

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.

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## 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-



mitted to have been good and kind, particularly to this friend, and I only speak of the impression she made on one to whom she was a stranger, at first sight.

"Madame de Staël's extremely dark complexion, her original toilet, her perfectly bare shoulders, of which either might have been very beautiful, but which harmonized very poorly with each other; her whole *ensemble* was far from approximating to the standard of the ideal I had formed of the authoress of *Delphine* and *Corinne*. I had almost hoped to find in her one of the heroines she had so beautifully portrayed, and I was therefore struck dumb with astonishment. But, after the first shock, I was at least compelled to acknowledge that she possessed very beautiful and expressive eyes; and yet it seemed impossible for me to find anything in her countenance on which love could fasten, although I have been told that she has often inspired that sentiment.

"When I afterward expressed my astonishment to the queen, she replied: 'It is, perhaps, because she is capable of such great love herself, that she succeeds in inspiring others with love; moreover, it flatters a man's self-love to be noticed by such a woman, and, in the end, one can dispense with beauty, when one has Madame de Staël's intellect.'

"The queen inquired after Madame de Staël's daughter, who had not come with her, and who was said to be truly charming. I believe the young gentlemen of our party could have confronted the beautiful eyes of the daughter with still greater amiability than those of the

mother, but an attack of toothache had prevented her coming.

"After the first compliments and salutations, the queen proposed to the ladies to take a look at her park. They seated themselves on the cushions of the queen's large *char à banc*, which has become historic on account of the many high and celebrated personages who have been driven in it at different times. The Emperor Napoleon was, however, not one of this number, as he never visited St. Leu; but, with this exception, there are few of the great and celebrated who have not been seated in it at one time or another.

"As they drove through the park and the forest of Montmorency, in a walk only, the conversation was kept up as in the parlor, and the consumption of intellectuality was continued. The beautiful neighborhood, that reminded one of Switzerland, as it was remarked, was duly admired. Then Italy was spoken of. The queen, who had been somewhat *distrainée*, and had good cause to be somewhat sad, and disposed to commune with herself, addressed Madame de Staël with the question, 'You have been in Italy, then?'

"Madame de Staël was, as it were, transfixed with dismay, and the gentlemen exclaimed with one accord: 'And Corinne? and Corinne?'

"'Ah, that is true,' said the queen, in embarrassment, awakening, as it were, from her dreams.

"'Is it possible,' asked M. de Canonville, 'your majesty has not read Corinne?'



“‘Yes—no,’ said the queen, visibly confused, ‘I shall read it again,’ and, in order to conceal an emotion that I alone could understand, she abruptly changed the topic of conversation.

“She might have said the truth, and simply informed them that the book had appeared just at the time her eldest son had died in Holland. The king, disquieted at seeing her so profoundly given up to her grief, believed, in accordance with Corvisart’s advice, that it was necessary to arouse her from this state of mental dejection at all hazards. It was determined that I should read ‘Corinne’ to her. She was not in a condition to pay much attention to it, but she had involuntarily retained some remembrance of this romance. Since then, I had several times asked permission of the queen to read Corinne to her, but she had always refused. ‘No, no,’ said she, ‘not yet; this romance has identified itself with my sorrow. Its name alone recalls the most fearful period of my whole life. I have not yet the courage to renew these painful impressions.’

“I, alone, had therefore been able to divine what had embarrassed and moved the queen so much when she replied to the question addressed to her concerning Corinne. But the authoress could, of course, only interpret it as indicating indifference for her master-work, and I told the queen on the following day that it would have been better to have confessed the cause of her confusion to Madame de Staël.

“‘Madame de Staël would not have understood me,’

said she; ‘now, I am lost to her good opinion, she will consider me a simpleton, but it was not the time to speak of myself, and of my painful reminiscences.’

“The large *char à banc* was always preferred to the handsomest carriages (although it was very plain, and consisted of two wooden benches covered with cushions, placed opposite each other), because it was more favorable for conversation. But it afforded no security against inclement weather, and this we were soon to experience. The rain poured in streams, and we all returned to the castle thoroughly wet. A room was there prepared and offered the ladies, in which they might repair the disarrangement of their toilet caused by the storm. I remained with them long, kept there by the questions of Madame de Staël concerning the queen and her son, which questions were fairly showered upon me. There was now no longer a question of intellectuality, but merely of washing, hair-dressing, and reposing, with an entire abandonment of the display of mind, the copiousness of which I had been compelled to admire but a moment before. I said to myself: ‘There they are, face to face, like the rest of the world, with material life, these two celebrated women, who are everywhere sought after, and received with such marked consideration. There they are, as wet as myself, and as little poetic.’ We were really behind the curtain, but it was shortly to rise again.

“Voices were heard under the window; among other voices, a German accent was audible, and both ladies im-



mediately exclaimed: 'Ah, that is Prince Augustus of Prussia!'

"No one expected the prince, and this meeting with the two ladies had therefore the appearance of being accidental. He had come merely to pay the queen a visit, and it was so near dinner-time, that politeness required that he should be invited to remain. And this was doubtless what he wished.

"The prince had the queen on his right, and Madame de Staël on his left. The servant of the latter had laid a little green twig on her napkin, which she twisted between her fingers while speaking, as was her habit. The conversation was animated, and it was amusing to observe Madame de Staël gesticulating with the little twig in her fingers. One might have supposed that some fairy had given her this talisman, and that her genius was dependent upon this little twig.

"Constantinople, with which city several of the gentlemen were well acquainted, was now the topic of conversation. Madame de Staël thought it would be a delightful task for an intellectual woman, to turn the sultan's head, and then to compel him to give his Turks a constitution. After dinner, freedom of the press was also a topic of conversation.

"Madame de Staël astonished me, not only by the brilliancy of her genius, but also by the deep earnestness with which she treated questions of that kind, for until then custom had not allowed women to discuss such matters. At entertainments, philosophy, morals, sentiment,

heroism, and the like, had been the subjects of conversation, but the emperor monopolized politics. His era was that of actions, and, we may say it with pride, of great actions, while the era that followed was essentially that of great words, and of political and literary controversies.

"Madame de Staël spoke to the queen of her motto: 'Do that which is right, happen what may.'

"'In my exile, which you so kindly endeavored to terminate,' said she, 'I often repeated this motto, and thought of you while doing so.'

"While speaking thus, her countenance was illumined by the reflection of inward emotion, and I found her beautiful. She was no longer the woman of mind only, but also the woman of heart and feeling, and I comprehended at this moment how charming she could be.

"Afterward, she had a long conversation with the queen touching the emperor. 'Why was he so angry with me?' asked she. 'He could not have known how much I admired him! I will see him—I shall go to Elba! Do you think he would receive me well? I was born to worship this man, and he has repelled me.'

"'Ah, madame,' replied the queen, 'I have often heard the emperor say that he had a great mission to fulfil, and that he could compare his labors with the exertions of a man who, having the summit of a steep mountain ever before his eyes, strains every nerve to attain it, ever toiling painfully upward, and allowing his progress to be arrested by no obstacle whatever. "All the worse for



those," said he, "who meet me on my course—I can show them no consideration."

"You met him on his course, madame; perhaps he would have extended you a helping hand, after having reached the summit of his mountain."

"I must speak with him," said Madame de Staël; "I have been injured in his opinion."

"I think so too," replied the queen, "but you would judge him ill, if you considered him capable of hating any one. He believed you to be his enemy, and he feared you, which was something very unusual for him," added she, with a smile. "Now that he is unfortunate, you will show yourself his friend, and prove yourself to be such, and I am satisfied that he will receive you well."

"Madame de Staël also occupied herself a great deal with the young princes, but she met with worse success with them than with us. It was perhaps in order to judge of their mental capacity, that she showered unsuitable questions upon them.

"Do you love your uncle?"

"Very much, madame!"

"And will you also be as fond of war as he is?"

"Yes, if it did not cause so much misery."

"Is it true that he often made you repeat a fable commencing with the words, 'The strongest is always in the right?'"

"Madame, he often made us repeat fables, but this one not oftener than any other."

"Young Prince Napoleon, a boy of astounding mental capacity and precocious judgment, answered all these questions with the greatest composure, and, at the conclusion of this examination, turned to me and said quite audibly: 'This lady asks a great many questions. Is that what you call being intellectual?'"

"After the departure of our distinguished visitors, we all indulged in an expression of opinion concerning them, and young Prince Napoleon was the one upon whom the ladies had made the least flattering impression, but he only ventured to intimate as much in a low voice.

"I for my part had been more dazzled than gladdened by this visit. One could not avoid admiring this genius in spite of its inconsiderateness, and its wanderings, but there was nothing pleasing, nothing graceful and womanly, in Madame de Staël's manner."\*

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE OLD AND THE NEW ERA.

THE restoration was accomplished. The allies had at last withdrawn from the kingdom, and Louis XVIII. was now the independent ruler of France. In him, in the returned members of his family, and in the emigrants who were pouring into the country from all quarters, was

\* Cochelet, Mémoires sur la Reine Hortense, vol. i., pp. 429-440.