CHAPTER III.

MADAME DE STAËL.

THE restoration, that had overthrown so many of the great, and that was destined to restore to the light so many names that had lain buried in obscurity, now brought back to Paris a person who had been banished by Napoleon, and who had been adding new lustre and renown to her name in a foreign land. This personage was Madame de Staël, the daughter of Necker, the renowned poetess of "Corinne" and "Delphine."

It had been a long and bitter struggle between Madame de Staël and the mighty Emperor of the French; and Madame de Staël, with her genius and her impassioned eloquence, and adorned with the laurel-wreath of her exile, had perhaps done Napoleon more harm than a whole army of his enemies. Intense hatred existed on both sides, and yet it had depended on Napoleon alone to transform this hatred into love. For Madame de Staël had been disposed to lavish the whole impassioned enthusiasm of her heart upon the young hero of Marengo and Arcola—quite disposed to become the Egeria of this Numa Pompilius. In the warm impulse of her stormy imagination, Madame de Staël, in reference to Bonaparte, had even, in a slight measure, been regardless of her position as a lady, and had only remembered that she was a poetess, and that, as such, it became her well to celebrate the hero, and to bestow on

the luminous constellation that was rising over France the glowing dithyrambic of her greetings.

Madame de Staël had, therefore, not waited for Napoleon to seek her, but had made the first advances, and sought him.

To the returning victor of Italy she wrote letters filled with impassioned enthusiasm; but these letters afforded the youthful general but little pleasure. In the midst of the din of battle and the grand schemes with which he was continually engaged, Bonaparte found but little time to occupy himself with the poetical works of Madame de Staël. He knew of her nothing more than that she was the daughter of the minister Necker, and that was no recommendation in Napoleon's eyes, for he felt little respect for Necker's genius, and even went so far as to call him the instigator of the great revolution. It was, therefore, with astonishment that the young general received the enthusiastic letter of the poetess; and, while showing it to some of his intimate friends, he said, with a shrug of his shoulders, "Do you understand these extravagances? This woman is foolish!"

But Madame de Staël did not allow herself to be dismayed by Bonaparte's coldness and silence—she continued to write new and more glowing letters.

In one of these letters she went so far in her inconsiderate enthusiasm as to say, that it was a great error in human institutions that the gentle and quiet Josephine had united her faith with his; that she, Madame de Staël, and Bonaparte, were born for each other, and

that Nature seemed to have created a soul of fire like hers, in order that it might worship a hero such as he was.

Bonaparte crushed the letter in his hands, and exclaimed, as he threw it in the fire: "That a blue-stocking, a manufactress of sentiment, should dare to compare herself to Josephine! I shall not answer these letters!"

He did not answer them, but Madame de Staël did not, or rather would not, understand his silence. Little disposed to give up a resolution once formed, and to see her plans miscarry, Madame de Staël was now also determined to have her way, and to approach Bonaparte despite his resistance.

And she did have her way; she succeeded in overcoming all obstacles, and the interview, so long wished for by her, and so long avoided by him, at last took place. Madame de Staël was introduced at the Tuileries, and received by Bonaparte and his wife. The personal appearance of this intellectual woman was, however, but little calculated to overcome Bonaparte's prejudice. The costume of Madame de Staël was on this occasion, as it always was, fantastic, and utterly devoid of taste, and Napoleon loved to see women simply but elegantly and tastefully attired. In this interview with Napoleon, Madame de Staël gave free scope to her wit; but instead of dazzling him, as she had hoped to do, she only succeeded in depressing him.

It was while in this frame of mind, and when Madame de Staël, in her ardor, had endeavored almost to

MADAME DE STAËL.

force him to pay her a compliment, that Napoleon responded to her at least somewhat indiscreet question: "Who is in your eyes the greatest woman?" with the sarcastic reply, "She who bears the most children to the state."

Madame de Staël had come with a heart full of enthusiasm; in her address to Napoleon, she had called him a "god descended to earth;" she had come an enthusiastic poetess; she departed an offended woman. Her wounded vanity never forgave the answer which seemed to make her ridiculous. She avenged herself, in her drawing-room, by the biting *bon mots* which she hurled at Napoleon and his family, and which were of course faithfully repeated to the first consul.

But the weapons which this intellectual woman now wielded against the hero who had scorned her, wounded him more severely than weapons of steel or iron. In the use of these weapons, Madame de Staël was his superior, and the consciousness of this embittered Bonaparte all the more against the lady, who dared prick the heel of Achilles with the needle of her wit, and strike at the very point where he was most sensitive.

A long and severe conflict now began between these two greatest geniuses of that period, a struggle that was carried on by both with equal bitterness. But Napoleon had outward power on his side, and could punish the enmity of his witty opponent, as a ruler.

He banished Madame de Staël from Paris, and soon afterward even from France. She who in Paris had

been so ready to sing the praises of her "god descended from heaven," now went into exile his enemy and a royalist, to engage, with all her eloquence and genius, in making proselytes for the exiled Bourbons, and to raise in the minds of men an invisible but none the less formidable army against her enemy the great Napoleon.

Madame de Staël soon gave still greater weight to the flaming eruptions of her hatred of Napoleon, by her own increasing renown and greatness; and the poetess of Corinne and Delphine soon became as redoubtable an opponent of Napoleon as England, Russia, or Austria, could be.

But in the midst of the triumphs she was celebrating in her exile, Madame de Staël soon began to long ardently to return to France, which she loved all the more for having been compelled to leave it. She therefore used all the influence she possessed in Paris, to obtain from Napoleon permission to return to her home, but the emperor remained inexorable, even after having read Delphine.

"I love," said he, "women who make men of themselves just as little as I love effeminate men. There is an appropriate *rôle* for every one in the world. Of what use is this vagabondizing of fantasy? What does it accomplish? Nothing! All this is nothing but derangement of mind and feeling. I dislike women who throw themselves in my arms, and for this reason, if for no other, I dislike this woman, who is certainly one of that number."

Madame de Staël's petitions to be permitted to return to Paris were therefore rejected, but she was as little disposed to abandon her purpose now as she was at the time she sought to gain Bonaparte's good-will. She continued to make attempts to achieve her aim, for it was not only her country that she wished to reconquer, but also a million francs which she wished to have paid to her out of the French treasury.

Her father, Minister Necker, had loaned his suffering country a million francs, at a time of financial distress and famine, to buy bread for the starving people, and Louis XVI. had guaranteed, in writing, that this "national debt of France" should be returned.

But the revolution that shattered the throne of the unfortunate king, also buried beneath the ruins of the olden time the promises and oaths that had been written on parchment and paper.

Madame de Staël now demanded that the emperor should fulfil the promises of the overthrown king, and that the heir of the throne of the Bourbons should assume the obligations into which a Bourbon had entered with her father.

She had once called Napoleon a god descended from heaven; and she even now wished that he might still prove a god for her, namely, the god Pluto, who should pour out a million upon her from his horn of plenty.

As she could not go to France herself, she sent her son to plead with the emperor, for herself and her children.

Well knowing, however, how difficult it would be, even for her son to secure an audience of the emperor, she addressed herself to Queen Hortense in eloquent letters imploring her to exert her influence in her son's behalf.

Hortense, ever full of pity for misfortune, felt the warmest sympathy and admiration for the genius of the great poetess, and interceded for Madame de Staël with great courage and eloquence. She alone ventured, regardless of Napoleon's frowns and displeasure, to plead the cause of the poor exile again and again, and to solicit her recall to France, as a simple act of justice; she even went so far in her generosity as to extend the hospitalities of her drawing-rooms to the poetess's son, who was avoided and fled from by every one else.

Hortense's soft entreaties and representations were at last successful in soothing the emperor's anger. He allowed Madame de Staël to return to France, on the condition that she should never come to Paris or its vicinity; he then also accorded Madame de Staël's son the long-sought favor of an audience.

This interview of Napoleon with Madame de Staël's son is as remarkable as it is original. On this occasion, Napoleon openly expressed his dislike and even his hatred as well of Madame de Staël as of her father, although he listened with generous composure to the warm defence of the son and grandson.

Young Staël told the emperor of his mother's longing to return to her home, and touchingly portrayed the sadness and unhappiness of her exile.

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed the emperor, "your mother is in a state of exaltation. I do not say that she is a bad woman. She has wit, and much intellect, perhaps too much, but hers is an inconsiderate, an insubordinate spirit. She has grown up in the chaos of a falling monarchy, and of a revolution, and she has amalgamized the two in her mind. This is all a source of danger; she would make proselytes, she must be watched; she does not love me. The interests of those whom she might compromise, require that I should not permit her to return to Paris. If I should allow her to do so, she would place me under the necessity of sending her to Bicêtre, or of imprisoning her in the Temple, before six months elapsed; that would be extremely disagreeable, for it would cause a sensation, and injure me in the public opinion. Inform your mother that my resolution is irrevocable. While I live, she shall not return to Paris."

It was in vain that young Staël assured him in his mother's name, that she would avoid giving him the least occasion for displeasure, and that she would live in complete retirement if permitted to return to Paris.

"Ah, yes! I know the value of fine promises!" exclaimed the emperor. "I know what the result would be, and I repeat it, it cannot be! She would be the rallying-point of the whole Faubourg St. Germain. She live in retirement! Visits would be made her, and she would return them; she would commit a thousand indiscretions, and say a thousand humorous things, to which she attaches no importance, but which annoy me. My

government is no jest, I take every thing seriously; I wish this to be understood, and you may proclaim it to the whole world!"

Young Staël had, however, the courage to continue his entreaties; he even went so far as to inquire in all humility for the grounds of the emperor's ill-will against his mother. He said he had been assured that Necker's last work was more particularly the cause of the emperor's displeasure, and that he believed Madame de Staël had assisted in writing it. This was, however, not so, and he could solemnly assure the emperor that his mother had taken no part in it whatever. Besides, Necker had also done full justice to the emperor in this work.

"Justice, indeed! He calls me the 'necessary man.' The necessary man! and yet, according to his book, the first step necessary to be taken, was to take off this necessary man's head! Yes, I was necessary to repair all that your grandfather had destroyed! It is he who overthrew the monarchy, and brought Louis XVI. to the scaffold!"

"Sire!" exclaimed the young man, deeply agitated, "you are then not aware that my grandfather's estates were confiscated because he defended the king!"

"A fine defence, indeed! If I give a man poison, and then, when he lies in the death-struggle, give him an antidote, can you then maintain that I wished to save this man? It was in this manner that M. Necker defended Louis XVI. The confiscations of which you speak prove

nothing. Robespierre's property was also confiscated. Not even Robespierre, Marat, and Danton, have brought such misery upon France as Necker; he it is who made the revolution. You did not see it, but I was present in those days of horror and public distress; but I give you my word that they shall return no more while I live! Your schemers write out their utopias, the simple-minded read these dreams, they are printed and believed in; the common welfare is in everybody's mouth, and soon there is no more bread for the people; it revolts, and that is the usual result of all these fine theories! Your grandfather is to blame for the orgies that brought France to desperation."

Then lowering his voice, from the excited, almost angry tone in which he had been speaking, to a milder one, the emperor approached the young man, who stood before him, pale, and visibly agitated. With that charming air of friendly intimacy that no one knew so well how to assume as Napoleon, he gently pinched the tip of the young man's ear, the emperor's usual way of making peace with any one to whom he wished well, after a little difficulty.

"You are still young," said he; "if you possessed my age and experience, you would judge of these matters differently. Your candor has not offended, but pleased me; I like to see a son defend his mother's cause! Your mother has intrusted you with a very difficult commission, and you have executed it with much spirit. It gives me pleasure to have conversed with you, for I love

the young when they are straightforward and not too 'argumentative.' But I can nevertheless give you no false hopes! You will accomplish nothing! If your mother were in prison, I should not hesitate to grant you her release. But she is in exile, and nothing can induce me to recall her."

"But, sire, is one not quite as unhappy far from home and friends, as in prison?"

"Ah, bah! those are romantic notions! You have heard that said about your mother. She is truly greatly to be pitied. With the exception of Paris, she has the whole of Europe for her prison!"

"But, sire, all her friends are in Paris!"

"With her intellect, she will be able to acquire new ones everywhere. Moreover, I cannot understand why she should desire to be in Paris. Why does she so long to place herself in the immediate reach of tyranny? You see I pronounce the decisive word! I am really unable to comprehend it. Can she not go to Rome, Berlin, Vienna, Milan, or London? Yes, London would be the right place! There she can perpetrate libels whenever she pleases. At all of these places I will leave her undisturbed with the greatest pleasure; but Paris is my residence, and there I will tolerate those only who love me! On this the world can depend. I know what would happen, if I should permit your mother to return to Paris. She would commit new follies; she would corrupt those who surround me; she would corrupt Garat, as she once corrupted the tribunal; of course, she would

promise all things, but she would, nevertheless, not avoid engaging in politics."

"Sire," I can assure you that my mother does not occupy herself with politics at all; she devotes herself exclusively to the society of her friends, and to literature."

"That is the right word, and I fully understand it. One talks politics while talking of literature, of morals, of the fine arts, and of every conceivable thing! If your mother were in Paris, her latest *bon mots* and phrases would be recited to me daily; perhaps they would be only invented; but I tell you I will have nothing of the kind in the city in which I reside! It would be best for her to go to London; advise her to do so. As far as your grandfather is concerned, I have certainly not said too much; M. Necker had no administrative ability. Once more, inform your mother that I shall never permit her to return to Paris."

"But if sacred interests should require her presence here for a few days, your majesty would at least—"

"What? Sacred interests? What does that mean?"

"Sire," the presence of my mother will be necessary, in order to procure from your majesty's government the return of a sacred debt."

"Ah, bah! sacred! Are not all the debts of the state sacred?"

"Without doubt, sire; but ours is accompanied by peculiar circumstances."

"Peculiar circumstances!" exclaimed the emperor,

rising to terminate the long interview, that began to weary him. "What creditor of the state does not say the same of his debt? Moreover, I know too little of your relations toward my government. This matter does not concern me, and I will not be mixed up in it. If the laws are for you, all will go well without my interference; but if it requires influence, I shall have nothing to do with it, for I should be rather against than for you!"

"Sire," said young Staël, venturing to speak once more, as the emperor was on the point of leaving, "sire, my brother and I were anxious to settle in France; but how could we live in a land in which our mother would not be allowed to live with us everywhere?"

Already standing on the threshold of the door, the emperor turned to him hastily. "I have no desire whatever to have you settle here," said he; "on the contrary, I advise you not to do so. Go to England. There they have a *penchant* for Genevese, parlor-politicians, etc.; therefore, go to England; for I must say, I should be rather ill than well disposed toward you!" *

* Bourrienne, vol. viii., p. 355.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME DE STAËL'S RETURN TO PARIS.

Madame de Staël returned to her cherished France with the restoration. She came back thirsting for new honor and renown, and determined, above all, to have her work republished in Germany, its publication having been once suppressed by the imperial police. She entertained the pleasing hope that the new court would forget that she was Necker's daughter, receive her with open arms, and accord her the influence to which her active mind and genius entitled her.

But she was laboring under an error, by which she was not destined to be long deceived. She was received at court with the cold politeness which is more terrible than insult. The king, while speaking of her with his friends, called Madame de Staël "a Chateaubriand in petticoats." The Duchess d'Angoulême seemed never to see the celebrated poetess, and never addressed a word to her; the rest of the court met Madame de Staël armed to the teeth with all the hatred and prejudices of the olden time.

It was also in vain that Madame de Staël endeavored to act an important part at the new court; they refused to regard her as an authority or power, but treated her as a mere authoress; her counsel was ridiculed, and they dared even to question the renown of M. Necker.

"I am unfortunate," said Madame de Staël to Countess

Ducayla; "Napoleon hated me because he believed me to possess intellect; these people repel me because I at least possess ordinary human understanding! I can certainly get on very well without them; but, as my presence displeases them, I shall, at least, endeavor to get my money from them."

The "sacred debt" had not been paid under the empire, and it was now Madame de Staël's intention to obtain from the king what the emperor had refused.

She was well aware of the influence which Countess Ducayla exercised over Louis XVIII., and she now hastened to call on the beautiful countess—whose acquaintance she had made under peculiar circumstances, in a romantic love intrigue—in order to renew the friendship they had then vowed to each other.

The countess had not forgotten this friendship, and she was now grateful for the service Madame de Staël had then shown her. She helped to secure the liquidation of the sacred debt, and, upon the order of King Louis, the million was paid over to Madame de Staël. "But," says the countess, in her memoirs, "I believe the recovery of this million cost Madame de Staël four hundred thousand francs, besides a set of jewelry that was worth at least one hundred thousand."

The countess's purse and the jewelry case, however, doubtlessly bore evidence that she might as well have said "I know" as "I believe."

Besides the four hundred thousand francs and the jewelry, Madame de Staël also gave the countess a piece

of advice. "Make the most of the favor you now enjoy," said she to her; "but do so quickly, for, as matters are now conducted, I fear that the restoration will soon have to be restored."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the countess, smiling.

"I mean that, with the exception of the king, who perhaps does not say all he thinks, the others are still doing precisely as they always have done, and Heaven knows to what extremities their folly is destined to bring them! They mock at the old soldiers and assist the young priests, and this is the best means of ruining France."

Countess Ducayla considered this prediction of her intellectual friend as a mere cloud with which discontent and disappointed ambition had obscured the otherwise clear vision of Madame de Staël, and ridiculed the idea, little dreaming how soon her words were to be fulfilled.

Madame de Staël consoled herself for her cold reception at court, by receiving the best society of Paris in her parlors, and entertaining them with biting *bon mots* and witty *persiflage*, at the expense of the grand notabilities, who had suddenly arisen with their imposing genealogical trees out of the ruins and oblivion of the past.

Madame de Staël now also remembered the kindness Queen Hortense had shown her during her exile; and not to her only, but also to her friend, Madame Récamier, who had also been exiled by Napoleon, not, however, as his enemies said, "because she was Madame de

Staël's friend," but simply because she patronized and belonged to the so-called "little church." The "little church" was an organization born of the spirit of opposition of the Faubourg St. Germain, and a portion of the Catholic clergy, and was one of those things appertaining to the internal relations of France that were most annoying and disagreeable to the emperor.

Queen Hortense had espoused the cause of Madame de Staël and of Madame Récamier with generous warmth. She had eloquently interceded for the recall of both from their exile; and, now that the course of events had restored them to their home, both ladies came to the queen to thank her for her kindness and generosity.

Louise de Cochelet has described this visit of Madame de Staël so wittily, with so much *naïveté*, and with such peculiar local coloring, that we cannot refrain from laying a literal translation of the same before the reader.

CHAPTER V.

MADAME DE STAËL'S VISIT TO QUEEN HORTENSE.

Louise de Cochelet relates as follows: "Madame de Staël and Madame Récamier had begged permission of the queen to visit her, for the purpose of tendering their thanks. The queen invited them to visit her at St. Leu, on the following day.

"She asked my advice as to which of the members of her social circle were best qualified to cope with Madame de Staël.

"'I, for my part,' said the queen, 'have not the courage to take the lead in the conversation; one cannot be very intellectual when sad at heart, and I fear my dullness will infect the others.'

"We let quite a number of amiable persons pass before us in review, and I amused myself at the mention of each new name, by saying, 'He is too dull for Madame de Staël.'

"The queen laughed, and the list of those who were to be invited was at last agreed upon. We all awaited the arrival of the two ladies in great suspense. The obligation imposed on us by the queen, of being intellectual at all hazards, had the effect of conjuring up a somewhat embarrassed and stupid expression to our faces. We presented the appearance of actors on the stage looking at each other, while awaiting the rise of the curtain. Jests and *bon mots* followed each other in rapid succession until the arrival of the carriage recalled to our faces an expression of official earnestness.

"Madame Récamier, still young, and very handsome, and with an expression of *naïveté* in her charming countenance, made the impression on me of being a young lady in love, carefully watched over by too severe a *duenna*, her timid, gentle manner contrasted so strongly with the somewhat too masculine self-consciousness of her companion. Madame de Staël is, however, generally ad-