is not for you. La Demoiselle, would you believe it, wrote me an anonymous letter from Lausanne. Farewell, my very dear friend. I recommend myself to all of you, and I am your very obligated and very sincere

W.B [William Belcombe]

The following letter summaries are derived from “CORRESPONDANCE DE MARC-AUGUSTE PICTET (1752-1825) *Partie scientifique et technique Tome III : Les correspondants britanniques Version française inédite préparée en 1996-1999, révisée et mise en ligne en novembre 2015* by René Sigrist

“From Marc- August Pictet Dec 21 1791

I'm not trying to exonerate myself. I take the opportunity of Schweppe, I undertake to write to the solstices and equinoxes and he will answer me at the apses and medium distances - I learned of his establishment in Scarborough and do not know I must congratulate him - I pity those who were to have close relations with him in London - thanks for the information from the pump - I will have mine from Hurter modified on

the principle of those from Holland - no course this hyver, I am writing the plan for my biennial course - its general plan - reading my Memoir in the Phil. Trans. - what happened to our translation in England? I had my diploma dated May 5 -Natural History Society. Travel from Switzerland and Coolers. Vitr spar. rose octahedron - Free mechanics course for artists - political position? good, bad financial - I continued to keep boarders, Lloyd and Magrath left. I have room for two. I hope Mrs. Belcombe is well - my wife is still quite worried about her nerves.

March 6, 1803

To William Belcombe, (summary)

Recommendation from Dr Frank and dispatch of the book. - Invitation to come and take a tour of Paris and send their children to Geneva.

To William Belcombe, summary, in York, August 24, 1804 (on occasion of someone who leaves tomorrow and will be in York in 20 days). - Invitation to give me news and his family by mail. - Interesting memory that I have left. - **Invitation to send, peacefully, one of the young people to Odier.** - My story - illness on return from England - nomination to the Tribunate - my role there - my speech of which I am sending him a copy. - Sweet life in Geneva - household details: 2 married daughters, 4 grandchildren. - I have not given up my place or my functions, and I am giving a Chemistry Course to the audience⁹³ - I go mountain races - recently been at Mont-Joly - seen La Tourette. - Invitation to send us scientific material through the Deboffe channel.