

## NOTABLE WOMEN: GEORGE SAND.

WITH LETTERS AND PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.



CAMILLE DOUCET, Permanent Secretary of the Institute of France, making the announcement in a report read before that body, that the subject chosen by the Académie Française for the next *concours d'éloquence* was "George Sand," said: "When, six years ago, it was suggested by one of your members that the eulogium of George Sand should be given as a subject for competition, his proposal was met with the words, 'It is too soon': to-day he barely escapes being answered, 'It is too late.'"

It would indeed seem that George Sand has gone out of fashion. For a number of years the same was said of Lamartine, and yet to-day the great lyric poet again stands on as high a pedestal as ever. However this may be in the case of George Sand, the time seems to me opportune, on the day following the publication of her voluminous correspondence, and anticipating the date set apart for her academic praise, to commit to writing some personal, intimate, and friendly recollections of this woman of genius—nay, more than that, of her who was the genius of kindness itself.

Let me first relate how it became my good fortune to have her as the sponsor of my first literary efforts. Legendary talk notwithstanding, her circle of friends did not consist merely of literary confrères, of revolutionary folk, or of the denizens of Bohemia. True republican though she was, she could forgive a few of her friends, to quote her own words, for having come into the world patricians. Among these few were Comte d'Orsay, who rendered into English the "*Mare au diable*," and Comte d'Aure, my step-father.

M. d'Aure, through whom I became acquainted with her more than thirty years ago, was in his way an artist. Toward the close of his life he was equerry to the emperor, after having in days gone by been *écuyer cavalcadour* to Louis XVIII. and to Charles X., and then *écuyer commandant* at the Royal School of Cavalry at Saumur. During a long and brilliant career the horse had been to him an object of constant and primary interest. Equitation was to him what it was in

centuries gone by to those who taught it in those academies where the nobility of France went to be instructed in an art among all others held highest in honor. Heir to the traditions of the Versailles school, of which he was the last representative, his treatise on equitation is, even at the present day, the official catechism, so to speak, of our cavalry, and, after a period of more than fifty years, Paris has not forgotten the glories of the riding-school of the Rue Duphot, where the representative of one of France's oldest families did not disdain to act as instructor. At a time when the subversive theories contained in "Jacques" and "Indiana" were causing a great stir, George Sand, a dark-haired, pale little woman, with her two pretty children, used to be an assiduous visitor to the school. That person, reserved in her manner, not to say shy, and anxious to escape observation as much as possible, was no other than the bold writer who shocked so awfully part of the reading public. Deprived as she was then of her rides through the wooded country of the Berri, she came to the riding-school by way of relaxation, after hours of assiduous labor. Thus it happened that an intimate friendship sprang up between Mme. Sand and M. d'Aure.

At the time when these two old friends laid their heads together to encourage my literary début, they had for some years ceased to have any frequent personal intercourse, as Mme. Sand dwelt almost constantly on her Nohant estate in the Berri, whereas the duties of M. d'Aure required his presence at court; but their epistolary communion had not suffered any interruption. The equerry to the emperor, the inspector-general of the stud, never brought out any work whatsoever on the subjects to which he devoted his special attention, such as equitation viewed from a military or political standpoint, or from that of industrial economy, without sending a copy to Mme. Sand, who would show in her acknowledgment of the gift that amount of interest which she knew so well how to take in every subject under the sun. From time to time she would intrust him with the re-stocking of her very rustic stables. She seemed always in need, for the purpose of carrying her folks over the country roads, of a pair of sturdy little horses of

ordinary breed, which were to cost her but little; for although she had in her lifetime earned over a million francs without ever making any sacrifice to pecuniary considerations, and while she conducted her affairs with much order, Mme. Sand, whose right hand was ever generous, was all her life compelled to be economical. In the bundle of her letters which I possess,—most of which will never see the light of publication,—the animal creation occupies no inconsiderable space. There are also pages of confidences—pages that are charming in their simplicity and in their tenderness—on the subject of her *maisonnée* (household), especially those which have reference to the nuptials of her son Maurice, who in 1862 became the husband of the daughter of her valued old friend Calamatta—“a union of hearts over which the parents rejoiced.” That which, however, stands out most prominently in these pages is the close participation in good works of these two pre-eminently generous people. At every step one finds them seeking to obtain a situation for some one, to secure some one's promotion. Not only did George Sand absolve M. d'Aure from the crime of taking service under a government for which she had no love, but she even allowed him to be the instrument of her intercession with the emperor, when some deed of charity seemed to demand it. In the matter of a free scholarship, which she was desirous of obtaining for Jacques Luguët, one of the grandchildren of Mme. Dorval, the famous actress, she spoke to M. d'Aure as follows:

You are under the impression that the request would have a better chance of being taken under consideration by the empress if it came from me. There is nothing that I would not do for a family so distinguished by its qualities of heart and head. But I should not like to make a false move. First ascertain whether the use of my name would not have an effect contrary to the one sought for, and I will then do whatever you judge appropriate. Were it possible to bring under the empress's notice, at a time when her mind is not otherwise engaged, that chapter of the “*Histoire de ma Vie*” wherein I have described the life and the death of Mme. Dorval, I think that would constitute in itself an effective plea, for I have painted her such as she was, and I have reproduced some of her letters, as well as some of her admirable and heartrending sayings.

The name of George Sand did not produce an undesired effect, and it is to be wondered at that she should have dreaded this contingency, since Napoleon III. had more than once granted her petitions on behalf of political friends, victims of the Coup d'État. Perhaps it was that the novel of “*Malgré tout*” had already made its appearance, and it was rumored that its author had ventured to paint

the empress under the somewhat unsympathetic traits of Mlle. d'Ortosa. She always protested against this accusation; still, aware as she was of the rumor, she had, under the circumstances, sufficient cause to fear that the imperial court would be prejudiced against her. However that may have been, Jacques Luguët obtained the coveted free scholarship.

It will readily be understood how M. d'Aure, upon seeing his adopted daughter develop a taste for writing, hastened to place the early efforts of the young beginner under the patronage of the friend in whom he reposed so great a confidence. He proceeded in this, however, with the greatest discretion, asking George Sand, without revealing my identity, and without showing her any of my prose, to give some advice suitable to a young woman who was about to take up literature as a career. Her answer was at first singularly discouraging:

It is absolutely necessary, for one seeking to overcome the almost insurmountable obstacles which separate the author from the public, first to write either something excellent, or very scandalous, very amusing, very original. Then an effort must be made to get the work published in a journal or in a magazine, and afterward, if its success has been a marked one, a publisher will come on the scene, who will purchase—at the lowest possible figure, as a matter of course. But then, every journal or every magazine is buried under a load of manuscripts, and the looking into the merits of the newcomer has to be postponed indefinitely. The most warmly worded recommendation will prove of no value. In no single quarter is an opening to be met with on any given day. Engagements have already been entered into, certain interests have to be carefully considered; then there are reasons purely of the “shop.” Taking the case of disinterested persons, there arise questions of system, taste, of settled convictions, of I know not what.

I had myself to wait two long years before I saw myself in print, and that at a time when publishers were still in existence, when the book trade was making money. Nowadays that trade is at its lowest, and Mme. Sand, no less than others, seriously feels this condition of things.

Such is the situation. If by chance your young friend is the possessor of a masterpiece, it may reap for her a few hundred francs, and that after much trouble and patience. Her second work will fare better, and her third still better. But three masterpieces at the very least (from this point of view of a success) constitute the minimum before one can live by one's pen. You doubtless will ask of me how it is that so many mediocre and even worthless productions see the light. My answer to this is, that some, although worthless, have met with approval by mere chance; the rest have been published at the author's expense.

Nevertheless, all this did not prevent her from placing herself unreservedly and with zeal at the disposal of the person whom M. d'Aure

finally decided to reveal to her in more clear and precise terms. She at once volunteered to introduce me to M. Buloz, the editor of the "Revue des Deux Mondes," a power who was approached only with trembling, yet to whom I was in the future to owe a large debt of gratitude.

In these days I was a mere novice, and confined my efforts to writing short stories of fiction, or criticisms for magazines and sporting journals. In the midst of this — July 6, 1861 — Mme. Sand wrote from Nohant to M. d'Aure as follows:

DEAR FRIEND: You were constantly in my thoughts yesterday as I read a book which I consider to be admirable. This book is above all one of art, but interwoven with an expert knowledge of technical things that will meet with your approval, while the literary form will at the same time give you delight. I do not know the author. Perhaps he has sent you a copy of his work. Should he not have done so, then buy it . . . Its title is "A Propos d'un Cheval," by Victor Cherbuliez. It takes but two hours to read, and you may take my word that you will not regret the time given to it.

The subject of the book was a horseman of the Partenopian's frieze, and George Sand had not been mistaken in her enthusiastic appreciation. It has been contended that she generally lacked the faculty of criticism. This much is certain, that her great kindness was wont to make her shut her eyes to certain flaws in works submitted to her, and to enhance their good qualities; but although she did not subject talent to an over-minute scrutiny, nor to a chemical analysis, she could recognize it, divine it, foresee it. Not to speak of any others, Fromentin and Cherbuliez were a living proof, of this. I wrote a paper on the former, and it pleased her, as will be seen from her following note to M. d'Aure:

DEAR FRIEND: I have found your daughter's article well thought out, well wrought, and very good. So far, I have not had time to write to you, and I was of opinion, moreover, that the thanks of the author would prove more agreeable to her; and again, if I have not done all this sooner it is because an absence of a few days has delayed my receiving the newspaper.

You know that I am entirely at your disposal; but believe me, do not subject the talent and the future of your young writer to any expression of opinion, not even to one spoken by me. Let her venture forth, and spontaneously develop herself. I know from experience that the best meant counsels may delay a move forward, and be the cause of turning individuality from its right path. It is easy to find excellent that which one greatly wishes to look upon as such, and I might perhaps be less severe toward her than she will be to herself. Others than myself may exercise an-

other kind of fatal influence over her, and discourage her by seeking to substitute their way of looking at things for her own. She can write, she weighs things well, and she is fully able to do good critical work. It is plain to see that she is well equipped and that she has sound judgment. With regard to imagination, if she lacks it, there is no advice that will endow her with it; while if she possesses it, advice might go so far as to stifle it. Tell her that so long as I consulted others I lacked inspiration, which came to me on the day that I trusted to my own wings.

I am glad to hear that the emperor understands you. If he wishes to do me a pleasure, he will leave the Pope under the sole and individual protection of M. Lamoricière.

Yours, with heartfelt feelings, my dear d'Aure. Maurice sends his kindest regards, and the engraver his affectionate compliments.

G. SAND.

"The engraver" was Alexandre Manceau, a talented artist, who for years dwelt at Nohant, whose self-styled librarian he was, and where he was, so to speak, one of the family. That hospitable mansion welcomed under its roof many faithful friends. Eugène Lambert, painter-in-ordinary to the feline kingdom, spent ten years there, when he had come originally for a season only.

IN the month of May, 1862, I was at last to enjoy the honor of meeting George Sand in person. She had let us know that she would come to spend a day in Paris, and that she would expect us. It was on a Thursday afternoon, at about two o'clock, that I set my foot in the house at No. 3 Rue Racine, which she occupied on the occasions of her somewhat infrequent trips to Paris. The date has ever remained a memorable one for me. I can see once more the plain little staircase, the small apartment, the intelligent, sickly-looking, and bald head of Manceau, the engraver, who welcomed us at the very threshold, and then in a somewhat vast and oddly shaped drawing-room, composed as it was of two rooms made into one by the removal of a partition, that little stoutish woman with a smooth, olive-like complexion, with wavy hair sparsely streaked with silver threads, and whose exceedingly simple black toilet modestly disobeyed the latest edicts of fashion. She sprang up from the sofa whereon she was sitting, for the purpose of extending a welcome to my step-father and me.

Without taking into consideration the portrait of George Sand "fit for a Book of Beauty," wherein Charpentier has represented her as a "belle Italienne," with pomegranate flowers in her curls, there exist three faithful and truly characteristic counterfeit presentations of the woman so well described by Balzac in "Bea-

trix." One of these, by Calamatta, shows her as a slender person, with an almost hieratic head-gear, which emphasizes her Sphinx-like physiognomy. It was made in the days when one of her admirers said that she looked like a tiny creole, supple as a reed; while, on the other hand, one of her detractors contended that she was as thin as a lath, and as black as a mole. The second portrait—of all the most interesting—leaves one in doubt as to her sex, and exhibits a physiognomy than which one more pathetic, or more stamped with suffering, cannot be imagined. It would seem that Delacroix, having come unawares upon "Lélia" during one of her moments of despair, on the occasion of some great crisis of passion, sought to preserve her image in his master-sketch of that pale face which emerges from a masculine redingote and an unloosened cravat, as the very expression—the most striking expression, the never-to-be-forgotten expression—of the feverish times of the romantic period. Couture was to follow, and to immortalize the epoch of calmness corresponding with the ripe age of Mme. Sand. He has shown her to us full of dignity: her powerful forehead is shadowed with deep thought; her look reveals deep and serene melancholy; her hair, of which she always possessed a mass, reaches in heavy bands down to her cheeks, and acts as a frame for her long oval face. The relaxation consequent upon age is shown at the corners of her mouth, which droops somewhat; all the other features have kept their noble regularity.

When I saw her the first time, Mme. Sand looked like Couture's picture of her. But I did not there and then notice this. I merely experienced the feeling of the affectionate gentleness which detached itself from her as she put out her two hands to me and kissed me, with a word of welcome spoken in an intonation deeper and more sonorous than that which is generally characteristic of the French voice.

The conversation took a cordial and cheerful turn, and was free from any attempt at wit. Mme. Sand was not witty. The scope of our talk was confined to the newly married couple, Maurice Sand and his wife, who were spending their honeymoon at Nohant, driving about with a little team selected by M. d'Aure.

In the course of our call, Mme. Viardot dropped in with one of her daughters, the god-child of Mme. Sand, and so I was privileged to see otherwise than on the stage that sister of Malibran, the sublime interpreter of Gluck, whom I already knew to be one of the most intellectual and remarkable of women, quite apart from her talent as a singer. I still remember a thought that came to my mind upon seeing George Sand and the incomparable *Orphée* together, a thought which has recurred

to me since, when seeing the portraits of George Eliot. It would seem that faculties of the highest order are, in the case of women, oftentimes to be found in what is styled a horse's head—one somewhat out of proportion with the body, the face very long, and the features rather masculine than feminine. Such a physiognomy usually lacks flexibility, however full of expression it may become when swept by strong emotions.

LATER, many affectionate messages of invitation from Mme. Sand sought me out, and one day in the autumn of 1862 I found myself on the way to Nohant.

Arriving at night at Châteauroux, I discovered a little diligence, and sank comfortably into the warm straw. In spite of all the deep ruts of the road, it seemed to be that I was being wheeled away into very fairy-land. There arose to my mind the childhood of George Sand, as told by herself, the dreamy childhood which so revealed her future—the childhood of the poet and of the little peasant which she spent in the family residence I was about to visit.

My mind was filled with visions borrowed from what I had read of the country of "Jeanne," of the "Champi," of "Simon," and of the "Meunier d'Angibault." The night was so dark that I could not see the surrounding country, but I experienced the feeling that I was passing through the picturesque sites of the Vallée Noire, so often, so admirably, described by the author of "Valentine." I could imagine the shady *trâines*, the hedges covered in summer with honeysuckle, the heather with its delicate purplish tint, the woods in which one loses oneself, around the Mare au diable. And so dreaming, we covered eight leagues.

The gleam of a lantern on the edge of the road told me that we were close to Nohant. I was soon down in front of a little garden gate, and, walking under big trees by the light of a lantern, I was conducted to the great dining-room, where, at the corner of the table, was laid my supper. At that table sat Mme. Sand and her daughter-in-law, the latter a young woman, very short-sighted, and thoroughly Italian in type. Although born in Paris, she could claim Italy as her country, for several reasons: the nationality of her father, the celebrated engraver Calamatta, her residence in a country which she was very fond of calling her own, and her professed adoration of Garibaldi. She could, moreover, boast of a glorious French ancestry, for she was the grandchild of Houdon, the sculptor. Her mother-in-law could not have loved her more had she been her actual mother, and in the oft-repeated words, "Lina mia," there was an indescribable tenderness. Supper over, I quickly withdrew to the room pre-

pared for me on the first floor, which was reached by a broad staircase with heavy banisters.

The first person who entered my room on the following morning was a young woman, who seemed to me to have sprung from the pages of Mme. Sand's novels. I had already heard a good deal concerning Marie Caillaud. Very tall, very fragile, with a gentle and grave physiognomy, Marie wore that clear muslin *cornette* which is one of the prettiest examples of headgear left by the middle ages to our country people. Under her peasant's dress of a finer material than that generally met with in a village, she was the type of girlish modesty. Mme. Sand had gradually raised her from menial rank to a position which was half way between that of a lady's maid and of a lady's companion. Marie waited upon her at meals, after which she would sit down at table to eat by herself, quite apart from the other servants. Although without education, she knew the works of her mistress, and in the evenings, when some one of us began to read aloud, she would frequently come into the drawing-room and sit at the end of the table, where she silently stitched together the prescribed number of sheets which constituted those little copy-books which George Sand was wont to fill nightly with her bold hand, erasing nothing that she had written. While Marie was lighting the fire and raising the blinds, I took a look at her, remembering meanwhile the pretty answer she had made to Prince Napoleon, who had some time before spent a few days at Nohant. Having at the moment of leave-taking slipped some gold pieces into the hand of "la grande Marie," he had drawn down upon himself this proud rejoinder: "Monseigneur, thank you for grasping my hand, but please take back what you left in it?"

Marie informed me that the breakfast hour was eleven o'clock, and that Mme. Sand never came down until toward the end of the meal, because she seldom enjoyed any sleep until after four o'clock, at which hour she had finished her daily task, which she began when those under her roof were retiring to bed.

So it was that I found at the family table only Maurice and his wife, Manceau, and Edouard Cadol, a friend of the family, who was preparing himself to write for the stage under the auspices of George Sand, previous to reaping the prolonged and popular favor which he enjoyed from his comedy, "Les Inutiles." There was also present a young doctor of the neighborhood, who, in the course of his morning visits to his patients, was a sort of impromptu habitué at the Nohant breakfast-table.

I was struck by Maurice Sand's likeness to his mother, a resemblance as to features only, for he was tall and slender. We spoke of his

trip to America, which he had made during the foregoing summer with Prince Napoleon, and from which he had brought back, besides a series of papers published in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," under the head of "Six mille lieues à toute vapeur," numerous entomological specimens. Plants and insects failing him in the lateness of the season, he would fall back on geology, which, however, did not prevent him from drawing, writing, and from giving much of his time to a marionette theater, of which I shall speak hereafter.

Mme. Sand and her son devoted themselves fervently to the study of nature; one made this study the basis of scientific works, the other put the same ideas into shape in her novels. "Le Pavé," which was performed at the Gymnase, had its origin in an oölitic block found on a highway of the Berri, while *Antonia* is only a member of the lily family which came to bloom in one of the hothouses of Nohant. It is to this technical acquaintance with nature that Mme. Sand owed one of the great merits of her novels, her accuracy of description. If in certain occurrences she allowed herself to be carried away on the wings of fantasy, she was ever scrupulously exact when describing any particular locality. Her landscapes were not painted with a scene-painter's brush. She was cognizant of what underlay them. "The poet whose song is of the bee will lose nothing by knowing all the details of her organism and her existence," she would most appropriately say, "provided of course that he does not wander into an arid technology. . . . Still, a microscopic examination is the key to the whole." This increasing study, carried on by reading, by exploration, by classifying, etc., took up all her afternoons, with the exception of the time she would scrupulously devote to her mass of correspondence. She answered all letters at once, not only with extreme courtesy, but, in those cases where she was asked to render service or give advice, at length. With difficulty she found time for walking and gardening. It was thus that only the night was left for imaginative work.

This breakfast-table was, at all times, well and abundantly laden, so that guests could drop in unexpectedly. Mme. Sand's whole luxury consisted in boundless hospitality. She herself was rather fond of good eating, and made no secret of it. Seated in the midst of us, clothed in a loose house-dress, which, from the cut of its sleeves, resembled a peplum, she ate heartily, speaking but little. Her silence, her absorbed appearance, the torpor of her look, which did not seem to concentrate itself on anything visible, would at times be a source of anxiety to those who did not know her. In the novel of "Beatrix,"

wherein Beatrix is the portrait of the Comtesse d'Agoult, who wrote under the name of Daniel Stern, and Camille Maupin, that of George Sand, Balzac says of the latter character: "She frightens one by her silence, and by her deep introspective look, with its profound fixity." It is well known that Théophile Gautier, whom a friend had introduced to the hostess of Nohant, was so much oppressed by her continuous silence, from the moment of his arrival, that he decided to return to Paris. It seemed to him that he was an unwelcome guest. "Great heavens!" exclaimed George Sand, in distress, when speaking to the common friend who informed her of her guest's resolution, "you must have forgotten to tell him that I am stupid."

Personally, I was not struck with her reserve to so great an extent as others; on several occasions she waxed truly eloquent in my presence. I can recall a certain outburst of hers against the middle ages, in connection with "La Sorcière" of Michelet, which she was reading at that time. It is true that these flashes, as if of lightning, were of rare occurrence. Most of the time she spoke but little, remaining a kindly listener, and occasionally putting in a few words full of good sense, but without any attempt at brilliancy. She detested discussions. "I fly from an argument," she would say; "for I always get the worst of it, though I be a thousand times in the right." Joking (*blague* as she styled it in student phraseology) was odious to her serious nature. She did not permit anything *risqué* in the conversation, but she would laugh heartily at those jovial little stories, which in France we classify as *plaisanteries de curé*. One wonders what her attitude could have been when present at those wonderful dinners given by the artist world at Magny's. In the salon of Mme. Emile de Girardin ("Delphine Gay"), whither she went occasionally in her younger days, she did not breathe a word, apparently stunned by the profusion of wit around her. The unreal and superficial relations, the conventionalities of which society is so exacting, did not appeal to her, and, at times, she would awkwardly assume rude and unpleasant ways, which were at variance with her remarkable *bonhomie*. To Mme. Charles Reybaud, an amiable writer, who was lavishly praising her novels, she replied with brutal frankness, "I am sorry I cannot return the compliment, madame, for I have never read any of your books."

But how we have traveled from my first breakfast at Nohant, and from the promenade through the grounds that followed it!

Before starting out the hostess donned a pair of heavy overshoes. Usually she was most daintily shod, as a remembrance, doubtless, of

what had been said in times gone by, that of all women in Paris she had the greatest mind and the smallest foot. Her extremely plain gowns were made at home, but her boots were sent to her by a well known bootmaker of the Rue de la Paix. A cloak and a felt hat made up the rest of her costume, and we then went for a stroll under the cedars, whose heavy branches of somber green spread out close to the château, in perfect harmony with the gray tone of its old stones. The façade, with its high roof and gables, detaching its massive form against the leaden sky, did not present a seigniorial appearance, in spite of the name of château given in the heart of France to all residences of a certain importance. The park was really only a garden filled with beautiful trees. Adjoining it was a kitchen-garden, while in the rear of the house was a yard surrounded by out-buildings, and farther off were the woods and fields which then formed part of the estate.

After feeding the birds, which would come to eat out of her very hand, Mme. Sand did the honors of her little hothouse filled with orchids. She was as fond of flowers as of animals. She did not disdain planting and weeding, willingly putting her hands to the soil, her faithful source of inspiration.

After our outdoor inspection, we made an indoor tour. I went over the big house from the attic to the kitchen, where Mme. Sand, who was an expert in the putting up of preserves and in concocting dainty dishes, would sometimes put her skill to the test. I can still see that immense kitchen, which suggested a pretty scene of home life. The servants had just finished their meal, and the several women who, to the exclusion of men, constituted the household at Nohant resembled, with their white *cornettes* and their body-aprons, into which was tucked a fichu, a body of some religious order. On the ground-floor, there was, besides the vestibule, the dining-room, and the capacious private apartments of the young married couple, an immense salon, on entering which one immediately noticed the length of the table which has given its name to the collection of critical essays "Autour de la Table," the outcome of the reading in common which took place around it. Almost every evening during my visit the reading went on, some of us busying ourselves with drawing, others with needlework, each one taking the book in turn. At each end of the room was a piano, one an upright, the other a grand. Mme. Sand, her day over, used to sit down at twilight to one of these instruments, and play the popular melodies of the Berri, fragments of Mozart's or Chopin's compositions, etc. She had talent for all the arts, having, as is well known, sought to earn her livelihood by drawing before she took

to writing as a profession. With her needle she was deft as a fairy. With regard to tapestry and embroidery, a favorite opinion of hers was that there is genius in taste, and that taste represents perhaps the sum total of woman's genius. How many times have I watched the beautiful hands of George Sand actively engaged in stitching together marvelous costumes for her marionettes! All in all, it was a fine country-house drawing-room, light and roomy, its high windows admitting a glimpse of the park. The walls bore some interesting pictures, chiefly a portrait of Aurore von Koenigsmark, George Sand's own great-grandmother; another of her father, Maurice Dupin, in military uniform, and her children by Delacroix.

Everything about Nohant bore a well-to-do appearance, which was not spoiled by any attempt at luxury. The château, with its old furniture, had remained such as it had doubtless been in the days of Mme. Dupin; in many ways George Sand kept alive the traditions of that revered ancestress.<sup>1</sup>

Mme. Sand remained in the drawing-room to play "patience" and to smoke cigarettes, while Mme. Maurice took me through her husband's beautiful studio, showing me the closets set apart for his collections of geological specimens, coleoptera, butterflies, and then into attic-rooms, wherein was put away in an orderly fashion all the scenery of the theater which constituted the principal source of amusement at Nohant; then into the marionettes' chamber, where these dolls carved out of wood, painted and dressed by artists' hands, and consequently superior to any known marionettes, were hanging up side by side, to the number of about one hundred, perhaps exchanging those reflections which George Sand has gathered from their lips, and preserved in that pretty fantasy of hers, "*Le Diable aux champs*." Among these personages, Balandard, the star of the company, attracted attention, even in his suspended position, by the most amusing physiognomy; but one had to see him perform to get an idea of his importance. The marionettes, as well as the actors in the flesh, had store-rooms for their costumes and their properties. All this occupied much of the space at Nohant, as it does in her novels, "*Le Château des désertes*," "*L'Homme de neige*," "*Pierre qui roule*," etc., wherein is reflected that passionate fondness for the stage so characteristic of the manners and habits of the Nohant people.

<sup>1</sup>Mme. Dupin was the natural daughter of Marshal de Saxe, and married first Count de Horn, and next the fermier-général, Dupin de Francueil, whose father and mother were remarkable for their talents, their wit, and their literary friendships; he had himself been the pupil of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Mme. Sand had

Manceau plied his graving-tool on the first story, where five or six guests' rooms opened out into a long corridor, as is usually the case in old châteaux. The suite of Mme. Sand was composed of several rooms; the big blue room, in which she slept, was filled with mementos of her travels, and with portraits, landscapes, and tokens of friendship. I can recall, looking as a living thing in the midst of all these inanimate objects, a mass of hair under a glass cover, the thick tresses of her who had in part inspired "*Lucrezia Floriani*," Mme. Dorval. The study, which was always highly impregnated with the fragrance of Oriental tobacco, was encumbered with papers and books, all, however, kept in the best of order. The principal article of furniture was a very large oaken writing-table, to which George Sand sat down every night to accomplish an amount of writing determined upon beforehand to the very last page, force of habit having, in her case, rendered inspiration subservient to will. Besides, one could easily comprehend her method of working, when one noticed how she lived absorbed in a thought which did not cease revolving in her mind—a thought which would flow at a given moment. It was sufficient, in order to conceive this, to be a spectator of the perpetual reverie of that thoughtful forehead and of those eyes, whose whole fire seemed introspective, while her ever-active fingers rolled a cigarette, or transposed the cards in a game of "patience." She would surrender herself freely to her family, to her friends, to the incidents of every-day life, but she never ceased to produce. She was constantly ruminating over the material which she gathered in all directions with marvelous intuition and adaptation.

Winter, which barred outdoor excursions, was, more than any other season, consecrated at Nohant to the pleasures of reading and of the stage. We spent the evenings together reading by lamplight the works of Pushkin, and the first stories, already attracting much attention, of a naval officer, poor Henri Rivière, who later was to be killed out in Tonquin under the most tragic circumstances. A discussion arose one day about the latest work of a singularly vapid and dull writer, who had, I know not how, gained the privilege of being introduced to the attentive audience gathered together "*autour de la table*."

"There is no doubt," remarked Mme. Sand, "that all of it is not good to the same degree, but it contains at least a description of Venice

learned from her grandmother many interesting facts concerning that man of genius. She asserted that in his "*Confessions*" Rousseau had falsely accused himself of a theft, a puerile one at the worst, committed in the home of the Dupins.

which pleases me greatly." Several of us agreed with her, albeit we were under the impression that we had already met with this descriptive piece somewhere.

"Egad, I know where!" suddenly exclaimed her son, and off he rushed to the bookshelves to get "La dernière Aldini," where, with a feeling of indignation at the plagiarist, we found the very description, which had been copied almost word for word.

"What, is this by me?" Mme. Sand repeated, astounded and startled. "I had no idea of it. After all, it is really not so bad."

She never read her earlier works a second time, unless compelled to, and she had almost forgotten them all, for as fast as she finished one of her books, she gave herself up entirely to the production of the next. Every ten or fifteen years she would renew her acquaintance with them, and, as a rule, they did not afford her any great satisfaction. Never was any modesty more sincere than hers; no human being was ever less self-conscious. She was naively sensitive to encomium, because she felt the need of sympathy, but the only value she set upon the gift of the creative faculty, of the inexhaustible fecundity which was hers in a special manner, was that it constituted a precious way by which she could as she said "sortir d'elle-même" (wander out of herself). From time to time she would roughly outline the features of a play, the scenes of which were just indicated in order to leave a fair and open field to the caprices of the actors.

I was very soon invited to applaud Balandard in one of his great parts. A parody of a romantic drama, "Gaspardo le pêcheur," was improvised by the marionettes of Nohant, with musical accompaniment, songs, and even dancing. A certain ballet at the court of Ferrara performed by these legless individuals, who were set a-going by the insertion of a finger in the head and one in each of the arms, made Mme. Sand go into convulsions of laughter. She most enjoyed this sort of childish fun. Maurice and Cadol acted as stage-managers of the little company, and, on the evening in question, they discovered some bright sayings and never-before-heard-of incidents for benefit of the little actors. Balandard was several times recalled to bow his thanks to the audience, and he wound up his performance with his standing joke, "I am the tailor who has brought you his little bill." This part of a tailor had, in a certain play, marked the acme of his success, and so he took care to remind you of it on every opportunity. But one was not content, during my stay, with the mere repertory of the marionettes. The great theater at Nohant, whose stage had been honored by Mme. Arnould-Plessy, Bocage,

Thiron, and many other famous actors, gave for my special amusement a rustic comedy, which later on was produced at the Vaudeville under the name of "Les Don Juans de village," and which was then known as "Jean le Rebâteux." Friends from La Châtre, and the countryfolk from the neighborhood, received invitations. I played leading lady, and I must in all humility confess that I alone did badly, while all the other actors were excellent. These actors, most of them experienced ones, were: Maurice Sand, Alexandre Manceau, Edouard Cadol, and a young comic actor named Clerh, who had just come to Nohant on a visit, and who was to achieve distinction later on the boards of the Odéon. Mme. Maurice played with captivating grace the part of a country lass. Marie Caillaud seemed to live hers, for she had only to be herself. A young carpenter from the village gave me my cues in a scene, which seemed to me a very difficult one, and in which he played a hundred times better than I did.

THE house at Nohant, during the time of my sojourn there, was an industrious beehive. Mme. Sand was engaged in writing "Mlle. La Quintinie," a philosophical retort to the catholic "Histoire de Sibylle," which Octave Feuillet had just given to the world. Her son was putting the finishing touches to a narrative of adventure wherein fact and fiction were blended, "Raoul de La Châtre." Edouard Cadol was revising his comedy of "Germaine," in which he made his theatrical début with Mlle. Pierson, then in all the splendor of her beauty, as interpreter of the title-rôle. As for me, I wrote four or five hours a day, and it seemed to me that the novel of which I had brought with me the opening pages was progressing admirably in the midst of such favorable surroundings. Later on, Mme. Sand perused it, and her criticisms of it are still fresh in my memory. She said to me concerning this novel, which appeared many years later under the title of "Le veuvage d'Aline," in so remodeled a form as to be unrecognizable:

I find a great many good qualities in it, and it shows especially that you have a future before you, if you devote your mind to a broad way of your own in looking at things, if you stock your mind with many ideas and different subjects of knowledge, without losing your individuality. I do not say to you, and I never will say to you: Think and see with me. I say to you: See things from your own point of view, but be sure to know well how you see them, and then fall in with that way of seeing as long as you remain of opinion that it is the best. Individuality is what is lacking in most productions of the mind, whether of a literary or of a critical nature. Your age has its individuality just as mine has, with this difference,



that at your age one does not know one's self sufficiently well to express in words the process of one's thoughts. I can feel this inevitable wavering throughout your narrative. Your characters revolve before you impregnated with the magic attraction which they have in your imagination, and you have not sufficiently resolved to disapprove such and such a one, nor to become the apologist of others. For lack of a determined line of action, and of an opinion grounded in your innermost conclusion, you are in consequence running counter to your goal, and you are not logical enough in the treatment of your subject. I beg you will pay heed that I am not outlining any theory for you to follow, and that if I find things *so*, I fully recognize your right to see them in a different light. But it is absolutely necessary that the *in spite of* and the *wherefore* be clearly deduced from any and every subject. One may be fond of such or such a character, *in spite of* or *because*, but it needs must be the one or the other, from the beginning to the very end. What an amount of pedantic talk with regard to a thing of the imagination! Nevertheless, I venture to say to you, that the more there is of caprice in art, the more does logic become necessary. I have doubtless often neglected following this precept; but do as I preach, and not as I do, for the precept may prove to be an absolute truth, while the example is only relatively true.

I feel sure that I am not altering a word of this advice, for I find it again and again in the correspondence which was to pass between us later on. She writes to me:

Do not allow yourself to be persuaded by the opinion of certain flighty critics that one is not in need of a belief and of an opinion of one's own in order to write, and that it is sufficient to reflect facts and forms in mirror-like fashion. No, this is contrary to truth; the reader becomes attached only to the writer who has an *individuality*; whether this individuality is agreeable or antagonistic to him, he feels that he has to reckon with a person and not with an instrument. . . . In the author himself must be the justice and the moral sentiment which permeate his narrative.

Theories like the above are far removed from that impersonality wherein the writers of naturalistic novels glory; but those even who find them out of date will be considerably struck, I believe, with the perfect good faith of Mme. Sand.

In a letter which she wrote to me on March 6, 1863, she recurs to the matter.

Read me understandingly, and, as says a character in Cadol's play, *do not tell me that I say what I do not say*. I have strongly dwelt on the point that it is not sufficient to play the mirror's part, but that it is necessary one should be the steady hand which holds it; and I have shown to you the disadvantage of separating from the narrative one's own judgment, one's own notions.

Elsewhere I find her saying to me:

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You ask me to make a list for you of such books as you ought to read. Were I concerned, I would boldly begin the study of history from its very beginning, for the proper study of man is the history of mankind.

Richly endowed as was George Sand, she had read a great deal, and from her readings she had acquired an extensive knowledge which in no way detracted from her originality; for, as she expressed herself, things did not remain with her in the distinct form in which she had received them, but had taken fresh shape while revolving in her mind. Nothing would so excite her indignation as the *laissez aller* of those would-be geniuses who trust to their own inspiration alone—she would have shrugged her shoulders with contempt at the *intuitivisme* of the present day. She would say over and over again that art is not a gift which dispenses with culture; that the lack of solid worth which is characteristic of so many productions of the pen is due to defective studies; that a mind will never be rightly molded if it has not triumphed over the difficulties of all kinds of labor which exact a tension of the will; in other words, that one should be thoroughly familiar with the art of fencing before taking hold of a sword. Hence her advice was to delve into history, natural sciences, and philosophy, and much more before one trusted one's self to the resources of imagination.

It will, perhaps, surprise those who recall the kind of priest-hatred to which she has given vent in her earlier writings to learn that she entertained a deep feeling of respect for the religious convictions of others. On the occasion of her counseling me to read the "Histoire de France," by Henri Martin, she wrote to me:

This work has been written from an elevated and advanced standpoint, but from a wise one, and one which will not upset your beliefs whatever they may be; it will merely cause you to look into them and to sound them, with the result of either preserving them untouched or modifying them. For, after all, if I have at times expressed before you somewhat outspoken views, I have perhaps been in the wrong. And you will see in the novel of "Mlle. La Quintinie," that I have tried to show a calmer attitude in my writing than in my speech. It is not well to pass too quickly from one belief to another. It has taken me thirty years to find again in philosophy the firm beliefs which I had formerly in dogmatic teachings, and I find myself much more religiously inclined than ever I was; but I have gone through the torture of fearful doubts, and I would not like to see you succumb to them; it is terrible suffering, and a terrible danger.

I do not see how it would be possible to spare in a more touching manner a young

soul liable to be easily impressed. Let us follow George Sand in this rôle of mentor, which for my benefit she played with so much delicacy and with such scrupulous care.

While staying with us, you read "Jane Gray," by M. Dargaud. Toward the end of the work there is an admirable chapter on philosophy in general. It is somewhat superfluous, but the author felt the want of making his declaration of faith.<sup>1</sup> Well, then, this declaration of faith will serve for my own and for that of many other people who have wrestled with these questions all their lives. The chapter is a beautiful one, and sums it all up in some twenty pages, which I urge upon you to peruse; then ask of yourself whether it seems to you truth or otherwise. You will already have taken thus a footstep toward reflection. If it be true, then it furnishes a ruling principle for the mind, one with which everything will be in accord, thoughts, studies, the study of the soul, and consequently that of the human heart, and consequently also the work of fiction, which is nothing but philosophy placed within everybody's reach, and demonstrated by facts. If from your point of view it be not true, you must go elsewhere in quest of your faith, but you must not suffer your soul to remain void of a faith, for talent is not developed in an empty soul. Talent may for a while agitate itself feverishly in such a soul, but it will perforce take its flight from it or die out. . . .

Still counseling the necessity of creating for one's self an inner physiognomy, Mme. Sand went on to say:

You have only to will it. I will with all my heart help you in your search after your own self, but without any desire to inflict my way of seeing things, if you of yourself do not view them in the same light. I thoroughly believe that on certain points we are thus far greatly in accord: God, a God who knows us, whom we can love, to whom we can pray, and who, while being all things, is also himself, and wishes to see us be ourselves. An active, honest, courageous and unselfish life; the duty of enlightening and of elevating our soul, which of course is immortal, and which will survive us with the consciousness of itself. No hell! Infinite mercy in the necessary law of progres-

<sup>1</sup> The declaration is one of ardent spiritualism.

sion. Expiatory punishments for the souls which have failed to recognize their own divinity; a more rapid progression toward God for those who have greatly striven after good. I do not think that I have so far given offense to anything essentially Christian.

My long correspondence with George Sand was a source from which I drew courage for a number of years. The death of my step-father inspired her with an exquisite page of farewell, to be found in that portion of the "Nouvelles lettres d'un voyageur" devoted to "the friends that have passed away." At this time, conveying to me the offer of introductions to Girardin, Buloz, Hetzel, and Sainte-Beuve, she says:

It is a difficult and even a terrible thing, my poor child, these beginnings in the literary field, for a woman; . . . yet I have faith in your future. At the age of twenty I could certainly not have produced what you are doing. My ideas were in so chaotic a state that I could never have gotten them into shape. Hence do I tell you to have courage, even if you have to wait several years for your day of victory.

Every production of my pen would call forth from her a letter which, at times, showed a too marked partiality in the judgment she passed on the work, although she made pretense of speaking to me unreservedly, and without heeding my feelings; while again, an observation pregnant with suggestion, a mere interrogation, would constitute the most judicious criticism, by which I hope to have profited. She caused me to look forward to success with a confidence that was sincere and contagious; again and again did she overwhelm me with friendly introductions to publishers and to newspapers — introductions "which are of no value" (so she would say herself), "but which keep your hopes from dying out, and which are a help to a timid beginner." And so it is that she will forever be numbered by me among the good geni who watched over the birth of my literary career — the career of a writer of idealistic fiction, a pupil, so to speak, of her teaching.

*Th. Bentzon.*





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*Georgina*