

## MADAME DE GENLIS.

THERE have been many remarkable men and women whose minds have developed and whose geniuses have bloomed in a soil the very opposite to that which we should have expected to produce them. Giotto was a shepherd lad ; Whitefield, the great preacher, began life as a waiter in an inn. But this was not the case with the subject of this paper, who grew up amid the very surroundings that most fostered her talents.

It was in the Château of St. Aubin in Burgundy that she first saw light. They baptised her, according to the fashion of the time, with a long string of euphonious Christian names, all of which however have dropped from her as useless incumbrances, and we know her as Madame de Genlis alone.

Her father was a M. de St. Aubin, who somehow, perhaps by virtue of a neglected title in the family, managed to blossom into a marquis ; and her mother was a pretty, witty lady, endowed with such superabundant animal spirits and vitality that we find her, even when she was far advanced in life, rising from her bed at an hour when most elderly dames would have been supposed to be snoring peacefully, to take part actively in a theatrical entertainment. The mania for acting among the French of that period can only be compared to the mania for writing we see among the English in our own day.

Mdlle. de St. Aubin was infected with the national fever for acting at a very early age, and in her case it happened to unfold and educate some of her brightest intellectual gifts. This taste for acting remained with Madame de Genlis throughout her life. She never actually acted in public, but she was always engaged in a series of amateur theatricals ; indeed she acted so well on the boards, that almost insensibly she grew to be always acting in her daily life. She put herself into an elegant pose the moment she came into company ; she had well-turned little graceful, artificial sentences always ready for every possible occasion at the end of her tongue ; she walked and moved as if she had ceaselessly the eyes of men directed upon her ; she schooled each feature, so that every expression of her face was kept under command, and used at will ; indeed, acting was so habitual to her, that it seems to have become a second nature, and it was quite impossible to know where the actress ended and the woman began.

It is in fact very difficult to discern what is real and what is false in examining her character and making a word picture of it.

But to return to Madame de Genlis in her early youth.

Her intellect was peculiarly precocious, and no doubt her achievements as an actress in her childhood served to awake up mind and memory in her first years, and strengthen both. She displayed an

immense appetite for knowledge ; nothing that they taught her came amiss to her vigorous young mental digestion : music, the classics, needlework, chemistry, geography, carpentry, were all learned by her one after another, and all with success.

This restless eagerness to gain new acquirements was throughout her life one of the marked characteristics of Madame de Genlis. We see her learning to make artificial flowers in middle age, and taking lessons in embroidery with seed pearls, one of the fashionable industries of ladies in that day, when she was already an elderly woman. She had a vast and healthy vitality in her nature, and this was doubtless one of the secrets of her success in educating young people.

Religion was to have its share in the many-sided bringing up of the future governess of royalty.

She was taken by her parents to a conventual establishment, and made a member of it under the title of a "chanoinesse." These youthful chanoineses enjoyed certain immunities and privileges, by virtue of which her name was changed, and from henceforth she was known as Madame de Lancy, and not as Mdlle. de St. Aubin. The little chanoineses were instructed in theology, and were supposed to acquire a taste for the cloister ; but this latter was certainly, in Madame Lancy's case, of an extremely superficial nature. Throughout all Madame de Genlis' career she decidedly showed no inclination for the life of a nun ; the mere thought of the loquacious, active-minded lady with her airs and her attitudes immured in a cell, calls up a smile at its incongruity.

Thus time went on till Madame de Lancy—as she was styled in polite society—was seventeen ; she was now as charmingly pretty a girl as ever turned the heads of a score of adorers at once, and gave a dozen dowagers with marriageable daughters fits of the jaundice with envy.

Her delicate features and large eyes were all sparkling with wit and intelligence ; her figure was that of a sylph ; her dainty feet seemed to be always treading on air by use and right, her step was so light and springy ; her slender white fingers appeared to be formed for the harp, on which instrument she in fact excelled.

About this period M. de St. Aubin took it into his head to see something of foreign lands ; perhaps after the fashion of many French husbands, and, it may be, just a few English ones, he was a trifle tired of domestic bliss with Madame.

In the Channel the vessel he was in was captured by an English privateer, and very shortly he found himself a prisoner in a country town in Cornwall, where, if he had been really guilty of any short-comings against Madame, he must have repented them mournfully at leisure. When he was just on the point of committing suicide for sheer *ennui*, he suddenly heard himself, to his delight and astonishment, addressed in the French tongue. He found that he had a compatriot in Cornwall ; a certain M. de Genlis ; and the two men

became great friends. When at last they were allowed to return to France the intimacy continued, and M. de St. Aubin introduced his friend to his wife and daughter.

M. de St. Aubin did not long survive his involuntary stay in England; he died soon after his return to his family. Hereupon Madame de Lancy and her mother retired to a convent, after the fashion of bereaved ladies of rank in those days. M. de Genlis, however, who had already been smitten with the charms of the young lady, followed her into the cloister, and made proposals for her hand which were accepted. He was a Count; he was endowed with a fair share of worldly means and also of brains; Madame de Lancy thought she could not do better than take him. The girl changed her name for the third time in her short life, and very soon we find her as Madame de Genlis—the name by which she is known to fame.

It may be as well to state here that future years justified the young lady's extreme sagacity in her choice of a husband. He was a cheerful, witty companion, he was gifted with a large fund of genuine kind-heartedness, and above all he could, when he pleased, put on a most comfortable and convenient marital blindness with regard to the doings of his charming Madame. The tears which she shed were therefore very likely sincere ones, when the news reached Madame de Genlis, exiled in a foreign land, that her husband had been guillotined in the Reign of Terror.

But to begin now with Madame de Genlis as a bride of seventeen.

Very soon after their marriage, the Comte de Genlis had occasion to leave his young wife, so he deposited her in a convent for a while, which was, it appears, the orthodox receptacle for all women of any station in France in those days when they lost their male protectors. These convents seem, however, to have been by no means dreary abodes of asceticism. The nuns were, to use a modern phrase, "jolly old girls," who were not at all averse to a frolic. The youthful madame appears to have had a very good time among them. At midnight she would steal into the cells, and paint with light fingers the faces of the slumbering nuns, so that when they met for their compline services to chant drowsily their office, they suddenly became broad awake as they stared at each other in the light of the holy tapers; every recluse in the aisle was rouged and patched like court ladies. Instead of scolding the pretty, mischievous bride confided to their care, like a pack of sour old maids, the good-natured nuns first indulged in a hearty laugh, and then went on with their religious exercises. Or when she was tired of practical jokes, the whole convent would be turned upside down to amuse her by a ball, in which the nuns would act as cavaliers, and their pupils, of whom they always had a number, as their fair partners.

At length M. de Genlis returned to claim his bride, and carried her off from the convent.

After that the pair lived several merry, happy years together, during which two daughters were born to them, who do not seem to have been taken much into account in Madame de Genlis' life ; they both lived to grow up, and both married.

Madame lived in the full tide of society, now in Paris, now in country houses, at which she was a frequent and favourite guest. She appeared at Court, and received her imprimatur as a beauty, by royal eyes resting with admiration upon her. She flirted a good deal, she danced a good deal, she talked a good deal. French society at that period was, in reality, rotten at the core, as far as any solid goodness and worth was concerned, but still, at the same time, it was a society full of sparkle, and wit, and grace, and was a school well calculated to form a finished woman of the world, and such undeniably Madame de Genlis became, and remained throughout her life. All the while she was in the full blaze of her social successes Madame de Genlis never wasted her time, or starved her mind ; she read much, and was always acquiring knowledge ; she was no vain, empty-headed fine lady, however much she might have seemed one, viewed superficially by casual spectators.

Two figures, which by their intellectual superiority have stamped themselves upon the picture of that age for all time, rise before us as we gaze upon the changeful panorama of Madame de Genlis' life at this period.

One is a man all bristling with eccentricity, with his face all alight with the lamp of mind. He affects an extreme humility, and yet he is in reality enveloped in a cloak of vanity. He dresses with studied simplicity, and yet whenever he goes abroad he thinks that the eyes of all men are upon him. He wishes to be thought a despiser of wealth and honour, and yet he is not above a smile from princes. He is always putting forth moral maxims, and yet his life is stained with blots of immorality. The other man has the eyes of an angel, but the smile of a fiend. His heart is in those beautiful eyes, but that smile casts contempt upon all things, both human and divine. These are the two philosophers who are striving to cure the sick age, each in his own way ; but the age will not be reformed by either Rousseau or Voltaire.

We see Madame de Genlis coming in contact with both of these two master minds, but neither seems to have left a lasting impression upon her ; she beholds, and wonders, and admires, as she meets them on the world's stage, and then goes her way.

Madame de Genlis was verging towards middle age, when her connection with the Orleans family first began. She entered the Palais Royal as a lady-in-waiting to the Duchesse de Chartres, and soon grew high in favour with the Duke and Duchess. She held very clear and strong views about education, and talked much about them, until the Duchess declared that if ever she had any children, Madame de Genlis should be the woman who should bring them up.

Therefore when a little princess was born to the Orleans branch of the royal line, she was at once appointed as her governess. Other young Orleans princes and princesses followed, and they were all put under Madame de Genlis' care and tuition. The Duke doubtless was extremely fond of talking to the governess, and slipped into the school-room at all hours, and lingered with her often in the corridors; but Madame de Genlis played her cards so well, and was so cautious in all her proceedings with regard to the Duke, that for many years the Duchess loved and trusted her without a shadow of suspicion and jealousy, and even the palace servants, prepossessed by her gracious manners, would speak no word of ill of her.

After she had lived in the Palais Royal for some years, Madame de Genlis left the immediate personal household of the Duchess, and was established in a separate house with the royal children. She devoted herself to their education with heart and mind. Her knowledge was wonderfully versatile, and she understood how to impart it with ease to other and younger minds; in short, she was a born schoolmistress. At this period she published several books on education, which were much read and admired.

One day a little English girl was introduced into the schoolroom of the royal Orleans children. Madame de Genlis said that she was born in Newfoundland, that she was an orphan, and that she had been brought up in England, so that she could speak no word of French. Her ostensible *raison d'être* in the Orleans household was that she should teach the royal children English. Madame de Genlis said that her name was Nancy Syms, but she chose to call her by the pretty, romantic name of Pamela.

From that time forward till her marriage, Pamela always remained at Madame de Genlis' side. She grew up an extremely pretty girl, gentle in manner, and modest and retiring in her ways. There was one fact about her which struck everybody who beheld her, and this was that she was strikingly like Madame de Genlis. People, no doubt, shook their heads, and whispered and smiled significantly when they spoke of the connection between Madame de Genlis and Pamela; but Madame persisted in calling her a friendless orphan, whom she had adopted for charity, though she treated her with the most tender affection. At the time of Pamela's marriage with Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the fact of her birth in Newfoundland, and the names of her parents, were very circumstantially set forth in black and white in a register, but there exists a letter, written by Pamela's husband, which clearly acknowledges her relationship to Madame de Genlis and the Duke of Orleans.

The confidential relations between the Duchess of Orleans and Madame de Genlis were disturbed after the lapse of some years. It was hardly possible that it could be otherwise; but the Duke of Orleans, Egalité as he was called in those days, probably retained a tender remembrance of her till his head fell on the scaffold. When

the revolution broke out in earnest, Madame de Genlis was sent to England by the Duke, having one of the young Orleans princesses still under her care. In England she remained some time, much courted among all the most intellectual men and women of English society. She stayed with Burke; she was on intimate terms with Fanny Burney; she bewitched Sheridan, until, according to her own account, he was so taken captive with the charms of herself and Pamela, that he made an offer for the latter's hand. This fact, however, Sheridan always denied. It is nevertheless certain that he was always philandering around two pretty Frenchwomen all the time they remained in England, and that they stayed for a month under his roof.

At length Madame de Genlis returned to Paris, where she appears to have renewed cordial relations with her husband. The amicable and comfortable terms on which she and Pamela and M. de Genlis seem to have lived at this period, strikes us as strange, to say the least of it, but it is in accordance with the times in France. It was at the theatre in Paris that Lord Edward Fitzgerald first saw Pamela and fell in love with her. Madame de Genlis and Pamela left Paris for Tournay; the young English nobleman followed them there, made Pamela a formal declaration, which was accepted, and the pair were very quickly married.

After that the life of Madame de Genlis was somewhat a lonely one. Pamela was living in her English home; her youngest royal pupil was grown up and had drifted away from her; very soon she received the news in Belgium, where she was then living, of the deaths by the guillotine of both the Duke of Orleans and M. de Genlis. She was alone, she was growing old, she was without money, for her fortune had all disappeared in the revolution; but she stood up bravely against sorrow and misfortune, and set herself to gain her own living, and to make fresh friends. Her brilliant and versatile talents now stood her in good stead, and she wrote many books that paid well; she also earned money by her pencil and her needle.

We catch glimpses of Madame de Genlis throughout her latter years residing in different cities of Europe, always cheerful, always at work, always sparkling with wit; filling up any leisure she had with music and conversation, in which she was all her life a mistress. Napoleon acknowledged her genius and gave her a small pension. Her love of young people endured to the last, and she adopted and brought up a boy when she was an old woman. She died at the ripe old age of eighty-eight, with all her faculties and intellects unimpaired, leaving a striking picture in the portrait gallery of celebrated women.

ALICE KING.