BARTOMEU FERRA

CHOPIN
AND
GEORGE SAND

IN THE CARTUJA DE VALLDEMOSA

ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY JAMES WEBB



PALMA DE MALLORCA

MCMXXXII

CHOPIN AND GEORGE SAND
IN THE CARTUJA OF VALLDEMOSA

WITH AN

EXTRACT FROM THE RECOLLECTIONS

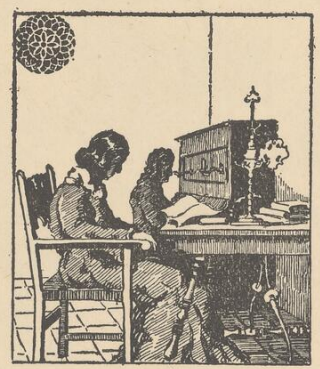
OF AURORE SAND

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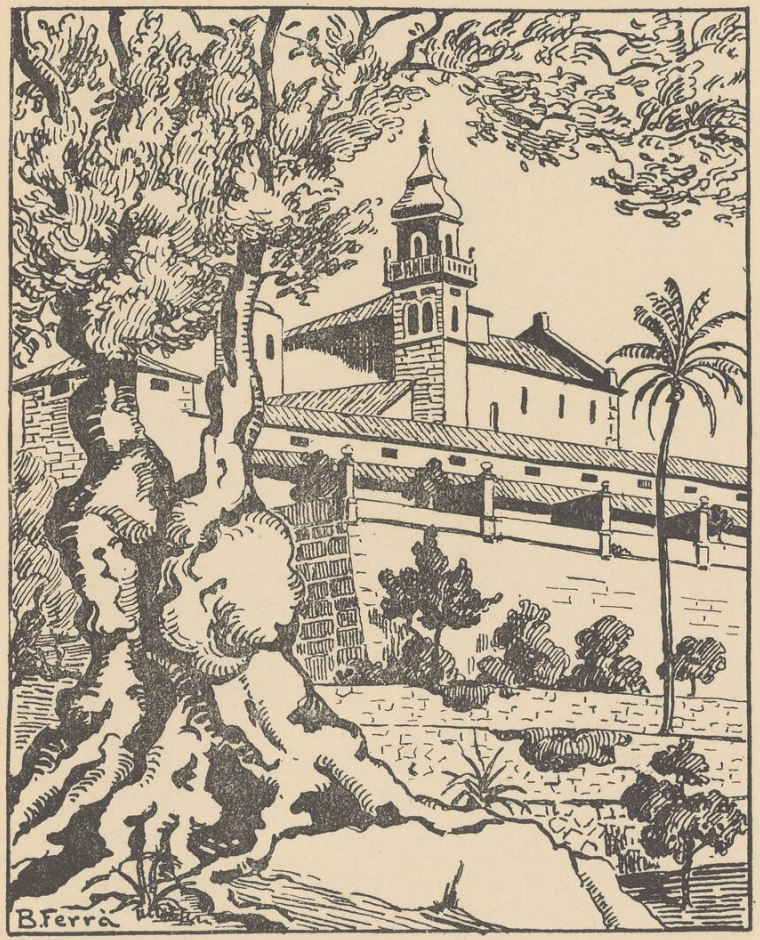
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PALMA DE MALLORCA

MCMXXXII

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CHOPIN

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EXTRACT FROM THE RECOLLECTIONS OF AURORE SAND

When my father, Maurice Sand, spoke to me of Majorca, he gave me the impression that this long past journey was the marvel of his youthful days.

Monsieur and Madame Marliani inspired in George Sand the desire to pass the winter in the Baleares. Marliani, politician and author, was married to a Spanish lady, and their description of Majorca convinced George Sand of the benefit she could secure from the climate and the beauty of the country for her son who was then in weak health.

Chopin, who was also ill and languishing, agreed that it would be a good opportunity for Maurice, and that he himself might be cured if he could accompany them. The advice of Dr. Gaubert, who said to George Sand "You will save him if

you give him fresh air and exercise", decided her to take him with them.

The beginning of their stay in Majorca, when the cold weather had not commenced, enchanted them. This is proved by the letters of Chopin and of George Sand. Later, when they were driven out of "Son Vent" under painful conditions, they were fortunate to find refuge at once in the Chartreuse at Valldemosa. This old monastery, abandoned amid its surrounding mountains; the lovely view from its garden over the valley; the long damp corridors; the mystery of the deserted church beyond the cloister facing their "cell"; the little cemetery, where George Sand loved to go for inspiration for her writing of "Spiridion", all made a scene impossible to forget.

The cell was spacious and very simple, but George Sand quickly gave it some degree of comfort by decorating the old walls; Chopin should not suffer from the cold and the rain which, in this winter, alas! did not spare the refugees.

George Sand preserved an ineffaceable memory of the beautiful walks in the surrounding country. The first that Chopin and she made to the Hermitage revealed to them the sea as they had dreamed of it, clear and blue as the heavens.

The two most important excursions that she made were to the hermitage situated above the coast near Valldemosa—which gave her matter for "Spiridion",—and to the "Granja", the old villa of the Fortuñy family, built in the style of the country, with collonaded balconies, and surrounding fine trees, admirably described by her.

The responsibility of nursing the sick, that weighed on George Sand, who, in addition, was obliged to manage all the details of the household, prevented her from seeing any more of the country.

Chopin, fighting against his malady, went out but little, and, after having once admired the strange and delightful situation of the Chartreuse, while the weather was mild, remained for many days immured in the cell originating sublime compositions on his poor little Majorcan piano.

Maurice Sand, fifteen years of age, and of an artistic temperament, wonderfully endowed, made sketches from nature during the whole visit with the fidelity of observant youth endeavouring to record the objects of his admiration, so as to preserve the memories. Some years later, these drawings served George Sand in writing her book "A Winter in Majorca" in which she followed, one by one, the suggestion of the sketches which thus admirably illustrated the fine description of the excursion."

AURORE SAND



The Cartuja of Valldemosa

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Drawing by Maurice Sand.



At the beginning of last century the road to Valldemosa was a narrow and stony track that was often converted by the rain into a torrent-bed.

At the entrance to the village, one would see two heraldic shields, carved in stone, set in the walls on either side of the road. These shields, signalising the entrance to the precincts of the Carthusian monastery recall the royal origin of the foundation. Between rough walls, covered with ivy and brambles, the path mounted in steps to the monastery bordered by rows of cypresses that gave to the scene an Italian aspect, both solemn and picturesque.

Ancient defence-towers, and a terrace with battlemented

parapet, shadowed by elm trees, gave a feudal character to the monastery. The entrance was by way of a stair, known as the way of the Santa Maria. Here it was necessary to pass through the gloomy cloister of the ancient monastery and beside the old gothic church, and the cemetery of the monks to reach the long and chilly corridor that gives access to the cells, newly constructed at the beginnig of the 19th century.

The tempest of the Revolution of the year 1836 extinguished the lamps of the chapels around the fragrant court of the myrtles, and the breath of terror and desolation spread through the monastery.

The voices of the clamant capitalists who had purchased from the Government the confiscated property of the monks rang strangely under the vaults and trough the corridors of the cloisters, till then accustomed only to the dominion of monastic silence. The remains of altar pieces, paintings, and many artistic objects not included in the spoliation remained neglected in the dusty outbuildings flanking the cemetery of the friars.

The monastery still retained the odour of incense, and as it were the ashes of the monastic life, when, in the winter of 1838, there came to take refuge here Frederic Chopin and George Sand. The novelist was then 34 years of age, and she was still animated by all the fire and enthusiasm of her turbulent youth. In vivid contrast was the exuberant vivacity of the writer, "so ardently and generously endowed with all the glow of body and spirit", with the delicate frailty of the great Polish musician, from whose aspect emanated that exquisite distinction and

cultured grace that was reflected in his works, that innate elegance that inspired Liszt to name him "the Prince". He was then 28, and in his breast was already bleeding the mortal wound that sapped his youth.

The children of George Sand, Maurice and the rebellious Solange, of 15 and 9 years respectively, gave a cheerful note to the surroundings of the strange couple.

They had come to Majorca in search of the southern climate favourable to the delicate state of Maurice's health. Motives of health decided Chopin also to undertake this journey, which should facilitate his wish to continue, in some quiet, forgotten retreat, the amorous relations, commenced six months earlier, with this complex and passionate woman, in whose embraces the poet-musician hoped to find a generous tenderness which should make him forget his recent and unhappy love affair with Maria Wodzinscka, that had left in his heart a deep trace of melancholy. George Sand decided to come to Majorca on account of the praises of the island sung by her friends the Spanish Minister, Mendizabal, the Marliani family, and Señor Valdemosa, a musician, native of Majorca, who was professor of the piano to Isabel II.

When, on 15 th December, they moved to the Cartuja of Valldemosa, where they had rented a cell for 35 francs a year, they had already been in Majorca for 42 days, having lived for a month in the house So'n Vent, situated in the pleasant district of Establiments. It was in that place that Chopin fell ill, suffering from the effect of the humidity. The chill of that house, with no means of heating, fell on the inmates like a mantle of ice. They tried

to warm it with braziers, but only succeeded in increasing the cough of the unfortunate sufferer by their asphixiating odour. The proprietor, Señor Gomez, fearing the contagion of consumption, uncompromisingly compelled them to leave.

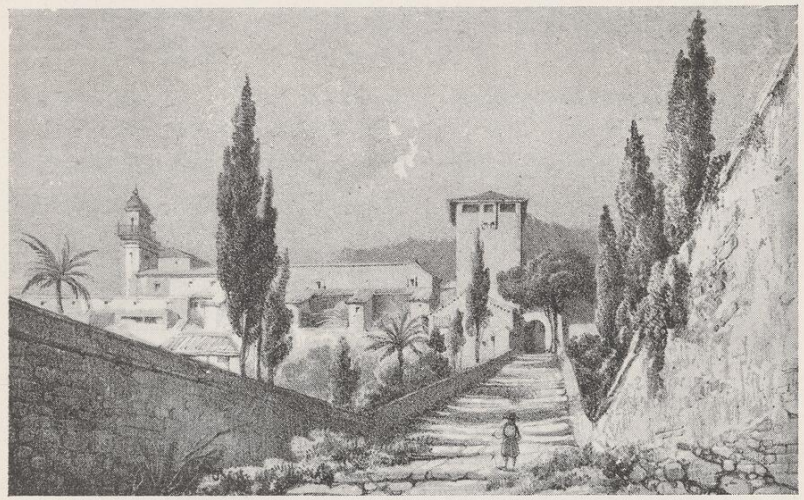
A Spanish gentleman, in refuge for political reasons in one of the cells of the Cartuja transferred it to them and sold them the simple furniture for one thousand francs. This included a smoking stove, worthy of a lama of Thibet, some trestle beds, provided with hard mattreses; a couple of white wood tables, some straw-bottomed chairs, and a sofa of unstained wood. A large tartan shawl, that had served them as a travelling rug, became a sumptuous curtain hung up before the alcove. The dusty paved floor of the cell was covered with a mat of esparto grass, and some shaggy white sheep skins. The walls were decorated by some copies of grotesques of Goya, drawn by Maurice, representing monks in unseemly guise, and an engraving of a Descent from the Cross by Rubens. Some dignity was given to their principal room by a beautiful gothic bench of oak that the sacristan of the church had lent them, its seat forming a chest which served them as a book-case. Its fine carving with delicate spires, throwing upon the wall, in the lamplight, shadows of its lace-like tracery and of its bolder pinnacles, restored to the cell all of its antique and monastic character.

The silence of the night and the repose of the unhappy invalid were disturbed often by a drunken old servitor of the monkish community, who wandered through the cloisters late in the night, praying in a loud voice before

INSTYTUT FRYDERYKA CHOPINA-NARODOWY BIBLIOTEKA
Zbiory Stowarzyszenia I. F. C.



Cloister and cemetery of the monks



Entrance to the Cartuja, 1838

Drawing by J. B. Laurens.

the empty darkness of the chapels, striking the doors of the cells with his stick, and calling out the names of the friars who formerly occupied them. Startled by the light that filtered through the bars in the door of Chopin's cell, he persisted in his knocking, until, weary of calling on "Father Nicholas" to come,—for this was his fixed idea,—he would go to kneel at the feet of the Virgin, ensconsed in a niche in the wall of the corridor, close to the cell of the foreigners.

A poor Majorcan piano which reminded George Sand of that of Bouffé in "Pauvre Jacques", served Chopin during the greater part of his stay in Valldemosa, and until the arrival, only twenty days before their departure, of the longed-for Pleyel, bought by him in Paris for the visit to Majorca.

The winter of 1838-39 was cold and stormy, marked by fogs, gales and gloomy days. Rain fell persistently day after day, holding the new guests prisoner in their cell in the deserted monastery. The wind moaned through the damp and chilly corridors, whilst a blanket of mist descended on the landscape.

During the short days of December, the cells are visited by the rays of the sun only in the forenoon, whilst, for the rest of the day, they remain enveloped in the grey veil of shadow thrown by the surrounding mountains. At such time the vista seen from the small conventual gardens presents the magic aspect portrayed by George Sand in her masterly phrase: with splendid exuberance of imagination, as though a painter sought to express in words the colouring and the luminosity of the landscape:

"what lovely effects of light may we see when the slanting rays shine through the great fissures in the rocks, and, gleaming between the ribs of the mountains, trace their heraldry of gold and purple upon the neighbouring slopes. At times, our cypresses that rear their gloomy spires from below, bathed their pinnacles in the glow of gold; the clusters of dates upon our palms resembled clusters of rubies, while a vast line of shadow divided the valley obliquely into two regions, the one flooded in a luminous glow as of summer, the other in the cold azure shade of a landscape in winter."

"The panorama here is completely satisfying, leaving nothing to desire, nothing more to imagine; all that poet or painter could dream nature has created in this place, vast in its entirety, infinite in detail, unending in variety, masses mingled, outlines defined, profundity impenetrable; all is here, art could nothing add. As for its effect upon myself, I have never felt the impotence of words as in these hours of contemplation passed in the precincts of this deserted monastery."

With these magnificent scenes constantly before his eyes, often kept prisoner by the rain and by his delicate health in the chilly and inhospitable cell, deprived of comforts and amenities, the days passed grey and dreary for the poor invalid who felt himself exiled from the world. In vain the great artist endeavoured to accustom himself to the solitary life of the Cartuja of Valldemosa; the sombre aspect of the monastery and the distracting landscape surrounding him were ill suited to his character. Chopin, a man of the world "par excellence", pampered

in the laps of princesses, felt profoundly the deprivation of the life of cities and of his familiar surroundings of elegance and refinement.

Under the influence of the atmosphere about him in the Cartuja, he wrote to his friend Fontana:

"Imagine me here, between the sea and the mountains, in an abandoned monastery, in a cell whose doors are larger than those of a coach-house in Paris. Fancy me, —without white gloves, my hair uncurled, pale as usual.— My cell is shaped like an immense coffin; the vaults are covered with dust; the little window opens on a few orange trees, palms and cypresses. Facing the window, under a rose-opening of Moorish design, is my bed. The works of Bach, my manuscripts, notes and other papers; —behold my total possessions! A perfect calm; one may shout at the top of one's voice, and no one will hear. In a word, it is a very queer place from which I write to you."

During his stay in Valldemosa, Chopin received a visit from his friend Demboski,—an Italo-Polish,—who came from Paris and was astonished at Chopin's surroundings and his furnishings, and, above all, at the isolation in which he was living.

Situated thus, throughout the long watches of winter days, while the rain beat monotonously on the roofs, and the wind moaned through the deserted corridors, Chopin was busy, retouching some of his works and adding fresh productions.

Suffering from a malady which depressed him and at the same time rendered more acute his sensibility, it is

not strange that, finding himself isolated from his world and surrounded by an impressive and strange environment, his mind and his art should show strong marks of its influence. George Sand writes in her "History of my Life".—"The cloister was for him full of terror and of phantoms". It was there that he composed the most beautiful of those brief works, modestly styled by him "Preludes". Those works bring to the mind visions of monks long dead, and the voice of the funeral chants that haunted him; others are full of a gentle melancholy, conceived in hours of sunshine and of health; hearing the laughter of children below the window, the distant music of the guitar, the songs of birds in the moist leafage of the gardens. There is one suggested by a vigil in the rain and gloom that fills the soul with depression and fear".

George Sand recounts that, one day, when she and her daughter had left him to go to Palma, they were overtaken, while returning by a violent storm; the streams became swollen, and overflowed the road, which was rendered impassable, so that they were obliged to leave the carriage and proceed on foot, reaching the monastery late at night,

"We hurried on", she says, "knowing what anxiety our invalid must be suffering. Truly, his distress had been great, but he had settled his mind to a kind of tranquil despair, and, all in tears, he was playing his exquisite prelude. Seeing us enter, he rose with a cry, then exclaimed, in a strange tone of voice "Ah! I was certain that you had perished!" The work that he composed that



Corridor of the Cartuja

Foto Arxiu Mas.

night was full of the suggestion of the rain drops sounding upon the roofs of the monastery; but those drops had become translated in his imagination and his music into tears falling from heaven upon his heart."

Referring to this work, and to others that Chopin produced at the monastery, Edouard Ganche writes.— "Much search has been made to identify the Prelude that can have reference to this scene, and to portray the monotonous falling of the rain drops. The sixth Prelude, in B minor, was that indicated. Liszt considered that the eight, in F minor, could also convey this idea, which, however, seems better expressed in the fifteenth Prelude, in D flat minor".

During his stay in the monastery, Chopin surely composed some preludes, and completed some others. He wrote the second Ballade, in F major, (Op. 38); the third Scherzo, in F sharp minor, (Op. 39); two Polonaises, en G major and G minor, (Op. 40); the Mazurka, in E flat minor, (Op. 41, No. 2). It is probable also that the Sonata, in B flat minor, and the two Nocturnes, (Op. 37) were sketched out in the Cartuja.

Commenting on the Preludes, Élie Poireé writes; "They are like pages of a book of musical reveries, given in brief, as might be written maxims; expressed in the firs throb oft inspiration, without ornamentation, or connection, sketches greatly transcending the laboured works of the master; they are of a simplicity at once imposing and serene. In one of these Preludes, (the fifteenth) an immense effect is produced by the mere insistent repetition of one note A minor G sharp above which are

added two themes entirely different, the one in the upper register, exquisitely sweet, the other low, mysterious and sombre,—almost Beethovian." This song, imbued with pious solemnity, seems to breathe the monastic spirit of the "Cartuja".

The well known prelude of the "Rain-drops" is referred to by Kleczynski in the following words; "The background of the picture is always the falling of the rain-drops at regular intervals, which, by their constant repetition, leads the spirit to a state of dreaming melancholy; a song full of tears rises in the midst of the murmur of the rain; then, passing into C sharp minor the melody mounts from the depths of the bass up to a tremendous crescendo reverberating with the sense of awe with which tempestous nature overmasters the spirit of man. Here again, when the medium can lift the feeling to no higher dramatic gloom, one is soothed by a movement of tranquil majesty."

The second Balade in F major, dedicated to Schuman, is considered by Ehlert as one of the compositions of Chopin of the greatest descriptive and suggestive value; "Perhaps, among all the works of Chopin that which has the most human appeal is the story told in the Balade in F major. I have seen children leave their play to listen to it. It might be said to be a fairy story told in music."

The fairy story that inspired Chopin is a poem by his friend Adam Mickiewicz in which the national poet of Poland recounts a legend of Switez, the great lake of Lithuania, that gives the name to the poem. Be this as it may, should you go to the land of Nowogrodek, among

the mysterious forests of Pluzyny, do not forget to check your horses to contemplate the Lake. There the "Switez" spreads its fair sea in form of a circle;—close and ancient woodlands surround its dark shores;—it is calm as an expanse of ice. Should you be there in the hours of night, and be led to the margin of the waters, you will see the stars above your head and not one moon but two. You may doubt whether it is the crystalline image that repeats itself, from your feet to the heavens, or that the heavens bend down to you their crystal vault, as your vision does not perceive the farther shore, nor penetrate the depths below the face of the waters, you seem to be suspended in space between the firmament and an enchanted abyss of azure wonder. Thus, by night, be the weather fair, the scene will hold the enchantment of illusion.—But, going to the Lake by night, beware of man!. For, what smugglers may be abroad; or what ghosts go raging! My very heart quails when the old folk tell these tales, and people tremble to recount them when night falls!

Often, from the deeps of the waters, rises the roar of a great city;—fire breaks forth, and a great smoke rises,—and a tumult of fighting, and the shrieks of women; —and the clang of funeral bells, and the iron ring of the armourers. Now, suddenly, the smoke vanishes; the clangour dies down;—On the lonely shores, only the sighing of the pines;—from within the waters, a low murmur of prayer, and the plaintive orisons of maidens. Know you the meaning of these stories?

The poet then recounts how the Lord of Pluzyny,

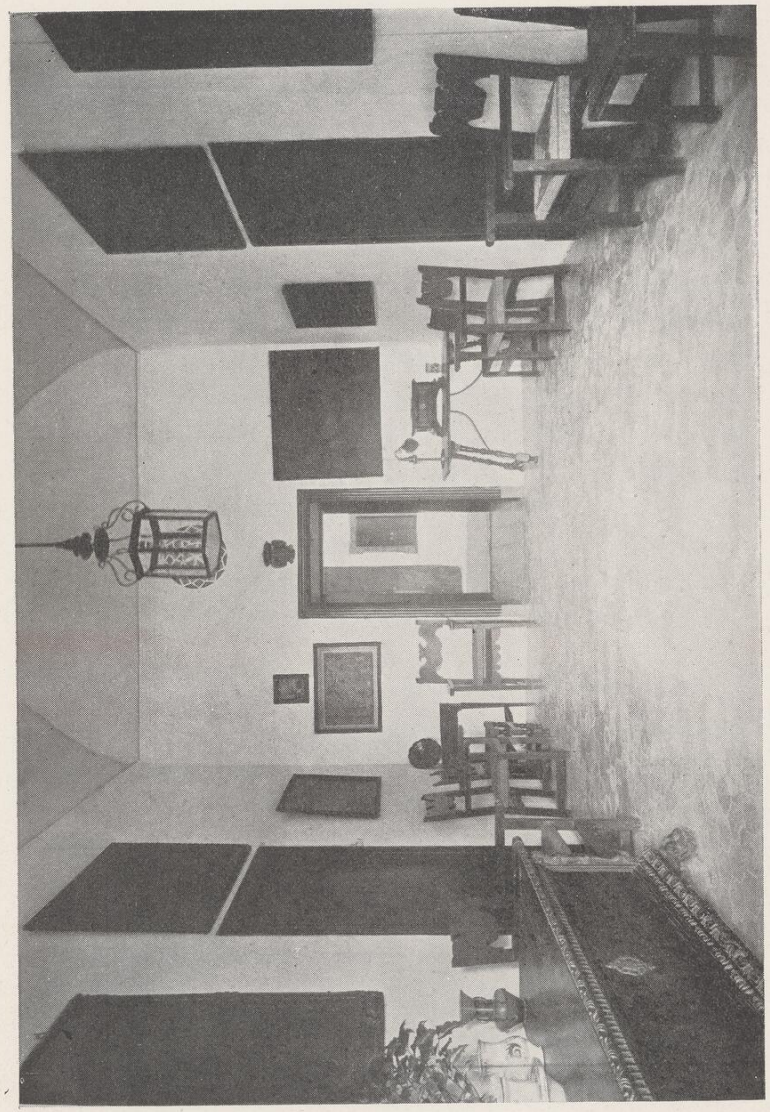
wishing to solve the mystery of the lake, caused some great nets to be sunk into it, and they brought to the surface a maiden who revealed to him that these waters covered the city of Switez, famed in the past for its valliant warriors and the beauty of its women. That city, when unable to defend itself against the armies of the Czar of Russia, made a prayer that God would let it be swallowed up in the earth rather than that it should fall into the hands of the enemy, so that the people might be saved from shame and slaughter. This told, the maiden withdrew and sank down into the lake, whilst the boats and the nets were engulphed in the waters; and, through the age-old trees of the forest, was heard a dull, moaning murmur.

The muse of Chopin kept always burning a votive lamp to his native land. His poetic music enshrined the spirit of the songs and dances of his country which impregnates his work, vibrant with patriotic sentiment. This is specially shown in the national dances, Polonaises and Mazurkas.

Chopin held a clear perception of his patriotic mission; a sacred trust, as his own words confirm. Speaking to the composer Hiller, he said that he aspired to be for his compatriots what Uhland was for the Germans.

Referring to the works of Chopin, Schuman writes; "If the powerful aristocrat of the North had known the formidable opponent that menaced him in the works of Chopin, he would have promptly suppressed his own contention."

From the Cartuja of Valldemosa, buried in the isolation



Interior of the cell of Chopin and George Sand

of the mountains of Majorca, we find Chopin a votary to his beloved Poland.

In this bare, white and humble cell rose the first notes of the Polonaises in G major and in G minor composed with his whole soul as accomplishing a patriotic rite.

De Gibert says, "He who declares that the art of Chopin is melancholy, morbid or unhealthy ignores unjustly many works characteristic of the genial artist; specially he must ignore the Polonaise in G major. That work does not portray the strength of a passion that galvanises for a moment the failing powers, but it vibrates with intense vitality, and youthful vigour. That work suggests the heroic and splendid vision of Polish chivalry, recalling those sumptuous receptions at which Polish society, to the tones of a gay march of Court or festival opened a ball or a grand entertainment of the nobility, the magnificent company, where, through the brilliantly illuminated halls, a crowd of lords and ladies passed proudly displaying the splendour of their robes, the dazzling light of their jewels".

If in reality that work was conceived during the depressing winter passed in Majorca, it gives proof of the ascendency that the spirit holds over the body, and how greatly it rises at times above human miseries.

What a contrast between the two works that form Nº 40! May not the explanation be that the first was composed at Valldemosa, while the second, with its accents of profound sadness and its moments of exasperation, is more consonant with the depression of spirit that Chopin

displayed in his letters to Fontana, the friend to whom he dedicated this work".

"If the first Polonaise was named by Rubinstein "Picture of the Greatness of Poland" the second in which the composer expresses the misfortunes that afflict his country, deploring them in noble form, was styled by the same authority "Picture of the Fall of Poland".

The third Scherzo in F sharp minor (Op. 39), was dedicated to his faithful pupil, Adolf Gutman, the devoted friend in whose arms Chopin died; it is the most dramatic of the series, and assuredly does not fail to reflect the influence of the place in which it was composed, the deserted monastery of Valldemosa.

The Sonata in B flat minor is the poem of Death, to which Chopin devoted four passages, the four movements of the Sonata. The third includes the admirable and popular Funeral March, composed earlier than the sonata, which is the most sad and mournful work of the Master.

"The passing bell, that repeats itself insistently, fills us with melancholy, and serves as accompaniment to a sorrowful lament, in which, however, there is heard the note of hope."

The two Nocturnes, (Op. 37) are, according to Niecks, the happiest of the series. The second, which, in its melody suggests a cradle song, is one of the most delightful of Chopin's works; for, in it is reflected all his infinite tenderness and sensitive grace. It is a delicate example of the serenity that is occasionally found in the work of this master.

The brief period of life, intense and lonely, passed

by the artist in our island, face to face with nature, in an atmosphere harshly contrasting with his habitual life of elegant refinement, left upon his spirit a fertile strain of inspiration wich is displayed in many of his works written subsequently, in which is seen to float the romantic breath of the abandoned monastery.

The stay of Chopin in Majorca was bad for his health, which grew considerably worse during the time he was at Valldemosa. He himself describes, in a letter full of humour, a visit of the Majorcan doctors in comparison with whom, those of Molière were Hipocrates:—"The three most noted medical men of the island have met together to consult: one smelt my sputa, another explored the part where I had expectorated: the third listened while I expectorated. The first said that I was going to die: the second said that I was dying: and the third said that I was already dead".

George Sand describes the treatment which, following the therapeutic system of the day, the doctors prescribed for phthisis. It was blood-letting, dieting, and milk. The invalid's instinct of self-preservation, and the good sense of his companion impelled them to ignore the counsels of science. "With exaggerated sensitiveness to trifles", writes George Sand, "the dread of misery and the want of refined comfort naturally gave him a horror of Majorca at the end of a few days of sickness, our sojourn in the Cartuja of Valldemosa was, therefore a martyrdom for him, and a torment for me. Gentle, gracious, charming in society, Chopin, ill, was despondent in intimate privacy. No spirit could be more noble, more delicate, more

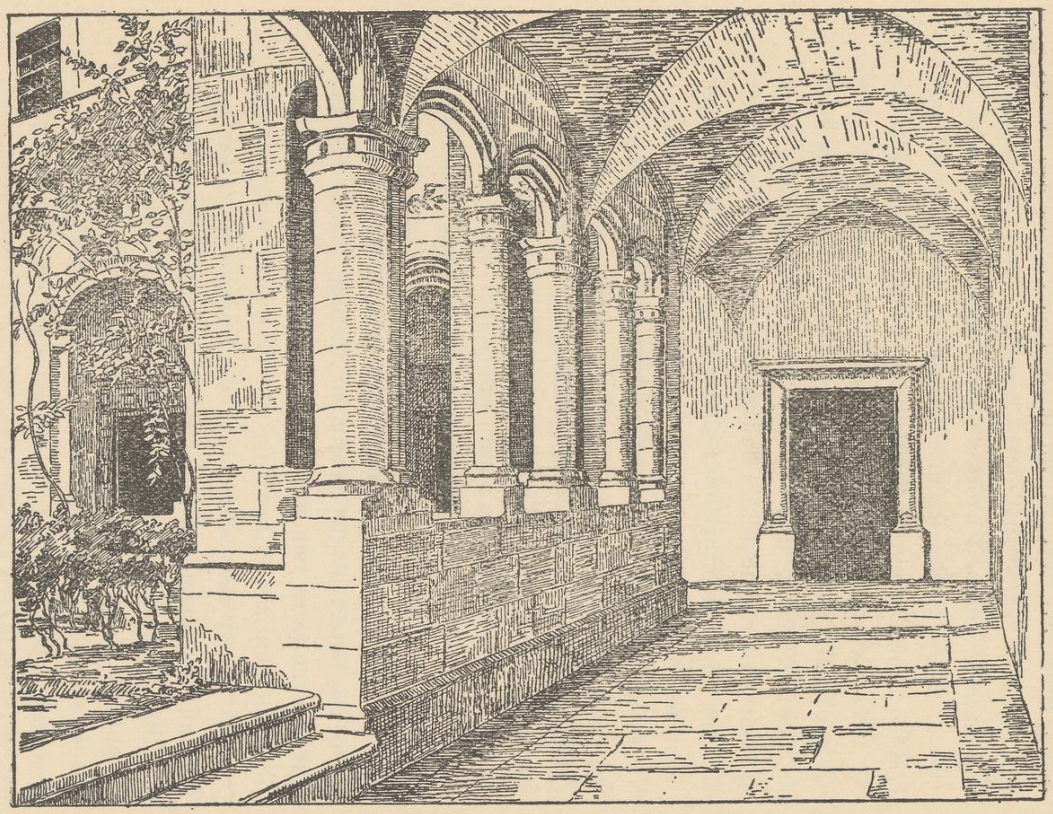
disinterested; no companionship could be more faithful nor more loyal; no wit more brilliant in happy moments; no intellect could be more serious, more versatile in all that was within his dominion. But, on the other hand, unfortunately, no humour could be more capricious, no imagination more suspicious or frenetic, no susceptibility so impossible to satisfy. Yet, nothing of all this could be counted as blame to him, but to his infirmity. His soul was stricken; the fall of a rose petal, the passing of a fly would make him shudder. With the exception of myself and my children, everything was hateful and revolting under the sky of Spain. He was dying rather of his impatience to depart than of the discomfort of remaining."—In spite of the fact that the period spent in Majorca was for him one of suffering and decline, Chopin showed, in some of his letters, the impression made on his mind by the Island "where the sky is turquoise, the sea lapizlazuli, the mountains emerald"; and he showed also the optimism with which he cherished the thought of settling at Valldemosa:—"Probably I shall live in a wonderful monastery, in the most beautiful country in the world: the sea, the mountains, the palm trees, a cemetery, a church of the Crusaders * a ruined castle, and olive trees a thousand years old". "Under this sky, one feels oneself filled with the poetic spirit that seems to emanate from everything around one, every day above our heads, unmolested the eagles wheel".

In the ponderous solitude of the Cartuja, "George

* An error of Chopin's, as the Crusaders never had a residence here.



GEORGE SAND
by A. Charpantier;
painting exhibited in the Paris Salon, 1839



Cloister of Santa Maria, in the old Monastery

Sand tried in vain to incite a reviving breath upon her weary heart; its only response was a pitying tenderness, dimmed by the regrets that came in gusts in the memory of the stormy delights of her past days in Venice. And Chopin, racked by a thousand petty sufferings, as man, deficient, though in spirit so great, feels, day by day, that the power to realise pleasure is leaving him. In both of them, their nerves are predominating. Only in their work do they find freedom, and the lonely condition binding them together, fills them with a kind of fraternal companionship".

To discover the secret of that intense interpenetration between the natures of these two artists, so completely different, so little penetrable individually, whom capricious fortune had united, it must be sought in the unmolested hours passed beside the piano, hours that must have been the highest of all in those brief days lived within the cold white walls of their monastic cell.

The fruit of those hours of deep spiritual intercourse is to be found in the words of George Sand, in wich she concentrates her admiration for her loved companion.

"The genius of Chopin is the most profound, and the most charged with sentiment and emotion that has ever existed. To make a single instrument speak the language of the infinite; to evoke from ten lines that a child might play, poems of the highest purity, drama of unequalled power, he had no need for great material medium. He required no saxophone, no ophocleid, to fill the spirit of the listener with terror, no cathedral organ nor "vox humana" to inspire the soul with devotion and

ecstasy. It needs a great advance of taste and intelligence in music for his works to become popular. Chopin felt his own power and his weakness. His weakness lay in that very excess of force that he could not control. His music is full of "nuances et d'imprevu". At times, rarely, it is fantastic, mysterious, even agonised. Although he felt the terror of the unfathomable, intense emotion bore him unconscious, up to regions realizable to him alone."

Sickness forbade Chopin to enjoy the scenery which appeared to attract him. The climate that he had hoped to find propitious, proved hostile. The loneliness and isolation of the Cartuja depressed and enervated his spirit.

"Of those days of fever and of weariness nothing remains but the delight of the immortal pages that he wrote there".

George Sand, in her book "Un Hiver à Majorque" tells minutely and bitterly all the inconveniences, annoyances and misfortunes that they suffered during their stay in Majorca; these troubles were largely due to the backward state in which they found the island.

We may recall a letter of Chopin to Fontana in which he laments the deplorable state of the roads and carriages. He exclaims,—"What vehicles! what conveniences! Here is the reason, my dear Julius, why one does not find one single Englishman, not even a Consul!"

The unyielding character of George Sand, and her attitude towards religious and social ideals, — greatly influenced by the republican philosopher Pierre Leroux,— inevitably threw her into antagonism with the idiosyncracies

of the Majorcan people, so strongly attached to their old customs and traditions, and hostile to all new ideas.

In face of the irregular amours of this romantic pair, Majorcan society stood aloof. The ladies especially shunned George Sand like the plague. The Consul for France and the members of the family of Valdemosa and of the banker Canut to whom George Sand had brought letters of credit and introduction alone maintained relations with her. The many attentions offered to her by the Marques de la Bastida she disdainfully rejected. She appeared to prefer isolation and lonelines to the treatment prefered by the few men who showed a desire for her acquaintance.

"Once only she went to the theatre, when all the opera glasses were fixed upon her during the whole evening".

Madame Choussat, a lady of French origin, the wife of the banker Señor Canut, describes in her memoirs her impressions of the writer. After praising the large dark eyes, beautiful but inexpressive, of the Baroness Dudevant, "Indian eyes" in the phrase of de Musset who had suffered so cruelly under their fascination, Madame Choussat speaks of her splendid tresses, "forming over her forehead two huge plaits that were coiled at the back of her head and adorned by a beautiful silver dagger. Her simple dress was almost always black or of a dark colour. From a velvet scarf which she wore around her neck hung a cross with huge brilliants, and from a bracelet, depended many rings which, doubtless, also were so many keepsakes,— remembrances, perhaps, of so many other amorous adventures. Such was the physical aspect of this woman,



THE CARTUJA

Painting by B. Ferrá.

sensual and complex, in whose veins ran royal blood, mingled with that of poor and humble forbears.

During their time at the Cartuja, there arose also active hostility between the two strangers and the villagers of Valldemosa.

Assuredly these people were not such as George Sand has pictured them "models of simplicity and purity, men according to nature, and conformable to the optimistic conception of contemporary socialism not yet distorted by social convention or by the artificial culture of cities".

In their code there was no place for free-love. The writer roaming by moonlight in the dead of night through the cemetery of the friars, disquieted the simple and non-romantic peasants. Her abstention from church awakened their resentment—.

Unless we consider this lack of comprehension, it is impossible to explain how this woman, so free-minded, so democratic, and so liberal, who lived the patriarchal life with her peasants at Berry, could have thrown herself, with such violence against the peasants of Majorca.

"On Sundays"—writes George Sand—"the sound of the conch which resounds in the village and along the roads to remind the laggarts of the hour of mass, pursued us in vain in the Cartuja: We were deaf because we did not understand, and when we understood we were still more so. Then they discovered a means to avenge the glory of God, which was by no means Christianlike. They agreed among themselves not to sell us any fish, eggs or vegetables except at exorbitant prices. It was useless

for us to quote the current prices. At the slightest objection, the vendor would reply, with the air of a grandee of Spain, "You do not want it?" putting back the onions or potatoes into the basket, "then you wont have it!" and would retire majestically, leaving no chance to recall him and open negociations. He made us fast to punish us for trying to bargain".

It is certainly true to the mentality of the peasants of Valldemosa that they should endeavour clumsily to exploit foreigners whom they regarded as hostile to their customs and beliefs. In addition the fear of the contagion of tuberculosis increased their natural reserve and aloofness.

George Sand carefully collected, and often exaggerated all these rural resentments, recapitulating them with a complete lack of grace or distinction, in her book published some years after her visit to Majorca.

It is notable that the most harsh complaints and most bitter invectives in her book fall upon two persons, namely Señor Gomez, the landlord of So'n Vent, who rather brutally ejected them from that house, and Maria Antonia, a Spanish woman who had installed herself in the Cartuja and occupied herself in exploiting the visitors who came to stay there. Maria Antonia offerred her services, and, together with "the Girl" and Catalina, became the domestic of the strangers, and made them the victims of her rapacity.

"I have never known" writes George Sand, referring to Maria Antonia, "a mouth so apt and fingers so adept at extracting choice morsels from the depths of a boiling pot, without scalding themselves, nor a throat so elastic

to swallow the sugar and coffee of her respected employers, all the while that she sings a country song, or chants the air of a bolero".

The other two servants shared the same voracity, so that the writer was obliged to set her children to mount guard against their pilfering, for they would "swoop, like vultures, on certain dishes of fish,—to drive from our kitchen, in mid—air, those little birds of prey that would have left us nothing but the bones".

These petty skirmishes, apparently so trivial, assumed a veritable importance for the refugees of Valldemosa, when added to the difficulties they faced in obtaining provisions.

George Sand writes, "If I could live a hundred years, I should never forget the arrival of the basket of provisions at the Cartuja."

The delicate condition of Chopin, his horror of the Majorcan cooking, the lack of the necessary means for his care exasperated his companion, who had to bear all the burden of housekeeping in addition to the responsibility of the journey.

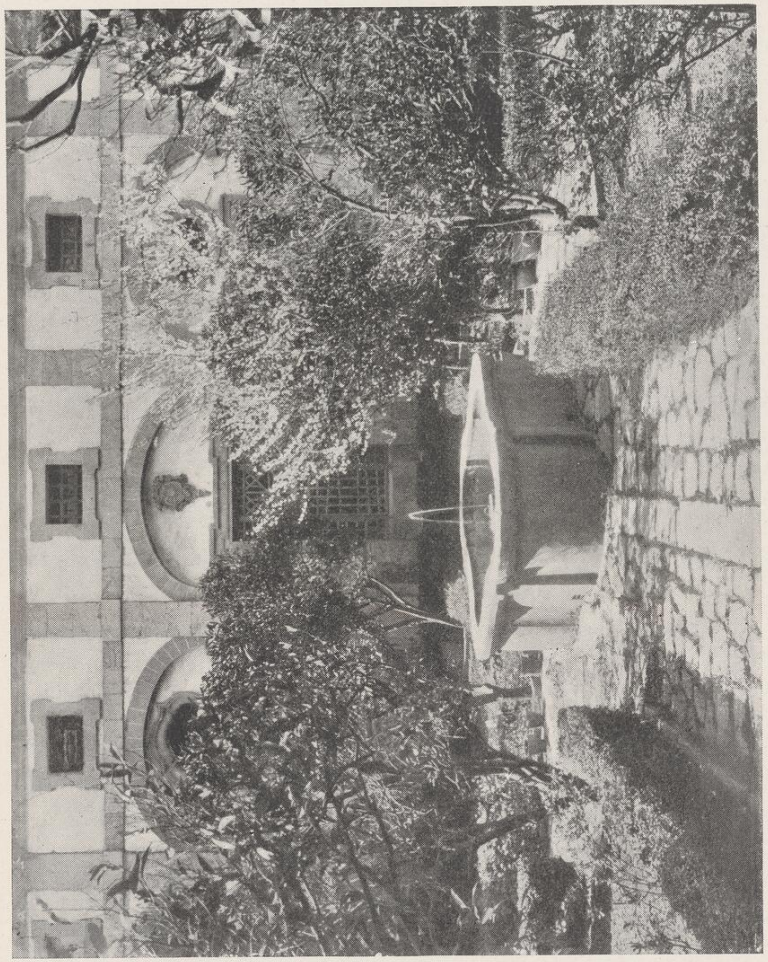
"A winter in Majorca" is the outcome of a hatred created by the misfortunes of Chopin, rather than by her own. She admits this in her work, "The Story of my Lyfe".

"Our life in that romantic solitude" she says "would have been very pleasant if it had not been for the constant sight of the sufferings of Chopin".

Setting aside the ill-feeling that characterises her book, we must recognise the compensating splendor of her descriptions of the scenery.

In the opening chapter, George Sand humourously claims the title of discoverer of the island of Majorca. Time has confirmed her claim. No one has portrayed so finely the enchantment of the country. Her descriptions, so extraordinarily suggestive, have never been surpassed. Some of these descriptions surprise by their modernity of vision and luminosity so subtle that they give the idea at times of a prevision of "impressionism". An instance is the description of the mountain range as viewed from the city, closing the horizon from the plain, — "At evening the colour of this scene changes from hour to hour,—ever in harmony, more and more. We have seen it at sunset, all glorious rose; then a lovely violet, then, later, of the tone of a silvered lily; and last, at nightfall, a pure and transparent azure. To the clarity of the atmosphere, and to the extraordinary luminosity of the island climate it is due that often the farthest planes of the landscape are seen in a vivid strength of colour and an extraordinary definition of detail, outlined on the rocks, houses and trees standing out sharply against the sky, just as we see them in the delightful landscape backgrounds of the primitive Italian painters. At times one might say that the rules of aerial perspective were reversed, since the clear definition of the distance contrasts with the nearer scene, enveloped in a luminous shade that merges all detail. This aspect of our surroundings, the despair of painters who have striven with profound study to express it, was admirably realised by George Sand in describing the view from their cell.

"Sublime picture, framed, upon the near plane, by



Court of the Myrtles

Foto Macià.

dark rocks clothed in pines; on the second plane, by mountains, boldly outlined and robed in grand trees; on the third and fourth by rounded ranges that the setting sun gilds with its clearest tones, and upon whose masses the eye can distinguish, at a league's distance, the microscopic silhouette of the trees, fine as the antennae of a butterfly, black and delicate as if etched with a pen in Indian-ink, on a ground of burnished gold".

This presents a faithful impression of the aspect offered by the valley of Valldemosa, as seen from the Cartuja, with its verdant terraces that score the mountain sides in form of an amphitheatre, a prodigious work of man that has softened the harsh face of nature.

Here the scene invites to contemplation, at once grandiose and intimate, immutable, yet ever varying with the hour; full of detail as a vivid picture of Patinir, over which are seen peacefully to pass the seasons. The Majorcan olive trees that are famed to have inspired Gustave Doré to realise those trunks in human form, tragically condemned to eternal torment, found in his illustrations to the Inferno of Dante, were powerfully described by George Sand in a flash of romantic phantasy.

"When one passes at night under their shadow it is hard to realise that these are trees that one is looking on, for to believe the eye and the imagination, one would be terrified amidst all these fantastic monsters. Some of them crouch over you like enormous dragons, with gaping maw and wings outstretched; others coiled upon themselves like huge sleeping pythons; some, again, at grips with each other like wrestling giants. Here is a galloping centaur,

bearing on his croup I know not what hideous harpy; there an indescribable reptile devours a gasping goat. Yonder is a satyr, capering with a buck, little less repulsive than himself. Sometimes it is a single tree twisted, naked, bent, deformed, that one could fancy to be a group of ten distinct trees, impersonating all these various monsters, to gather them all together under one head, horrible as that of an Indian fetisch, and crowned by one green branch, like a chimera."

The grotesque side of the peasants is cleverly caricatured in some pages of the book, as in the following passage that one finds interpolated in a poetic description of the peaceful Majorcan nights.

"In a neighbouring peasant's cottage, one would hear the sobbing of a child, and the mother singing it to sleep with a pretty country song, very monotonous, very sad, and very Moorish. But other voices, less poetic come to remind me of the comic aspect of Majorca.

The pigs waken, complaining in a manner not easy to define. At once, the peasant father of the family is awakened by the voices of his beloved piggies, just as the mother at the cries of her infant. He puts his head out of the window, and one hears him in a solemn voice chide the inmates of the sty below. The pigs hear him, and are silenced. Then the peasant, seemingly to lull himself to sleep again, starts to pray the rosary in a lugubrious voice that, as sleep approaches and recedes, sinks and rises like the distant murmur of the waves. Then, sometimes a pig will emit a wild squeal; the master raises his voice, without interrupting his prayer,

and the obedient animals, calmed by an "Ora pro nobis" or an "Ave Maria", pronounced in a familiar tone, at once are silent."

Some of the descriptions in "Spiridion",—her work written, in great part, in the Cartuja,—such as that of terrace of the convent and that of the Hermitage, may be considered as complementary to descriptions in "A Winter in Majorca".

The scenery of Majorca imprinted an ineffaceable memory upon the spirit of George Sand. Referring to the road to Valldemosa, she writes:—"I can never forget a certain turn in the valley where, on looking back, one saw, on the summit of a hill, one of those pretty Moorish houses that I have described, half hidden among the racquet-like leaves of its prickly-pear bushes, and a great palm tree, hanging over the abyss and defining its silhouette against the sky. When the sight of the mud and the fogs of Paris excites my spleen, I close my eyes, and I see again, in a dream, that green hill and its brown rocks, and the solitary palm tree lost in a rose-toned sky."

The wide panorama of the sea, the cliffs and the mountains, the gigantic tortured olive trees; the humble peasant cottages, surrounded by walnut and carrob trees; the ascending ranks of terraces, the exuberant vegetation beside the streams, the lofty palm trees rising beside the lonely farm houses; the grandeur of the tempestuous nights and the great nocturnal silences,—"more profound than in any other place, broken only by the rhythm of the distant sheep bells", are portrayed in her book with admirable art; at times with the sharp contrast of an etching, and

at others with the inspiring enchantment of a romance in lithograph. The artist achieved a noble realisation of the "genius loci" of the scenes amidst which she lived, with profound perception of the spirit of our land.

Her allusions to Poussin, Corot, Rousseau, Dupré, Descamps and Delacroix, when faced with scenes in harmony with the spirit that animated the works of those masters, give evidence of gread judgment. These allusions confirm her high sensibility to nature, and her fervent admiration for Majorca, which was concentrated in that phrase which has become famous: "It is the verdant Helvetia, under the sky of Calabria, with the solemnity and calm of the East".



THE STAY OF CHOPIN AND GEORGE SAND IN MAJORCA

In the passenger lists of the steamer "Mallorquin", for the years 1838-1839, appear the following entries:—

1.—S. S. "Mallorquin", departure from Barcelona, 7th November 1838, 5 p. m.: arrival at Palma, 8th November, 11.30 a. m. carrying passengers as follows:—

First Class;

Madame Dudevant, married;
Monsieur Maurice, her son, a minor;
Mademoiselle Solange, her daughter, a minor;
Monsieur Frederic Chopin, artist.

Second Class;

Mademoiselle Amelie, Maid.

2.—In the same steamer, on 13th February, 1839 at. 3. p. m., the same passengers, all foreign, left Palma, arriving in Barcelona on the following day.

This proves that Chopin and George Sand remained in Majorca 98 days.

They stayed, first, in a boarding-house in the Calle de la Marina, Palma, where they lived 8 days

Next, they were in the house named Son Vent, at Establiments, then owned by Señor Gomez, for. . . . . 30 days

In the house of M. Flury, Consul for France. 4 days

In the Cartuja of Valldemosa . . . . . 56 days

TOTAL. . . . . 98 days

Stowarzyszenia Zbiory I. F. C.

IMP. F. SOLER

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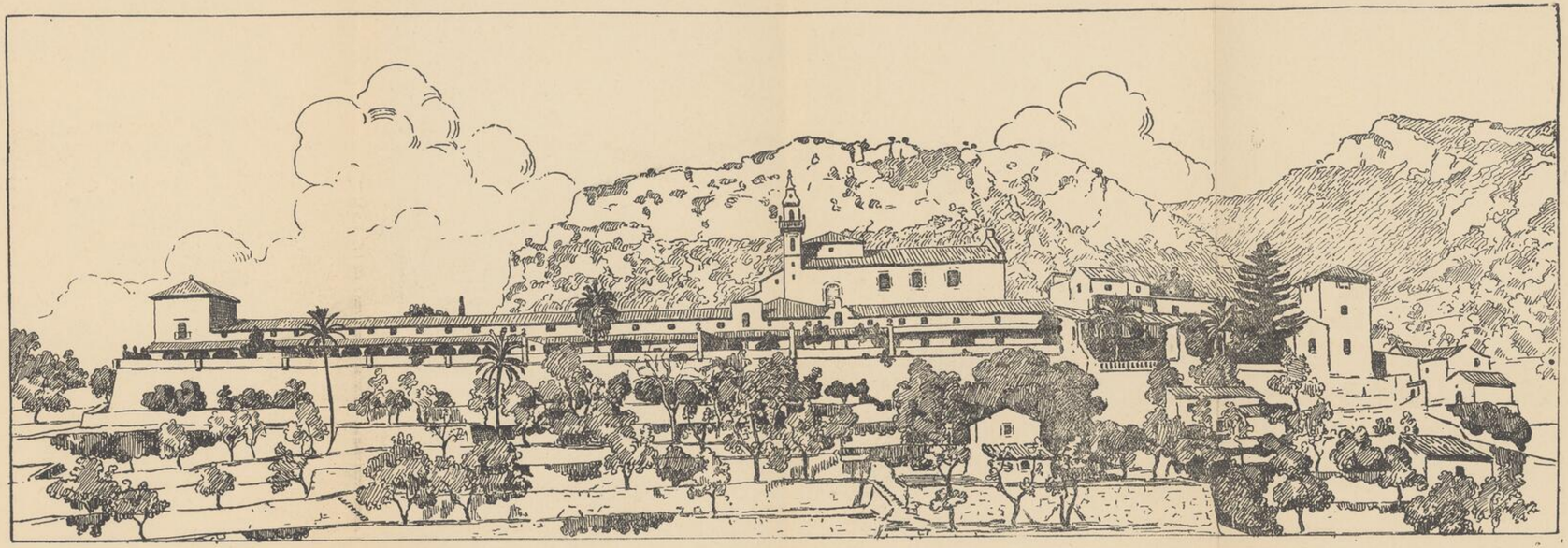
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GENERAL VIEW OF THE CARTUJA OF VALLDEMOSA

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EDICIONS
LA CARTOIXA

BARTOMEU FERRA

CHOPIN
AND
GEORGE SAND

IN THE CARTUJA DE VALLDEMOSA

ENGLISH TRANSLATION



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