

I describe to thee the fructifying vapors that rise from the moist earth, or the cool breezes wafted over the rippled face of the waters? Shall I speak of the sweet song of the birds, or of the rich luxuriance of the flowering plants? What charms me beyond all else is the calm repose of this spot. It is only visited occasionally by huntsmen; for my wilderness nourishes herds of deer and wild goats, but not bears and wolves. What other spot could I exchange for this? Alcmaeon, when he had found the Echinades, would not wander further.* In this simple description of scenery and of forest life, feelings are expressed which are more intimately in unison with those of modern times than any thing that has been transmitted to us from Greek or Roman antiquity. From the lonely Alpine hut to which Basil withdrew, the eye wanders over the humid and leafy roof of the forest below. The place of rest which he and his friend Gregory of Nazianzum had long desired, is at length found.† The poetic and mythical allusion at the close of the letter falls on the Christian ear like an echo from another and earlier world.

Basil's Homilies on the Hexæmeron also give evidence of his love of nature. He describes the mildness of the constantly clear nights of Asia Minor, where, according to his expression, the stars, "those everlasting blossoms of heaven," elevate the soul from the visible to the invisible.‡ When, in the myth of the creation, he would praise the beauty of the sea, he describes the aspect of the boundless ocean plain, in all its varied and ever-changing conditions, "gently moved by the breath of heaven, altering its hue as it reflects the beams of light in their white, blue, or roseate hues, and caressing the

* *Basilii M. Epist.*, xiv., p. 93; *Ep. ccxxiii.*, p. 339. On the beautiful letter to Gregory of Nazianzum, and on the poetic frame of mind of St. Basil, see Villemain, *De l'Eloquence Chrétienne dans le Quatrième Siècle*, in his *Mélanges Historiques et Littéraires*, t. iii., p. 320-325. The Iris, on whose shores the family of the great Basil had formerly possessed an estate, rises in Armenia, and, after flowing through the plains of Pontus, and mingling with the waters of the Lycus, empties itself into the Black Sea.

† Gregory of Nazianzum did not, however, suffer himself to be enticed by the description of Basil's hermitage, preferring Arianzum in the *Tiberina Regio*, although his friend had complainingly designated it as an impure *βύραθρον*. See *Basilii Epist.*, ii., p. 70, and *Vita Sancti Bas.*, p. xlv. and lix. of the edition of 1730.

‡ *Basilii Homil. in Hexæm.*, vi., 1, and iv., 6; *Bas., Op. Omnia*, ed. Jul. Garnier, 1839, t. i., p. 54-70. Compare with this the expression of deep sadness in the beautiful poem of Gregorius of Nazianzum, bearing the title *On the Nature of Man* (*Gregor. Naz., Op. omnia*, ed. Par., 1611, t. ii., Carm. xiii., p. 85).