

## MADAME DE STAEL.

IN the year 1766 there was joy one day in the house of M. Necker, the rising young man who was beginning to make such a mark for himself in political life, for a little daughter had been born to him; but it was a sober, measured joy, for the young mother was one of the most strict followers of the severe sect of Calvinists. The child, before she could well speak plainly, was remarkable for sharp, piquant little sayings, which set bonnes and lady visitors in a roar, and the wondrously expressive pantomime which accompanied her talk, added yet a further and most irresistible charm to her many graceful whims and conceits.

Louise's first toy—a toy, too, of her own special imagining and invention—caused her Calvinist mother no small exercising of mind. One or two of the servants had paid stolen visits to the play-house, and had whispered much together in the child's hearing about its glittering wonders. Mademoiselle Louise knew well enough that she should never be permitted by her mother to go to such a place of amusement, but why should she not have a theatre of her own? The question went whirling hither and thither through her restless young mind, until it brought forth unexpected fruit.

One morning the little lady begged an old box of her bonne, and that much-enduring personage was most agreeably surprised to find how entirely this seemingly insignificant present occupied, in some strange, mysterious way, all the energies of her lively, quicksilver-like charge. What was her astonishment when she found the box transformed into a miniature stage, with a few coloured prints for scenery. On these boards her dolls were made dexterously to perform their entries and exits, the dramatic company was strengthened by several skilfully cut-out and painted paper figures, the dialogue was supplied by the young manageress herself, who now went off into long ripples of laughter at her own wit, and now sobbed passionately behind her pinafore at her own pathos.

In all the April sorrows of her childhood, and all its rainbow-tinted joys, little Louise had one unfailingly sympathizing friend, one untiring playfellow; this was her father. M. Necker was a singularly sweet-tempered, cheery-natured man, and his little daughter was not slow to find out this. Her father's knee was a sure haven of safety to which she could fly whenever the wrath of mother, aunt, or governess pursued her with Juno-like persistency. Her father's ear was always a willing receptacle for every new fairy fancy. With her small arms clasped around that well-loved neck, with her head nestling on that trusted breast, she felt as if she might bid defiance to the whole world. Besides, this strong affection for her father was to prove no

feeling which was to slip away out of Louise Necker's heart and life. As she grew from girl to woman, and fresh and closer ties formed themselves around her, it was to tinge in a certain way her whole story, and we still find notes of it in "Corinne," where Oswald laments his father's loss.

One of the ways in which Louise showed, in her childhood, her devoted love for her father was, to say the least, a very extraordinary and characteristic one for a girl of her age. This little incident took place when she was about ten, and as it calls up before us an amusing picture out of the panorama of her varied life, we will pause to gaze for a moment at it.

There are brilliant lights this evening, and the ring of many voices in the salon. Madame Necker is giving a party. The house of the Neckers is famous throughout all Paris for the number of men of wit and intellect whom it often gathers beneath its roof in its frequent reunions. To-night, to judge by the flash of bright intelligence in every face, by the sparkles of airy fun which fly from lip to lip, by the deep, thoughtful earnestness in the eyes of some of the guests, who, a little apart from the gayer throng, are speaking of high, grave themes in knots of two or three together, there must be more men of mark than usual here.

By-and-by there is a slight stir at the door of the room, many eyes are turned towards it with a kindly light in them, many a playful word is on each lip, and all this greets a small, daintily-dressed figure which comes dancing up the salon. The gentlemen try to make her stop to exchange a few saucy words with them, the ladies stretch out their arms to draw her on to their laps; but to-night, very contrary to her usual custom, the young lady heeds none of their blandishments; there is a set, intent look on her face, and she is evidently pre-occupied, and completely filled with some strong, ruling idea. Her mother tries to get her to take her usual seat on a stool at her feet, but quickly seeing that the little maiden is in no flexible mood, desists, not wishing for a scene before company. On goes the girl through rows of gleaming silks and waving fans, through long lines of powdered gentlemen; until she reaches a corner, where her father sits engaged in absorbing talk with a short, dark man, who speaks French with a strong, rather harsh, foreign accent, and whose face is all ablaze with keen, intellectual fire; yet, though that face is so clever, we do not exactly like it, and we feel we could never love it. There is something uncomfortable in the steel-like glitter of the eyes, and the sarcastic smile which flickers round the mouth; somehow it makes us think of a fine polished Toledo blade. Genial-looking Monsieur Necker, however, seems to take great pleasure in this gentleman's society, and the pair appear to understand each other.

When little Louise draws near, the two men cease their serious talk, the guest begins a merry, fantastic tale for her edification, her father calls her with many a loving, playful wile to his side, but the



child seems in no humour for fun of any sort this evening ; she has something far too grave in hand, something about which no joke must be made. Her father and his friend cast amused, wondering glances at each other, and cannot at all guess what is coming next. But whatever strange, impossible conjectures they may have made on the subject, they are most completely outdone by the words which now come from Mademoiselle Louise's lips. She places herself between the two gentlemen with a grand, majestic air, and turning to the guest, says solemnly, while she fixes her eyes steadfastly on his face :

“ Monsieur Gibbon, will you consent to a betrothal taking place at once between yourself and me ? Because, you see, if I were to marry you, you would stay in France, and never go back to England, and then my father would always enjoy the pleasure of your conversation, in which he so delights, and I should know that I had obtained it for him.”

If all things are considered, it was surely well for the young lady that she was ten instead of twenty when she made this proposal to the author of “*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*”

As Louise Necker grew into early girlhood, she began to show something of the vast, strong capacities for which her mind was afterwards so distinguished ; she displayed a decided aptitude for those deeper studies which are, in general, distasteful to the young female brain, and handled them as easily as most girls do their crochet needles. She delighted in looking into the history of nations, and in reading their annals by a light evolved by herself out of their past ; her imagination, too, kept pace with her reason, and she revelled in the poetry of all lands, for she was a clever linguist. Her pen soon was busy with something besides letter-writing, though even her parents hardly knew anything of what she was about ; until, one day, they and several of their intimate, learned friends were literally struck dumb by the girl of fifteen bringing them to read a treatise on the laws of her country.

At eighteen, Mademoiselle Necker's brilliant conversational powers were fully developed, and began to show themselves in society. She talked about everything ; about literature, religion, science, social troubles, politics ; sometimes rather wide of the mark, it is true, but always with brightness and originality. The worst of it was, however, that in those days, in France, young ladies of position did not talk in public at all. Even her father began to be a little frightened at the phenomenon which his house had produced, radiant phenomenon though it was, and to look about for some safe, responsible man, who would be willing to take the shining wonder out of his hands, and to hold it in secure keeping.

The Swedish ambassador at the French Court was a certain Baron de Stael. He was middle-aged, and a Protestant, and well-endowed as to worldly goods ; his intellect was not exactly as bright as a northern *aurora borealis*, but his private daily life was as steady-going as a



French diligence. He was just the sort of son-in-law Monsieur and Madame Necker wanted, and he showed a decided admiration and liking for their daughter. Through the influence of Queen Marie Antoinette, with whom Monsieur Necker was at this time something of a favourite, a marriage was arranged, and before she well knew what was happening to her, Louise found herself Madame de Stael.

The girl was not the least in love with her husband, but then it was the fate of every girl in France of her rank to be married without love; so she resigned herself to her destiny without feeling that there was much to complain of in it. The marriage cannot be said to have been an unhappy one, though the pair were often separated for long periods, and though they knew nothing of what we call in England domestic, home life. Two children, a son and a daughter, were given to bless it, and no doubt Madame de Stael learned, as years went on, to feel a sincere, warm esteem for her husband. In after life, however, Madame de Stael came to express a strong disapproval of the loveless character of French marriages in general, in high life. She would say, with eager, tender earnestness, that her own daughter should marry for love, and for nothing else; and when Mademoiselle de Stael reached years of discretion, she fully obeyed her mother's wishes in this respect in her choice of the young Duc de Broglie.

But to return to Madame de Stael in the first days of her married life. She now enjoyed far more freedom than she had ever done before. She had a house of her own, where she could gather round her all the friends she loved best; she could talk as much as she pleased, because her being a married woman made all the difference; she was near her beloved father, and could see him every day. Her brain and her pen were always busy. Altogether this was perhaps one of the calmest, happiest periods of her life. Probably her most uncomfortable experience at this time was when she had to attend at Court, as she had occasionally to do. Display of this kind never suited her; her irregular features had nothing of the sort of beauty which looks well in a State pageant, though her hand and arm are said to have been statuesquely perfect. Her whole figure was too strongly developed for her to move with much grace; she forgot, amid some grand wave of thought which came rushing over her, minute forms which she ought to have observed, and in the confusion consequent on such mistakes, with the eyes of many grand dames looking daggers at her, caught her feet in her train as she backed out of the presence of Royalty, or tore her rich lace in the crowd in the antechamber. The whole charm of her appearance always lay in her wondrous mobility of expression while she talked, and in the radiant splendour, now flashing lightning-like, now glowing soft as summer moonlight, of her dark, lustrous eyes. But loveliness of this kind did not shine much in the automaton drill which composed the ponderous gilded etiquette of the French court life.

When the first warning trumpet-note, which foretold the coming



revolution, rang through France, Madame de Stael, in common with many other great, liberal-minded men and women, who foresaw nothing of the horrors that were at hand, greeted it with joy. Her generous nature was always on the side of the weak and oppressed, and she thought a dawn of high and noble things for the common people was at hand. Her father shared, in a great measure, her views, and she had the triumph of seeing him placed at the head of public affairs as Prime Minister. But before long the spirit which Necker had helped to raise proved too strong for him to control; the fickle mob, who had burnt incense to him yesterday, now thronged round his door with wild threats on their lips, and his only hope for his life was secret and speedy flight. Then husband, children, political opinions, were forgotten and abandoned by Madame de Stael, and in such frantic haste that she had not time to change the evening dress she had on at the moment, she accompanied her father into exile. It seemed to her that that adored life would be safer if she were near to shield it, if needful, with her own.

The father and daughter went into Switzerland, and took up their abode at Coppet, on the shores of the Lake of Geneva. There they led a busy yet tranquil existence, filled with much reading and writing, and by the visits of many friends, who, refugees like themselves, came to settle near them. It was at this time her first great work of fiction, "Delphine," was published, and found at once a wide circulation. During the whole of her residence at Coppet, Madame de Stael's heart and mind turned, in grief and longing, towards her distracted country. Once, even, before the Reign of Terror was over, she returned for awhile to Paris, where, having some influence with a few of the revolutionary leaders, she put her own life in danger, and showed the most intrepid courage in her efforts to save men and women from the guillotine.

When the star of Napoleon began to rise, Madame de Stael greeted it with a hymn of glad homage, for its splendour dazzled her; she hastened to France, and took up her residence once more in Paris. As soon, however, as she perceived what false glitter there was in that radiance, and discovered that selfish tyranny and aggrandisement were the one rule of her hero's life, she changed her note. Bonaparte quickly found out her inimical feelings towards him, and the First Consul and the authoress of "Delphine" indulged in language about each other which was more remarkable for strength of expression than for elegance. At length the conqueror of a thousand fields began to be thoroughly afraid of this woman; her scathing wit lashed him wherever he turned. He felt she was indeed his mistress in a war of words, so he took summary and arbitrary revenge, and banished her from Paris, forbidding her to come within so many leagues of the capital.

But even in the quiet country retreat which now sheltered her, she knew she was not safe from the mighty wrath of Napoleon. Any



hour an order of arrest might come. One of her most devoted friends and admirers, M. D'Anglie, used to watch every night beneath her window to be ready to warn her if danger was at hand. Her life was one long dread, and great though her grief was at having again to leave her beloved country, it was perhaps almost a relief to her when a further decree of Napoleon banished her from French ground altogether.

Madame de Stael's life was now for several years one long history of wandering from one land to another. Now we find her in England, competing successfully in brilliancy of talk with Burke and Sheridan, taking Fanny Burney's heart by storm, and flirting, in somewhat too sentimental a way, perhaps, with the handsome young refugee, the Comte de Narbonne. Next she was in Germany, where Goethe and Schiller, unused as they were to much conversational power in German ladies, were a good deal exercised by her tongue, and where she published one of her best known books, "*L'Allemagne.*" By-and-by she was in Berlin, where a great sorrow fell upon her in the news of her father's death. Her sorrow for that loss lasted as long as her own life, and, go where she might, Necker's picture always hung at her bedside.

In order to distract her mind, in some measure, from this great, overwhelming blow, she took a journey into Italy. There her imagination was fired with all she saw and heard, and she wrote "*Corinne.*" We have no space here to dwell on this world-famed novel. It is a real prose poem, and its end and aim, on the whole, are noble.

Go where she might, and be employed as she might, one vast, sickening, yearning feeling always lay at the bottom of Madame de Stael's soul, muffling each note of praise, casting a grey cloud over each scene, however bright: this was her longing after her country, for her heart was French to the very core. Two or three times Napoleon's enmity against her slumbered so far that she gained admission, for a short time, into France; but in a few weeks her rebellious, keen pen and tongue were sure to say or write something which called forth against her a fresh decree of exile. Once she was told by some mediating friend that if she would write a poem to celebrate the birth of the little King of Rome, which had just then taken place, she would find her way speedily into Bonaparte's favour; but her only remark on this proposal was, "I don't see what I can say, except that I wish the child a good nurse." We can fancy that when this reply was reported at the Imperial Court it was not exactly received with smiles.

The Baron de Stael sometimes was with his wife, and sometimes they did not meet for long periods. Whenever he was near her, however, he always treated her with gentleness and consideration; he seems to have had real respect for her genius. When he died, which was while she was still comparatively young, she watched by him tenderly to the last, and her tears fell on his grave, as for a true and loyal friend.

Wherever she went Madame de Stael had a train of worshippers and admirers following her ; wherever she went, her voice was raised on the side of the injured and oppressed. She felt keenly that, in her day, women did not enjoy sufficient freedom and sufficient educational advantages, and she spoke aloud in their cause ; she stands out before us in middle-age a noble figure, ever ready to be the champion of the weak and to raise the fallen. Napoleon's mean hatred still went on pursuing her, and at length she was forbidden to go more than a certain number of miles beyond the shores of the Lake of Geneva, where, with memories of her father ringing in her heart, she had settled down.

When she was a few years past forty, Madame de Stael fell in with a certain young officer named de Rocca. She nursed him through a long illness, and such was still her charm that he became passionately in love with her. She responded to his feelings, and the pair were privately married. We may smile at the disparity of years in this union—de Rocca was but twenty-three ; and yet there is something deeply pathetic in this great woman of genius, thus a few short years before her death, enjoying a gleam of sweet home peace.

Madame de Stael lived to see the fall of Napoleon. She died in France at the age of fifty-one, with her husband's hand in hers, leaving a name for posterity.

ALICE KING.

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“ALL FOR LOVE.”

THUS may the angels work : but how should we—  
 Frail, selfish men, whom offer of reward  
 Or fear of retribution's sharp-edged sword  
 Cannot persuade to virtue, and keep free  
 From sin's hard bondage—dream to serve our Lord  
 For love alone? It surely may not be.  
 Yet doth obedience well with love accord ;  
 And love still yields the truest fealty.  
 The threat'ning heav'ns' loud crash and awful fire  
 May call us to repentance ; make us raise  
 Affrighted eyes to the great Throne above :  
 But not till the cold heart is drawn by love  
 Will the whole life be one of acted praise ;  
 Our Father's smile sole guerdon we desire.

EMMA RHODES.