

1725.<sup>1</sup> He was thus exactly ten years younger than Guettard. So pinched were the conditions of his youth that he could hardly read even when fifteen years old. From that time, on the death of his father, better prospects dawned upon him. The parish priest urged his guardian to have him educated, as far as the slender means left for his sustenance would allow. He was accordingly sent to the college of the Oratorians of Troyes; but the pittance available for his benefit was exhausted by the first few terms of his stay there. He had, however, made such marked progress that his teachers, interested in his career, were glad to continue gratuitously the instruction for which he could no longer pay. At the end of his time with them, they passed him on to their brethren in Paris.

Having made some advance, especially in geometry and physics, he was able to support himself by private teaching and other labours which, however, barely provided the necessaries of life. After some ten years of this drudgery, the studies which had been his occupation and solace, came at last to be the means of opening up a new and noble career to him.

The appearance of Buffon's *Theory of the Earth*, in 1749, had had a powerful influence in France in directing attention to the revolutions through which our globe has passed. Among the results of this influence, a society which had been founded at Amiens by the Duc de Chaulnes, proposed in 1752 a prize

<sup>1</sup> The biographical details of the following sketch are taken from the well-known eloquent *Éloge* of Desmarest by Cuvier, *Recueil des Éloges Historiques*, edit. 1819, vol. ii. p. 339.