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MADAME DE STAËL AND HER LOVERS

MADAME DE STAËL

From a Painting by François Gérard

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MADAME DE STAËL AND HER LOVERS

BY

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PREFACE

The Life of Madame de Staël has been written a good many times. The earlier biographies—up to and including the ambitious work by Dr. Stevens—are inadequate, owing to the scantiness of the material then available. They give a somewhat uncritical relation of Madame de Staël's public life, but leave her personal life wrapped in mystery, without even suggesting that there are secrets unrevealed. Lady Blennerhassett's book, written in German, and translated into both French and English, is much better from every point of view. At the time of its appearance Benjamin Constant's *Journal Intime* had just been published in the *Revue Internationale.* That extraordinary document threw quite a fresh light upon Madame de Staël's character. It showed her as the exigent mistress, clinging to a reluctant lover, and refusing to let him go. Lady Blennerhassett quoted a good deal from it. Hers is consequently the first Life in which Madame de Staël appears as a woman with a passionate heart and not as a philosopher in petticoats.

The story thus brought to light was not

absolutely a new one. There had been some gossip about it in articles printed in the *Revue des deux Mondes* at the time of Benjamin Constant's death. Sainte-Beuve had heard something of it from Madame Récamier, and had repeated what he had heard in certain of his *Causeries du Lundi.* There had been references to it in one or two of Sismondi's letters to the Comtesse d'Albany. Details, however, were lacking. The story rested in the main upon oral tradition, and had almost been forgotten when the publication of the *Journal Intime* revived it. But the *Journal Intime*, which is probably the most pitiless piece of self-analysis ever put on paper, has never been translated. In so far as it is known at all to English readers, it is known only through the extracts cited by Lady Blennerhassett; and it merits far more minute attention than is given to it in her pages.

Moreover, the *Journal Intime* was not the only document needed for the thorough understanding of the story. It is further illuminated by a considerable mass of correspondence to which Lady Blennerhassett had not access. Some passages in the Memoirs of Barras show us how the relations of the lovers struck a cynical observer of the period. The letters of Benjamin Constant's cousin Rosalie to her brother Charles, preserved in the Geneva Public Library, are full of picturesque, and sometimes poignant, particulars.

Benjamin Constant's own letters to his cousins and to his aunt, Madame de Nassau, help us to bridge many gaps in the narrative. It is from these that we infer that Benjamin Constant indubitably believed — what Barras states as a matter of common knowledge — that Madame de Staël's youngest child, Albertine, afterwards Duchesse de Broglie, was not M. de Staël's daughter, but his.[1]

Madame de Staël's own letters to her lover are unfortunately, with few exceptions, missing from the collection; and the Constant letters tell us why. They were kept in a box, originally stored by Madame Constant at Hanover, but afterwards consigned to the care of other members of the Constant family at Lausanne. Immediately after Benjamin Constant's death, the Duchesse de Broglie wrote to Charles de Constant, asking that the box and its contents might be surrendered to her, as Benjamin Constant had promised that they should be. Charles de Constant complied with her request. The letters were surrendered, and are believed to have been destroyed. If they exist, they are in safe custody in the Tower of the

[1] "Benjamin Constant seemed to me to do justice to the truth of the reciprocal positions Madame de Staël had somewhat distorted for his sake, in order to still further excite his imagination, which was perhaps rather inclined to excitement at that very time, when the public saw proofs which were hardly equivocal of an affection strongly shared, in the birth of a daughter whom Madame de Staël called Albertine, and the resemblance of whose features, hair, everything in fact, appeared to the world as the striking image of Benjamin Constant" (*Memoirs of Barras*, vol. iii. p. 162).

Archives at Coppet. The Comte d'Haussonville, who at present owns and occupies that mansion, does not consider that the story which they tell concerns the public; and when he writes of Madame de Staël, as he often does, he ignores Benjamin Constant altogether.

The box, however, did not contain all the letters that passed between the lovers. A few of them —a very few—were printed by Strodtmann in Germany, and reprinted by Lady Blennerhassett. A larger collection which had remained in the hands of the descendants of Madame Benjamin Constant were published, a few months ago, by that lady's great-granddaughter, in the American *Critic*. The *Critic's* description of them as "love letters" is not entirely accurate. Only a few of them, at any rate, are rightly so described. Their date is subsequent to what is generally regarded as the final breach between the lovers—subsequent to the locking of the box of which Benjamin Constant's cousins took charge. Their interest is only retrospective; they only rake dead ashes. But they nevertheless add a good deal to our knowledge not merely of the facts but also of the psychology of the intimacy under review, and form one fresh piece of evidence among many that this intimacy was the one event of really permanent importance in Madame de Staël's life.

During her lifetime she had several distinct reputations. Her fame, and the story of her persecutions, echoed from end to end of Europe.

Most justly might she have asked: "Quae regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?" Her contemporaries reckoned her a great politician, a great philosopher, and a great novelist. They called her after the heroine of her chief romance, and they spoke of her "duel" with Napoleon. Posterity sees these aspects of her renown in a more true proportion. In politics her successes and her failures alike were only those of the wire-puller. As a political philosopher she figures only as the apologist of her father's mediocrity. As a metaphysician she is only the echo of an echo, reproducing Schlegel's reproduction of the thoughts of Kant. As a novelist she only followed the fleeting fashion of the hour, and her *Corinne* hardly counts for more in the history of literature than Madame de Krudner's *Valérie.*

Those were her limitations. Professor Saintsbury has pointed them out in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; though he adds that to recite them and then stop "would be in the highest degree unfair." If Madame de Staël was not a great thinker or a great artist, she was at any rate a "live" woman of immense ability and great force of character, whose personality had to be reckoned with in most of the departments of endeavour. Even Talleyrand was, at one time, glad to lean upon her influence; even Sir James Mackintosh was deceived by the glitter of her writings; even Byron was jealous of the figure she cut in Society; even the Duke of Wellington

knelt to kiss her hand; even the Russian Emperor sought her advice.

Outwardly, therefore, in spite of her limitations, and in spite of Napoleon's hostility, her life was crowned with success. She did not despise her success; homage and applause were the things for which she appeared to live. But the tribute of flattery and the consciousness of power did not satisfy her. These things were vain unless she could also love and be loved. That is the secret of her inner life. She tried to be—in a sense and to an extent she was—*grande amoureuse.*

Perhaps she loved love better than she loved her lovers; certainly she did not always love either wisely or well. In her youth she made a foolish marriage with her eyes shut; in middle life she made a ridiculous marriage with her eyes open. Neither the foolish marriage nor the ridiculous marriage was allowed to be an obstacle to any more passionate or more sentimental appeal to her emotions. Her treatment of Rocca, the infatuated boy, was not a great deal better than her treatment of M. de Staël, the cynical man of the world, who bought her dowry with his title. Even her lovers had some reason to complain of the levity of her affections. Benjamin Constant's relatives complained very loudly on his behalf.

None the less, she never lost sight of the ideal. She craved for happiness, and believed that happiness was only to be found in love; she

always did her best to persuade herself that her first love was her last and that her last love was her first. But she was weak, and circumstances were strong, and, in her infidelities, she was only following the example which men set her. M. de Staël forsook her society for that of actresses; M. de Narbonne tired of her. Again and again she was driven to make a fresh start in her sentimental life. That is why her case is so profoundly interesting. Her conduct, viewed without reference to its motives, was that of a loose woman; but the motives transfigure it. Madame de Staël meant well, and felt good. Her aim was not merely to achieve happiness, but also to impart it; her real life was in that struggle, and not in any political adventure or any literary undertaking. Every new document that comes to light confirms that estimate of her character, and suggests that it may be worth while to re-write her Life from a fresh point of view.

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THE story, since it has no inevitable beginning, may best be dated from the day when Mademoiselle Suzanne Curchod, the pastor's daughter and the village belle, descended from "the mountains of Burgundy" [1] and captured the heart of the future historian of the Roman Empire.

She who was presently, as Madame Necker, to set the frivolous Parisians the example which they needed of a prim propriety, was hardly, in those days, considered either prim or proper in serious circles at Lausanne. Her reputation, it would be truer to say, was that of a flirt who flirted with the extreme audacity of provincial innocence.

[1] From Crassier, near Nyon. It is not really in Burgundy, but the phrase is Gibbon's.

Her earliest recorded flirtations were with the ministers of the gospel who assisted her father in his parochial duties. She used to invite their signatures to documents, drafted in playful parody of legal contracts, whereby they engaged themselves "to come and preach at Crassier as often as she required, without waiting to be solicited, pressed, or entreated, seeing that the greatest of their pleasures was to oblige her on every possible occasion." Matrons and elderly spinsters made unkind remarks, but the young clergymen signed gladly. There was a great deal of human nature in the Swiss clergy of those days, and a great many of them were poets as well as preachers.

At Lausanne the village beauty opened a school. She presents the figure, perhaps unique in history, of a schoolmistress who was also what in the England of the same period would have been styled a "reigning toast." "At the end of the lane which leads to the mineral waters of La Poudrerie, her pupils built her a throne, and it was there that she distributed her praises and her prizes, and received the compliments of the wits attracted by her fame." That is how her Academy is described by a contemporary writer; and Dr. Tissot,[1] the fashionable Lausanne physician, adds, not without a gentle touch of irony: " Mademoiselle

[1] Author of many medical works, notably an *Essai sur les maladies des gens du monde*. He became a Professor in the Medical School at Padua.

Curchod is too beautiful and too learned for me to venture to be her friend; while I am neither young enough nor ignorant enough to present myself as her scholar."

The younger citizens, however,—and notably the clergy and the theological students,—aspired more highly. Not only did they take part with Mademoiselle Curchod in Debating Society discussions of such themes as "Does an element of mystery really make love more agreeable?" or "Can there be friendship between a man and a woman in the same sense as between two women or two men?"—they also wrote odes and letters to her, and published them in the *Journal Helvétique*. For example:—

> "Parfaite, les Destins vous montrent sur la terre,
> Pour jouir du tribut qu'on doit aux Immortels.
> Nos cœurs seront autant d'autels
> Faits pour vous présenter un hommage sincère
> De respect et d'amour.
> C'est le plus doux soin de ma vie
> Que de m'en acquitter en secret chaque jour.
> Mais aujourd'hui je le publie."

To which the poet adds in prose: "Yes, charming, or rather divine, Cur . . . . , I cannot refuse to express those sentiments. You, in your single person, furnish the model of the beauties which Zeuxis failed to find in combination. Though I should add to this beauty the wisdom of Minerva, rendered amiable by the sweetness of the Graces and the playful badinage of Hebe, your portrait would still be imperfect."

That is one tribute among many that appeared. Three such tributes are reprinted at full length by Professor Eugène Ritter in a pamphlet entitled *Notes sur Madame de Staël.* It is not surprising that Gibbon, then a pupil in the house of Pastor Pavilliard, felt impelled to enter the lists for such a prize. He may even have felt that here was a challenge which the honour of his country required him to take up. So we read in his diary: "Saw Mlle Curchod. *Omnia vincit amor; et nos cedamus amori.*" And a reminiscence of Julie von Bondeli[1] tells us that "he used to run about, like a madman, in the fields in the neighbourhood of Lausanne, carrying a sword in his hand, and compelling the husbandmen to confess that Mlle C. was the most beautiful person in the world."

Nor was Mademoiselle Curchod, on her part, insensible to the Englishman's attentions. We have a portrait of him from her pen—one of those sketches which it was then the fashion for young people to make of each other, as essays in the art of composition. "He has beautiful hair," she writes, "a pretty hand, and the air of a man of rank. His face is so intellectual and so strange that I know no one like him. It has so much expression that one is always finding something new in it. His gestures are so appropriate that they add much to his speech. In a word, he has

[1] A lively blue-stocking from Berne, in correspondence with Rousseau, Wieland, and other eminent men of the age.

one of those extraordinary faces that one never tires of trying to depict. He knows the respect that is due to women. His courtesy is easy without verging on familiarity. He dances moderately well."

So there began the love story with which, so far at least as its main outlines are concerned, Gibbon's *Autobiography* has made the world familiar. Gibbon was invited to visit the parsonage at Crassier: "In a calm retirement the gay vanity of youth no longer fluttered in her bosom, and I might presume to hope that I had made some impression on a virtuous heart." But his "dream of felicity" was to remain a dream. His father "would not hear of this strange alliance." Sighing as a lover, but obeying as a son, he took up his pen and wrote:—

"I do not know how to begin this letter. Yet begin it I must. I take up my pen, I drop it, I resume it. This commencement shows you what it is that I am about to say. Spare me the rest. Yes, Mademoiselle, I must renounce you for ever. The sentence is passed; my heart laments it; but in the presence of my duty every other consideration must be silent." With more in the same strain, concluding: "Good-bye. I shall always remember Mlle Curchod as the most worthy, the most charming, of women. May she not entirely forget a man who does not deserve the despair to which he is a prey!"

Was he treating her badly? Did she really

care? M. d'Haussonville, her great-great-grandson, answers both questions in the affirmative, arguing the matter almost with the animus of a man who sees in the jilting, in the remote past, of his great-great-grandmother an ineffaceable blot upon the family escutcheon. As regards the former question, his case appears to rest upon an error as to the date of a letter. Gibbon, he says, after leaving Lausanne in 1758, kept silence for four years, and then, without warning, broke off the engagement in 1762. But the letter which M. d'Haussonville dates 1762 conveys a salutation to Pastor Curchod, who died in 1760. Evidently, therefore, it was written, not in 1762, but in 1758 or 1759; and the charge of callousness at least falls to the ground in consequence. One is glad to be able to clear Gibbon's memory of that; and, for the rest, it is sufficient to remember that he was very young at the time, and absolutely dependent upon his father, and also that Mademoiselle Curchod herself ceased to bear rancour very soon after the final breach. The second question is more difficult; but even about that two things are clear: the first, that Mademoiselle Curchod threw herself, with very unmaidenly persistence, at Gibbon's head; the second, that it was not very long before she disposed herself to seek consolation, in more than one quarter, for her loss.

It was, as has been said, in 1758 that Gibbon left Lausanne. He returned there, in the course

of the grand tour, in 1763; and attempts were instantly made to bring him to a sense of his obligations to his former *fiancée.* Pastor Moultou[1] tried; and a certain irony attaches to the story of his endeavours from the fact that the Pastor had himself once sighed at the feet of Mademoiselle Curchod, but had ceased to sigh in order to marry another lady with a dowry of 105,000 florins. Rousseau, at that time a fugitive from French justice, living at Môtiers, in the Val de Travers, was induced to express an opinion which provoked from Gibbon the dignified retort that "that extraordinary man whom I admire and pity should have been less precipitate in condemning the moral character and conduct of a stranger." But the chief advances were made by Mademoiselle Curchod herself.

All that has been preserved of the correspondence is printed by M. d'Haussonville in *Le Salon de Madame Necker.* It discloses a frank attempt on the part of the lady to pick up the broken threads and revive the relations of five years since. If Gibbon will not be her lover, she begs that he will at least be her platonic friend. "Place your attachment for me," she writes, "on the same footing as that of my other friends, and you will find me as confiding, as tender, and at the same time as indifferent as I am to them."

[1] Of Geneva. He defended Rousseau when *Emile* was condemned to be burnt, and gave shelter in his house to the family of Calas.

He accepts the proffered friendship,—"it bestows so much honour upon me that I cannot hesitate," —but he asks that the correspondence may cease.

"I am sensible," he protests, "of the pleasures which it brings me, but at the same time I am conscious of its dangers. I feel the dangers that it has for me; I fear the dangers that it may have for both of us. Permit me to avoid these dangers by my silence. Forgive my fears, Mademoiselle; they have their origin in my esteem for you."

Whereupon there follows a letter of tumultuous reproaches—a letter in which the *spretæ injuria formæ* not only speaks out but cries aloud. Mademoiselle Curchod has rejected other offers of marriage for Gibbon's sake—and this is how he treats her. Perhaps someone has told him that she flirted during his absence—it is false. Possibly someone has been coupling her name with that of M. Deyverdun[1]—it is a shame and a calumny. And so on to the angry end:—

"I am treating you as an honest man of the world, who is incapable of breaking his promise, of seduction, or of treachery, but who has, instead of that, amused himself in racking my heart with tortures, well prepared, and well carried into effect. I will not threaten you, therefore, with the wrath of heaven—the expression that escaped from me in my first emotion. But I assure you,

[1] Gibbon's most intimate friend, whose house he shared when he ultimately settled at Lausanne.

without laying any claim to the gift of prophecy, that you will one day regret the irreparable loss that you have incurred in alienating for ever the too frank and tender heart of S. C."

That closed the passionate episode; though the lovers lived, not only to be reconciled, but to become the best friends in the world. In a sense, no doubt, it is irrelevant as an introduction to the story of Madame de Staël. But it was worth relating, partly for the sake of the chance presented of vindicating Gibbon from the aspersions of M. d'Haussonville, and partly for the purpose of taking the influences of heredity into account. One has heard a good deal of the differences of character between Madame Necker and her daughter, but the resemblances seem worthier of attention.

In each case equally we meet reverberant passion and emphatic insistence on the right not only to love but to be loved; though, in the latter case, the emotion is more developed, more intense, more modern, more symptomatic of the *maladie du siècle*,—less trammelled by middle-class ideas about duty and the sanctity of the marriage tie. Madame de Staël, in short, might be described as a Parisian Madame Necker, and Madame Necker as a provincial Madame de Staël. Or we might put it differently, and say that Madame Necker suggests a Madame de Staël with a Nonconformist conscience, and Madame de Staël a Madame Necker who has overstepped the

barriers of circumspection. The case, at any rate, is not one in which heredity is negligible; and the mother, wrapped in contemplation of her greater daughter's more signally amorous career, might most properly have exclaimed: "There, but for the grace of God, goes Madame Necker!"

Moreover, a further point of likeness between the mother and the daughter may be found in the facility with which they could both transfer an unrequited affection to a worthier object. The list of Madame de Staël's attachments, as we shall see, is long. Her mother did not unduly protract her grief for Gibbon; and the reports which reached the historian of "the cheerfulness and tranquillity of the lady herself" are well substantiated by the facts. We have only to follow her career a little farther in order to meet the proof.

Hardly had she uttered her bitter farewell to her first love than she began to consider a proposal of marriage from a prosperous lawyer of Yverdon. We have a letter from him in which he solicits "a favourable answer by return of post"; and we have two interesting letters setting forth Mademoiselle Curchod's view of the situation. In the one she stipulates that, if she accepts M. Correvon's offer, she shall not be required to live with him for more than four months in each year. In the second she tells Pastor Moultou—the Pastor who had once been her suitor but had withdrawn from the suit for

the sake of Mlle Cayla and her 105,000 florins—that another admirer has been paying her attentions which she rather thinks may be serious, and concludes: "But if this castle in the air collapses, then I will marry Correvon next summer." One cannot wonder that, as the castle in the air did not collapse, Correvon felt himself aggrieved. The news was broken to him that Mademoiselle Curchod was going to marry the great Parisian banker, M. Necker, and he wrote: "I see very clearly that you looked upon me as a miserable makeshift, and that you were looking out for the first opportunity that might occur to settle yourself in Paris or elsewhere."

The taunt undoubtedly had truth in it; but there is no evidence that Mademoiselle Curchod was troubled by any qualms. The romantic and the practical met strangely in her nature. She was poor and a dependent. It was very important to her to get married. She had always looked upon marriage, not as an incident in the romantic life, but as its appointed happy termination. She naturally preferred to make a good marriage, and this was a great opportunity. M. Necker was not only very rich—he also had all the virtues. So she was much too happy to be hurt by the reproaches of the man whom she threw over. Her happiness bubbled over in a letter to a Swiss confidante:—

"What a prodigious change! And how impenetrable are the ways of Providence!

"To-morrow I am to unite my lot to the man whom I like best in all the world. Placed at the head of a household, surrounded by superfluities which make my reason sigh without bewildering it, I see and feel nothing but the happiness of my union with the tenderest and most generous of souls; but nothing shall make me forget your kindness to me. . . . You saw me at the hour when I needed all your kind sympathy to calm the agitation of my soul; and had it not been for the wise counsels of your husband, my troubles would perhaps have precipitated me into an abyss of evil. I assure you that I regard that as one of the strongest arguments in favour of a special providential dispensation. I am marrying a man whom I should believe to be an angel if his attachment to me did not prove his weakness. He is called M. Necker, and is the brother of the Professor. His talents and his shrewdness have won him more consideration than his fortune, although he has an income of twenty-five thousand livres."

Gibbon, we may take it, if remembered, was no longer regretted when Mademoiselle Suzanne Curchod wrote that letter—the last to which she subscribed her maiden name. The sentimental memories of that first romance were, indeed, long years afterwards, to recur to her; but for the moment a new romance effaced it.

CHAPTER II

Necker's genealogical tree—How he got it and what he paid for it—The Neckers at Geneva—The scandalous frivolity of Louis Necker—Jacques Necker in Vernet's and Thelusson's banks—His rise in life—His courtship of Suzanne Curchod —"Each became the other's thurifer."

THE statement has been made—it is repeated in both Dr. Stevens' and Lady Blennerhassett's Lives of Madame de Staël—that the Necker family was of British origin; but neither of these biographers produces any evidence. The truth is that there is no evidence of any value to be given, and that the legend originated in this way.

In 1776, M. Necker, having been given the charge of the French finances, felt the need of a coat of arms and a genealogical tree to support his official dignity. Being wealthy, he could afford to pay for such things; and his brother Louis caused searches to be instituted on his behalf by both English and German experts. The English expert furnished the following information, to be found in a manuscript in the possession of the Geneva Historical Society, copied from a document supplied by Louis Necker himself:—

"It appears from the registers that, in the time

of William the Conqueror, a certain Roger N., in the public service, of the town of Armagh in Ireland, was nominated by the King as a Commissioner for the completion of the records of Domesday-book.

"It may be presumed that this same N. bore arms at an earlier date, as the majority of William the Conqueror's courtiers were also soldiers. He was given the title of 'miles,' and he carried a shield on which was a swan, with its neck separated from its body by a cut dividing the shield into two parts. The upper part of the shield was only one-third the size of the lower part.

"In the reign of Edward I., about 1293, a Robert N., whose arms were the same, passed over to France, and settled in Guyenne, then belonging to England; and in the following year the same Robert returned to Ireland with his armorial bearings changed, having placed at the head of his escutcheon a bunch of grapes, very probably added in honour of the country to which he had gone, as it abounded in vineyards. He retained his crest, however (a swan's neck), with the motto: *Nobilis vita, nobilior mors.*"

That is all, except that the genealogist pledges himself to "terminate his researches to the complete satisfaction of M. Necker for the sum of one thousand pounds. The fee," he adds, "is small, but he is anxious to oblige."

What he would have brought to light if he had had his fee and continued his investigations, it is, of course, impossible to say. The fee was not

paid; the inquiries were not pursued; and though M. Necker adopted the crest thus indicated to him, the verdict must be "not proven." The chain between N. of Armagh and Necker of Geneva consists principally of missing links. The authentic history of the family was supplied by the German expert, Dr. J. B. Steinbruck, pastor of the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul at Stettin, whose charges were lower. "I should think," he wrote, "that after all my labour and researches, I have earned six golden louis"; and for that fee he demonstrated that all the various branches of the house of Necker were descended from two brothers, Christian Necker, pastor at Wartemberg in Pomerania, and Matthæus Necker, silk merchant at Stettin, both alive at the end of the sixteenth century. It is only the posterity of the pastor that need here concern us.

Christian's third son, Jean, was a deacon at Garz, on the Oder. Jean Necker had a son named Samuel, who was a lawyer at Kustrin. He married Marguerite-Sophrosine de Labehack, of Stettin, and was the father of Charles Frederick Necker, born at Kustrin, in Brandenburg, on January 13, 1686. Charles Frederick also became a lawyer, taking the oath as a member of his profession on May 26, 1711. He left Kustrin to act as travelling tutor to various young German noblemen, and was, furthermore, for some time secretary to General Saint Saphorin, British

Ambassador at Vienna. In 1724 he offered his services to Geneva as honorary Professor of Law at the Academy. The Register of the Council of the Two Hundred for the 18th of September of that year contains the following note on the matter :—

"Discussion on the establishment of a Professorship of the Public Law of Germany and of Feudal Law, resolved upon in connection with M. Necker's offer to serve gratuitously; he being known here for a clever and honourable man, acquainted with high German, which circumstance may attract the high German nobility to this town. Concerning which there were read two letters written by him from Vienna in Austria, to M. de Terrasse, and to noble Tronchin, formerly Syndic, expressing in very polite terms his great esteem for the town, and his desire to establish himself here, together with the offer of his services; all those to whom he is known in the town having also borne very favourable witness to his good qualities and his affection for the State. To which it was added that the establishment of this Professorship is honourable to the public, advantageous to the Academy, and useful to private individuals, and that the functions thereto appertaining can only be discharged by a German.

"Resolved, therefore, to accept the said offers of M. Necker."

The Professor received the news of his appointment in London, where he was staying with the Count of Bothmar. He was in the service of the

Elector of Hanover, who was also King of England, and had to seek the royal permission to accept the post. George I. not only gave permission, but also granted the Professor a pension to enable him to open at Geneva a boarding-school for English girls whose parents desired them to be educated on the Continent. This school, which succeeded admirably, laid the foundations of the Necker fortunes. Its institution, rather than any fanciful family tree, is the link which connects the Neckers with Great Britain.

The inaugural lecture was delivered in September 1725, and in January of the next year the Professor was admitted to the *bourgeoisie* of Geneva without fee, "in consideration of his personal merit and of the satisfactory manner in which he discharges his duties." In 1734 he was made a member of the Council of the Two Hundred, and from 1742 to 1747 he was a member of the Consistory. He married Jeanne-Marie Gautier of Geneva, and had two sons—Louis and Jacques.

Louis, commonly known as Necker de Germany, from an estate near Geneva which he inherited, became a Professor like his father, but tarnished the respectability of the family by his behaviour. The only reason for recalling the scandal of which he was the hero is that it throws a certain light upon the manners and tone of the Genevan society of the period, but for that reason it may be worth while to quote Julie von Bondeli's account of it.

"It is," she writes, "a Madame Vernes, a merchant's wife, who has had an affair of gallantry with Professor Necker. That lady is not Rousseau's Julie; but Rousseau, in his letter to d'Alembert, said that there had never been a woman of genius except 'Sappho and one other,' and that 'one other' is said to be Madame Vernes, whom Rousseau saw at Geneva in '53 or '54. Madame V. was the daughter of an indigent attorney. Vernes, who is rich, saw her in spite of the opposition of his parents, and, being unable to marry, became the father of a child which she bore him without any public scandal, and without losing her reputation for being as virtuous as she was beautiful and clever. At last Vernes obtains the consent of his parents, and, to the general astonishment, there appears in church with him a child eighteen months old. Papa and mamma were, according to the chaste laws of their country, thrown into prison; but the parents worshipped the bride, and the public not only forgave but idolised her. Never before had such a thing been seen in this pure and holy city.

"At the birth of her second child she had an abscess inconveniently situated, and the treatment of it tortured her for three years. She set an example of stoicism. Her chamber was an Academy, and her bed the tribunal of grace, virtue, and genius. Never did a woman enjoy such a beautiful reputation. Tronchin[1] cured her. Necker fell in love with her. The husband discovered letters, treacherously fired a pistol at the lover, and then ran away in despair. The matter was hushed up for a fortnight; but the

[1] The famous physician of Geneva.

tribunes of the people made inquiries, and the public prosecutor would not belie his oath. Necker denied that the husband had wounded him, and the lady backed him up; but the surgeon who was called in found out the truth. The husband surrendered himself to justice as a murderer; but Necker saved him from the scaffold by denying that he was anything of the kind, and submitted to a sentence of perpetual banishment. . . . The lady withdrew to Savoy. Six months afterwards she returned to Geneva, and so artfully rehabilitated her reputation that people only regarded her as imprudent and unfortunate. That done, she went to join Necker at Cadiz."

Such is the story, on which it seems superfluous to moralise, though it may have its significance to the student of heredity as the first indication of warm blood pulsing in the veins of a family chiefly famous for dry legal erudition and dry financial genius. Our business now is to follow the fortunes of the younger and more gifted brother.

He was the very type of the man who, by sheer will, succeeds in a calling for which he has more aptitude than inclination. Having to be a banker, he resolved to be a good banker; but he would far rather have been something else—a scholar, for instance, or a comic poet. At Geneva he was scholar enough to take a prize over the heads of lads mostly two years his senior. In Paris he was sufficiently a comic poet

to write comic poetry, though he refused to publish it. "To have done so," he said, "would have affected my whole career. The reputation of a comic author has never been compatible with the serious dignity required from a Prime Minister." Countrymen of Canning cannot be expected to assent to that opinion. But it is possible—it is even probable—that Necker's light verse was not so good as Canning's, and in that case he was wise in suppressing it.

It was as a clerk in Vernet's bank that he began his financial career. He was speedily promoted to be head clerk; and Vernet, on retiring from business, showed his appreciation of his services by financing him as a partner of the Thelussons; and Thelusson's, under his direction, soon became the greatest banking-house in France. In this way he had already reached a great position when he made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Suzanne Curchod.

Mademoiselle Curchod had just taken a situation as "companion" to Madame Vermenoux, a widow and a lady of fashion, who sometimes made her feel that she was not quite fashionable enough for the post. Steinlen, in his Life of Bonstetten, tells us how Madame Vermenoux sometimes snubbed her. "Go out of the room, Mademoiselle," she said to her, "and return, making another curtsey. I do not wish you to make me ashamed of you at Paris." Necker was, at the time, paying his addresses to Madame

Vermenoux, and, somehow or other, it came about that he transferred his affections from the mistress to the companion.

Naturally there are two versions of the story. The one is that the companion deliberately set herself to "cut out" her mistress; the other that the mistress herself contrived the marriage in order to get rid of an unwelcome suitor. The latter view is maliciously stated in the Memoirs of the Baronne d'Oberkirch.[1]

"For my part, I did not like M. Necker. I was struck with his incredible likeness to Cagliostro, though he lacked Cagliostro's sparkling eyes and dazzling expression. He was, as it were, a constrained Cagliostro, of stiff, unpleasant manners; there was nothing agreeable about him except his determination to make himself agreeable. Madame Necker is still worse. In spite of the high positions which she has occupied, she is a schoolmistress and nothing more. The daughter of a village pastor named Curchod, she was given an excellent education, from which she profits in a perverse kind of way. She is beautiful without being agreeable, and benevolent without making herself beloved. Her body, her mind, and her heart are all wanting in grace. God, before creating her, must have soaked her, inside and out, in starch. She will never acquire the art of pleasing. To sum it up in a sentence, she can neither weep nor smile. Her father was

[1] An Alsatian lady. Her Memoirs are among our best sources of information concerning social conditions in Paris just before the Revolution.

poor; she set up a girls' school at Geneva, and was brought to Paris by Madame Vermenoux, who is well known for her beauty and her addiction to gallantry. This Madame de Vermenoux was on intimate terms with Abbé Raynal, with M. de Marmontel, with other philosophers, and with M. Necker. The last-named bored her, and I am quite sure he would have bored me just as much. It occurred to her to get rid of him by marrying him to Mademoiselle Curchod.

"'They will bore each other so much,' she said, 'that they will be provided with an occupation.'

"They did not bore each other, but they bored all the rest of the world, worshipping each other, paying compliments to each other, burning incense to each other without cessation. Each became the other's thurifer. Madame Necker in particular became the thurifer of her husband."

The spite is here too frankly exhibited for the narrative to inspire much confidence; but the truth, so far as one can spell it out, seems to be this: that Madame Vermenoux did really want to pass on M. Necker to her companion, but that the companion did not know it, and conscientiously believed herself to be poaching on her mistress's preserves. One infers that, in the first place, from the fact that the marriage was a secret one, and in the second place, from a passage in a letter from Madame Necker to Pastor Moultou: "I wish that she would not attribute our marriage to her own action. I am rather offended with her; and my husband, who says I

am the only woman he ever loved, is annoyed at her speeches."

Whatever the origin of the marriage, however, its result was happiness. To be happy, and yet to be well-conducted, was with Madame Necker almost an instinct. Her goal had always been a home and a high position in society. She had won it; she was satisfied with it; she adorned it. She had no craving for new sentimental sensations—no restless need for a grand passion to fill an empty life. Platonic friendships, perhaps,—the appreciation of these appears in the correspondence with Thomas, and Gibbon, and others,—but decidedly no grand passions. That was to be the line of cleavage between the mother and the daughter: the mother, who had the Crassier parsonage and the Genevan Puritanism close behind her, and whose life was amply filled by her cares for her husband and her salon; the daughter, removed by a generation from these pious and simple antecedents, beginning to live at a time when strange convulsions were shaking the foundations of a corrupt society, an *émigrée* cut adrift from such moorings as a fixed place in any fatherland might have afforded—thrown back upon sentiment as the one reality which, incarnate in many shapes, could still make life possible and even tolerable. Our business here shall be with the fierce sentimental strivings of that tempestuous career.

CHAPTER III

The grandeur of the Neckers—Madame Necker and her poor relations—Birth of a daughter—Her education in a salon—And in a garden—Necker in office—And out of office—A course of foreign travel — The purchase of Coppet — The place of exile.

THE Neckers grew in grandeur. M. Necker's *Eloge de Colbert* was "crowned" by the Academy; from 1768 he was the accredited diplomatic representative of Geneva at the Court of Versailles; in 1776 he was called to the direction of the French Exchequer. The increasing dignity is reflected in many of Madame Necker's letters [1]—especially in those which define her attitude towards her poor relations in the Canton of Vaud.

She was very good to them, though they were very exacting. She paid children's school bills, and gave annuities to aunts. But when cousins propose to visit her—that is another matter. A certain Cousin Toton, it seems, was anxious to come. "Could I have the audacity," Madame Necker asks, "to make her change her name, and disavow my relationship to her? Even if I were willing to do so, would my husband and my servants keep my secret? On the other

[1] Published in *Etrennes Helvétiques* in 1901.

hand, how could I introduce her as my relation in a house frequented by persons of all ranks in society, and in which, to be appropriately dressed, she would have to spend at least a thousand French crowns a year? To say nothing of her manners, her way of speaking, and a thousand other trifles which, without detracting from her real merit, would make the most unfortunate impression in a country in which people judge by appearances?" And Madame Necker begs her correspondent not to show Toton her letter, but to acquaint her with its contents, toning them down and making them as palatable as possible.

The thing was done; but Toton had to be admonished, in a further letter, for her unreasonable jealousy.

"I am sure, from the knowledge I have of her character and her talents, that she would not have endured for six months the rôle which I am filling. She seems to imagine that, in marrying M. Necker, I have acquired the right—or almost so—of reducing him to a narrow life on a small income, and dispensing his fortune in accordance with my whims.

"M. Necker, while leaving me the greatest liberty, most reasonably desires to satisfy his own tastes, to live with dignity, and to receive in his house a society which requires from me the greatest consideration and a kind of tact which I have much difficulty in acquiring. If I asked him to live differently, if I introduced excessive economies into his establishment, if I

were cross and ill-tempered about such things, I should soon be an object of indifference to him—I might even say of dislike. A husband to whom, after the Supreme Being, one owes everything—a husband who enjoys consideration, who has cultivated tastes and a refined wit, cannot be treated as one would treat M. Puthod. I have told you, Madame, more than was necessary for the enlightenment of a mind so intelligent as yours. I am persuaded that your intelligence and your knowledge of men and things have, more than once, caused you to place yourself in my position; but my cousin seems to me to be capable of holding only one idea in her head at a time."

The argument seems reasonable enough, though the tone strikes one as excessively self-righteous. There is something in the letter, in fact, which helps to explain why the writer's Parisian friends were so fond of scoffing at her as "the schoolmistress"—why she never really succeeded in becoming a popular exponent of the virtues which she practised and adorned—why Gibbon, on resuming his friendship with her, was obliged to "laugh at her Paris varnish, and oblige her to become a simple, reasonable Suissesse." Here, however, one can only briefly note its unconscious self-revelations, and must then pass on to record the birth of Madame Necker's only daughter.

Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker was born in Paris on April 22, 1766, and was brought up in a salon. That summary may almost suffice. To

draw the picture, one has little to do but to recite the names and imagine the illustrious bearers of them presenting themselves on Fridays: Diderot and d'Alembert, the Encyclopædists, the Abbés Morellet, Raynal, and Galiani, Baron Grimm,[1] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, to be famous presently as the author of *Paul et Virginie*, Dr. Tronchin, the fashionable physician, M. de Marmontel, Madame Necker's platonic friend Thomas, MM. Saint-Lambert and Suard, Lord Stormont, "the handsome Englishman," and, on certain occasions, Gibbon and David Hume. In the midst of them, the little girl sat bolt upright on a high chair, listening, listening, listening. That early spell of silence, says a wit, lasted her for the rest of her life; though it is surely an excess of cynicism to demand silence from those who are able to talk well. The time came too when she talked as well as listened. The celebrities drew her out, discussing all imaginable topics with the child, just as with a grown-up person. Marmontel wrote verses to her. Little essays which she wrote were circulated by Grimm, in his correspondence, in proof of her remarkable precocity.

Then came illness—that vague, unclassifiable disturbance of the nerves which so often stands waiting for precocious genius on the threshold of maturity—an incomprehensible malady akin to

[1] The lover of Madame d'Epinay, and the originator of the *Correspondence Littéraire*—a circular letter of literary gossip to which German princes subscribed.

that which overtook Disraeli after the writing of *Vivian Grey*, and sent him on his first foreign travels. Dr. Tronchin was called in—the same Dr. Tronchin who had dared to open the windows at the palace of Versailles. He decreed fresh air and idleness. The child had been living an unnatural life in a forcing-house. Her mother had been too zealous for her education. Let her go out into the garden and stay there.

So Germaine Necker was sent to Saint-Ouen with her friend, Mademoiselle Huber[1]—to the great chagrin of her mother, who could not accompany her because of her social duties, and who was far too much of a pedant to understand that it may be good for a child to be left to grow up without the constant supervision of adults. "A life of poetry," writes her cousin and first biographer, Madame Necker de Saussure, "succeeded to a life of study, and her abundant energies found a more imaginative expression. She ran about in the shrubberies of Saint-Ouen with her friend; and the two girls, dressed up as nymphs or muses, used to recite verses, or compose poems and dramas of all kinds, and to act them." The poems and stories which she liked best, says the same authority, were those which made her weep. We note the fact as the first fore-warning of the gift of tears, to be bestowed on her abundantly.

[1] Afterwards Madame Rilliet. She remained on terms of intimacy with Madame de Staël until the end.

Anecdotes of her girlhood abound, and may be sought in the works of Dr. Stevens, Lady Blennerhassett, and M. d'Haussonville. They prove that she adored her father—a king of men to her, though to Gibbon only a "sensible, good-natured creature"; that she respectfully accepted, rather than idolised, her mother; that, in spite of the interruption of her studies, her precocity continued to excite remark. Madame Necker, in fact, somewhat lost interest in a daughter whom, as she no longer educated her, she could no longer take pride in as "her work"; but M. Necker encouraged her, albeit checking her extravagances with gentle raillery. "To his incredible insight," she often said, "I owe the frankness of my character. . . . He stripped the mask from my affectations."

The first public event that meant much to her was M. Necker's dismissal in 1781 from the office assigned to him in 1776; his policy of retrenchment being unpopular with influential persons who found their salaries reduced or their sinecures abolished. He justified himself in his famous *Compte rendu sur les finances*, and replied to Calonne's attack on the *Compte rendu* in the Press, but the day came when he was bidden to betake himself at least forty leagues from Paris. "An exile appeared to me," writes his daughter, "the most cruel act that could be committed. I exclaimed in despair when I heard of it. I could not conceive of a greater misfortune."

Afterwards, it may be, looking back on the

event, she could see in her father's misfortune the premonition of her own. The condemnation to reside at least forty leagues from Paris was to be, in her case, not only a trouble but a cause of trouble. Through it, she was to live as the sensitive plant uprooted, and to be driven to seek sentimental solace with characteristic desperation. She could not be expected to foresee that then, however; and exile for the moment meant only retirement to a country estate at Marolles, an excursion to the watering-place of Plombières for her mother's health, a visit to Buffon, the naturalist, at Montbard, and a course of foreign travel. Lausanne, among other places, was re-visited. "I saw there," writes Bonstetten, who came to see them, "the future Madame de Staël, in all the charm of youth, of intellect, and of coquetry." They met other old friends there—many of them fugitives from the justice of Louis XVI. Gibbon was living there, and his picture of the company in a letter to Lord Sheffield is like a paragraph from a society paper.

"A few weeks ago I was walking on our terrace with M. Tissot, our celebrated physician; M. Mercier, the author of the *Tableau de Paris*; the Abbé Raynal; Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Necker; the Abbé de Bourbon, a natural son of Lewis the Fifteenth; the Hereditary Prince of Brunswick, Prince Henry of Prussia, and a dozen Counts, Barons, and extraordinary persons."

It was about this time, too,—his daughter being

then eighteen years of age,—that M. Necker bought the property of Coppet from his old partner, Thelusson, paying for it 500,000 livres in French money, together with about one-third of that sum, in taxes due on the transfer, to the Bernese Government.

The house and grounds have hardly been altered, if at all, since the day when the banished banker—not feeling the less an exile because he was in his own and his wife's native country—took possession of them. Thousands of trippers have trooped there under guidance; most of them, perhaps, gaping and wondering why they have been brought there, and what are these stories that their guide is telling them in a strange tongue, so hard to follow when it is spoken fast; a few of them—a very few in these personally conducted days—silently moved by the many memories which the scene evokes.

One enters a spacious courtyard through a vaulted gate, passing the old tower containing the "archives" which hold so many secrets, still only partially revealed. One climbs a broad staircase, and notes that the walls are embellished with armorial bearings—for M. Necker, as we have seen, shared the Swiss delight in these decorative links with the past, and was easily persuaded of his personal title to them. One passes through bedchambers severely luxurious in eighteenth-century style. One walks through a French window on to a balcony, and looks down

over a garden, and out over the blue lake to the dark forested hills of Savoy. One lingers longest in the large drawing-room, with its portraits and other relics of the past, inviting slow inspection; and the most interesting moment is when the guide—that decorous and distinguished family retainer—points to one particular miniature, and says, in tones suggesting that the matter really is of no importance: "M. Benjamin Constant—homme de lettres qui visitait le chateau de temps en temps." For then one knows, or may know if one cares to, that he has touched, though lightly, and as if he would hush it up, the fringe of the great love story which gives a visit to Coppet its real interest.

Still thinking of that love story, one escapes from guidance, and passes out through a gateway to roam at leisure in the park. Here are straight avenues of trees—"her friends who watched over her destiny," as Madame de Staël was to call them. Here is a spacious central meadow, bordered by a stream spanned by rustic bridges. Here are benches to sit down upon; here flowers grow, and here a fountain bubbles. Sylvan, Arcadian—those are the epithets that come to mind. One expects shepherds and shepherdesses, as in a Watteau picture; and one knows what real shepherds and shepherdesses have here disported themselves—what eclogues they have chanted—how they have loved, and quarrelled, and been reconciled. We shall meet them, and tell of their loves and quarrels presently.

Truly a gilded exile—a place to make one in love with exile, if that could ever be—but an exile, none the less, and therefore in some sense bitter to those who came to dwell in it. For Necker was to come there to die, expelled first by an ungrateful king, and then by an ungrateful people—the pilot who had failed to weather the storm. And Necker's daughter was to come there to live otherwise than as she wished—to feel herself not a flower duly planted in the garden, but an uprooted flower flung upon the grass—a mere spectator of the drama in which she wished to be an actor—thrown back upon her passions, and striving to make some sort of a life for herself somehow by their treacherous aid.

CHAPTER IV

Mademoiselle Necker's early writings—Her secrets revealed in her short stories—Her love for General Guibert—The match-makers at work—Marriage to the Baron de Staël-Holstein.

THE real exile, of which the journey to Switzerland was, in some sense, a foretaste, was still, however, to be delayed for a good many years. Necker was back again in Paris presently, and Madame Necker again had her salon there, though its character was somewhat altered, and the philosophers gave way to the politicians. The ex-Minister was a personage, though out of favour with the Court. Moderate reformers rallied round him, and his ultimate recall to office might be foreseen. His daughter had reached a marriageable age, and a husband had to be found for her.

Mademoiselle Necker had not inherited her mother's beauty, though even that beauty, if we may trust the judgment of a modern taste upon the collection of portraits at Coppet, was much exaggerated by complimentary report. At the most she possessed only the *beauté du Diable*, and her chief charm was in her vivacity and intelligence. It would have been premature to say of her as yet, as was said afterwards, that she

combined the heart of a woman with the brain of a man, but the tendencies which were presently to call forth that verdict must already have been discernible. She had begun to write, though not to publish. We have seen how her childish essays—mostly "characters" of her friends and acquaintances—were copied and exhibited by Grimm. At the time of her father's disgrace, when she was only fifteen, she delighted him with an anonymous letter of sympathy, the authorship of which he speedily divined. A little later she wrote comedies, tragedies, short stories. It is worth while to glance back at the writings, not critically, but in order to satisfy ourselves upon what plane of ideas this precocious child was moving.

We need not wonder at finding the note melancholy and even morbid. That is the note of youth, and especially of the youth of the North, when artistically gifted and able to stand aloof from the battle of life. The girl had more German than French blood in her veins, and morbid literary influences were prevalent. The sorrows of Werther had temporarily unbalanced some of the sanest minds—the mind, for instance, of Ramond de Carbonnière, subsequently to be known as the hardy pioneer of the Pyrenees, who made his *début* as the author of a drama relating the adventures of a youth whose way out of an *impasse* of the affections was to wander over the world in disguise and finally to blow out his

brains amid the ruins of an ancient castle. In sprinkling her pages with death in many a shape, Mademoiselle Necker was only swimming, or drifting, with the literary tide. Her problems and her solutions were equally taken from the common stock; she added nothing to it.

More significant, in view of her tender age, are the sentiments which transpire with regard to love and marriage. She is already thinking of love as something apart from marriage—something which has as little to do with marriage as Lord Melbourne considered that religion ought to have to do with private life. In *Sophie ou les sentimens secrets*, we see love threatening to break up domestic peace. Sophie, the orphan girl, is in love with her guardian, who is the husband of her dearest friend. In *Adelaïde et Théodore* we have a heroine who goes to her marriage as to her doom, not loving her husband, and sure that she will never love him, lamenting the end of all sentimental things.

"Adelaide was in despair. Her romantic dream of happiness was destroyed. She resisted longer than might have been expected from a girl of her age; but, at a ball, consent was at last wrung from her. On the morrow of the fatal day she wrote a letter full of melancholy to her aunt. 'There is no more hope for me,' she said. 'They have robbed me of my future. The happiness of loving is for ever forbidden to me. I shall die without knowing what life is. Nothing that can happen

can concern me any more. All things are one to me.' A few days later she wrote: 'I must let my senses be dazed. I must let myself be caught in the whirlwind of life. For me there is neither happiness nor unhappiness any longer. I can no more take pleasure in dreaming. I yield to the torrent. I love whatever makes the time pass faster.'"

And then follows the story of the marriage, with a striking expression of disdain for the unhappy husband. The young bride is the queen of the Parisian salons, and yet—"In the midst of her transports of joy at the *fêtes* and her success in them, Adelaide was always kind to her husband, for she reflected that even fools have their vanity."

The passages are instructive; for the emotion and the psychology discovered in them were not wholly derived from books. Dates settle that. The story, though not printed until 1795, was written in 1786—in the year, that is to say, of the author's own marriage. It seems wrong to say, therefore, with Madame Necker de Saussure and Dr. Stevens, that "the chief importance of the little volume is in its introduction, which is a critical essay of remarkable ability on Fictitious Literature, written at a later date." Its importance is as a bitter cry, uttered either on the eve or on the morrow of a wedding, and a piece of evidence, strangely overlooked, determining for us the frame of mind in which Mademoiselle

Necker entered upon her union with the Baron de Staël-Holstein. It is useless, after reading it, any longer to profess ignorance of her sentiments. The proof of them is there, and we have no need of any further witness. The bride who, not being a professional writer of fiction, wrote like that, was pouring out her soul upon the paper, and telling her secret to future generations. She was in love, indeed, but not with the Baron de Staël-Holstein.

The man whom she loved was General Guibert,—a handsome, plausible soldier, with literary as well as military talents,—best known to the world as the suitor who seduced the affections of d'Alembert's mistress, Mademoiselle Lespinasse, and then deserted her and broke her heart. She admitted as much to Miss Burney at Mickleham; and there is corroborative evidence in that *Eloge* of General Guibert, written by her at the time of his death, in 1790, locked up in her desk for the remainder of her life, and published posthumously by her son.

He must have been a worthless, albeit in his way a dazzling, man. His treatment of Mademoiselle Lespinasse was heartless, and worse. He refused to return her letters when she asked for them; he left them lying about for all the world to see; when he did, under pressure, return some of them, letters from other ladies were carelessly included in the parcel. But Madame de Staël was not to know anything about that. She only

knew that she had felt the fascination; so that the *Eloge*, in form a panegyric such as might have been pronounced in a solemn session of the Academy of Letters, was in essence a lamentation to which it might indeed have been embarrassing for the wife of the Swedish Ambassador publicly to subscribe her name.

"Ah, who," she cries, "will give me back those long talks, so rich in imagination and ideas? It was not by weeping with you that he consoled you for your troubles, but no one did more to soften your sorrows, and to help you to bear the weight of your reflections, by teaching you to look at them in all their aspects. He was not a friend for every moment, or for every day. His thoughts, and perhaps his personality, distracted his attention from other people. But, to say nothing of the great services which he would render you—services of which too many profess themselves capable, and for which you could always depend upon M. de Guibert—his whole soul, when he spoke to you, seemed to be yours."

That is the writing of a woman who has loved the man of whom she writes—whose emotion has thrown even her sentences into confusion; and there is also evidence of a kind of the warmth of Guibert's own feelings. Madame de Staël, in this same *Eloge*, speaks of his "profound admiration for my father." He had no such admiration for the father, but affected it for the

daughter's sake. His real sentiments about Necker are recorded in his own journal: "Received from Paris the reply to M. Necker's book. I was thoroughly satisfied with it. The author proves to demonstration the contradictions into which M. Necker has fallen, and the entire failure of his arguments to lead to any conclusion."

There could be no question here of marriage, however, since General Guibert already had a wife—the lady who took such interest, not to say such pride, in his extra-conjugal amours that she actually published the letters which he had refused to return to Mademoiselle Lespinasse. The Neckers, moreover, were Protestants, and a Protestant husband had therefore to be sought, and was not easily to be found in Paris. The story of the attempt to arrange a match with William Pitt is well known, though Pitt's alleged reply that he was "already married to his country" rests upon very dubious authority. The name of the Swedish Count Fersen was also suggested, though the Neckers can hardly have been ignorant of the scandalous report which represented him as the lover of Marie-Antoinette. In fact, all the negotiations for the disposal of the hand of the great heiress were conducted to their conclusion in favour of the Baron de Staël-Holstein with a slow deliberation which can fairly be called cold-blooded.

The bridegroom frankly wanted the dowry. Practically nothing but the desire for the dowry

appears in the correspondence—it contains no single reference to any other of the attractions which the bride possessed. The Baron de Staël-Holstein "played up to" the dowry for seven years—from 1779, when Mademoiselle Necker was only thirteen, and when the Ambassador at that date representing Sweden reported to Stockholm that he was "in a pitiful condition, at the end of his resources, and without a penny in his pocket." The mutual friend through whom he approached the Neckers was Madame de Boufflers,[1] who did not like Mademoiselle Necker, but did like M. de Staël, thought that the heiress would be a "catch" for him, and was anxious to do him a good turn. Necker, on his part, appears in the transaction as showing equally little regard for the inclinations of his daughter, but lays down hard conditions, like a king arranging the marriage of a princess. If His Swedish Majesty will assure M. de Staël the Swedish Embassy in perpetuity, and will make him a Count, and will bestow upon him the Order of the Polar Star, etc. etc. etc., then he will give his consent to the union. And if not, not.

So the thing drags on. The proposal is the subject of interminable letters—most of them of a painfully sordid character. At times M. de Staël is in despair. He does not know how to keep the wolf from the door through all these long delays. "The hopes," he writes to Gustavus,

[1] Wife of the Governor of Senegal.

"which your Majesty permitted me to form have vanished like a cloud of smoke. I am in terrible embarrassment, and I do not know how to save myself from the precipice unless your Majesty deigns," etc. etc.; and Madame de Boufflers writes on his behalf that he has, on the strength of his expectations, incurred debts to the extent of 200,000 francs. Necker, however, remains obdurate, and insists on his conditions, and at last Gustavus is willing to treat him as a rival potentate, and to make terms with him. Everything was arranged over Mademoiselle Necker's head. She was quite unquestionably sacrificed on the altar of her father's ambition, though her devotion to him blinded her, at least partially, to the fact. The marriage was celebrated on January 14, 1786. To see how it was regarded by those who had brought it about—or at all events by the bridegroom's friends—we have only to turn to a letter which Madame de Boufflers wrote to the King of Sweden almost immediately after the event.

"I hope," she says, "that M. de Staël will be happy, but I do not expect it. His wife, it is true, has been brought up in honourable and virtuous principles, but she has no experience of the world and no knowledge of the *convenances*, and is so spoiled and so opinionated that it will be difficult to make her perceive her deficiencies. She is much too imperious and self-willed. I have never, in any position in society,

seen such self-assurance in a woman of her age. She argues about everything, and, clever though she is, one could count twenty lapses from good form for one good thing that she says. The Ambassador dares not speak to her about it for fear of alienating her in the early days of his married life. For my own part, I exhort him to begin by being firm with her, for I know that the whole course of a married life is often determined by the beginning that a man makes. For the rest, her father's friends praise her to the skies, his enemies find her ridiculous in a thousand ways, while those who are impartial in the matter render justice to her intelligence, but complain that she talks too much and is more brilliant than sensible or tactful. If she were not so spoiled by the incense burnt in her honour, I should try to give her a little advice."

This, from the chief contriver of the marriage, is cynicism open and unabashed. From Necker there naturally is no such avowal. He probably confused his daughter's interests with his own, being that sort of self-centred but well-meaning man, and of an age to regard grandeur as a more tangible thing than love. Of the bride's view of the transaction we have had our glimpse in our extract from her short story; and the same document reads very like a declaration of her plans for dealing with the situation. She would seek distraction; she would live her own life. But she would remember that fools have their vanity, and would be kind.

That, at any rate, whether as the result of deliberate intention or of accident and circumstance, was pretty much how things fell out. Madame de Staël was kind to her husband, perhaps, even to the point of helping him to write his despatches. But the seeds of estrangement were already sown, and were soon to germinate. The marriage failed; and though there exists nowhere any full record of the failure, we can see how complete it was from an occasional passage alike in Madame de Staël's letters and in her published writings. "For you," she writes to Rosalie de Constant, whom we shall meet again,—"for you who have neither a husband to fear nor children to look after there remains a future"; and in one of her earliest essays, *De l'Influence des Passions sur le Bonheur des Individus et des Nations*, there is a strikingly sad comment on the marriage tie.

"It is the tie of all others in which it is least possible to obtain the romantic happiness of the heart. To keep the peace in this relationship it is necessary to exercise a self-control and to make sacrifices which cause this kind of existence to approximate much more nearly to the pleasures of virtue than to the joys of passion."

This is a confession, if an informal one, meant only for those who could read between the lines; and it would be an idle enterprise to attempt too

carefully to apportion praise and blame. All that one can profitably say is this: that M. de Staël was a wooden-headed man and a gambler, who had married for money, and for no other reason; and that, when such a man marries a young woman who is both brilliant and fascinating—even if she be not beautiful—the first steps on the road that leads to disaster have been taken, and the wife must be judged at least as leniently as the husband, when the hour of the catastrophe arrives.

Let us, then, apply that rule. The proximate causes of the dissension between Monsieur and Madame de Staël will then seem to matter little, while its ultimate causes will be clear. We have only to turn back to the story of *Adelaïde et Théodore* to find them foreshadowed. There we have read the lamentation of the girl who was "robbed of her future" by her marriage. Now, at a later stage, we see the girl trying to win back what she has lost, resolved to dream her romantic dream, whoever says her nay, denying the right of parent or husband or priest to slam the door on sentiment for ever, asserting her claim to live her life and to find happiness where she can—claiming especially to find happiness in love, since love always appears to her as the highest manifestation of virtue, even when she must trample on the world's conventions to attain it.

CHAPTER V

Necker recalled to office—Dismissed—Recalled again after the fall of the Bastille—Fails—Resigns—Retires to Coppet—Madame de Staël's essay on the works of Rousseau—Inferences that can be drawn from it—Madame de Staël's salon—Description of it by Gouverneur Morris—Progress of the Revolution—Madame de Staël saves her friends, and then leaves Paris.

We shall see how Madame de Staël lived her life during the years of the Revolution, already, at the time of her marriage, almost in sight; but we must first see how her father lived his.

We left Necker out of office, and he was to remain out of office for some time longer; but his successors were making a sad mess of the national finances, and his recall to cope with the emergency became more and more obviously inevitable. Calonne was a failure, and had to go. There followed in succession M. de Fourqueux and M. de Villedeuil, giving place in their turn to Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse, afterwards Archbishop of Sens. He lasted for eighteen months, and then the King sent for Necker. The populace cheered him, and burnt the Archbishop in effigy; and the funds rose thirty per cent. in a single day. That was in August 1788. The assembling of the States-

General followed, and Necker supposed himself to have succeeded as the people's Minister. "As Malebranche saw all things in God," said the wit, "so M. Necker sees all things in Necker." There was a day when the people shouted for him, and carried him home in triumph. His enemies then intrigued against him, and the King dismissed him, bidding him leave Paris quietly to avoid disturbances. He did so, and the reply of the people was to burn the Bastille. The King accepted the intimation, and recalled him. The couriers despatched in haste overtook him at Basle, and he drove back hailed as the saviour of France.

That was in August 1789; and it was already too late for France to be saved otherwise than by fire and sword. The emigration had begun, and the tide of Sans-culottism, presently to become Terrorism, was flowing. In October came the march of the women to Versailles and the bringing of the King and Queen to Paris. Necker could not control a mob that did things of that sort, nor could he or any man straighten out the finances of a country in which such things happened. For that achievement credit was needed, and revolutionary France had none; and, as Necker could not work miracles, he found his popularity on the wane. Only a little while since, the question had been when he would be sent for; now the question was when he would be dismissed. He did not wait to be dismissed, but retired, and

had trouble in getting away. At Arcis-sur-Aube his carriage was stopped, and he had to appeal to the National Assembly to give special orders that he should be suffered to depart in peace. So he went into exile at Coppet, where he wrote pamphlets in vindication of his policy, and where he presently felt himself insecure. Fearing a raid and an attempt to kidnap him, he appealed to the Bernese Government for permission to maintain at Coppet a guard of fifty armed men at his own cost. The permission, for whatever reason, was refused, and he went to live at Rolle — probably in the country house of his brother, Louis Necker de Germany, on the outskirts of that town — until times should be quieter.

Outwardly, during that period, Madame de Staël's life was much wrapped up in her father's —certainly far more in his than in her husband's. She was with Necker when he drove to Versailles to resume office in August 1788, and on the day of the meeting of the States-General in May 1789, when Madame de Montmorin predicted to her " frightful disasters to France and to us."[1] She followed him to Brussels, when the King bade him leave France, in July of the same year; and she came back with him when he was recalled and conducted in triumph to the Hotel

[1] The prophecy in her case was fulfilled. Her husband perished in the September massacres. She and one of her sons were guillotined.

de Ville, with beating drums and blaring bands and the waving of flags captured at the storming of the Bastille. She hurried to him at Versailles, by a circuitous route, on the day on which Théroigne de Méricourt led the women of Paris to the Palace. She hastened to visit him at Coppet in September 1790. Of her relations with M. de Staël at the time we know next to nothing, except that she bore him a son four and a half years after her marriage. Perhaps we may infer something from the fact that he is almost the only one of her intimate male acquaintances to whom her correspondence contains no affectionate reference. In her most intimate letters he is always "M. de Staël"—there is no departure from that formal style. Evidently they began early to go their separate ways:[1] he losing his money—or rather her money—at the card-table, and she dazzling the salons by her talk.

It was in these years, however,—the years of the calm that preceded the revolutionary storm,—that her literary career began. An edition of twenty copies of her *Lettres sur les Ecrits et le Caractère de J. J. Rousseau* was published in 1788. "By this accident," she wrote in a "Second Preface," in 1814, "I was drawn into the literary career"; and she proceeded to speak of the consolations which she had derived from the

[1] M. de Staël had a natural son, and also appears to have been on terms of intimacy with the actress Mlle Clairon, but not much is known on this branch of the subject.

pursuit of it throughout the course of an unhappy life. From the first she wrote as one who enjoyed writing—who wrote because her thoughts were secrets that she could not keep. That is why what she wrote is nearly always interesting though not often valuable. This particular essay, indeed, has little literary or critical importance. It takes no broad views, and has much of the stiffness of a scholastic exercise. But the personality of the writer flashes out in it now and again. The biographer, reading between the lines of it, can see of what Madame de Staël was thinking as a young married woman of two-and-twenty.

Especially are her thoughts disclosed in the chapter on "La nouvelle Héloïse." She evidently saw in the case of Madame de Wolmar an anticipation of her own. She seems to be telling us by implication how her own marriage has been brought about. Some may think, she says, that Madame de Wolmar, as she did not love her husband, should not have married him; but—

"How miserable the girl who imagines that she has the courage to resist her father! His right, his wishes may be forgotten when he is far away—the passion of the moment effaces all recollections. But a father on his knees, pleading his own cause! His power increased by his voluntary dependence on her will! His unhappiness in conflict with her own! His entreaties when she expected him to compel! What a spectacle is that! It suspends love

itself. A father who speaks like a friend, who appeals at once to nature and the heart, is the sovereign of our souls, and can obtain whatever he desires from us."

Here clearly we have something more than the critical reflections of a reviewer; and there presently follows a passage not less personal and significant on the unhappiness of the lot of women thus obliged to marry without love.

"They need much strength of mind. Their passions and their destiny are in conflict in a country where fortune often imposes upon women the obligation never to love, and where, more to be pitied than those pious women who consecrate themselves to their God, they have to accord all the rights of passion and deny themselves all the pleasures of sentiment. Must they not have a very strong sense of duty if they are to walk alone in the world, and to die without ever having been first in the thoughts of some other being, and, above all, without ever having fastened their own affections upon an object which they can love without remorse?"

There again, we may be sure, the writer is according us a glimpse at the secrets of her soul; while a third passage, not less significant to the biographer, is that in which Madame de Staël pities Rousseau's heroine because she lives in the quiet country, and not in "this whirlwind of the world which can make one forget one's husband and one's lover both." That outburst,

at any rate, hardly arose out of the subject under discussion, and can only be read as a confession wrung from the writer's heart. Did M. de Staël, one wonders, ever read this first book of his wife's? If he read it, did he understand? If he understood, did he care?

It is impossible to say, though one pictures him as too dense a man to understand that sort of thing unless the explanation, with all the dots on all the i's, were actually thrust under his nose. But there can be little question that his wife was thinking a good deal more of herself than of Madame de Wolmar when she wrote the phrase about "the whirlwind of the world." She was caught up in the eddies of that whirlwind from the first—a whirlwind that was both political and social, and that whirled faster and more furiously as the years went by, and one revolutionary force after another was unloosed. The life of excitement certainly helped her to forget her husband. As for her lover—or lovers—that is a different matter. Guibert, indeed, as it would seem, lost ground in her thoughts; her early attachment to him declining into a sentimental memory. But there were others. There exists a letter in which she wrote to M. de Gérando: "The three men whom I loved best after I was nineteen or twenty"—after her marriage, that is to say—"were N., T., and M."; and the names for which these initials stand are those of M. de Narbonne, M. de Talleyrand,

and Mathieu de Montmorency. We shall see presently what services she rendered to each of them; but first we must see what was her position, at this period, in Parisian Society.

It was a position which she had, at first, to fight for. She was not, as the Germans would say, "born." She had something less than the manners of a *grande dame*. There were those among the old *noblesse* who wished to make her feel her deficiencies. One gathers that, and also, at the same time, gathers some indication of the matters at issue between Madame de Staël and her husband, from the account of her presentation at Court given in the Memoirs of Madame d'Oberkirch.

"She has had little success," we read. "All the men found her ugly, awkward, and, above all, artificial. She did not know how to behave, and felt very much out of her element in the midst of the elegance of Versailles. M. de Staël, on the contrary, is exceedingly handsome, and the best of company. His manners are very distinguished, and he did not appear to be very proud of his wife. . . . The Genevan appeared underneath the woman of talent, and—especially —underneath the Ambassadress."

That was the view of the Opposition, as expressed by its most spiteful representative. Madame de Staël conquered her place in Society in spite of it, partly by her force of character and her brilliant conversation—partly because

her salon was on the winning side, and she was in a position to be useful to her friends—partly also because, as the Revolution ran its course, the beginning of the emigration removed her social rivals. From 1788 onwards, therefore, her salon became more and more the centre alike of social life and of political intrigue.

It was an exciting, but not the less a gay and festive time. The Terror was not yet in sight. The King had not yet been deposed and degraded to the style of Citizen Louis Capet. Members of the old families were still governing the country in his name. The conditions were not to be of long duration, but while they lasted Madame de Staël was able to help her friends. She helped Talleyrand by writing a State paper which he signed. She helped M. de Narbonne by procuring him the office of Minister of War. Then, as always, her notion of friendship was to pull wires for her friends' advantage — not quietly and unobtrusively, but openly and ostentatiously, as if she were pealing the tocsin. We have a choice of memoirs from which to draw ourselves the picture. Perhaps we shall see it best through the impartial eyes of Gouverneur Morris, the American Minister, who had no spite to vent, but only a curiosity to gratify, and who saw what there was to be seen from the detached point of view of a stranger.

Morris landed in France in January 1789. In March we find him dining with M. Necker, who

"has the look and manner of the counting-house," and there making the acquaintance of Madame de Staël, who "seems to be a woman of sense and somewhat masculine in her character, but has very much the appearance of a chamber-maid." It is not until September—after the fall of the Bastille, and Necker's banishment and dramatic recall—that the acquaintance develops. Madame de Staël draws Morris out; and he fancies that she is inspecting him "with that look which, without being what Sir John Falstaff calls the 'leer of invitation,' amounts to the same thing." That, however, one imagines, was only his vanity, and he admits that he was given no opportunity of demonstrating "what can be effected by the native of the New World who has left one of his legs behind." Their relations continue to be friendly; and his accounts of the receptions at her salon are frequent and graphic. For instance:—

"Quite the first salon of Paris at this time was that over which Madame de Staël presided. Her regular Tuesday evening supper, when not more than a dozen or fifteen covers were laid and her chosen friends were admitted into the little salon, the *chambre ardente*, was the great feature of the week. Here, the candles extinguished to heighten the effect, the Abbé Delille declaimed his 'Catacombs de Rome,' and here Clermont-Tonnerre submitted to the criticism of his friends his discourse before delivering it in public. Near the

chimney Necker stood, entertaining the Bishop of Autun, who smiled but avoided talking. Here was to be found the Duchesse de Lauzun, of all women the most gentle and timid; and in the midst stood the hostess, in her favourite attitude before the fire, with her hands behind her back, a large, leonine woman, with few beauties and no grace of gesture. She nevertheless animated the salon by her masculine attitude and powerful conversation. De Narbonne is of course with Madame de Staël this evening."

Generally the conversation is of politics, but sometimes it is of literature. As late as April 1791, when the times were really beginning to be revolutionary, Morris hears Madame de Staël read the assemblage her tragedy *Montmorenci*, and remarks that "she writes much better than she reads." Over and over again we find her name coupled with that of M. de Narbonne; over and over again he is described as "her lover *en titre*"—once in a despatch to Washington in which we get a glimpse of an interesting jealousy.

"In the beginning of the Revolution he [M. de Narbonne], great anti-Neckerist though the lover *en titre* of Madame de Staël, M. Necker's daughter, was not a little opposed to the Revolution, and there was afterwards some coldness between him and the Bishop [Talleyrand], partly on political accounts, and partly because he (in common with the rest of the world) believed the Bishop to be too well with his mistress. By the

bye, she tells me that it is not true, and of course I, who am a charitable man, believe her."

The subject, however, was not one to be discussed only behind Madame de Staël's back. It could be referred to in conversation both with herself and with her husband. So much we gather from a reminiscence of a dinner party at Necker's house—a reminiscence the more interesting because it gives us one of our rare glimpses of M. de Staël's view of a situation not particularly flattering to his *amour-propre*. First it is :—

"I go to-day to dine at M. Necker's, and place myself next to Madame de Staël, and as our conversation grows animated, she desires me to speak English, which her husband does not understand. Afterwards, in looking round the table, I observe in him much emotion. I tell her that he loves her distractedly, which she says she knows, and that it renders her miserable. Condole with her a little on her widowhood, the Chevalier de Narbonne being absent in Franche-Comté."

And then :—

"After dinner I seek a conversation with the husband, which relieves him. He inveighs bitterly against the manners of this country, and the cruelty of alienating a wife's affections. He says that women here are more corrupt in their minds and hearts than in any other way. I regret with him on general grounds that prostration of morals which unfits them for good

government. Hence he concludes, and I believe truly, that I shall not contribute towards making him uncomfortable."

Whence it would appear that M. de Staël, having married a woman of genius for her money, had already begun to realise the price that he must pay. He made no clamorous public protests—that was hardly the fashion of the time. He did not even meet scandal with scandal to any great extent, but accepted the inevitable, and effaced himself for fear of ridicule. One conjectures that his vanity was more deeply wounded than his affections, and that he found more consolation at the card-table than he admitted.

Meanwhile, however, the Revolution was progressing with giant strides. The men whom Madame de Staël had advanced by her influence found their heads in danger; the most that her influence could now do for them was to save their lives. It was good to be her friend in those days, and not necessary to be her lover in order to have her help. Her courage was heroic and her energy admirable; and if she was proud of her power over the mob, she was well entitled to her pride. On the eve of the September massacres, she, a young matron of six-and-twenty, forced her way into the Hotel de Ville, and rescued Lally-Tollendal and Jaucourt from the clutches of the executioners. Over M. de Narbonne she threw the ægis of ambassadorial sacrosanctity, hiding him in her house, and defying

the mob to search for him, until he could be got away to London with a false passport. Not until that was done—not until the September massacres were in progress—did she apply for her own passport and make her own retreat.

There were still difficulties to be overcome. The mob assailed her carriage, and would have pillaged her luggage, had not Santerre—the same Santerre whose drummers were to drown the dying speech of Louis XVI.—sat on the coachman's box defending her. Tallien,[1] however, escorted her past the Paris barriers; and she drove post haste, not to her husband who was in Holland, but to join her father and mother at Rolle. "Switzerland is in mourning," writes Madame Necker in a letter dated September 9. "The Ambassadress arrived the day before yesterday, bringing the terrible news of the 2nd, and the story of all her personal sufferings." This was the real beginning of exile.

[1] He who afterwards helped to overthrow Robespierre.

CHAPTER VI

From Coppet to Mickleham—The motive for the journey—The *émigrés* at Juniper Hall—Madame de Staël's friendship with Fanny Burney—M. de Narbonne "behaves badly."

"PEACEFULLY sheltered in the chateau at Coppet," says Dr. Stevens, "Madame de Staël immediately became its chatelaine, the priestess of its abundant hospitalities;" but this statement somewhat anticipates the facts.

The date of Madame de Staël's second confinement was fast approaching, and she was in no condition to dispense hospitalities. Nor did she and her family remain at Coppet. The chateau, as we have seen, was not considered a sufficiently safe retreat. M. Necker was afraid of being kidnapped by raiders from over the border. He removed to Rolle, and it was there that Madame de Staël's second son, Albert de Staël, was born.

The time, moreover, was inappropriate for social relaxations, and the party were in no mood to enjoy them. Madame Necker was ill—she was, in fact, continually ailing for many years before her death. M. Necker was a depressed and practically a broken man. Conscious of his position as the pilot who had failed to weather the storm—made the more acutely conscious of it by the demeanour of the

French *émigrés* who refused to cross his threshold or even to speak to him—he locked himself up in his room and wrote pamphlets, vindicating his own policy, and advising the French nation about the policy of his successors. Our most graphic picture of his situation is to be found in one of Gibbon's letters to Lord Sheffield.

"I passed four days at the castle of Coppet with Necker; and could have wished to have shown him as a warning to any aspiring youth possessed with the Dæmon of ambition. With all the means of private happiness in his power, he is the most miserable of human beings: the past, the present, and the future are all equally odious to him. When I suggested some domestic amusements of books, building, etc., he answered with a deep tone of despair, 'Dans l'état où je suis, je ne puis sentir que le coup de vent qui m'a abattu.' How different from the careless cheerfulness with which our poor friend Lord North supports his fall! Madame Necker maintains more external composure, *mais le Diable n'y perd rien.* It is true that Necker wished to be carried into the Closet, like old Pitt, on the shoulders of the people, and that he has been ruined by the Democracy which he has raised."

That was in 1791, Gibbon being at the time a resident of Lausanne, reposing in tranquillity after the completion of his history of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* He knew, therefore, what were the "means of private happiness" of which he spoke. They were those

from which he himself derived a calm enjoyment—the amenities of life upon the shores of the most beautiful lake in Europe. But there was one difference between his condition and Necker's which he failed to seize. He was transplanted; Necker was uprooted. In a subsequent letter, dated April 4, 1792, Madame de Staël's name appears.

"Madame de Staël is expected in a few weeks at Coppet, where they receive her, and where, 'to dumb forgetfulness a prey,' she will have leisure to regret the pleasing anxious being, which she enjoyed amidst the storms of Paris. But what can the poor creature do? her husband is in Sweden, her lover is no longer Secretary of War, and her father's house is the only place where she can reside with the least degree of prudence and decency."

The arrival expected in April was postponed, as has been already mentioned, until September; and the stay was of short duration. Already, in December, immediately after the birth of her child, she began to talk about departing. Our first intimation is in a letter from Necker to Henri Meister, then in London.

"My daughter is going to leave us to pass a few months, not in London but at a country place in England, where several of her friends are living together. It is not from you, sir, to whom I am attached, and who are attached to us, that I shall conceal the grief which this journey causes us. I have made every imagin-

able effort to prevent it, but in vain. . . . We must resign ourselves to what we cannot hinder, but it is very unfortunate from every point of view."

Then follows a letter from Madame Necker to Gibbon, dated the 2nd of January 1793.

"After having tried in vain every device that wit or reason could suggest to divert my daughter from so mad a project, we thought that a short sojourn at Geneva might make her more amenable by bringing her under the influence of public opinion. She took advantage of the liberty which she thus obtained to start even sooner than we apprehended. Under such sad auspices has she begun her new year and caused us to begin ours. I will say nothing more."

Finally there is a letter in which Gibbon hands the news on to Lord Sheffield, adding significantly: "Her friend the Vicomte de Narbonne is somewhere about Dorking;" and in that sentence the motive of the journey, undertaken at a time when her health was impaired and travelling was dangerous, and the grounds of her parents' objection to it, appear to be disclosed.

Probably it was the first occasion on which her parents realised that she was prepared, in the matters of the heart, to take—and had indeed already taken—the final compromising step which her mother, warmly as she made love on paper, had never been in any real peril of taking. On paper, it is true, Madame Necker seems, when we turn over those of her letters which M. d'Haussonville

has published, to have gone rather far. We are brought to the same conclusion whether we look at the letters which she wrote or at those which she received. "The moments of your leisure," she wrote to Gibbon, "belong to her who has been *your first love and your last.* I cannot make up my mind which of these titles is the sweeter and the dearer to my heart." She kept a letter from Marmontel, in which he threatened to swim the Channel in order to follow her to England: "Why should not friendship have her Leander as well as love?" She kept a letter from Thomas, in which he exclaimed: "Your soul is necessary to mine—without yours mine is wandering; it is never in its place and is never at rest but when it is beside you." The correspondence is full of "words to that effect," spoken to and by a great number of correspondents.

It all meant nothing, however—nothing or very little. The most extreme comment which it warrants is that Madame Necker, when she writes to her friends, gives one the impression of a virtuous woman presuming on her virtue. Her affections, in truth, were rather of the head than of the heart. She spoke the language of gallantry because it was the language of the salons—because to use it seemed to be a part of the manners of good society. She may even be said to have used it with a certain appearance of affectation, as one who spoke a foreign tongue, acquired late in life.

The daughter's case was very different from the mother's. She was, before everything else, sincere; and she was plain, and she was passionate; and she believed in her indefeasible right to happiness, to be attained if not through marriage, then through love; and she had, in all departments of life alike, the genius, the energy, and the initiative of a man. And she did not love her husband, and had never loved him, and did love M. de Narbonne. It was only to be expected, in her case, that sentiment would be translated into action, and that, if she was not pursued, she would pursue. So she rose from her sick-bed, and raced across the Continent and the Channel to her lover.

M. de Narbonne was one of a group of *émigrés* who had hung on in France till the last. The extreme Royalists had left the country long before. Some eighteen thousand of them—the Army of Coblentz—were trying, not very successfully, to invade it under foreign leadership. The aristocrats who were also reformers had remained behind, hoping at first, and still trying after they had ceased to hope, to lead and limit the Revolution. But the tide flowed too fast for them. Power slipped from their grasp, and they were as little able as Necker himself had been to stem the current. Terrible things which they could neither approve nor resist began to happen. The Swiss Guard were massacred in the Tuileries; the epoch of domiciliary visits opened. They were themselves

suspect, and had to get away as best they could, often narrowly escaping arrest. One of them only avoided detention, when his house was searched, by pretending that he was not himself, but the doctor called in to attend his sister-in-law, who had fainted in her alarm. Another was smuggled away in a boat, concealed beneath a pile of faggots. How M. de Narbonne was saved by Madame de Staël we have already seen.

Though repudiated by the Revolutionists, however, this company had no intention of fighting their country on their King's behalf. They only sought to wait, in a cheerful security, for better times. So they came to Mickleham in Surrey, and took Juniper Hall—which, of course, they called Junipère.

You see the house—you cannot help seeing it —as you follow the highroad from Leatherhead to Dorking. Originally an inn styled the "Royal Oak," it had been bought and enlarged in the middle of the eighteenth century by Sir Cecil Bishop, from whom it had been acquired by a wealthy lottery-office keeper named Jenkinson, who let it to the *émigrés*. It is an imposing red mansion, approached through a lodge gate by a drive, with a steep and thickly wooded hill behind, a wooded glade in front, and a clump of dark stately cedars in its immediate precincts—altogether a very gracious place of exile; and the exiles themselves—both those who stayed in the Hall and those who came from time to time to

visit it — were all persons of high distinction. Among them were the Marquise de la Châtre, M. de Narbonne, M. de Montmorency, M. Jaucourt,[1] M. Malouet,[2] the Princesse d'Hennin, Talleyrand, Lally-Tollendal, and General d'Arblay, who had been Lafayette's adjutant and was presently to be Fanny Burney's husband. Though they were poor, they were not quite destitute; though their property had been confiscated, they had money to go on with. They entertained. Fanny Burney, then on a visit to her sister, Mrs. Phillips, was one of their guests, and it is to her Diary and Letters that we have to go for most of our information about their sojourn.

Miss Burney was delighted with everything and everybody—especially with Madame de Staël and M. de Narbonne. Of the former she writes: "She is a woman of the first abilities, I think, I have ever seen; she is more in the style of Mrs. Thrale than of any other celebrated character, but she has infinitely more depth, and seems an even more profound politician and metaphysician." Of the latter: "He bears the highest character for goodness, sweetness of manners, and ready wit. You could not keep your heart from him if you saw him only for half an hour." The constant play of wit and the serious interest taken in literary things

[1] He had been an officer and a Deputy, and he accompanied Talleyrand on his mission to London. Afterwards he was Louis XVIII.'s Minister of Marine.

[2] One of the leaders of the Royalist party in the Constituant Assembly. He died as Minister of Marine in 1814.

gave her a new and refreshing experience. In the midst of their trials these French exiles could write tragedies—or at all events Madame de Staël could write them—and read them aloud, and listen to the reading of them in the drawing-room. But that picture needs to be supplemented from the pen of Dr. Bollmann.

"The Staël is a genius—an extraordinary, eccentric woman in all that she does. She only sleeps during a very few hours, and is uninterruptedly and fearfully busy all the rest of the time. Whilst her hair is being dressed, whilst she breakfasts, in fact during a third of the day, she writes. She has not sufficient quiet to look over what she has written."

She gave it, in fact, to M. de Narbonne to look over and to copy, and it seems not unlikely that this was one of the tests under which M. de Narbonne's devotion to her broke down. But that is to anticipate. We have first to note how her relations with M. de Narbonne cut short her intimacy with Miss Burney.

Madame de Staël had invited Miss Burney to visit her; but scandals were abroad, and Dr. Burney intervened. He admitted Madame de Staël's "literary and intellectual powers,"—

"But," he added, "as nothing human is allowed to be perfect, she has not escaped censure. Her house was the centre of Revolutionists previous to the 10th of August, after her father's departure, and she has been accused of partiality to M. de

N——. But perhaps all may be Jacobinical malignity. However, unfavourable stories of her have been brought hither, and the Burkes and Mrs. Ord have repeated them to me. . . . If you are not absolutely in the house of Madame de Staël when this arrives, it would perhaps be possible for you to waive the visit to her, by a compromise of having something to do for Susy."

Fanny Burney's reply was very characteristic of the country which invented Mrs. Grundy. She did not believe the calumny, she said, but she should certainly behave as if she did. "She is very plain," she writes; "he is very handsome; her intellectual endowments must be with him her sole attraction. . . . I think you could not spend a day with them and not see that their commerce is that of pure but exalted and most elegant friendship." But she continues:—

"I would nevertheless give the world to avoid being a guest under their roof, now I have heard even the shadow of such a rumour; and I will, if it be possible without hurting or offending them. I have waived and waived acceptance almost from the moment of Madame de Staël's arrival. I prevailed with her to let my letter go alone to you, and I have told you, with regard to your answer, that you were sensible of the honour her kindness did me, and could not refuse to her request the week's furlough; and then followed reasons for the compromise you pointed out, too diffuse for writing. As yet they have succeeded, though she is surprised and disappointed. She

wants us to study French and English together, and nothing could to me be more desirable but for this invidious report."

"Est-ce qu'une femme est en tutelle pour la vie en ce pays?" was Madame de Staël's comment on the situation. It seemed to her that Miss Burney, who was forty, was behaving as if she were fourteen. No doubt she saw through the reasons that were given to the reason that was suppressed. But she tried not to be angry, and sent an amiable message through Mrs. Phillips: "Dites à Mlle Burney que je ne lui en veux pas du tout—que je quitte le pays l'aimant bien sincèrement, et sans rancune."

She had, in fact, just then, other things besides the behaviour of Miss Burney to think about. She was parting not only from Miss Burney, but also from M. de Narbonne himself; and her grief was not lessened by the fact that she was to join her husband. Exactly what had passed between her and her lover we do not know. But we have Madame Récamier's word for it that "M. de Narbonne behaved very badly, as successful men too often do"; and we have Mrs. Phillips' account of the parting: "Madame de Staël could not rally her spirits at all, and seemed like one torn from all that was dear to her." And then again, in the same letter: "I came home with Madame de Staël and M. de Narbonne. The former actually sobbed in saying farewell."

And so back again to Switzerland.

CHAPTER VII

Madame de Staël returns to Switzerland—Her exertions on behalf of the *émigrés*—Correspondence on this subject with Henri Meister—Death of Madame Necker—Benjamin Constant introduces himself.

SAINTE-BEUVE's picture of Madame de Staël's life in Switzerland during the Terror is well known. "She passed the time," he says, "in the country of Vaud, with her father and some refugee friends, M. de Montmorency and M. Jaucourt. On these terraces of Coppet her most constant meditations contrasted the dazzling sunlight and the peace of nature with the horrors everywhere let loose by the hand of man. Her talent maintained a religious silence; from afar were heard, muffled and thick as the beating of the oars upon the Lake, the measured strokes of the guillotine upon the scaffold. The state of oppression and anguish in which she remained during these terrible months only suffered her, in the intervals of her active devotion to others, to desire death for herself, and to look forward to the end of the world and of this lost human race."

The account has a certain poetical truth, but it is no more literally true than is the statement of Dr. Stevens that Madame de Staël "made the

Coppet mansion an asylum for Frenchmen who were fleeing from the guillotine." She was hardly at Coppet at all during the period, owing to M. Necker's fear that the house might be raided and its inhabitants kidnapped and carried off to France; and her talent was not silent. In one pamphlet she pleaded eloquently with the French people for the life of Marie-Antoinette; in another she pleaded with Pitt that he should make peace with France. She was writing, at the same time, though she did not publish it until later, her treatise *De l'Influence des Passions sur le Bonheur des Individus et des Nations*.

It is a remarkable work, immature perhaps, as many critics have said, but not the less characteristic. As in almost everything that Madame de Staël wrote, the personal note is somewhat louder than it is meant to be. To read it with care is to see the particular masquerading in the garments of the general, and a confession tricked out as a philosophy. A passage has already been quoted from it which can only be read as a confession of the writer's failure to find happiness in marriage. There are many other passages which can only be read as confessions of her failure to find happiness in love, and as veiled—but very thinly veiled—protests that she has been treated badly by her lover. "It is certain," she declares, "that love is of all passions the most fatal to human happiness." It confers, for a few brief instants, a supreme joy; but this comes to an end, and then: "One goes

on living without any chance that the future will give one back the past." And this is a woman's tragedy far more than a man's.

"Love is woman's whole existence. It is only an episode in the lives of men. Reputation, honour, esteem, everything depends upon how a woman conducts herself in this regard; whereas, according to the rules of an unjust world, the laws of morality itself are suspended in men's relations with women. They may pass as good men though they have caused women the most terrible suffering which it is in the power of one human being to inflict upon another. They may be regarded as loyal though they have betrayed them. They may have received from a woman marks of a devotion which would so link two friends, two fellow-soldiers, that either would feel dishonoured if he forgot them, and they may consider themselves free of all obligations by attributing the services to love—as though this additional gift of love detracted from the value of the rest. No doubt there are men whose character furnishes an honourable exception; but—such is the force of public opinion in the matter—there are few who would dare, not fearing ridicule, to proclaim, in the affairs of the heart, the delicacy of principle which a woman would deem herself obliged to assume even if she did not feel it."

Decidedly these generalisations have a very particular meaning, and the dots stand ready to be put upon the i's. It was passion, and no lighter

sentiment, that Madame de Staël had felt for M. de Narbonne. We find the word in italics in one of Miss Berry's letters describing her own relations with Madame de Staël: "She was too much occupied with her *passion* 'de s'en apercevoir de mon existence.'" The services which she had rendered him were the highest, since she had first pushed him into Cabinet office, and then saved his life, at the risk of her own, when he was proscribed. And he had been ungrateful; he had "behaved badly"; she had pursued her romance to England, only to see it end. That was the bitter reflection that was uppermost in her mind and dominated her life during this time of exile. She poured out her soul on paper.

Yet, at the same time, she was active. Activity was, at all times, almost a disease with her; and now there was a double need for it. Her thoughts required distraction, and there was work for her to do. We trace the course of her life best in the series of her letters to Henri Meister.

Henri Meister was a man of fifty, and an old friend of the Necker family. His father and Necker's father, the Genevan professor, had pelted each other with pamphlets in a theological dispute. He had himself succeeded Madame Necker as a dependent in the house of Madame Vermenoux. The Neckers had helped to "introduce" him in Paris, where he had become first Grimm's collaborator and then his successor as editor of the

Correspondence Littéraire.[1] Madame de Staël's letters to him were mostly, if not exclusively, on matters of business. On other matters he was not in her confidence; but he was glad to be useful to her, and she gave him the opportunity.

It is not until late in 1794 that she dates from Coppet. The earlier letters are mostly from Nyon and Lausanne—one or two of them from Zurich and the Swiss Baden. That definitely settles her whereabouts during these years. Her chief, and almost her sole, preoccupation, we find, is with her friends the *émigrés*. She managed to get several of them safely out of France with Swiss or Swedish passports. Her husband, though he was not with her, and kept diplomatically in the background, was her collaborator in this good work. Some of the refugees—M. de Narbonne, to our astonishment, was among them—found a shelter in her house, not at Coppet, as Dr. Stevens says, but at Nyon. She could not receive them all, however; and for the rest she sought to find other Swiss domiciles. Notably we find her much exercised about the fortunes of Talleyrand, of whom she writes as if, now that the ardour of M. de Narbonne had cooled, she held him dearer than a friend. But the story will be best told in extracts from the letters.

[1] A MS. journal of literary gossip, circulated only among subscribers. Most of the German princes took it.

"Nyon, *December* 23, 1793.

"Two gentlemen, de Montmorency and de Jaucourt, have been here with me for two months under Swedish names; M. de Narbonne is coming under a Spanish name. Berne knows it, and allows it, because I am living absolutely alone in the country, and because it is abundantly proved that we only aspire to the most obscure retirement. But the Bishop of Autun, whom I love so dearly, cannot be received here on account of the democratic opinions which he formerly held. Opinion in your canton is more liberal. Be so good as to tell me if I can, with some expectation of security, hire there for the spring a country house to which I can invite M. de Talleyrand. Tell me if Zurich is willing to give expression to the moderation of its opinions by according an asylum to men who, on account of a similar moderation, are being persecuted. Tell me, finally, if I may be indebted to you for the happiness of spending the summer with you and with my friends. If that be impossible, I will ask you to procure me some information about Schaffhausen. That would be much less convenient; but, in any case, what I want is a house which may serve as a shelter from the insults that are in the air and as a retreat from the passions of men."

"*February* 19, 1794.

"I have read in the *Schaffhausen Gazette* that the Bishop of Autun has been expelled from England. I should not believe this story if it were not that I have had no English news for a fortnight. The report has so upset me that I can

hardly hold my pen in my hands. If he came here, I should be only too happy. But it seems that he is going to America; but . . . If it is God's will that the rumour of this fresh misfortune is untrue, I will write and ask you to insert a denial in the paper.

"What do you know about M. Ott's country house at Zurich?"

"NYON, *March* 12, 1794.

"M. Ott's house seems to be the very thing to suit me; but if I go there I prefer to board myself, as that is the easier and more economical plan. I think, however, that, as I am not quite sure that I am not going to London, and am still less sure that I shall please the Zurich people so well that they will allow me to have two or three of my friends in the house with me, I had better begin by staying a week with M. Ott in the town. During that time I will, with your help and the grace of God, bring all my little coquetries into play; and, if they succeed, I will, with your assistance, choose my own house, and a pension for Madame de Châtre, who is not comfortable in the Canton of Berne. I will settle at Winterthur or Rapperswyl, as M. de Montesquiou[1] has done at Bremgarten, if that suits them better. . . . But say nothing and do nothing until I arrive. I sometimes get what I want in a personal interview. . . .

"I begin to detest Europe, and my last attempt for my friends shall be Zurich. For my own part, I shall drag on for a while longer. But how, at

[1] He had commanded the army of the South and conquered Savoy, but was accused of treason in November 1792, and took refuge in Switzerland.

seven-and-twenty, is one to cut oneself adrift from the past? How to love as one used to love?"

"LAUSANNE, *March* 28, 1794.

"My mother's condition is so sad that I shall perhaps have to give up the idea of settling at Zurich. I hope my friends may be received there, but I shall not live there myself. If it is my fatal name that frightens people, my opinion is that, my name being more formidable than my person, I had better go and show myself there, since my presence has nearly always been found supportable."

So the letters proceed; and Madame de Staël's life during the period which they cover can easily be reconstructed from them. It is a life of feverish activity on behalf of others, and at the same time of dull despair on her own account, with literary work for the inevitable anodyne. The old order has broken up, and everything that she has been used to live for has come to an end. Her father is in exile and disgrace; her mother is dying. Many of her friends have perished on the scaffold. The rest are scattered and impoverished. She has no love, save her father's, to lean upon; for she has never loved her husband, and M. de Narbonne is cold, and the Bishop of Autun has gone to Philadelphia. One hardly knows whether or not to be surprised, in such conditions, to find her turning longing eyes to France, and threatening to return thither long before the events of Thermidor have checked the falling of the knife.

She tells Henri Meister of this project in a letter written from Baden on her way back from her visit to Zurich. Her reasons are not given, but something in the letter suggests that she hoped, by her presence at Paris, to save a portion of her fortune from the wreck, and that Henri Meister approved of the attempt, and that it was a part of her plan that her father and mother should follow her.

"We cannot all start at once. The season is too bad for my mother to travel. Besides, the cost would be too much for me. I shall go at very small expense, in excellent and very useful company. I shall send them the necessary money to join me, and they will find the business getting on nicely. I think I ought not to hesitate a moment."

She did not start, however. Probably the desire to be up and doing counted for more in the scheme than any serious expectation of rescuing her own or her father's property from the *débâcle*; but however that may have been, she had to abandon her intention when she came home to find herself in a house of mourning—her mother dead, and her father needing all the consolation that her presence could afford.

Perhaps she had not loved her mother over much. Madame Necker had been too much the schoolmistress and Madame de Staël too little the docile scholar for perfect sympathy to subsist between them. The standing quarrel between

the older and the younger generations had had some aggravating circumstances in their case. Right, and duty, and happiness were three ideas which they defined differently. If the daughter had some of the mother's pedantry, the mother had always been shocked by the daughter's passion — shocked equally by her dependence upon love and her independence of marriage; and their life together had been more or less of an armed truce, with Necker, who loved them both, for mediator. But the blow was none the less a blow, falling, as it did, at a time of universal tragedy. If only for her father's sake, she was overwhelmed with grief.

Her first thought was that she must take him away somewhere. She inquired from Henri Meister about houses at Zurich. "Could you find us a furnished house in the suburbs? Should we find M. Ott's house fit to live in if we arrived unexpectedly? And will you open negotiations for a place at Weiningen, arranging to provide the furniture? I think I will take my father there." But then a difficulty arises: "My mother has left such extraordinary instructions as to the embalming and preservation of her body—how it is to be laid out under glass in spirits of wine—that if, as she imagined, the appearance of her features had been preserved, my poor father would have passed his whole life in gazing on her. . . . It follows that, until the monument is finished,—until August, that is to say,—he will not

leave this part of the country. After that, I think, he will have no objection to going to Zurich; he said so in so many words. But we must stay here for the summer. He wanted to go back to Coppet to wait till the monument was finished; but I besought him to keep the bier at Beaulieu, as Coppet frightens me for various reasons."

So they lingered on in the neighbourhood of Lausanne, and the correspondence harks back to the provision of domiciles for the *émigrés*, and suggests that strings may be pulled for the advantage of M. de Saussure—the philosopher who had climbed Mont Blanc, a connection by marriage of the Neckers, who had lost the greater part of his fortune: "He has been thinking about Russia. Would the Empress perhaps allow him to give public lectures, or interest him in the education of the sons of the Grand Duke? Or would some nobleman, dazzled by the name of such a tutor, entrust his son to him? Would not Grimm honour himself by putting forward so illustrious a man—taking care not to mention his relationship to us?" Then there is mention of something that Madame de Staël has been writing—an *Epître au Malheur*. The only things of which there is no mention are certain episodes in the writer's social life, and certain acquaintances which she was then making.

It was at that period that she came to know of Count Joseph de Maîstre, Catholic *émigré* and reactionary; but he hardly counts. They did not

like each other, though they respected each other's gifts. The only trace left by their few interviews is an epigram — one of the many epigrams by which men avenged themselves for Madame de Staël's success in outshining them in society. She was too much used, he thought, to adulation: "S'il lui avait plu d'accoucher en public dans la chapelle de Versailles on aurait battu des mains." The other acquaintance was of deep and lasting importance to her life.

The time was September 1794. Madame de Staël was living in Lausanne, and a young man who was passing through Lausanne set out to call on her. They had many mutual friends. He had cousins who knew her rather well, and were dazzled by her—one cousin in particular who had written of her as "a very extraordinary woman of distinctly superior genius." Nothing was more natural than that he should desire to know her, and should seize the opportunity presented by his visit to the town. As he walked towards her house, he met her driving out; but he had the courage of his curiosity. He signalled to the driver to stop, and approached the carriage and introduced himself. He was Monsieur Benjamin Constant. Madame de Staël invited him to enter the carriage and drive home with her to supper. He took his seat by her side, and so the curtain drew up on the new drama.

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

From a Painting by Mdlle. Vallier

Photo by Braun Clément et Cie

CHAPTER VIII

Benjamin Constant de Rebecque—His ancestors—His precocious childhood — His dissolute youth — He meets Madame de Charrière at Paris and visits her at Colombier—Writes the History of Religion on the backs of playing-cards—Departure for Brunswick—Affectionate correspondence—Colombier revisited—The end of the *liaison*.

Benjamin Constant de Rebecque was French by descent, but Swiss by birth and nationality. His father's family came from Aire, in Artois. His ancestor, Augustin de Constant, in the service of the Emperor Charles v., sent on a mission to France, embraced the Reformed religion, accepted an appointment from Jeanne d'Albret, and, at the battle of Coutras, saved the life of Henri iv., who rewarded him with the governorship of Marans, had ultimately to leave the country in consequence of the religious persecutions, and died at Lausanne. His mother, *née* de Chandieu, was descended from Antoine, Seigneur of Roche-Chandieu, in Dauphiné, who became a pastor of the Reformed faith, fled to Geneva at the time of the Saint Bartholomew massacre, was recalled by Henri iv., as whose chaplain he acted at the battle of Coutras, but subsequently returned to Geneva, where he died.

One of Augustin de Constant's great-grandsons

was Samuel de Constant, governor of the fortress of Bois-le-Duc, and known as a friend of Voltaire. This Baron de Constant had two daughters—the Marquise de Langallerie, in whose house at Lausanne Voltaire organised his theatre, and Madame de Charrière de Bavois—and four sons, David Constant d'Hermenches, Philippe, Juste-Louis-Arnold, and Samuel.

The Constant d'Hermenches were among Voltaire's best amateur actors, but hardly concern this story. Philippe died young. Juste-Louis-Arnold married Henriette de Chandieu, and became the father of Benjamin; he was an officer in the Dutch service. Samuel married Mademoiselle Charlotte Pictet, of an old and notable Genevan family, and settled down on an estate near Lausanne, where four children were born to him—Benjamin's four cousins, Rosalie, Lisette, Juste, and Charles. Rosalie, ugly and deformed, but keenly witty and brilliantly intelligent, was much in her cousin's confidence, and was the observant and by no means silent spectator of the vicissitudes of the long *liaison* about to be related. Much of our intimate knowledge of it is picked up from her letters. Her brother Charles helped the future biographer by bequeathing the family papers to the Public Library of Geneva.

Benjamin was an only child, and his mother died in giving birth to him, in 1767. He was at first brought up by his maternal grandmother, Madame de Chandieu, and his aunt, Madame de

Nassau, *née* de Chandieu, and married to a German Count from whom she was separated. At the age of seven, however, his father took him to Holland and put him in the hands of a tutor. A number of his letters from this date onwards have been preserved, and they display a precocity, not merely of scholarship but of ideas, which is uncanny and almost terrifying. At the age of eight he is able to write to his grandmother: "I think I am paying very dearly for knowledge since it takes me away from you." At the age of nine he is speaking to her with enthusiasm of his studies: "I am reading Roman history and Homer. It gives me great pleasure, especially Homer, because he is a poet and I like poetry, and, while amusing me, he gives me great ideas. He is the father of the religion of the ancients."

By the time he is ten, however, he has discovered something of the vanity of study.

"My dear grandmother," he writes, "let us make an agreement. Do you let me give you a little of my health, and give me in exchange ten of your years. I should be the gainer; for I should have more sense, and, having learnt Latin and Greek, and all the things that I must know, I should learn from you the things that are more essential. For what do the thoughts of these ancients matter? I have not to live with them, and I think I shall drop them altogether as soon as I am of an age to live in the society of living men and women."

And then follows a still more striking proof of the direction in which his young thoughts are straying.

"I sometimes see here a young English girl of my own age whom I prefer to Cicero, Seneca, and the rest of them. She is teaching me Ovid. She has never read him or heard of him, but I find the whole of Ovid written in her eyes. I am writing a little romance for her, and am sending you the first pages of it. You shall have the rest of it if you like."

In other letters we have the picture of the boy's daily life. He is studying other things besides the classical authors—dancing and the harpsichord to wit. He goes to the theatre; he plays piquet; it is his good fortune to "call sometimes on a beautiful young lady from England." He is composing an opera, "verses and music and all." It is going to be very beautiful, and he is "not afraid of being hissed." In a letter to his father we find a further trace of the "little romance" already referred to. This is the document—apparently a dedication—written at the age of twelve:—

"Les Chevaliers: Heroic Romance by H—— B—— C—— de R—— at Brussels, 1779.

"Letter to M. Juste Constant:—

"Dear Author of my days,—I have been told that fathers find the works of their sons excellent, even though these are only a mass of reminiscences thrown together without art. In order

to demonstrate the falsity of this report, I have the honour of presenting this work to you, in the full confidence that, although it is I who have composed it, you will not find it good, and will not even have the patience to read it."

Decidedly this is a precocity which differs not in degree but in kind from all the stock examples —from the case, for instance, of John Stuart Mill learning Greek at the age of three, or Macaulay in his high chair expounding to the parlourmaid from a volume as big as himself. Whereas the others were only clever children, Benjamin Constant strikes one as having been born grown up—a little man of the world in short frocks—*désabusé* in the nursery—disillusionised by intuitive anticipation. We shall see, as we proceed, how the child was father to the man; how the child became a cynic, while the cynic remained a child, never strong enough to find satisfaction in cynicism, always going back to the deceptions which did not deceive, always hankering after the emotions of which he found himself incapable.

At the absurd age of thirteen his University career began, and he was successively at Oxford, at Erlangen, and at Edinburgh. At the last-named seat of learning he made the acquaintance of Sir James Mackintosh; but nothing of lively interest is known about this portion of his life. It was an uprooted life in which no new ties, even of a sentimental sort, seem to have been formed. He was serving his apprenticeship to cosmo-

politanism—earning the appellation of "the first of the cosmopolitans"—becoming a cosmopolitan of a much more distinctive type than was foreshadowed by the careers of such predecessors as Horace Walpole and Baron Grimm—a man without a country and without a home.

In 1787 we find him in Paris. "How foolishly," he afterwards wrote, "I wasted there my time, my money, and my health!" He gambled, of course,—it was the vice of the age,—and indulged in the other vices natural to undisciplined youth. His father heard of his proceedings, and for once asserted his authority, and summoned him to Bois-le-Duc, where he was in garrison; but Benjamin rebelled and would not come. One can read his character at the age of twenty in the letter in which he told the story of this impetuous revolt.

"I pictured myself," he wrote, "as a poor devil who had failed in all his projects. I was bored, wretched, more sick than ever of my melancholy life; and I pictured this poor father of mine disappointed of all his hopes. A fixed idea settled in my head. I said to myself: 'Let me be off; let me live alone; let me no longer cause unhappiness to my father, or trouble to anyone.'

"My head was excited. In haste I pick up three shirts and a few pairs of stockings. A saddler in the house opposite to me hires me a post-chaise. I send for horses to drive me to Amiens. I get into my carriage, with my three shirts, a pair of slippers, and thirty-one louis in

my pocket. I drive in hot haste. In twenty hours I cover sixty-nine leagues. I reach Calais. I embark. I arrive at Dover, and awake as if from a dream."

A walking tour was thus the first remedy which he tried against the *maladie du siècle.* It was also the remedy tried at the same date against the same disorder by Ramond de Carbonnière, who, upset by *The Sorrows of Werther*, restored himself to mental health by making first ascents in the Pyrenees. His wanderings in the Scottish Highlands, however, did not cure him. He needed not Nature's but Woman's sympathy, and for a time he found what he sought in the house of a lady whom he had met in Paris—Madame de Charrière, the novelist, author of *Caliste* and the *Lettres Neuchâteloises.*

Madame de Charrière was of an old and noble Dutch family. Isabelle Agnes Elizabeth van Tuyll van Serooskerken van Zuylen was her maiden name, and she was witty rather than beautiful. After rejecting many suitors, she saw the time arrive when she could no longer hope to pick and choose, and in these circumstances she accepted the hand of M. de Charrière, a Swiss gentleman who had been a tutor in her father's house. He took her to live at Colombier, near Neuchâtel.

Save for a new building or two—notably a handsome schoolhouse—the village (or perhaps

one should call it a little town) has hardly altered since the eighteenth century. An old castle, now used as a barrack, frowns from the brow of a low hill upon ill-kept avenues which stretch away towards the reedy marshes and the Lake shore. The narrow streets are silent and empty, and the grass grows in them. Your impression, as you walk through them, is of a stagnant place, detached from life; you think of Tennyson's lines about "a place where no one comes, Or hath come since the making of the world."

You can find Madame de Charrière's house if you inquire for it, though no mural tablet marks it out, and no photographer has put it on a picture postcard. It stands a little away from the main street, at the foot of the hill, and seems half schloss half farm, with rough sheds for stable and coach-house, built round a court containing the inevitable pump. The entrance is at the foot of a circular tower, which you ascend (if you are bidden) by a winding stone staircase of venerable age; and you may be shown (by the favour of the present tenants) a kitchen which is obviously a survival of a remote past, a dining-room which is dark even at noon, and a long salon, naturally cold, and difficult to warm, built above one of the sheds, and looking out over vegetable gardens and vineyards.

Here Madame de Charrière sat, and wrote, and was bored. She had nothing in common with her husband—nothing in common with more

than two or three of her neighbours. "One's imagination," she wrote, "dries up here. In the matter of literature, beyond M. Du Peyrou, with whom I sometimes talk about Rousseau, who dictates a note for me to his servant nearly every day, and to whom I also write nearly every day, there is no one here to whom I can talk for a quarter of an hour on the subjects of greatest interest to me." She wrote, therefore, to distract herself; and though what she wrote was fiction, and distinctly good fiction, the citizens of Neuchâtel neither sympathised nor understood. Her lively pictures of their sluggish manners gave offence. She was accused of caricaturing and calumniating individuals. "It was bound to be," she said, "though I had not thought of it before. When one draws a fanciful but true picture of a flock of sheep, each sheep discovers its own likeness in the picture."

To this dull house Benjamin Constant came upon a visit, on his way to take up an appointment which his father had procured for him at the Court of Brunswick. He was twenty, and Madame de Charrière was forty-seven. Their relations were bound, in the long run, to be governed by these facts. She must have known it from the first, and he was certain to discover it before any great lapse of time. For the moment, however, they had need of each other, and could live in the present, looking neither before nor after. The young man figured as the

lady's "poor wounded dove." She could be with half her nature his mistress, and with the other half his monitress and guardian angel.

The visit was spun out. Two months elapsed before Benjamin could tear himself away; though the link between them was doubtless more intellectual than passionate. They could talk; and it was so long since Madame de Charrière had had anyone to talk to who understood, or was interested in what she had to say. So the long October and November evenings were all too short for them, while they sat together by the subdued lamplight in the salon. Benjamin was engaged upon a History of Religion, which he was to rewrite many times before publishing it; he wrote it on the backs of playing-cards which he threaded together on a string. Madame de Charrière sat opposite to him, writing a novel, and occasionally reading passages aloud for his criticism. Where M. de Charrière spent his evenings we do not know—perhaps in the tavern with his Swiss friends, perhaps in the kitchen with his pipe and bowl. It must have been very clear to him that he was not wanted in the drawing-room.

It was as much as the friends could do to separate when midnight struck. The hour always found them in the midst of some interminable discussion, now philosophic, and now sentimental; and they sat down in their respective bedrooms and wrote notes to send to each other by the

servant as soon as they were called. Still harder was the parting when Benjamin had at last to set out for Brunswick. The letters which he despatched to her as often as he stopped to change horses on the journey were passionate avowals.

"The roads are frightful, the wind is cold, and I am sad—sadder to-day than I was yesterday, just as I was sadder yesterday than the day before, and shall be sadder to-morrow than to-day. To quit you for a single day is hard and painful, and every day is a fresh pain added to those which have gone before."

"As long as you live, and as long as I live, I shall always say to myself, in whatever situation I may be: 'There is a Colombier in the world.' Before I knew you I used to say to myself: 'If they torture me too much, I shall kill myself.' Now I say: 'If they make life too hard for me, I have a retreat at Colombier.'"

"This evening, while playing loto, I thought of you, as you will easily believe. The idea of you mingled, so to say, with the room in which we were; and as I was undressing, a moment since, I asked myself: 'Who was it, then, that I found so charming to-night at the Duchess' reception?' And, in an instant, I realised that it was you. It is thus that, at a distance of 250 leagues from me, you contribute to my happiness without suspecting it. Adieu, you who are ten thousand times good, ten thousand times dear, ten thousand times beloved."

It could not last, of course. Nothing is more

certain than that. The woman of seven-and-forty must grow old while the lad of twenty was only growing up. Not for many years could the last love of the one run concurrently with the first love of the other. Autumn must decline into winter while May blossomed into June. The boy must live his own life, and she must let him live it. The most that she could hope for was to keep some vague lien on his heart by not insisting. There was a Colombier in the world; and if she left him free to range, he would sometimes, when life went hardly with him, remember it and return to it.

And so it happened. At first Benjamin wrote to Madame de Charrière from Brunswick to tell her of his boredom and his melancholy. "How," he asks, "am I to succeed? How am I to please? How am I to live?" But presently he writes that he is going to be married to Wilhelmina, Baroness von Cram, maid of honour to the Grand Duchess. She was ugly, pock-marked, red-eyed, and thin. So, at least, says Rosalie de Constant, who was astonished at her cousin's choice. She adds, however, that "her husband adores her as if she were beautiful"; and to Madame de Charrière the husband writes: "My wife makes me very happy. I cannot even wish to draw nearer to you, since that would alienate me from her; but I shall never cease to say: 'The pity of it!'"

And Madame de Charrière forgave. What

else could she do, being in love and being forty-nine? She forgave and waited; and presently came the news that she perhaps was waiting for. Benjamin writes that he is unhappy with his wife—that he is about to divorce her—for sufficient reasons: "The day after to-morrow I am to appear, with Madame de Constant, before a Consistory which wishes to amuse itself by making efforts, that will be futile, to reconcile us." He adds that life at Brunswick has become intolerable to him, that he expects to obtain leave of absence, and that he hopes to come and stay with her at Colombier. But by this time she was fifty-three, while he was only twenty-six.

His letters at this stage were numerous, but they were no longer in the same tone as the earlier letters. It is not merely that the bitterness of disillusion rings in them; not merely that we find excuses—replies, no doubt, to reproaches—for not writing oftener and not coming sooner. We find much stronger proof in them of the cooling of the lover's ardour. Now it is this cynical outburst, apropos of some *chronique scandaleuse* that he is relating: "I like to see the sum of pleasure in our little world increase, and, as I have vowed myself not only to celibacy but to continence, I am quite willing that others should have my share of these short-lived enjoyments." Now it is a confession of some love affair which his correspondent can hardly have been best pleased to read about. One Charlotte—

Charlottechen—whom we shall meet again in the course of this history, has been pestering him with attentions, proposing to sacrifice honour and fly with him. A certain *petite comédienne* has called, desiring to know whether he is willing to renew relations that have been interrupted. She is, in some way not described, "protected" by Charlottechen. "You will admit," writes Benjamin, "that this is a quaint situation."

And still Madame de Charrière forgave. For, at any rate, he did correspond with her, and did come to see her. He even spent a winter with her at Colombier; and when he parted from her to return to Brunswick, in order that it might not be said that he had been turned out of a post which he was intending to resign, he wrote: "Adieu. I embrace you. You know how much I love you, and how happy it makes me to love." It was a part of what she wanted, though not the whole. She clung to the small place in his heart which was still reserved for her. She continued to cling to it even after he had come under the new spell of Madame de Staël; but when that happened she knew that the end was near.

"I find him much changed," she wrote. "We laughed together at nothing, unless it were at ourselves, or rather at each other. Besides, the Neckers and the Staëls were so many arch-saints, on no account to be profaned. The rupture is a pity for me. As for him, who is younger, and doubtless needs excitement and

variety, he can find many substitutes, and Madame de Staël, with her wit and her plots and plans, her alliances and quarrels with the entire world of men, is much more to him than I can be."

That was the approach of the end. It actually came when Benjamin wrote to her :—

"She is the second woman whom I have met who could have taken the place of all the rest of the world to me. You know who was the first. In fact, she is a being apart, a superior being, such as one meets only once in a century."

After that, all was indeed over. It was only a question of formally speaking the last words over the grave of a dead love. Benjamin Constant seems to have spoken them in a letter dated March 26, 1796: "Farewell you who have embellished eight years of my life . . . you whom I can appreciate better than you will ever be appreciated by anyone else. Farewell. Farewell."

He was twenty-nine when he wrote this, and she was fifty-six. She had nine more years to live—nine lonely years of slow descent into the Valley of the Shadow, by the side of a husband, now stone deaf, to whom she was indifferent, in the midst of a dull provincial society which did not understand her. He was at the beginning of a long entanglement, marked by strange vicissitudes, for which the previous romance had merely been the preparation.

CHAPTER IX

Benjamin Constant's intimacy with Madame de Staël — What Rosalie de Constant thought—The Paris salon reopened—Services rendered to Talleyrand—And to Benjamin Constant—Revolt and reconquest—The birth of Albertine.

Madame de Staël and Madame de Charrière had a slight acquaintance with each other. The younger lady had even gushed over the elder in her impulsive style. "It is in Holland, it seems," she had written, "that one learns the French language best;" and, in the midst of the Reign of Terror, she deplored having already read *Caliste* ten times, and being therefore unable to fly to it as a fresh consolation for her troubles. The elder lady was less enthusiastic. As an eighteenth-century purist, she disapproved of Madame de Staël's prose style. It was a "rhapsodical rigmarole," and she wondered what Bossuet and Fénelon would have thought of it. Benjamin Constant was inclined to the same view until he came under the personal spell. In September 1793 he writes: "I have not seen Madame de Staël, and have no curiosity to do so." Two months later, he pens a sarcastic criticism of the *Apologie de la Reine*. It seems to him affected and insincere.

"What," he asks, "is the sense of this platitude: 'Brilliant and frivolous, like happiness and beauty'? The idea is false. Happiness is neither brilliant nor frivolous. And then those antitheses, and those balanced phrases when one has before one's eyes the picture of such long and fearful tortures! One could spit on the thing."

So the introduction was delayed until Benjamin's return from Brunswick, after winding up his affairs, closing his connection with the Court, and arranging for the removal of his library to Switzerland. In what circumstances it was effected we have seen; and we have next to see in what circumstances acquaintance ripened into intimacy. The story is told in Benjamin Constant's Diary.[1]

"It is truly curious to observe," he writes, "how women take notice of the maddest actions of men who are interested in them, when these concern themselves. It had been agreed between Madame de Staël and myself that, in order to avoid compromising her, I should never remain with her after midnight. Whatever the charm which I found in our conversations, and however passionate my desire not to let the matter stop at conversation, I had to submit to this firm resolution. But this evening, the time having seemed to fly faster than usual, I pulled out my watch, to demonstrate that the hour for my departure had not yet arrived. But the inexorable minute hand having deceived me, I was proceeding, with a movement of passion worthy

[1] Not the *Journal Intime*, but the *Carnet*, quoted by Sainte-Beuve.

of a child, to smash on the floor the instrument of my discomfiture, when Madame de Staël exclaimed: 'What madness! How absurd you are!' But what an inward smile I perceived shining through her reproaches! Decidedly this broken watch of mine is going to do me a great service."

And the next day's entry is:—

"I have not bought another watch. I have no longer any need of one."

There is a crow of triumph in the sentence. Benjamin Constant believed himself to have won a victory, whereas the truth was that he had let himself be caught in a net. Presently he was to discover that; but his cousin Rosalie saw it at once. "She is stronger than he is," she wrote; and her letters are full of her dislike of "the Ambassadress." For instance:—

"She would die if she had not a crowd round her. In the absence of cats she would make herself a court of rats, and even a court of insects would be better than nothing at all."

"She is very unhappy with advantages which would suffice to make ten other people happy; but she is passionately fond of Benjamin. God knows where their passion will lead them."

"I have seen my cousin de Staël, and my cousin the shorn sheep, two or three times. The day before yesterday, I called on them. I found her surrounded by the fox,[1] the little cat,[2] and the other.[3] She was resting one of her

[1] M. de Tracy. [2] Adrien de Meun. [3] Benjamin Constant.

elbows against the chest of the first, and toying with the head of the second, while the third stroked her neck and called her his 'dear little kitten.' The picture disgusted me, as did also their pleasantries at the expense of the Ambassador."

"I have seen M. de Staël for the first time, and my first impression of him is that he is more agreeable than all his wife's lovers. He seems crushed, timid, and overwhelmed. Her manner is haughty and contemptuous. She speaks in his presence of her *coquetterie* and her adoration of Benjamin, to whom she vows that she will devote her life."

And finally :—

"Our cousin de Staël has been in a great state of mind because our uncle was unwilling to see either her or her son. She cannot understand that a father should be anything but delighted to see his son loved by her. She speaks of him quite openly as 'the man whom I love best in the world, the man to whom I cling with all the vitality that is left to me,' and never suspects the scandal she is causing."

Madame de Staël, in truth, very seldom had the fear of scandal before her eyes or shrank from the public advertisement of her attachments. It was part of her conception of love that she should openly use her influence to advance the interests of her lovers, who, on their part, were seldom backward in availing themselves of her services. We have seen how, at the beginning of the Revolution, she pushed M. de Narbonne into

the office of Minister of War, and how he repaid her with ingratitude. The time was coming when she could be helpful in similar ways to other friends.

In March 1795, M. de Staël resumed his position as Swedish Ambassador in Paris. In May of the same year Madame de Staël joined him there, and reopened her salon, establishing relations not only with her old Royalist friends, but with such prominent politicians as Boissy-d'Anglas, Tallien, and Barras. Her position, however, was delicate and difficult; and her manœuvres were hardly compatible with her diplomatic status. Her husband was insolently slapped on the back by a hot Republican and called a "foreign spy"; and she herself would probably have been expelled if she had not retreated. A letter from her father to Henri Meister, dated January 2, 1796, announces her arrival at Coppet, adding that "M. Constant was her travelling companion." She remained there, or in the neighbourhood, throughout that year and a portion of the next. Benjamin Constant was with her most of the time, and her husband, his Embassy having been again suspended, joined her late in September 1796. Rosalie de Constant's letters, quoted above, were written during this period. In the spring of 1797, however, we find her once more in Paris, after stopping on the way at Hérivaux, in Seine-et-Oise (where Benjamin Constant also stayed), and renewing her activities on her friends' behalf.

Barras, in his Memoirs, draws a graphic picture of her exertions on behalf of Talleyrand, the perfumed unbelieving Bishop, whose mistress he declares her to have been in the days before the emigration. "Il faut faire marcher les femmes" was, according to Barras, the Bishop's motto; and he describes how Madame de Staël assailed him again and again in his Cabinet with the demand that he should do something for her friend. She entered, he says, with her hair and her dress in disorder, threw herself into an arm-chair, seized him by both hands, and dragged him to a seat beside her, speaking breathlessly.

"'Barras,' she exclaimed, 'Barras, my friend, you are the only person in the world whom I can rely upon. Without you we are lost—lost altogether. Do you know? But no, you do not know, or you would not leave me so cruelly embarrassed. Do you know,' she continued in a voice interrupted with sobs, 'what *he* has said, what *he* just now repeated to me?'

"'What who said? What is the matter, madame?'

"'Barras, my friend,' she repeated, pressing my hands more tightly than ever, and rolling her eyes like an epileptic. 'My God, it is of our poor Talleyrand that I am speaking to you. Do you know what has just happened to him?'

"'What, madame?'

"'I have just parted from him. Perhaps he is no longer alive. He told me that he would throw himself into the Seine if you did not make

him Minister of Foreign Affairs. He has only ten louis between him and starvation.'

"'But has he no other resources? His friends?'

"'His friends? I am one of them myself. I have supported him up till now, and have been glad to do it. But now he has no home, whether with me or elsewhere; and when one has no ready money and no lucrative profession, and nothing in the world but debts, the situation is truly cruel. We must get him out of it. My dear Barras, we are lost. Talleyrand is going to drown himself. He is a dead man if you do not make him Minister. If you have absolutely disposed of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, give him another. He will be equally suitable for it. He is versatile; he is capable of everything.'"

And so on for many pages. Barras believed, or says that he believed, that if he had attached "personal and sentimental conditions" to the advancement of Talleyrand, Madame de Staël would have acceded to them on the spot; though in the end, as we know, the Bishop got his preferment on his merits.

Benjamin Constant was also introduced by Madame de Staël to the Director. "I will not say," he writes, "which of the two brought the other; for, whatever calumny may have said to the contrary, I protest here, to the honour of Madame de Staël, that I never really knew to which sex she belonged." She led Benjamin Constant by the hand, presented him as "a young man of prodigious ability who is on our side,"

and the author of a pamphlet entitled *De la Force du Gouvernement actuel de la France, et de la Nécessité de s'y rallier*. Barras perceived his talents, and he was, in this way, launched in politics, with a prospect of a career—albeit a career which, for various reasons, never came to very much.

The curious thing is, however, that at the very time when Madame de Staël was so zealously serving his interests Benjamin Constant began to feel his fetters gall. Outwardly his life was that of a rising politician and a young man of fashion. He held his own among the *muscadins* and *incroyables* of the Directorate—those elegant dandies who lorded it in the streets and salons, now that the reign of sans-culottism was over. But these externals did not faithfully reflect his inner life, of which we get two striking glimpses in two interesting letters written to his aunt, Madame de Nassau. The first letter is written from Hérivaux on May 18, 1797, and the essential passages are as follows:—

"I write to you, my dear aunt, from the profoundest solitude, in the midst of my forests, and with the feeling that nothing but a greater stability in my situation is required to make me tolerably happy. I write to ask you if you can help me to supply that need. A tie to which I cling from a sense of duty, or, if you will have it so, from weakness—but to which I feel sure that I shall continue to hold fast until a more real duty emancipates me from it, since I cannot break it without confessing that I am tired of

it, which I am too polite to do—a tie which plunges me into a world which I have ceased to care for, drags me away from the country which I love, makes me profoundly unhappy, and can only be broken by a shock which I feel myself incapable of giving it: such a tie, I say, has held me enchained for the last two years.

"I am isolated without being independent, subjugated without being united. I see the last years of my life slipping away without either the repose of solitude or the amenities of legitimate affection. It is in vain that I have tried to break my bonds. My character is such that I cannot resist the complainings of another by the opposition of my will, especially when it is possible for me to postpone my emancipation from hour to hour without distressing inconvenience. In this way I wear myself out in a position unfavourable to my tastes, to the occupations which I prefer, and to the tranquillity of my life. Besides, supposing the tie broken, I shall only find myself in a solitude which will intensify the picture of the pain, real or imaginary, which I shall be told that I have caused. To console myself for this I must at least make someone happy.

"Do you guess, my dear aunt, to what I am working up? To a project which I have had in my mind for the last year—about which I have written you twenty letters (though I have torn them all up). In a word, I am going to ask you to find me a wife. I want one in order to be happy. And, in order that I may feel for her beforehand every sentiment of friendship, I want her to come to me from you. . . . I should like her to have a little fortune; and as for herself,

I would rather that she were Genevese than Swiss, because it would suit me, newly naturalised as a Frenchman, to marry a Frenchwoman. Let her be not more than sixteen, tolerably pretty, without any conspicuous defect, of simple and orderly habits, capable of supporting life in solitary retirement, reasonable enough to be willing to live eight leagues from Paris and go there but seldom. As for her character—I leave that to you. As for wit—I am sick and tired of it."

This is the first sign of revolt; and it seems to have been the fate of Madame de Staël first to conquer men with her wit, and then to weary them with it. Again and again we shall see how Benjamin Constant found her vivacity overwhelming, and how it made him long for the quiet domesticities for which, at bottom, he was not less unfit than for the life of high-strung nervous tension. This time, however, the revolt was quickly followed by reconquest; and in a letter dated July 1, 1797, we see him retracting.

"You wish, then, most amiable of aunts, that your nephew should remain a celibate. Your will be done! I resign myself thereto because my legitimate sovereign has returned, and my project of insurrection is abandoned. To speak seriously, I have received fresh and so great proofs of the devotion of the person in question—to whom I thought it better, for the moment, both for her sake and for my own, to appear less attached—that I could not without displaying the most lively ingratitude, or without laying up for myself

a store of bitter regrets in the future, think of doing anything whatever that would be painful to her. I beg and entreat you, therefore, my dear aunt, to forget the portion of my letter bearing on that subject, and, above all, to show it to no one, and to remember only those passages of it which relate to my sentiments towards yourself."

What, then, we have to inquire, had happened between these two letters, accounting for the quick revulsion of sentiment? Nothing less, we find, than that Madame de Staël, rushing through life like a whirlwind, and insisting upon her share of all emotions and all experiences, had found time to bear yet another child—Albertine de Staël, afterwards to be known as Duchesse de Broglie, and one of the great Protestant ladies of France. Nothing is more clear than that Benjamin Constant believed that he, and not M. de Staël—who had so long been absent from his wife and was so soon to divorce her—was the child's father. The proof in these letters would almost suffice by itself, and it does not stand alone. Other proofs, not less eloquent, will greet us, when the time comes to turn over the pages of that *Journal Intime* in which Benjamin Constant wrote his secret thoughts in cipher, and in which the lonely man's cry for the "dear Albertine" whom he loves, and whom he would like to have with him always, recurs and recurs like a refrain.

CHAPTER X

M. and Madame de Staël separate—The alleged "duel" with Napoleon—Publication of *De la Littérature*—Death of M. de Staël—Why Madame de Staël did not then marry Benjamin.

It was in the summer of 1798 that M. de Staël definitely separated from his wife. The few years that remained to him were chiefly given to gambling, prodigality, and the heaping up of debts. Madame de Staël, during the same period, was perpetually passing to and fro between Paris and Coppet, with Benjamin Constant often, but not always, in her company. She had written (before Byron) that love was woman's whole existence; but her aphorism was only true of herself at the hours of agitation when love had just departed or was threatening to depart. When love was secure, it was an episode to be "classed," and indulged concurrently with others. It seemed secure at this stage; and the magnet which obviously drew her was her ambition to shine in literature, in society, and in politics.

The politics of the period we must largely take for granted. They are very complicated; and Madame de Staël's connection with them was rather that of an impetuous partisan than an

effective force. Her salon might be a centre of intrigue and a source of apprehension, but her practical influence has been exaggerated. She could do a great deal to advance individuals, but very little to direct events. Her *protégés* did not remain in leading strings. Talleyrand in particular did not, but easily accommodated himself to the new conditions which she resisted. Even Benjamin Constant was comparatively in favour with the powers which she displeased. She always had the air of being dangerous; but circumstances were too strong for her, and she never actually became so.

On one occasion she achieved a great personal triumph—when the French, in 1798, invaded the Canton of Vaud, to liberate its citizens from the yoke of the Bernese, who had subjugated the country in 1536, and treated it as a dependency ever since. Coppet was on the line of march, and Necker, in great alarm, destroyed letters and other papers which he feared would be compromising. Thanks to his daughter's influence, however, he was assured of the protection of the French Republic, and his name was erased from the list of proscribed *émigrés*. Twenty officers were entertained by Madame de Staël at Coppet. They behaved with absolute correctitude, and everything passed off well.

With the rise of Napoleon, however, Madame de Staël's influence began to decline. Her admirers are fond of speaking of her "long

duel" with the Emperor; but here again one scents exaggeration. The idea of a long duel suggests some sort of equality between the combatants, and some similarity in the weapons used. Those conditions were wanting—and were bound to be wanting—in this case. Madame de Staël was only one among many obstacles that the strong man swept out of his path in order that he might get on with the work which he had appointed himself to do. He could not have salons intriguing against him when he was restoring order after a long period of confusion. She must support him or take the consequences. The alternative was offered to her almost in so many words, and she was found defiant. The consequence was an injunction to remove to a distance of forty leagues from Paris. She continued her defiance, making the welkin ring with her protestations, tried to make herself a figure not less conspicuous than her enemy in the eyes of Europe, and so brought down further persecution on her head. But she was rather a victim who could not be silenced than an antagonist to be reckoned with. Napoleon no doubt treated her very badly, esteeming her a troublesome termagant. But he rather bullied than fought her, and to speak of their "duel" is a misuse of language.

This, however, is to travel somewhat beyond the scope of the present volume. The ten years of exile in which the centre of Madame de Staël's

interest in life was to be emotional rather than political had not yet begun, and the course of certain intervening events must be traced before we come to them.

Of her intimate relations with Benjamin Constant there is hardly any mention in her letters, and very little in his. We note, however, that the maintenance of the *liaison* is estranging him from his excellent aunt, Madame de Nassau. In letter after letter he protests against her coldness to him, which he attributes to this cause. At the same time, in his letters to his cousin Rosalie, we find indications that his thoughts are beginning to stray occasionally from her whom he has called his legitimate sovereign. An interest revives in the Charlottechen whom we have already met, and whom we are to encounter yet again.

"I should like to know," he asks, "what has become of a Madame de Marenholz or de Hardenberg, who must be thirty-one years of age, and if Victor has seen her. Do not tell me where, but only tell me whether he has seen her, and whether she spoke to him of me." Having received the news he seeks, he writes: "I was very much interested by what you told me concerning a lady who interested me exceedingly in days gone by. I should indeed be frivolous and unfeeling if seven short years sufficed to make me forget in that way one who is only five-and-twenty leagues away from me." Trifling words, but perhaps symptomatic of a good deal.

Charlotte always figures in Benjamin Constant's life as the woman to whom his heart turns instinctively when he is weary of emotions and agitations. Evidently he is feeling that weariness now; for he proceeds, with a reference to Madame de Staël: "The fair lady who lately arrived from Geneva lives in a whirlwind of balls, *fêtes*, and evening parties. Sometimes she drags me with her to them, but more often I make my escape."

Madame de Staël's life, indeed, at this juncture was a rush with which no man enamoured of tranquillity could well keep pace. To all appearance her social duties filled her days and nights. No social gathering was complete without her, and she had a finger in every political pie. But she was, at the same time, not less busy with literary work. She was collecting material for her first novel, *Delphine* — writing to Henri Meister for information which she required for it; and in 1800 appeared her essay, *De la Littérature considérée dans ses Rapports avec les Institutions sociales.*

It is not a work which we need pause to criticise with any care. The dust which has accumulated upon it in the bookcase is in itself no inconsiderable criticism. It is taken down from the shelf not by those who are interested in the subject, but by those who are interested in the author. Literature is the peg on which the writer hangs her opinions about things in general;

a discourse on literature is the medium through which she expresses an ebullient personality. She declares for the perfectibility of human nature—a belief which, wherever we find it, is always an emotion rather than a reasoned conviction, common to those who feel good, but frame their own moral laws as they go along. She alternates flat-footed platitudes with brilliant intuitions, not recognising the difference between the two things, but being inspired by fits and starts. She foresees Cæsarism as the deplorable end of the Republic, and so, of course, increases the sum of her offences against the Cæsar that is to be. Napoleon sent his brother to warn her, but the warning fell upon deaf ears; for she had all her father's pride, and more than her father's obstinacy, and was accustomed to pull wires and get her way.

The book had been out about two years—had made an immense stir and got into a second edition—had been the centre of a controversy in which Chateaubriand among others took a hand—when the death of M. de Staël gave his wife her freedom. He had been ill, and she had returned to him in circumstances about which very little can be said because very little is known. Certainly there is nothing to indicate that the return implied repentance for acts of infidelity. It was impossible for Madame de Staël to repent of anything, because it was impossible to her to believe that anything that she

did was wrong. She anticipated George Sand in confusing the call of desire with the voice of conscience, and, as has been said above, in "feeling good" because of her loyalty to the moral standards which her inclination improvised. She had, at the same time, however, irresistible impulses of pity, and an imperturbable conviction of the consoling value of her presence to the distressed. We do not know whether M. de Staël desired her to be with him in his illness or not. Perhaps he did; for he seems to have been a weak man and not proud. Perhaps—but the speculation is idle. His wife was at any rate quite sure that she was wanted. Capable of all the emotions in turn, she felt them all intensely at their several hours. Connubial emotion was to have its turn with the rest. One can almost see her possessed by it, and hear her exclaiming, "My place is by his side."

She joined him, and was taking him to Coppet, whence he was to travel to Aix-les-Bains, to take the waters, when he died at Poligny of an apoplectic stroke. "All those," says the *Publiciste*, "who knew M. de Staël, know how well he merited, by the gentleness of his manners and the natural goodness of his disposition, the affection, esteem, and regrets of his family and his friends." "You have heard of my trouble," writes his wife to Meister, and then passes on to other subjects. Benjamin Constant, on the date of his death, the news of which had not yet reached him, wrote to

his friend Fauriel:[1] "Perhaps happiness is impossible to me, as I cannot enjoy it with the best and cleverest of women."

In due course, however, the news reached him. He joined the best and cleverest of women at Coppet, and the question came up for discussion whether they should avail themselves of their freedom to get married. That the question was answered in the negative we know, though why or by which of them it was so answered is not so clear. The general belief is that Benjamin Constant made an offer of marriage which Madame de Staël declined; and the theory is borne out by a sentence which we find written, seven years later, in his Diary: "I am between two women, one of whom did me a wrong by refusing to marry me, while the other is about to inflict an injury on me by doing so." The statement has also been made that Madame de Staël agreed to the offer, but imposed an unacceptable condition—that she should retain her own name, which she had made illustrious. She did not want, she said, "to put Europe off the track—*désorienter l'Europe.*"

Very likely she did not. The entanglement was such that there may well be several explanations of the solution found for it, each with its element of truth. Probably, however, we come

[1] A politician, principally famous for the rapidity with which he resigned the various offices which he held, and subsequently of some eminence as an historian.

nearest to absolute truth in the letters of Rosalie de Constant, who expected the marrriage, and was sincerely disappointed that it did not take place.

Rosalie had considered the question as far back as 1796, when there was talk of a divorce, but had doubted, rightly, as it proved, whether Madame de Staël would have the nerve to seek that scandalous solution of the problem. "It is much simpler for her," she wrote, "to continue to live as she is living now." She deplored, however, Benjamin's undignified position as "cavalier perpetually in attendance." He was too clever, and too important, she thought, for that; and she describes the situation as "distressing" to his friends. She believes, however, that it is a situation which M. de Staël's death must necessarily terminate. "Benjamin," she writes, "is coming to Coppet. Everybody is putting forward reasons against their marriage. It seems to me that it cannot fail to take place."

That was in May 1802. In July Rosalie is not so confident. Benjamin has, in the meantime, been on a visit to her, and she reports: "His character is like that of a wayward child, who always acts on the impulse of the moment and can never be depended upon. He seemed to me to be very much frightened by the idea of the marriage which I thought so certain." At the beginning of September she visits Coppet, and finds that matters have made no progress, though Benjamin is "doing the honours" of the establishment.

"His position here is very curious. He pays his court to no one, has everything at his command, and grumbles from time to time like a spoilt child." Not until August 1804 does she show that she has received confidences which enable her to understand the situation; but then she writes:—

"It seemed to me such a natural thing for her to marry Benjamin when she was free that no doubt of her doing so occurred to me. It appears that they were both so afraid of the step that they came to an arrangement. She had other lovers, and he had a constant desire to run after other women; but their intellects unite them. No other man offers her such intellectual resources as his. She is absolutely determined to maintain her hold over him, and keeps him by her side, now by habit, now by tyranny, and now by requiring services from him. He remains, but murmurs."

This was her statement to her brother Charles. Another interesting letter, written to Madame de Staël herself, of which only a tattered fragment remains, contains this notable passage:—

"Ah! how much I should have loved you if you had married Benjamin and made him happy. What would I not then have done to deserve a little friendship from you! The *identity of your feelings* in the matter imposes silence upon my thoughts and words, but I look back with regret upon the wishes which I used to form."

Reading these scraps, and reading also Madame de Staël's statement, made several years afterwards, that Benjamin did propose marriage to her,

but with the manner of a man discharging a duty and hoping to be refused, we cannot be in much doubt as to what happened. Everything happened that could happen. The subject was discussed in all its bearings, and approached in different moods on different days. Everything was said, in one mood or another, that could imaginably be said; and every loophole was left for every possible reproach. The bed-rock fact was that the lovers could not be happy either together or apart. They had discovered this already, and were to rediscover it many times before the end. Meanwhile they compromised, and continued to compromise, and let things drift.

Benjamin Constant's relatives thought that, if he was not to marry Madame de Staël, he had better marry someone else—no matter whom, provided that the match were "suitable." In spite of experience, they doubtless clung to the notion that, if he married, he would "settle down." Living, for a time, in close retirement and great solitude, in his small country seat in France, he toyed with the idea. Rosalie had pointed out to him that a certain young lady at Geneva was very eligible. "I think of her," he replies, "with tenderness, and among the vague ideas which charm my retreat I give her recollection the first place." But the idea remains vague, and must remain so, for good reasons.

"Consideration for a person who, though she has

more drawbacks than this lady, has also much more real and much higher merit, controls me to-day as it has always controlled me. Nothing would be more unendurable to me than that this person should be unhappy or should suffer, and I should think no sacrifice too great to avoid being the cause of her unhappiness. Give me a few letters about her too. Your letters shall be scrupulously burnt, and you shall not be compromised in any way."

That is the real and invincible reason. He mentions others—that he has vowed himself to a solitary life with which the lady whose heart and hand are proposed to him would be bored; that her desire is to be married anyhow, and not to be married to him in particular; and that this desire, "though perfectly legitimate, is not very flattering to the bridegroom." But having given these reasons, he soon harks back to the thought that is uppermost in his mind. Estranged from Madame de Staël, he pleads for news of her.

"I know, my dear Rosalie, how you dislike speaking to me of a person interesting to both of us, whose qualities and defects are sometimes the charm and sometimes the torment of my life. I am going nevertheless to ask you to conquer this repugnance. I claim that from your friendship for me. It is perhaps the most important service that you could render me at the most important crisis of my fate.

"You can depend upon it that, two minutes after your letters have been read, they shall be

burnt, and your name shall not be so much as mentioned. Besides, it is not that I want to have an explanation with her or to justify myself in anybody's eyes. It is for my own satisfaction alone that I should like to be informed—because I am unhappy about the unhappiness of which I am told that I am the cause, and because, if I could be assured that this unhappiness has ceased, and above all that another object of interest distracts her at the moment when her distress is depicted to me in the most painful colours—my calm would return to me, the remorse which I feel, and which tortures me, would cease, and I should be able to continue in my freedom without having my plans and my life upset any more by the supernatural influence of her voice and her letters, and her assurance that she cannot live without me, and that I make her suffer."

It is the letter of a man who has lost his way in life, and it reads the more strangely when we know that Benjamin Constant was in regular correspondence with Madame de Staël at the time when it was written, and find him insisting that his letters to Rosalie must on no account be shown to her. "I always write to her," he says, "with great consideration for her feelings, only laying before her such of my sentiments as can cause her pleasure. I tell her nothing that is untrue, but I do not tell her all the truth. Consequently, whereas she complains at present of the indifference of my letters, she would be indignant at their perfidy if she saw this one, and a

thing would happen to me which has happened a hundred times before, and will, I think, always happen: I should be condemned for the good which I desired to do, and the pain which I was anxious to avoid giving." He cannot, however, he continues, remain any longer the *amant en titre* of a woman whom he is not going to marry; and he concludes:—

"You alone have done me a little good. You alone have given me the strength to resist a torrent to which I had been painfully yielding for years. If I were not confident that you would approve of my conduct, I should suffer much more than I do."

But if Benjamin Constant believed that he could resist the torrent for more than a few weeks, he had misjudged his strength, as we are now about to see.

CHAPTER XI

Publication of *Delphine*—A *roman-à-clef*—Necker writes a novel—Social life at Coppet—And at Geneva—Correspondence with Camille Jordan—He refuses to travel with Madame de Staël in Italy—She goes to Germany with Benjamin Constant instead.

Delphine was published about six months after M. de Staël's death, in November 1803. It is long—very long—a great deal too long for modern tastes. The story is told in letters, and there are 218 of them, covering 698 pages of small print. The readers who do not read the book are nowadays in the majority, even in France. Times change, and our tastes change with them. It made a great stir at its hour, however; partly because it was by Madame de Staël, who could not do so much as cross the room without making a stir; partly because of the allegation that it attacked morality.

Into the moral side of the question we need not enter. In polemics morality is seldom clearly distinguished from the conventional hypocrisies of a period. The distinction was certainly too subtle for Madame de Genlis, who was Madame de Staël's principal assailant; and the interest which it is still possible to take in the novel in no way depends upon the views which it expresses by implication upon such matters as divorce and

suicide. We must read it, in the first instance, as a *roman-à-clef*, and in the second place as a mirror of the writer's mind.

Several of the characters are drawn from well-known people. The domesticated Madame de Cerlèbe is no other than the author's cousin, Madame Necker de Saussure. The original of M. de Lebensei—"the most remarkably brilliant man whom one could conceivably encounter"—is as obviously Benjamin Constant. Talleyrand was another of her models, and he knew it. "I hear," he said to her, "that you have put both me and yourself into your romance—and that we are both disguised as women." He indeed admittedly figured in it as Madame de Vernon, so seductively amiable in her manners, yet at heart so unscrupulously selfish. It was the novelist's revenge upon the Bishop, whose motto had been "Il faut faire marcher les femmes,"—who had made use of her when he was friendless, but had dropped her when her intimacy seemed likely to compromise him in Napoleon's eyes. And she is, of course, herself Delphine. If she is not disguised as a woman, she does at least appear in the disguise of youth and beauty.

The novel is not, however, like Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, a veiled autobiography. Nothing had happened in the author's own life corresponding to the sensational incidents related. The correspondence is only on the plane of thought and feeling; and it was solely this

correspondence that Madame Necker de Saussure had in her mind when she wrote that "Corinne is the ideal Madame de Staël; Delphine is the real woman as she was in the days of her youth." The antithesis is perhaps a little forced; but it is at any rate true that Madame de Staël put a great deal of herself into *Delphine*, and that we can trace through it not only the sentiments on which she lived, but also the marks of the sentimental experiences which she had undergone.

She is crying for happiness throughout the book, almost as a child cries for the moon. Happiness in marriage is the ideal—but it is so hard, so rare, and "fate has decided against a woman from the day on which she marries a man whom she does not love." There is nothing for her but "to extinguish her sentiments and let her heart dry up." But that too is hard, even for a woman whom beauty has not favoured: "Many men have ennobled a natural ugliness by the laurels which they have gained, but love is women's whole existence; the story of their lives begins and ends with love." It is a sentiment which we have met before in the *Essay on the Influence of the Passions*; and it seems to lead us at least half-way to Madame de Staël's second ideal—her *pis aller*—happiness in love, without reference to marriage. *Corinne*, published four years later, is its formal manifesto; but already, in *Delphine*, it appears to be foreshadowed, and already, as we know, Madame de Staël had, in practice, inclined to the pursuit of it. We

seem to read the record of experience in this reflection :—

"In general, I think, a man whose character is cold easily wins the love of a woman whose heart is passionate. He captivates and holds your interest by making you believe in a secret which he does not express; while his lack of self-abandonment arouses, for the moment at least, a woman's anxious and impressionable temperament. *Liaisons* so formed are not perhaps the happiest and the most durable, but they have the more power to agitate the soul that is weak enough to yield to them."

Such sentiments are only written down by women who have discovered them to be true; and we know who had taught them to Madame de Staël. Probably General Guibert in the first instance; certainly M. de. Narbonne in the second; possibly Talleyrand in the third; unquestionably Benjamin Constant in the fourth. Not one of them belonged to the category of men who gush. Each of them in turn, in his relations with Madame de Staël, had seemed to wear a mask of indifference, to remove it, and to resume it. Sometimes it had been her fate to tear off the mask violently and find that indifference itself was underneath. Hence the extreme bitterness of her bitter cry.

The time round about the publication of *Delphine* was mostly spent in Switzerland. Madame de Staël had received a hint from the highest quarters that she had better stay there,

and she took it. She had her children to educate, and her father to look after. The old man was so excited by the success of his daughter's novel that he too sat down to write a work of fiction. He had maintained in conversation that the domestic affections might, no less than passionate love, lead up to tragedy, and his story was an exercise upon the theme. *Suites Funestes d'une seule Faute*, "The Disastrous Consequences of a Single Error," is its somewhat tract-like title. Let those read it who can. It has the merit, at any rate, of brevity.

Certain social distractions also mitigated the exile. Madame de Staël had her own society at Coppet, and the society of Geneva was open to her. In the lists of those whom she received at her home we meet the names of Sismondi,[1] Bonstetten,[2] Madame de Krudener,[3] and Madame Récamier; but our picture of the Coppet Salon will be better deferred until we come to its later, palmier period. Of the occasional visits to Geneva there is a picturesque account in the *Bibliothèque Universelle* from the pen of Mallet d'Hauteville. The parties which she attended, he says, "had something of the stiffness and etiquette of a Court;" and he continues:—

"There were times when this little foreign Court invaded the drawing-rooms of the town. The

[1] The economist and historian.

[2] At one time Bernese Governor of Nyon. An amateur of letters, and a friend of Gray.

[3] Author of *Valérie*. Afterwards she found religion, and became a missionary.

folding-doors used to be thrown wide open, and the authoress entered at the head of her retinue. She was attired as a Sibyl, just as she is represented in her portraits, with her black hair framed in her turban, and her fingers waved a little spray of leaves, which moved faster and faster to keep pace with her thoughts. Outside the circle of those who took an active part in the conversation was grouped a ring of silent listeners; while young *ingénues*, observing the celebrated lady from a distance, wondered how it was that she inspired such lively sentiments of regard."

This homage, however, did not content her; and she found still less satisfaction in the beauty of the scenery. She could look at Mont Blanc, and sigh for the gutter of the Rue du Bac. She was taken for a trip to Chamonix, and returned, Mallet d'Hauteville tells us, "breathless and indignant, wanting to know what crime she had had to expiate by a visit to this terrible country." Paris was her Rome, her Mecca, her Jerusalem, on which her eyes were always fixed. "Actualities," she wrote to Gérando,[1] "are what exiles such as we are live on. My father and I are not so fond of rustic life as you, and we are eager for anecdotes even in the presence of Mont Blanc."

She seems, at this period, to have been corresponding with everybody about everything. She wrote about the philosophy of Kant to Villers,

[1] Marie-Joseph de Gérando (1772–1842) was a voluminous writer, chiefly on educational subjects; an authority, notably, on the education of deaf mutes.

who had lately introduced the transcendental teaching to French readers, and who was much too polite to tell her that she did not understand it. She inquired from Gérando about her early love, M. de Narbonne. Did he still think of her? Had he read *Delphine*, and, if so, what did he say about it? She laments, again and again, that she is, and has reason to be, unhappy. "I have come to the conclusion," she tells Gérando, "that suffering is the natural condition of human kind, and I live with a pain in my heart which is like a physical ailment."

In the midst of all this, however, we find her unfaithful, at least in thought, to Benjamin Constant, and temporarily admitting a rival to her affections, in the person of Camille Jordan.

He was a journalist and minor politician of the period. During the Terror he had become an *émigré* as the consequence of his conduct at the revolt of Lyons, and he had been driven into exile a second time through his opposition to the Government of the day. Now he was back again, and was on terms of intimacy with Gérando, who was living at Madame de Staël's country seat at Saint-Ouen. That was how her friendship with him began; and already in 1801 we find her writing to Gérando about him.

"I have," she confesses, "the most tender feeling for him; and it is a painful thought to me that you will find him a wife, and that he will thus have affections which will thrust me away from

him. I shall write my first letter to him to warn him against matrimony."

She did more than this, as we know from the collection of her letters which Sainte-Beuve published in the *Revue des deux Mondes*. This is the first passage which seems to indicate something more than sisterly regard :—

"I had a lock of my hair which used to belong to poor M. de Staël. I was meaning to send it to you, but you appeared so engrossed in admiration of Madame de Krudener's fair tresses that I feel shy of offering my own black locks, and they shall stay where they are until we meet again."

But that should not be long if Madame de Staël could help it. There follows an invitation—"not to be mentioned even to Mathieu or to our good friend (Gérando)"— to travel in Italy.

"I have money enough to arrange for you to make an agreeable journey practically without expense to yourself. Benjamin will be in Paris for the winter. . . . If you do not agree to this plan which I have at heart, *do not speak of it to anyone*, for I must not allow this idea to cool the affection of my other friends. To forget all that has been troubling me during the last six months—to forget it with you whom I love so well under the blue Italian sky—that is what will make me happy."

Camille Jordan, however, excused himself; and in the next letter we read :—

"I knew very well, my dear Camille, that what

is commonly called reason was not on the side of my proposal; but I felt a passionate desire for something better than reason when this idea came to me. Let us say no more about it. . . . My revenge now limits itself to the wish that when you read *Delphine* you may be sorry that our plan has vanished into thin air."

That was the end of the episode, though by no means the end of the friendship; for, in Madame de Staël's case, friendship and love always merged into one another by infinitely fine gradations. When she could not be a man's mistress, she was always willing to be a sister to him. That had been the end of her relations with M. de Narbonne; that was the end of her relations with Camille Jordan. Presently, in spite of her warning, he got married; and her letter of congratulation ran as follows:—

"I admit that I am not very fond of seeing my friends get married, but when they do so, I should be a very indifferent friend if I did not try to enter into their feelings. If I meet Madame Camille, I shall be as nice with her as I have been with you. Is not that as it should be?"

And she kept her word. She complained, in a subsequent letter, that Camille was "stiff" with her. But she also sent her compliments to Madame Camille,—"provided she is willing to receive them."

For the moment, however, all her activities were directed to obtaining permission to reside in Paris. She set her friends to work. Her father

petitioned the Emperor on her behalf—fragments of the rough drafts of his petition are treasured among the Coppet archives—but all in vain. It was evident that she must come to Paris without leave or not at all. The breach of the Peace of Amiens, and the massing of the Army of England at Boulogne, seemed likely to monopolise Napoleon's attention, and there was a chance—especially as his brother Joseph was her friend—that he would forget to turn her out. At least, it should be safe for her to settle somewhere near Paris; so she packed and started.

First she visited Madame Récamier at Saint-Brice, and nothing happened. Then she settled at Mafliers, about ten miles from the capital, and things began to happen. "It is determined by the Government," Fouché had written, "that this foreigner shall not remain in France." Madame de Genlis, her virtuous rival in literature, had whispered to the First Consul, not only that she was in France, but also that the road to her house was enlivened by the conversation of her visitors. She received a hint to move, and the hint was followed by a visit from an officer of *gendarmerie*, conveying the order that she should set off within four-and-twenty hours. She protested; and he used his discretion to the extent of allowing her to go first to Paris, where she thought her friends, Junot and Joseph Bonaparte, might be able to get her sentence rescinded.

They did their best. Joseph went so far as to

offer her a temporary refuge at his country seat at Morfontaine. She stayed three days there, but felt her position painfully. Treated with every courtesy, she was nevertheless surrounded by officials, and could not display her emotions or speak her mind. Where to go? was her problem.

"My father," she writes in *Dix années d'exil*, "would have received with unspeakable kindness his poor storm-beaten bird; but I feared my own emotions of disgust at finding myself sent back to a country which I was accused of finding a little tedious. I also felt the desire to recover, through the good reception which I was promised in Germany, from the outrage which the First Consul was inflicting upon me. I wanted to oppose the kindly welcome of ancient dynasties to the impertinence of the dynasty which was preparing to subjugate France. This sentiment of *amour-propre* carried the day."

So it was settled that she would go to Germany. Joseph Bonaparte hurried to Saint Cloud to procure the necessary permission, for which she had to sit and wait in a suburban inn, and also gave her letters of introduction at Berlin. Benjamin Constant, in spite of the Camille Jordan episode,—of which perhaps he did not know, since the young man had been solicited to hold his tongue about it,—was willing to accompany her. They set off sorrowfully; but by the time they reached Châlons, he had, she relates, restored her to cheerfulness by his "astonishing conversation."

CHAPTER XII

Travel in Germany—The German view of Madame de Staël—Life at Weimar—And at Berlin—Benjamin Constant's studies and amusements—Extracts from his Diary—Death of Necker.

In a sense, and up to a point, the German journey was a triumphal progress.

The Germans, of course, had their own point of view, and made their reservations. They were quite sure that Madame de Staël did not understand their metaphysics, and they were right. "I do not like the Forms and the Categories," is a sentence from one of her letters about the philosophy of Kant; and in another letter she expressed the opinion that Kant's views as to the origin of our ideas were quite reconcilable with those of Locke. When she set out to interpret the Kantian doctrine to her countrymen, she paraphrased it into cloudy sentimental gush. To the horror of Crabb Robinson, who had tried to teach her what the categorical imperative really was, she began her restatement of the doctrine with the emotional qualification: "Pour les cœurs sensibles." The Germans, at any rate, knew better than that; and Goethe even went so far as to say that she did not appear to have any conception of the nature of "the thing commonly called duty"—a

thing which she was, indeed, at that stage, a little apt to confuse with her personal inclinations.

German poetry too was, to all intents and purposes, a closed book to her. She had, it is true, outgrown the stage at which she could write to Henri Meister: "I flatter myself that I already know everything that has been said in the German language and everything that is likely to be said in it in the course of the next half-century." She had begun to learn the language, and could read it a little though she could not talk it; and she admitted in theory that the German nation had a message to mankind. But whatever may have been the case when she had, for several years, had Schlegel to prompt her, she certainly did not understand the nature of that message then. Crabb Robinson said to her, point blank: "Madame, you have never understood Goethe, and you will never understand him;" and she could think of no better retort than: "Sir, I understand everything that is worthy of being understood. Whatever I do not understand is of no importance." Most of the Germans were of Crabb Robinson's opinion.

Most of the Germans, again, found Madame de Staël too voluble for their taste. Some of them resented the necessity of conversing with her in French. "I should think it my duty," said Voss, "to learn French before going to France;" and he considered that the French ought to learn German before going to Germany. To others it

seemed shocking that she skimmed lightly over the surface of subjects, instead of probing them to the bottom in quest of truth. "Madame de Staël," wrote Reichardt, "was much fonder of comparing the results of her inquiries with her personal opinions than of identifying herself with the object of her studies." The general complaint, however, was of the ceaselessness and volume of her talk. Goethe, sitting buried in reflection at the ducal supper-table, was hurt by her remark that he was never really brilliant until after he had got through a bottle of champagne. Schiller confessed to having had "a rough time" in dialogue with her, and declared that her departure left him feeling like a man who had just recovered from a serious illness.

And yet the progress was a triumph in the main. Germany had already interested itself in Madame de Staël. "I have to answer so many letters (mostly from Germans)," she had written, in 1801, "that half my life is thus taken up." Some of her writings had been translated and discussed. Her arrival was awaited, therefore, with a hush of expectation; and, wherever she went, glamour attended her. She was something more than the comet of a season; and even those who disapproved were dazzled.

Metz (though Metz was not then in Germany) was the first stage. It was there that she wrote that she did not know what she would have done without Benjamin. But the Prefect was "per-

fect" for her; and she had her opportunity of meeting M. de Villers,[1] with whom she had corresponded about Kant, though, as it happened, she did not find him quite the kindred soul that she expected. He had with him, she wrote, "a fat German woman whose precise attractions I have not been able to discover." What she did discover was that those attractions were no negligible quantity, but barred the path to intimacy with M. de Villers. She made an appointment to meet him alone in the Cathedral, and he kept it. But, says the editor of the Letters to Gérando, "he gave Madame de Staël to understand that he was linked by an invincible gratitude to Madame de Rodde and her family, though he would always behave to his new acquaintance as a devoted friend." She wrote him some letters complaining that his devotion was too limited in character, and then passed upon her way.

At Frankfort there was a delay, owing to the illness of Albertine de Staël, who caught scarlet fever; and it was not until the middle of December that the party arrived at Weimar.

No one needs to be reminded that Weimar was in those days the Teuton Athens. Goethe, Schiller, Wieland, and Herder were the great fixed stars of its literary firmament. The life was homely, but the ideas were not straitlaced. Uncongenial couples divorced each other without

[1] M. de Villers first introduced Kant's philosophy to the French. He became Professor of Literature at Göttingen.

malice, and lived happily ever afterwards. Duke Charles Augustus was the father and brother of his people. Duchess Louise was their hostess. Madame de Staël was at once made the most welcome of their guests. For a long time she supped every night at the Palace; and with the Duchess she formed a memorable friendship, the recollection of which is kept alive by an interesting correspondence, extending over a period of many years.

From Weimar Madame de Staël went on to Berlin, where she arrived in March 1804; and there the Weimar triumph was repeated. Joseph Bonaparte's introduction to Laforest, the French Ambassador, had made things easy for her. Among the personages whom she met were the Prince of Orange, the Prince and Princess of Brunswick, the Duchess of Courland, Princess Radziwill, Brinckmann, the Ambassador from Sweden, Fichte, Kotzebue, and A. W. Schlegel, whom she engaged to be her son's tutor (and incidentally her own) at a salary of 12,000 francs a year. A few sentences from a letter to Duchess Louise of Weimar will best give the picture of her reception at the Prussian Court.

"I went to see the reigning Queen; and the Court, on that day, was veritably imposing. At the instant of the Queen's entrance all the instruments of music began to play, and I experienced a truly lively emotion.

"The Queen, in all the distinction of her

beauty, appeared. She approached me, and, with many other complimentary phrases, addressed to me these words, which I really cannot forget: 'I hope, Madame, that you regard us as persons of sufficiently good taste to be extremely flattered by your arrival at Berlin. I was very impatient to make your acquaintance.'

"All the Princesses whom I saw at Weimar, and who love me, because your Highness has spoken of me, came up to kiss me. The King spoke to me very kindly, and I was surrounded by a kindness which touched my heart. . . .

"The Prince of Orange and Prince Radziwill called upon me on the morning of my arrival, and gave me permission to bring Auguste to the famous masquerade. All our society, for the last twenty days, has been thinking of nothing but the masquerade; rehearsals, dresses, ballets filled all their heads; and though I was a little late in my arrival at Berlin I really missed nothing on this occasion save a more intimate acquaintance with the dancing steps executed yesterday. We remained until three o'clock in the morning to see the Queen dance in a pantomime representing the return of Alexander to Babylon. There were two thousand spectators. . . .

"Several quadrilles succeeded that dance, and then Kotzebue arrived as a priest of Mercury—or perhaps it was as Mercury himself—with a wand in his hand and a crown of poppies on his head. . . ."

The letter was written in bed, the writer's head being "still full of the noise of drums and trumpets." In a letter to Gérando, of

approximately the same date, she tries to describe the effect of all this gaiety upon her spirits: "By dint of reflection I manage to endure life in spite of my exile; but *my heart strings are still wrung.*" Her chief satisfaction was probably in her fame—that fame which she was presently to describe as "a splendid mourning for happiness." Losing her sense of proportion, she could easily think that she was hardly less famous than Napoleon Bonaparte himself. That thought was doubtless more comforting than the consolations of German philosophy; and for the time being it seems to have outweighed even her sentimental interests. But then, on April 18, came the news that her father was lying dangerously ill at Coppet; and she posted in all haste back to Weimar, where Benjamin Constant was waiting for her.

In the whirl of excitement Benjamin Constant had slipped into the background of Madame de Staël's thoughts. It is not even clear how far he was willingly in attendance on her. We have already seen him, in the months immediately preceding his departure, discussing the question of marriage, and considering the suitability of various possible brides. His cousin Rosalie even supposed, for an instant, that he had decided on the step; and his denial breathed no special devotion to his mistress. "After so many years," he wrote, "of a tie much closer than marriage, I need to breathe the air of freedom." And then came the tidings of Madame de Staël's exile,

and her appeal, at a time when his political activities were temporarily suspended, and all his resolutions were scattered. "I suppose it seemed natural to you," he wrote to Rosalie, "that, in spite of my resolves of this summer, I did not hesitate to render to a person to whom I cannot cease to be attached in very sincere friendship all the services that I could in the most painful circumstance of her life. It is impossible to complain of one's friends at a time when they are unhappy."

He accompanied Madame de Staël, therefore, to Metz, to Frankfort, and to Weimar. At Frankfort he helped her, with great devotion, to nurse Albertine. At Weimar he took Albertine to the theatre—we shall find many indications, in the course of the narrative, of his passionate fondness for the child; but his attentions to the mother were not, at the time, conspicuous, and Crabb Robinson was even disposed to be sceptical of the gossip as to his relations with her.

His time was largely given to study. He was writing a History of Religions—the same History of Religions which he had begun to write on the backs of playing-cards in the boudoir of Madame de Charrière. He was not to finish it for many years to come; for his views on religion were always changing, and the necessity of recasting his work was always with him. Moreover—what is more important for our purpose—he began, in January 1804, the composition of that marvellous diary known as the *Journal Intime*. He wrote

it in Greek characters, as an indication that it was private and confidential; but it was, of course, easy enough for the inheritors of his papers to decipher it, and it was first printed in the *Revue Internationale* in 1887, and has since been reprinted, though there exists no English translation of it. It is a faithful record of events, and also of the diarist's inner life — a unique example of keen and candid introspection. Reading it, we feel that we know the lover of Madame de Staël far better than either she or any of his contemporaries knew him. In telling the remainder of the story we will follow it wherever possible.

The earlier entries are chiefly about his work and his German acquaintances. Goethe is full of wit and new ideas—"mais c'est le moins bonhomme que je connaisse." Wieland's is a French intelligence—"cold as a philosopher and lightheaded as a poet." Herder resembles "a soft warm bed in which one dreams agreeably." A dinner with the Bethmanns suggests the remark that "the commercial spirit is a tiresome thing," nothing more important having transpired in the conversation than that somebody had killed five snipe that morning. And so forth; even approbation being expressed in epigrams, but due thanks being always rendered for any helpful idea on the History of Religion. The Germans, it appears to Benjamin Constant, differ from the French in that, even when they are dull, as often happens, they are nearly always sane and well-informed.

By degrees, however, the Diary becomes more intimate. "A charming child!" is the entry when Albertine is taken to the theatre; but we read some way before we find any mention of Madame de Staël. "A letter from Madame Talma" is the first allusion to a relation to which we shall find further references; but the general impression is that the writer is weary of women. At one moment, indeed, when he has gone to Leipzig and is alone, he exclaims: "There is nothing in the world so good, so loving, and so devoted as a woman;" but this utterance seems more characteristic:—

"Dined with a number of women—brilliant women. Their brilliance consists of bustle without purpose—entirely a creation of Society, and in consequence artificial. So long as they are a little pretty that is all very well. Our physical interest in them makes us pardon the useless and ineffectual agitation of moral nature. But at a certain age women are no longer fit for society. There remains for them the *rôle* of friends—but of friends kept in retirement, receiving confidences and giving advice to men in whose interest they fill only the second or third place."

And what Benjamin Constant says of women in general, he also says of certain women in particular. There is a Madame Schac . . . . whom we need not try to identify, from whom he receives a *billet tendre*. "Poor woman!" is his comment. He is sure she would be better off in Oriental retirement; and he writes mournfully:—

"I write to Madame de Schac . . . . to take a sad, respectful, and tender farewell of her. Here is another inclination towards me which I do not desire. And the time will come when even that sort of thing will not be offered to me. Why are youth and beauty so proud? Do we never find humility and gentleness save when youth and beauty have departed?"

"A desirable woman! *C'est l'Enfer!*" is the comment on another lady, with whose husband Benjamin wants to go out to supper, in order that he may escape from her attentions; and then comes another general outburst, which is evidently directed at Madame de Staël, though there is no mention of her name.

"The attachment of some women, and the sway which they maintain over a man, to the great astonishment of the world at large, may be compared to the fatal sleep which overtakes travellers on the Great Saint Bernard. These travellers are not satisfied with their position, but they give way to the sensation of the moment, which every passing instant makes more difficult to resist. And death comes to them while they are making up their minds to get up and go."

That was written on the road from Weimar to Switzerland, where Benjamin had business to transact. As he bowled along in his post-chaise, he read Greek,—like a man of taste he much preferred Sophocles to Euripides,—reviewed his situation, and tried to fix his plans. He

wrote to Madame de Staël, recommending one Screiben as a tutor, but reflected: "The main thing is to know that he is the sort of man who will teach the children in addition to interesting the mother." But he tried to picture his own future without reference to her.

"Whence come the sad and sombre ideas which overwhelm me to-day? Have I then lost all power over myself? Is not my destiny in my own hands? Have I not recovered a power of work beyond what I had hoped for? In order to be happy I only need the will to be so. I should be so if I could make up my mind to three things: to live a purely literary life; to keep aloof from public affairs which I have quitted through a perfectly irreproachable line of conduct; to settle in a country in which I find light, security, and independence. That is all that I require. I wish all my efforts to tend to those ends. I must find a means of fixing my whole life in literary pursuits. Literature will satisfy all my aspirations. The things I know and the things I learn give me sufficient joy. If I lived for a hundred years, the study of the Greeks alone would be enough for me. I am reading the *Antigone.* What an admirable man was Sophocles!"

Then he analyses. Why is it that, whatever he does, people are always able to make out that he is in the wrong? It must be because he is sensitive, and because he is not a fool. "When one is a fool, one has all the fools on

one's side." And so to Lausanne, where his cousins and his aunts renew their advice to him to marry and settle down. He cannot stand the place. It is too dull and stupid. No one there takes any interest in his literary pursuits. "No one can understand what I say about anything." He will go back to Germany and settle there. His work shall be the one interest, the one consolation, of his life. But then comes sad and startling news, upsetting all his schemes.

"M. Necker is dead. What will become of his daughter? What despair for her in the present! What loneliness in the future! I want to see her, to console her, or at least to help her to bear up. Poor unhappy woman! When I recall her suffering, her anxiety, two months ago, and her lively joy, which was to be of such short duration. Better death than this pain. And the good M. Necker, how I regret him! So noble, so affectionate, so disinterested! Who now will be the guide of his daughter's existence?"

Again he looks into his own heart. He finds in himself a double personality—"one always watching the other." He is sad, and yet knows that the sadness will pass away; but he will not let it—"because I know that Madame de Staël needs me not only to console her, but to suffer with her." For the moment, therefore, his course is clear: "I have decided to set out again for Germany, to meet Madame de Staël, who is on her way back."

CHAPTER XIII

Madame de Staël returns to Coppet—The reason why she was not allowed to go to Paris—She decides to visit Italy—Benjamin Constant drags at his chain—Further extracts from his Diary.

Of the death of Necker, as of the death of Napoleon, it may be said that, whereas at one time it would have been an event, it was, when it occurred, only an item of news. He had risen from obscurity to fame; he had failed; he had been found out; he had been forgotten. That is his biography in a sentence. Napoleon's contempt for him was profound. "The old boy was maundering," was his comment when Necker submitted plans for a French Constitution; and after his death he summed him up as the very type of mediocrity—"with his pompousness, his fussiness, and his string of figures."

In the domestic circle, however, incense had always been lavishly burnt to him. He himself printed the eulogy in which his wife declared that "if men were originally angels, then I think that M. Necker must have been charged in that character with the task of clearing up chaos before the Creator deigned to descend and make the world." His daughter worshipped him no less, and loved him with a more ardent

passion. She even uttered the singular regret that she had not known her father as a young man—"for then our lots might have been linked for ever;" and now her cry was that "the waves of life have swept everything away from me except this great shadow on the summit of the mountain pointing to the life to come." It was indeed imperative that Benjamin Constant should go to her.

Sismondi accompanied him. "He has been told so often," Benjamin comments, "that he is rendering a great service that he is almost frightened by the grandeur of his own conduct." But he himself was making the journey more as a comforter than as a lover. He knows indeed that he will find "the person whom I love best in the world abandoned to the most terrible despair"; but his next comment is:—

"Destiny seems pleased to condemn me to wear out my health, which is good, and my talents, which are sufficiently distinguished, without attaining either pleasure or glory. The moment is approaching, however, when I must set my life in order, and make use of the years and faculties that remain intact to leave some memory behind me. My most urgent task is to help my unhappy friend. But, however her lot may be arranged, my own can only be literary and independent. I could not forgive myself if I had not made my mark at fifty. At Geneva and in Switzerland, one finds neither resources nor the stimulus of rivalry. But if I am to succeed in France, I must produce a remarkable

work; and my present manner of life makes that impossible. Then Weimar is the place—Weimar, a library, as much pleasure as is necessary to prevent me from feeling that I am deprived of pleasure, order in my fortune, and for once in my life, repose."

In that mood he arrived at Weimar, where "the first moments were convulsive." It was his pride that he shared Madame de Staël's grief, instead of offering platitudinous consolations; and presently he and she and the children and Schlegel and Sismondi drove back together to Coppet, Madame Necker de Saussure bringing Albert de Staël to meet them at Zurich. "Her condition," he writes, "is fearful. A strange combination: this deep, agonising, and genuine grief which overwhelms her, joined with her susceptibility to distractions, her incorrigible character, which leaves her all her natural weaknesses, all her *amour-propre*, and all her need for activity."

Her need for activity found satisfaction at first in the writing of her father's life—a sketch which her friends considered the best of all her works; but that, after a little while, did not suffice. She filled her house with people, and talked, and talked, and talked. She sought to obtain leave to return to Paris, while planning a journey to Italy as an alternative.

Joseph Bonaparte, as before, was doing his best for her. He was at that time a general on duty at the Boulogne camp, whence he wrote

urging her to patience, since no one would succeed if he did not. She postponed the Italian excursion, and stayed on at Coppet, hoping against hope. "The rumour," she wrote to Joseph, "has been spread that the Emperor means to recall all the exiles on the day of his coronation. He would, by this step, give the occasion a solemnity superior to that which it will derive from all the pomps and ceremonies. I mean to stay here until the 15th of November on the strength of this feeble hope." She waited, but the hope was not fulfilled—for a reason which she never knew. The facts were these.

The First Consul had lately become Emperor, and appointments in the Imperial household were being made. The report had reached Madame de Staël that one of them was likely to be accepted by her previous lover and present friend, M. de Narbonne. She wrote to him to say that she hoped the report was untrue; that she thought it most unbecoming that members of the aristocracy of France should stoop to be "the men-servants and chambermaids of the *bourgeois* and *bourgeoises* of Corsica." Fearing lest her letter should be opened in the post, she entrusted it to a certain M. S——, who promised to deliver it by hand. But, as it happened, M. S—— was a French spy. He delivered the letter at the Department of Police, and Fouché showed it to Napoleon. It was with difficulty that the Emperor was dissuaded from throwing the writer into prison for

her insolent words; and he was absolutely resolved that she should not return to France, where the Pope was coming to crown him. At last, therefore, Madame de Staël got tired of waiting, and set out for Italy. "I don't know," wrote Rosalie de Constant to her brother Charles, "what she is going to do there, unless she expects to take the Pope's place during his absence."

That was towards the end of 1804, about six months after the sorrowful return from Germany. During all that period Benjamin Constant had been near her—sometimes staying in her house, and at other times visiting Geneva and Lausanne—a prisoner dragging at his chain. We must turn again to his Diary for the record of the happenings that mattered most to both of them; but we must first try to realise his singular position at the time when he made the strange confessions which are to follow.

He was thirty-seven. He had behind him a past that had been alternately brilliant and dissolute. He had been a great personage in politics, and now he was an exile in effect if not in name. Paris was indeed open to him if he chose to go there, as he sometimes did; but he belonged to an extinguished Opposition, and his political part was, for the time being, over. On the other hand, in spite of his strong desire for the literary life, he could not settle down to it with Gibbon's calm contentment. His past forbade. He had accustomed himself to be in

love. Women had meant so much to him from of old that they were still necessary to him even when he thought that he was tired of them. The idea of marriage haunted him; it was only the idea of marriage with any given woman that was intolerable. So he was doomed to live in indecision, drawn this way and that, finding it much easier to form new *liaisons* than to break with old ones, reluctant to give pain, yet always giving it, distressed at his failure to give his life any sort of sentimental continuity, wearing a mask of gay cynicism, yet always, at bottom, a "self-tortured sophist." Such was the man. His story will be best told in his own words. The Journal unhappily is not dated; but the extracts which follow all belong to the six months succeeding the return to Coppet. We hear in them the rumblings of the coming storm.

"I go to Rolle to see my aunt, Madame de Nassau. She is a woman of much intelligence, and greatly attached to me; but the surrounding atmosphere has weighed upon her. She has adopted all its prejudices, so that there is a kind of constraint between us which I only get over by means of pleasantries. I think, however, I shall succeed in acquiring a reputation for goodness of heart which will enable me to arrange my life without having all the world on my back. What a task life is when one has begun it badly, and what a bore when one does not conduct it regularly!"

"I have not yet got my ideas clearly together again. It is impossible. I am interrupted every minute. Solitude! Solitude! It is even more necessary to my talent than to my happiness."

"I have been to Rolle, to see Madame de Nassau, who is ill. There is too much fundamental opposition in our opinions for us ever to feel at our ease together. . . . I sleep at Lausanne. I cannot depict my joy at being alone. I am very fond of everything at Coppet; but this continual society, this perpetual distraction, tires and enervates me. I lose all my power for action in it, and say to myself bitterly: 'When will it come to an end?'

"I have worked very well. Solitude is an immense advantage. But what a society is that of Lausanne! I should die in it. My cousin Rosalie is a good creature, but sour-tempered, and skilled in the art of saying the sort of thing that displeases one coldly, and as if she did not perceive what she was doing. A sad gift! But she is a hunchback, and still an old maid at forty-five! Can one expect her to be gentle?"

"Dinner at ——'s with Auguste. . . . I must arrange my life in the course of 1804 with regularity and independence. It is too bad to have neither the pleasure to which one sacrifices one's dignity, nor the dignity to which one sacrifices one's pleasure."

"Dinner at Severy's. Unpretending and graceful mediocrity. I am tired of my solitude here, but I do not want to get married here.

My heart is too old for fresh *liaisons*. I speak to no one except with the tips of my lips."

"Having received no letters from Coppet, and no invitation to return there, I have conceived a prodigious desire to do so. The fact is that, from the point of view of heart, mind, and self-abandonment, I am not well off anywhere but there. The other people whom I meet are as much strangers to me as the trees and the rocks."

"The evening ended with a discussion between Schlegel and Madame de Staël on the genius of conversation. It seems a singular way of educating a tutor. It is very tiresome for the spectators to see them planted in front of each other, Schlegel expressing his contempt for society, and she belauding herself for her conversational gifts. A reciprocal panegyric, both of them praising themselves at the expense of the other."

"Went to Geneva, and called on the Mesdemoiselles de Sellon. Saw Amélie Fabri again. She is as muddy-complexioned, as lively, as wide-awake as ever. How I should have hated her if they had succeeded in getting me to marry her! Yet, in reality, she is very amiable. It is my bad luck always to find something impossible in every woman whom I think of marrying. Charlotte de Hardenberg was tiresome and romantic; Madame Lindsay[1] was forty and had

[1] She is mentioned in Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*: "Mrs. Lindsay, a lady of Irish descent, with a material mind and a somewhat snappish humour, an elegant figure and attractive features, was gifted with nobility of soul and elevation of character: the Emigrants of quality spent their evenings by the fireside of the last of the Ninons."

two illegitimate children; Madame de Staël, who understands me better than any of them, will not be satisfied with friendship when I can no longer offer her love. This poor Amélie who wants me, at thirty-two, has no fortune, and certain ridiculous idiosyncrasies which age has confirmed in her; Antoinette, who is twenty, has a fortune, and is not absurd, is common in appearance and has nothing French about her."

"In the evening a sad and bitter conversation with Pussy.[1] She is profoundly unhappy, and thinks it is the business of others to relieve her sorrow, as if the first condition of not being overwhelmed by life were not to master it, and make use of all one's own inward resources. What can others do against your agitation and your contradictory desires? Against your desire for a brilliant place in the world, of which you are enamoured because you only see the externals of it; against your coquetry, which is afraid of old age; against your vanity, which makes you seek to be conspicuous, while your character is incapable of facing the annoyances which one always provokes when one seeks to shine? What! You do not want to suffer, and yet you spread your wings, and brave the gales, and dash yourself against the trees, and break yourself against the rocks. I can do nothing to help you here. Until you furl your sails, until you recognise that any settled situation is better than this perpetual disturbance, there is no hope for you."

"Madame de Staël shows me a curious col-

[1] Madame de Staël.

lection of letters written to Madame Necker. . . . Those from Gibbon are affected and ridiculous through the contrast between his love for Madame Necker and his ponderous, cold, and precious style. Thus, after having written to her that the happiness of his life would be to possess her, he concludes by saying that he is, with a particular consideration, her most obedient humble servant."

"This evening Schlegel was hurt because Madame de Staël teased him; and, as she never gets tired of talking, she wanted to recommence an explanation at one o'clock in the morning, reserving until after this explanation a discussion of matters which have already been discussed a hundred times. I was dying to go to sleep, and I had a pain in my eyes, but I had to obey her. I have never seen a better woman, more gracious or more devoted, but I have never known one who, without being aware of it, is more continually exigent, who more completely absorbs the life of everyone near her, or who, with all her qualities, has a more positive personality. All one's life—one's minutes, one's hours, one's years—must be at her disposition; and when she does let herself go, then it is a noise like all the thunderstorms and all the earthquakes. She is a spoilt child—that sums her up."

"A gay supper with the Prince de Belmonte. Remained alone with Madame de Staël, and the storm gradually rose. There was a frightful scene, lasting till three o'clock in the morning, about my lack of sensibility, my unworthiness of her confidence, and the failure of my sentiments

to correspond with my actions. Alas! I should be very glad if I could avoid wearisome lamentations relating not to genuine misfortunes, but to the universal laws of nature and the advent of old age. I should be very glad if I, a man, had not to endure the vexations of a woman whose youth is leaving her. I wish she would not ask me for love after ten years of intimacy, when we are both nearly forty years of age, and when I have told her, at least two hundred times, that, as for love, I have no more of it to give her—a declaration which I have never withdrawn except for the purpose of calming fits of pain and rage which frightened me. If my sentiments do not correspond with my actions, I wish she would cease to ask me for actions to which she attaches so little importance. I must, however, separate my life from hers, remaining her friend, or else disappearing from the earth."

"I have read over my reflections on marriage. I adhere to them, and I will get married this winter."

"When I consider my fatigued constitution, my taste for the country, for solitude, and for work, marriage seems to be necessary for me. Nevertheless, in spite of this conviction, I prefer literary glory to happiness, though without cherishing many illusions as to the value of such glory. But if I were happy in the vulgar fashion, I should despise myself."

"At this season seventeen years ago I was rambling alone through the English provinces. It was in that journey that I first discovered the

immense happiness of solitude. I am far enough away from it now."

"A letter to-day from Madame Talma, who is coming to Soleure. I will go and see her. What happiness!"

"My situation is insoluble; there is no planning out my life. I must live from day to day and work as much as possible. That is all that is left to me."

"I have seen the young Laure d'Arlens. If I had to get married, I would marry a girl of sixteen. There would be a clear gain of the three or four years during which a woman of that age cannot live an independent life. Very likely it comes to the same thing in the end, but at least one enjoys this moment of respite. A clear gain there! Then there is the chance that one may influence the character that is in course of being moulded and turn it in the direction that one desires. I do not say that the chance is a good one, but when one marries a woman whose character is already formed, there is no longer any room for doubt on the matter. The character already exists, and you do not even know what it is. In the case of a girl of sixteen one watches the character while in course of formation, and, seeing the enemy immediately on his arrival, you can take your precautions better."

"Ten years ago to-day I was in Germany, alone, taking proceedings against my wife, treated with injustice by the majority of my friends. . . . And yet, in the midst of all that, I was perfectly

happy. My means of happiness were perfectly simple. I was alone, and I was at work. Every day as it dawned promised me a sequence of quiet hours which nothing could disturb. It is the period of my life which I now find the greatest pleasure in recalling. Since then I have sometimes enjoyed success and sometimes suffered reverse, but calm, solitude, and independence I have never had.

"Under the influence of the people about me I was weak enough to marry an ugly woman without fortune, older than myself, and, to complete the list of her attractions, of violent and capricious temper. The wrongs she did me were of the kind that cannot be forgiven; but, instead of seeking to punish her or to avenge myself, I only asked for my freedom. Whence an outburst of all manner of wrath against me. I was unwilling to allow my wife's enemies to dishonour her at their fancy under pretence of proving their friendship for me. I have come to the conclusion that the motto of friends who serve you is always: 'If you do not allow us to defend you at the expense of others, and to make up for the good which we do to you by the greater evil which we do to our enemies, then we shall not defend you.'

"Through my failure to realise this condition which friendship attaches to its services, I have done myself much wrong."

CHAPTER XIV

The Diary continues—Benjamin Constant at Coppet—Attempt of his relatives to find him a wife—He goes to Lyons to see Madame de Staël off to Italy.

The Diary continues. Owing to the state in which the manuscript was found, it is impossible to be quite positive that every entry has been printed in its proper place; but the story which it unfolds is not one in which dates matter very much. It is important to know that certain things happened—not to know whether they happened on a Monday or a Saturday. The progress to the crisis was not, in any case, dramatically continuous. The crisis was to come suddenly—through a woman—but not yet. In the meantime Benjamin Constant drifted to and fro, suffering, as we can see, a far keener mental agony than the woman who complained of the waning of his love for her. She, having paid her tribute to her father's memory, was preparing a fresh triumph—preparing to conquer Rome and Naples and Milan, as she had conquered Weimar and Berlin. He, unable to live either with her or without her, was deploring his own weakness, toying with other amours, toying with the idea of marriage, longing for solitude, yet unable to endure it, the

miserable victim of a divided mind. Let his Diary speak again.

"To-day Madame de Staël is at Geneva. Bonstetten, Schlegel, Sismondi, and I dined like schoolboys whose head master is away. Strange woman that she is! Her domination is inexplicable yet very real over everyone near her. If only she could govern herself, she would be able to govern the world."

"I start to see Madame Talma[1] at Soleure."

"The pleasure of seeing Madame Talma at Soleure was spoiled by the serious condition of her son. I fancy she is trying to deceive herself, as so many do. . . . She needs excitement, and to deaden her feelings. Happy is he who can fall back upon himself, and does not ask for happiness, whose life is in his own thoughts, and who waits for death without exhausting himself in vain endeavours to soften or embellish his life."

"I never cease thinking of my situation. I am agitated and distracted by a miserable weakness of will. There never was anything so absurd as my indecision. Now I incline to marriage, now to solitude; now I want to live in Germany, now in France; and I always hesitate because, in reality, there is nothing that I can do without. If I have not got rid of all these embarrassments in the course of the next six months—embarrassments which only exist in my own imagination—I am no better than an imbecile, and will no longer take the trouble to listen to my own maunderings."

[1] The divorced wife of the actor.

"A letter from Madame Dutertre.[1] Here is another who, having a lively love of freedom, having succeeded in reconquering it at the age of twenty-five, and possessing in addition a considerable fortune, is in a hurry to spoil her life over again by contracting a fresh tie which to-day oppresses her as much as, and more than, the first. One only meets people who do not know how to make proper use of their advantages. The reason is that the enemy of man is within him."

"Received a letter from Madame Talma. She is the person whom I love, not indeed the most passionately, but with the least admixture of other feelings, and the least regret. Her son is better. When he was so ill at Soleure, Madame Talma was a singular example of the fanatical attachment with which people cling to the opinions of their youth. Brought up as an unbeliever, this mother was ardently anxious that her son should not believe in the immortality of the soul, and I fancy she would have argued with him when he was dying if he had demanded consolations of that kind. And yet Madame Talma is a good woman, and all her affections are concentrated upon this child. Inexplicable human nature!"

"Called upon Mlle Bontemps. I fear I have made but a poor response to her affectionate interest in me. If only I knew what I wanted, I should know better what I am doing."

"Twenty years ago to-day (October 9th) I was in Scotland, fairly happy, alternately living with

[1] *Née* von Hardenberg, and married, *en premières noces*, to M. von Marenholz.

some friends and boarding with an excellent family in the country, three leagues from Edinburgh. Several of these friends are dead; the dearest of them is mad. A new generation has grown up in the family, and the new generation does not know me. Such is life!"

"Madame de Staël is in a good mood, gentle and amiable. Nevertheless, there is a corner in her character which I do not like. I mean an absolute want of pride, and a need of always standing well with the authorities—a need which contrasts strangely with the very little authority which she exercises over herself, and causes continual inconsistency in her conduct, with the result that every party in turn suspects her of intrigue and bad faith. She is in consequence guilty of a kind of duplicity which is harmful not only to her own dignity and success, but also to that of her friends."

"Pussy Cat is in a bad temper because I will not sit up late at night. It seems clear that I shall have to get married in order to be able to go to bed in decent time.

"I received a visit to-day from Henriette Monachon, who drew me a graphic picture of her last years with Madame de Charrière.

"Seven years have passed since I last saw her; ten since all relation between us ended. How easily then I broke all ties that tired me! How sure I was that I could form others when I chose! What a sense I had that my life was my property, and what a difference ten years have made to my feelings! Everything seems precarious and about

to escape from me. That which I have does not make me happy. I have passed the age at which gaps can be filled, and I tremble to renounce anything whatever, not feeling that I have the power to put anything else in its place."

"Madame Du Deffand used to say to M. de Pont-de-Veyle, 'We have been friends for forty years. Is not that because we do not love each other very much?' That is my own history."

"Sismondi, with whom I take a walk, reproaches me for taking too little interest in him and in the world in general. The wretched man knows nothing about my position, and how it prevents me from disposing freely of my life, with the result that I am a shadow running with other shadows, and have no power of making plans for the future."

"At dinner there were several guests. I was very melancholy, and yet I jested a good deal. This contrast is usual with me. At supper too there were a good many people. What a melancholy thing is conversation! Even conversation which turns upon interesting subjects leads to so little."

"Out in the evening and meet some amiable women, but fate is obstinately unkind to me. In the person whom I could marry, and should like to marry, there is always something that does not suit me. Meanwhile my life advances. I admit that it will be all the same when it is over."

"A walk with Sismondi, who reproaches me for never speaking seriously. It is true that, in

my present mood, I take too little interest in persons and things to be convincing. I am satisfied, therefore, to be silent or to jest. That amuses me and deadens my feelings. The best gift with which Heaven has endowed me is that of being amused at myself. I read Sismondi my Introduction.[1] He was much impressed by it. He is not at all a brilliant man, but he has very just principles and very pure intentions. Only he works very little, and goes out into society, where he feels flattered to be received. He does not dream that it is only his talent that has opened the doors of society to him, and that he is sacrificing to the enjoyment of a first success the means of making others."

"Here is a pleasing story of Schlegel's *amour-propre*. One day he read a letter which he had addressed to one of his friends. A little while afterwards I learnt that this friend was dead. I told Schlegel this, and he replied: 'Yes, he is dead, but he had time to receive my letter before he died.' As if this friend had been brought into the world to read Schlegel's letter, and having read it, might depart in peace!"

"I have happily escaped from a party given by the Duchess of Courland to the Prefect, with music on the Lake.

"I have again seen Amélie Fabri. It is a great pity that she is old, muddy-coloured, and thin. If she were ten years younger I should prefer her to any other woman. I could have made a charming person of her, on condition that

[1] To the *History of Religion.*

I were already what I have now grown to be. Her faults are due simply and solely to the isolation in which she has lived. Everyone is amused by her lively wit, and, seeing people laugh at what she says, she concludes that whatever makes people laugh is good to say.

"It was a year ago to-day that Madame de Staël arrived in Paris against my wish and against the advice of all her friends whom she had not so dominated as to oblige them to speak against their consciences. The consequences were sad."

"An argument with Schlegel on French tragedy—bizarre and monotonous. His notions are often as grotesque as a madman's."

"Dinner with Madame Necker.[1] She perceives in others only the greater or less attention that they pay to her. A person whom it is diverting to forget by reason of the amazement and anger which the forgetfulness causes her. She does not think that it is possible to think of anything but her. Still that does not make her ridiculous, for she has a noble though egotistic character, a delicate though artificial wit, and a distinguished though withered appearance."

"Schlegel's brother has arrived. He is a globular little man, extraordinarily fat, with a pointed nose issuing from two shining cheeks, and underneath this pointed nose a mouth that smiles with honeyed sweetness; fine eyes, a subdued air, especially when he is not speaking, and an icy air when he is listening. His principles are as absurd as those of his brother."

[1] Madame de Staël's cousin, Madame Necker de Saussure.

"Madame de Staël gave me to read a fragment of her work on her father. I could not restrain my tears. There is a sensibility in it the more real because it is free from all affectation. Will they laugh at it in Paris? I record my impresson of it here that it may not change."

"Dined with the Duchess of Courland. To see her I should say that it only depended upon myself to make her think me very agreeable. I bore myself so much in Society that it is difficult for me to believe that I can please. I am ill. Everyone notices how changed I am. I shall not be sorry when it is all over. What have I to expect from life?"

"This is the day of my birth—thirty-seven years ago. The best part of my life is over. Even if nature is kind, there can only remain, free from infirmities, about half the period that I have already lived. My life has only left me very confused recollections. I am hardly any more interested in myself than in other people. I know that, up to the age of fourteen, the object of great affection on the part of my father, on the one hand treated with great severity, but encouraged, on the other, in the wildest vanity, I filled all those about me with admiration for my precocious talents, and distrust of my violent, quarrelsome disposition. I had no mother. They mistook for naughtiness what was only *amour-propre*. From fourteen to sixteen I was in a German University, left a great deal too much to my own devices, winning successes which turned my head, and committing prodigious follies. From sixteen to eighteen I studied at

Edinburgh, and there, for the first time, acquired that real taste for study which they had till then vainly tried to instil into me. But, after living for a year a well-regulated and tolerably happy life, I abandoned myself to the passion of gambling, and lived in a very agitated, and, I will add, a very miserable manner. I next went to Paris, with only my own sense to guide me—which it did pretty badly. From eighteen to twenty I was always in love, sometimes loved in return, often tactless and giving myself over to acts of theatrical violence which must have been very amusing to those who were pleased to criticise me. I then went a second time to Paris, where I made the acquaintance of all the follies that youth can think of, with the temptations that Paris provides. At the same time, however, I was living in the society of men of letters, in which to some extent I distinguished myself. Next, I set out for England. It was then that I tasted for the first time the inexpressible delights of solitude. From twenty to twenty-six I lived in Germany, leading a life that was tiresome without actual unhappiness, wasting my time and my talents; and had it not been for a revolution that occurred in my life, I should have declined gently into stupidity. At twenty-seven I was divorced from a first marriage contracted in Germany—I have already spoken of it. At twenty-seven I commenced an attachment that was to last for ten years; then came political passions. Now I think I have reached a further stage, for all that I desire is repose. Shall I obtain it? It always looks as if it would be easy to obtain something that one does not want; but when one begins to want the thing

that seemed so easy to get, then the difficulties present themselves."

"I am every day more convinced that one must exercise cunning in one's relations both with life and with men, whether one wishes to escape from one's fellow-creatures or to make use of them. Ambition is not nearly so mad a thing as people suppose; for one has to take nearly as much trouble to be allowed to live in peace and quietness as to govern the world. Nevertheless, so far as I am concerned, the die is cast. I want to find a country in which one can sleep in tranquillity. Germany is the place for me."

"My aunt hints that if I marry she will show herself grateful. That is, in effect, to promise me a fortune four times as large as my own. Very likely I shall repent of not having said 'yes.' But 'yes' would be too much trouble. I give up the idea."

"Schlegel wants to be the leader of a new religion. Nothing is more ridiculous than the plans of this kind which men form because they see that something of the sort succeeds about once every ten centuries. I cannot deny that I have formed my own. Schlegel says that in all religions there are mysteries. Therefore he makes a pretence of concealing a portion of his doctrine. That is to say, he shows the whole of it, and conceals the rest."

"I do not know why, but I have a presentiment, a kind of hope, that Madame de Staël's affairs[1]

[1] Benjamin Constant was trying to obtain permission for Madame de Staël to reside in Paris.

will succeed. But I am forgetting that it is only bad presentiments that come true."

"I am continually thinking of Weimar, which would be a pleasant retreat for me, if I can convince the people there that I have not come for them, but for their Library."

"A charming letter from Madame Talma, and other Paris friends. I shall be delighted to see them again—but on condition that I stay with them as short a time as possible.

"I feel such a physical necessity for peace and quietness, that if my present situation were to be prolonged, I should die of it, and might just as well hang myself at once. I feel that I must muster up the courage to conquer my winter for myself. And yet, in forming this project, I feel that I am hard-hearted and unjust. Why should I ruffle the affections of a woman who loves me so well, and deprive her of her last remaining friend at the moment when she has just lost her father?"

"Visited Genthoud. There is no better proof of the heavy burden of life than the spectacle of elderly persons trying to pass the time gaily. There is something so melancholy in this gaiety, and so painful in this resignation. And to think that the end of the boredom is death!"

"Dined with Madame Necker. Brilliant people are almost as tedious in their conversation as fools."

"Passed the evening with my poor Amélie, and played piquet with her. Really she is not so silly as they say, but I do not think she is as amiable as she tries to make me think. Still she

has a sort of gaiety and grace which, in spite of her ugliness, which is on the increase, rekindles my weak sentiment for her, as often as I look at her."

"It is announced that the plague is spreading all over Italy. Madame de Staël cannot go there, and so I am obliged to remain here. One would say that exile, death, and the plague are in a conspiracy to keep me in chains. How could I desert Madame de Staël two years ago when she was banished? Or seven months ago when she lost her father? How can I desert her now that she has given up her journey? What am I to do against fate?"

"The reports of the plague in Italy were much exaggerated. Madame de Staël is carrying out her plans, and I, on my side, am going away too. How much time is lost in these continual preparations for departure!

"Who would have believed that the good Adèle de Sellon would have put on such impertinent airs since the marriage of her sister, whom she believes to be in high favour? Assuredly that is the last fault that I should have suspected in Adèle. But I believe that all faults are latent in all women, waiting only for opportunity to develop them."

"*En route* for Poligny."

"Arrive at Brevens, where I find my father, a little aged, but in good health."

"I set out again from Dôle. A regular road to walk on—that is what my life requires."

"I arrive at Lyons, where I rejoin Madame de Staël."

CHAPTER XV

Madame de Staël's triumphs in Italy—She "gives performances in the character of woman of letters"—Her relations with Monti—Benjamin Constant in Paris—His relations with Madame Récamier, Madame Talma, and other friends.

Benjamin Constant had left Coppet a few days before Madame de Staël, in order to visit his father, who had married his housekeeper and got his affairs embroiled. His son did his best to deliver him from the imbroglio, but the old man was barely grateful. He had become attached to his grievances through habit, and missed the sense of importance which he derived from them. Benjamin could only reflect that, at least, he had tried to do his duty.

His meeting with Madame de Staël at Lyons was only for the purpose of saying good-bye. He stayed there a day or two, and spent an evening with the family of his rival, Camille Jordan. "Ridiculous provincials," was his verdict on them; and he adds: "The party was amusing, thanks to the folly of the persons present." He meant to go on to Weimar. "Either I am a madman or else I shall be in Weimar in three weeks," he wrote; but he went instead to his own estate at Hérivaux, in Seine-et-Oise, whence he

visited Paris from time to time. "I have received," he notes, "a letter from Madame de Staël, who finds my letters melancholy, and inquires what I want to make me happy. Alas! What I want is my freedom, and that is exactly what I am not allowed to have. I am reminded of the case of the hussar who took such an interest in the prisoner whom he had to put to death that he said to him: 'Ask me any favour you like except your life.'"

Madame de Staël, meanwhile, had crossed the Alps, and was conquering Italy in her fashion, as Napoleon had previously conquered it in his; the Emperor doing nothing, on this occasion, to interfere with her triumph. Provided that she kept away from Paris, he was willing that, at a distance from Paris, she should be treated with consideration. He even said that, if she should be arrested in the kingdom of Naples, he would claim her as his subject, and march twenty thousand men to her rescue; while she, on her part, was disposed to avoid giving unnecessary offence. The French Government was in Necker's debt for money advanced;[1] and though the claim could be disputed on the ground that Necker's name had been on the list of *émigrés*, whose property had passed to the State, there was a chance that Napoleon would settle it. As a matter of fact, the debt was not discharged until after the Bourbon Restoration; but the hope of payment

[1] It was advanced in the reign of Louis XVI.—not to the King personally, but to the public Exchequer.

had, for the time being, a quieting effect upon Madame de Staël's demeanour.

Her companions upon her journey were her children, Schlegel, and Sismondi. The last-named quitted her to visit Florence and the Comtesse d'Albany — Alfieri's widow, formerly the mistress of the Young Pretender, with whom he afterwards carried on a long and interesting correspondence. Schlegel remained with her throughout. We have met him already in the character of her children's preceptor; but it is said that he also had higher pretensions, which Madame de Staël did not encourage, giving him only her friendship, whereas he aspired to her love. She distributed friendship as freely as charitable organisations distribute coals and blankets, so that there is nothing inherently improbable in the supposition — to which, indeed, Benjamin Constant's dislike of Schlegel may be deemed to give further support. His manners were rather bad than good. The stock story told against him is that he insisted on addressing Madame de Staël in public as *chère amie*, in order to make it clear to the company that he was no ordinary pedagogue. Be that as it may, however, he was an exceptionally competent guide to the art treasures and ruins of Rome.

How far Madame de Staël was susceptible to Italian influences—to what extent Italy conquered her—we shall have to consider presently when we speak of *Corinne*. The view of her friends

CAMILLE JORDAN

From a Painting by Mdlle. Godfrey

Photo by Braun Clément et Cie

at the time was that she needed them badly, but was not likely to prove amenable. In matters of art, as in matters of metaphysics, she was more prone to gush than to understand; and she herself wrote that sculpture left her comparatively cold—that a beautiful thought meant more to her than the most beautiful piece of statuary. To those, moreover, who followed her course, it may well have seemed that there was too little receptivity in her attitude. She went through Italy as an actress struts upon the boards, losing no opportunity of taking the centre of the stage. "She is giving performances in the character of a woman of letters," is the way an Italian contemporary, Chigi, puts it; and there must have been an appearance of reason for his belief that, whatever she seemed to see in Italy, the spectacle actually present to her mental vision was always Madame de Staël surrounded by other things.

The great performance was before the Roman Arcadian Academy, where ten young men in succession discharged sonnets at her, "like the thunderbolts of the Vatican," and she herself recited a poem of her own composition. "All Rome," she writes, "with its Princes, Cardinals, etc., was present. I spare you a dozen sonnets in which I am made a new star." But Benjamin Constant, when the news of the triumph reached him, commented, in his Diary, thus:—

"A letter from Madame de Staël. She is

altogether enchanted with her success at Rome. Much good may it do her! She has written a sonnet on the death of Jesus Christ, and has read it at the Arcadian Academy. Of a truth there is something of the mountebank in this behaviour. If this sonnet reaches France, people will have a fresh reason for laughing at her. They will say she has been using religion as a means to gain her ends. How unfortunate is this ambition to win small successes which has already cost her so much trouble!"

The conquest of Italy included the conquest of the Italian poet, Vincenzo Monti. "Mamma," wrote the little Albertine de Staël, "cared for nothing in Italy except Monti and the sea;" and it is true that she coupled Monti in eulogy with Mount Vesuvius, and addressed him as "*caro* Monti" several times in the same letter, saying, "You were certainly a friend waiting for me, not a new acquaintance;" and she invited him, of course, to visit her at Coppet. He was hardly worthy of the enthusiasm which she lavished on him, for he was a time-serving poet, always ready to sing for any master, whether Italian, French, or Austrian, who would give him a public appointment; and, in spite of reports that were circulated, there is no substantial reason for supposing that any relations other than enthusiastic were established. At all events, there is no hint to any such effect in Benjamin Constant's attitude; and that fact seems conclusive.

It was in the summer of 1805 that Madame de Staël returned to Coppet; and the entries in Benjamin Constant's Diary during the interval show that, though she thrust herself from time to time into his thoughts, she did not by any means monopolise them. He was writing; he was going into society; he was interesting himself in other women—the Mrs. Lindsay whom he could not marry because, as he has told us, she had two illegitimate children, and the divorced wife of the actor Talma, also a lady of somewhat light reputation, seeing that she too had borne two natural children before her marriage, and had given birth to twins, whom she named Castor and Pollux, within a fortnight of the ceremony. But let the Journal speak. It continues to be the faithful mirror of a complex and distracted mind.

"I was meaning to dine to-day with Allard. The desire for solitude overtook me, and I dined at home. And, indeed, what should I have done at this dinner? I should have seen candles which would have pained my eyes, and people whom I do not care about; and I should have said things which I should afterwards have been sorry for. I dined alone, I said nothing, and I screened the candles. It was much the better way."

"A very nice letter from Madame de Staël. She is always in too great a hurry to put herself forward. Agitation and ambition! She does not give the wings of fortune time to grow, but

plucks them out feather by feather to make plumes for her hat."

"How fatal is the society of women, owing to the difficulty of resisting them! How egoistical they are without knowing it! How they sacrifice everything to the fancy of the moment! And to think that I cannot make any firm resolution because of my profound sense of the brevity of life!"

"An absurd dinner at Madame D[utertre]'s. A husband beginning to be jealous, people who talked nothing but the gossip of their provincial towns, and myself timid in the midst of it all, as if it were evidence of inferiority to find oneself in the presence of the mediocre."

"Called on Madame Dutertre. What a folly she committed, and what a hornet's nest she fell into, when she married a man of the emigration! Indeed, what a company of convicts is this society of provincial *émigrés*, who left their country after fifteen or twenty years of a bad education in the houses of the squireens, their fathers, to complete that education on the banks of the Rhine, driven from village to village, acquiring nothing of the military life but its coarseness and licence, keeping themselves to themselves—keeping, that is to say, the worst company in the world. Now that they are back in France, they are more ignorant, more mad, more detestable than ever."

"I try to rescue a fallen woman, but it is no good. There is a habit of degradation which nothing can efface. How things of that sort teach one to appreciate a pure marriage, in which

pleasure is not followed by disgust, duty and enjoyment go hand in hand, and she whose embrace one quits becomes one's friend, the companion of one's life, and the partner of one's thoughts and interests."

"The *Journal de Paris* has attacked the posthumous works [of Necker] just published by Madame de Staël. The article is by Carrion Nisas, an infamous buffoon. I set to work to reply to him in a few words. Thus: 'It is not given to all the world to accomplish with impunity the most sacred and natural of all duties. In all ages a certain class of the populace has bawled to disturb funeral processions.

"'The daughter of M. Necker might have expected it. She remains to-day the sole representative of a family that was long illustrious. This family must pay the price of its glory to the depreciators of all glory, the enemies of all virtue. Besides, the opportunity is a good one. The father is dead; the daughter is far away. Put forth all your strength, then; the enterprise is worthy of your courage. It becomes you to attack a tomb defended by a woman.'"

"Called upon Madame Pourrat. She spoke to me of Madame de Staël's book on M. Necker, which is doing better than I expected. 'How,' Madame Pourrat said to me, 'could M. Necker be afraid of death? He should have said to himself: "Either the soul is immortal or it is not. If it is, I have nothing to fear; if it is not, then too I have nothing to fear."' As if the imagination ever presented these dilemmas! It is as if I

were to say to a lover: 'Either your mistress is faithful to you or she is not. If she is, she is worthy of you, and you need not distrust her; if she is not, she is unworthy of you, and you need not regret her.'"

"A tiresome dinner with Madame Pourrat."

"Dine with Madame Récamier, and meet General Sebastiani. A silly man, cold-blooded, full of those generalisations which the Machiavellists of our day adopt as profound truths."

"This morning I sorted my papers—a task which always makes me profoundly melancholy. What a number of ties I have broken!

"What a strange passion for independence and isolation has dominated my life, and through what weakness, stranger still, I find myself at the present time the most dependent man I know! I must follow to the end this life which I have led so madly. I have at least had the wit to keep it serious and intact in the eyes of others. No one suspects the madness which invades and devastates it. A letter from Madame de Staël. I shall not answer. I am sick to death of her eternal reproaches and my eternal justifications. It is all very well for women to talk. When once there has been love in one's relations with them, they will not be satisfied with anything else."

"Madame Talma gets worse and worse. The doctors are divided in opinion. Their skill is inadequate, and nature is inexorable. . . . All my friends are dying, and I do not remember to have

seen the death of a single enemy. A year ago, in this same Journal, I was congratulating myself upon saving Huber at Ulm. He is dead. I wrote that there had been nothing but pleasure in my relations with Madame Talma; she is dying. I have often praised the gentleness, the social qualities of Blacon; he has committed suicide. My path is over graves. . . . I remain—débris in the midst of fallen ruins—my soul withered and worn out. I regret to note that all that is good perishes, and that all that is vile and savage endures."

"Madame Talma is dying; nothing more can be done for her. Her pretended friends are around her, making a fuss, looking out for what they can get. Their melancholy calculations are disguised as a confident hope of her recovery. Her character is almost entirely changed by her illness. She is restless, exacting, *greedy*—she who used to be so *generous*! Poor human nature!"

"Dinner at Madame Lindsay's with a few friends. The evening was agreeable and the conversation pleasant; but my life is not there. In truth my life is not anywhere but within. I let it be taken hold of. Anyone is free to take possession of my outward life who can. It is wrong; for that deprives me of my time and strength. But the inner life is defended by a barrier which other people do not cross. They cause pain to enter there sometimes, but never do they establish themselves there as masters."

"Pass the evening at Madame Récamier's. I

must have made myself amiable, for I was complimented on doing so."

"Dinner with Madame Talma. She is much better, and seems to have reconquered life by the power of her mind. That would prove the truth of the saying that it is only through stupidity that one dies."

"Supper with Madame Récamier. It was very tiresome. The young people of this generation are too much given to sneering, and are veritably stupid."

"Dined with Hochet and Piscatory. What with the dinner and the conversation, I became excited and said things about people which I have hitherto been careful not to say. Happily my companions will forget half of what I said and only repeat a portion of the rest.

"I propose to interrupt all my literary work in order to set my life in order. Many people have needed less than a month to seize power in the State. Ought I to need more in order to decide matters which concern myself alone? I will put all my strength into the task. But, above all, there must be no more Coppet, and no more Geneva. All that I find there is a glittering lake which has made me blind, and relatives who never cease finding fault with me.

"Madame Lindsay writes to me to say that, at bottom, we are very much like each other. That perhaps is a reason why we should not suit each other. It is because men are so much alike that Providence has created women who do not resemble them."

"Dined with Madame Talma, who is dying, but is more amiable than ever."

"Passed the day and the night near Madame Talma, whose end is approaching. I look on and study death. She has recovered all her faculties—her wit, her grace, her gaiety, her memory, the old vivacity of her opinions. Can it be that all that will perish? One clearly sees that what she has preserved of her soul is only troubled by the weakness of her body, but not intrinsically diminished. It is certain that, if one could take that which makes her think and speak—her mind, in a word—and all the faculties which make up that which I have loved so well, and transport it to another body, it would all live again. *Nothing is impaired.* . . . The spectacle of death on this occasion brings me ideas to which I was not prone."

"She is dead. It is over, for ever! Kind and gentle friend! I saw you die. Long time I held you in my arms. And now you are no more. My grief had been kept in suspense by the hope of saving you yet again. I saw your death without terror, for I saw nothing violent enough to destroy this intelligence of which I guard so lively a recollection. *Immortality of the soul!* Inexplicable enigma! . . .

"To read what I have written in the past about this distinguished woman, no one would believe in the bitter regret and the unceasing pain which her loss has made me feel. Yes, I judge my friends severely, but I love them better than anything else in the world. I serve them, and I

render them more true affection than do all those people who boast of their sensibility, but who, I am sure, are not such good companions in grief and adversity as I am. I have lost the most disinterested and the best of friends."

"I was present at the burial of Madame Talma, with a small number of friends who were deeply affected. For a moment I feared that I should not be able to bear up through this mournful ceremony, which seemed doubly sad when I recalled the grace, the gaiety, and the kindness of heart of her who was locked up in the narrow coffin. The ceremony alone was an empty show, wherein each played his part, the priests singing their psalms for money, and everything proceeding mechanically. A queer state of things, when even those who claim to represent religion, those who call themselves its ministers, do not take the trouble to appear convinced of its truth. Only one portion of the ceremony seemed to me to have anything touching in it—the salutation of the priests as they pass before the body, and the blessing, as it were, of the coffin by each one of those present. The repetition of this salutation is a sign of memory and farewell which left me with an agreeable emotion. I felt grateful to the men who thus continued to show their respect to her who was no more."

CHAPTER XVI

Corinne

Madame de Staël returned to Coppet and wrote *Corinne*, which was published in the spring of 1807.

It is the most famous of her books. Six editions of it were printed in her lifetime, and others have been printed since. Those of her contemporaries who found fault with it did so chiefly because she glorified an Englishman at the expense of a Frenchman, and spoke disdainfully of the Italians. Most of them were enthusiastic; and it would be possible, if it were worth while, to fill many pages with the expressions of their praise. Byron, Benjamin Constant, Suard, Henri Meister, Sir James Mackintosh, Frederick Schlegel, Gouverneur Morris were numbered among her panegyrists. It is only because the verdict was so nearly unanimous that it is unnecessary to call the witnesses. The world in general bestowed the name of the heroine upon the author. Thenceforward, when people said "Corinne," they meant Madame de Staël. The modern critic, even if he does not endorse the judgment, must at least begin by recording it.

Such a critic's first impression is that here, at last, is something definite and mature. When Madame de Staël began to write, she could not even punctuate; the stops are all over her pages, as if sprinkled at random from a pepper-pot. In *Corinne* they are used, as they should be, to give form to the sentences. And, as the sentences are complete, so too is the book. There is no longer any question of brilliant promise or noble failure to achieve. We may like the book, or we may dislike it; but we can make no mistake about it, and can have no doubts as to the writer's intentions. For good or for bad, it is exactly what it was meant to be. It is, in fact, and was meant to be, two things—a dissertation on Italy, and a romance into which Madame de Staël, as usual, put a great deal of herself.

"If it were not out of respect for my fellow-creatures," Madame de Staël said to Molé, "I would not take the trouble to open my window to get my first view of the Bay of Naples, whereas I would willingly travel five hundred leagues to converse with a man of talent unknown to me." We have already quoted her assertion that she preferred beautiful thoughts to beautiful statuary. The two statements put together complete Madame de Staël's confession of her incompetence to interpret a country which appeals far more to the senses than to the intellect. Just as the real intellectual problems, as presented, for instance, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, were too high for

her, so the art of Italy was outside her range. She was clever, but not profound; prone to emotion, but not susceptible to the charms of form and colour; incapable, above all things, of becoming as a little child in the presence of things which she did not understand. "I understand everything that is comprehensible, and whatever I do not understand is of no importance," would seem to have been her motto in Italy as in Germany. We find her writing, therefore, like an art lecturer who has never been an art student —but with one significant qualification: she had Schlegel at her elbow.

What Madame de Staël saw with her own eyes in Italy was the levity of the Italians, who made love without abandoning themselves to passion, and had no talent for politics. About that she wrote despairing letters to Monti. The rest was seen, in the first instance, if not in the last resort, through Schlegel's eyes. As we read the book, we picture Schlegel peeping over the writer's shoulder and proposing instructive interpolations. More than half of the first volume, at any rate, consists of such interpolations, though they do not appear exactly in the shape which Schlegel would have given them. Occasionally there is a flash of inspiration that obviously was not Schlegel's. The description of the Roman Campagna as "a tired soil which seems too proud to be fertile" is a case in point—a characteristic use of the pathetic fallacy. More often the

generalisations acquire a vagueness of which Schlegel would not have been proud; and there is a vast deal too much enthusiasm for the *beaux arts* in general, paraded on page after page as the badge of the *âme sensible.* It is self-conscious and patronising, and the true ring is not in it. Italy contributes the local colour, but not the spirit or the atmosphere of the story. Indeed, the English local colour is better and more convincing than the Italian; Madame de Staël having known England in earlier and more impressionable years.

The story, as all the world knows, is of the vain endeavour of a woman of genius to find happiness in love. Its interest and value is as Madame de Staël's own rendering of what she conceived to be her own experience of life. Here again, as in *Delphine*, there is little that is strictly speaking autobiographical. The story, indeed, so far from being autobiographical, is hardly even original. The plot is taken from Madame de Charrière—the same Madame de Charrière from whom Madame de Staël had already taken Benjamin Constant. In *Caliste*, which Madame de Staël had read, as she says, "ten times," there is the same English nobleman who, for sufficient reasons, cannot marry the foreign woman whom he loves. What is new is not the plot but the motive—a woman's genius despised and rejected, domesticated mediocrity triumphant, the man sorry for his refusal of the pearl that was beyond all price.

It would not seem that the lover is drawn from Benjamin Constant, or from M. de Narbonne, or from Camille Jordan, or from any man whom Madame de Staël had known. He is a woman's ideal man, somewhat suggesting—or should one not say anticipating?—by his mysterious melancholy and his amazing prowess, those lovelorn Life Guardsmen of "Ouida's" fiction who suffer untold agonies in perfumed boudoirs, sit up all night drinking brandy punch with boon companions, and win the Grand National or stroke the Oxford Eight to victory upon the morrow. The way in which Lord Nelvil takes the helm and encourages the timid sailors during the storm in the Channel, and the way in which he runs about with a squirt, extinguishing the conflagration at Ancona—to say nothing of the way in which he plunges into the Bay of Naples to rescue a drowning man—are equally characteristic of the Super-man as conceived by woman in the days when she did not yet esteem hers the stronger sex. But Corinne is not only the Super-woman. She is also Madame de Staël.

We are told, it is true, that Corinne was beautiful, and we know that Madame de Staël was not; but that discrepancy proves nothing, and is not intended to deceive. Or, at any rate, it proves, not that Madame de Staël fancied that she was beautiful, but only that she would have liked to fancy it. In other respects the likeness is a speaking one. The crowning of Corinne

with laurel on the Capitol was, as we have seen, an incident in Madame de Staël's own Italian journey. She had been clothed for the occasion exactly as she clothes Corinne; she had exchanged sonnets with her admirers in exactly the same way. She gives Corinne those shapely arms which were the chief of her own physical attractions. Corinne's talents were her own talents; Corinne's unhappiness was her own unhappiness. In her portrait of Corinne she depicted feminine genius as she understood it. The limitations of the conception are the more pathetic because they are so absolutely and obviously unconscious.

Genius is indefinable. One hesitates, therefore, before saying that Madame de Staël neither had the divine gift nor succeeded in depicting it in her heroine. Yet one can find in the figure of Corinne a good deal that seems to warrant Thiers' pronouncement that her creator was the very type of mediocrity. Thiers was a man who knew mediocrity well from personal experience, and his remarks on that branch of the subject necessarily command respect. It was, no doubt, highly gifted mediocrity that he recognised in Madame de Staël; and it might plausibly be argued that, when mediocrity is highly gifted, it ceases to be mediocre. By tirelessness, by restlessness—by great, though scattered, energy — Madame de Staël rose far above the common level of women, imposed her personality, and left her mark.

And yet, admitting all this, one can see what Thiers meant by his criticism — and can see, too, that there was something in it. One sees it best by first seeing, as one can from the persual of *Corinne*, what Madame de Staël understood by genius, and how she expected it to be manifested.

What one misses in the alleged genius of Corinne is "inwardness"; what one notes is obviousness. The end at which this genius always aims is effect; the test by which it is pronounced supreme is always that of effect—in the actor's sense of the word. One does not think of Corinne producing beautiful things by stealth because the love of beauty constrains her. Like Madame de Staël herself, she gives performances; and her claim on our admiration is not the quality of the work, but the success of the performance. She is as it were the *salonière* of the fine arts. She talks interminably, and the men sit at her feet and hang upon her words. She "improvises," and the men clap their hands and place the crown upon her head. We are left with the impression that this sort of thing is not only the proof but the purpose of genius, and that genius, whether in the person of Corinne or of Madame de Staël, is wronged when happiness in love does not result from such exhibitions of what vulgar people have been known to call "parlour tricks."

Yet the real reason why happiness in love is not so brought about is quite clear, though quite

other than Madame de Staël supposed. It is not the splendour of the genius, but the obviousness of it, that is the obstacle. The history of Madame de Staël's own love affairs is generally this: that she won men's affections because she talked so well, and then lost them because she talked so much. The level-headed observer would have expected pretty much the same thing to happen with Corinne. The first effect would have been dazzling because—once more to quote the vulgar—Corinne "kept all her goods in the shop window." But, if there is to be happiness in love, the first effect must be only the piquant prelude to the second, and the second to the third. The lover must be permitted to feel that he is also a discoverer—that the pearl of great price which he has found has a secret value of which he only is aware. He may, indeed, scramble and compete for the pearl of which the marvellous value is made publicly known to the world; but in that case it is vanity, not love, that lures him on. And happiness in vanity is a very vain sort of happiness, and differs *toto cœlo* from happiness in love.

In considerations of this sort, and not, as Madame de Staël supposed, in the dislike of mediocrity for anything better than itself, lies the secret of Corinne's failure. Much satire is expended, in the course of the story, upon the narrow vision and gross prejudices of the commonplace. It is effective satire, and it is

well merited; but it is largely beside the mark. Real genius triumphs over such things by ignoring them. Corinne's was the superficial genius of the popular entertainer. Her volubility dissipated the mysteries through which it is the delight of love slowly to find its way. When she had recited her poems and lectured on the arts, she had revealed all the secrets of her charm. She was *tout en dehors*—as obvious as the photograph of a professional beauty or the pictorial advertisement of a tooth-paste. The pathetic thing is that Madame de Staël should have drawn such a figure as a glorified portrait of herself, not perceiving the limitations which its externality implied, but in the confident belief that this sort of thing is genius in its loftiest manifestation, and that those who do not love it when they see it, and desire its daily companionship, are citizens of Philistia, the enemies of light and "sensibility." The reason of her own loud, long, and unavailing cry for happiness is there.

CHAPTER XVII

The return from Italy—The life at Coppet—The visitors—Their reminiscences—Descriptions of Coppet by Madame Vigée Le Brun—By Baron de Voght—By Rosalie de Constant—Quarrels with Benjamin Constant.

MADAME DE STAËL was no sooner back from Italy than she wished to go to France; but Fouché refused her a passport. She therefore divided her time for some months between Coppet and Geneva, arranging a notable series of theatrical representations in both places. Even after she had obtained her passport, she delayed her departure until the spring of 1806, when she took up her residence at Auxerre. Schlegel was with her. Mathieu de Montmorency, Camille Jordan, and other friends visited her there; but she was, none the less, unhappy. Benjamin's conduct, as we shall see presently, was once more such as to cause her distress; and we gather from one of her letters to Frederika Brun[1] that she could not sleep without the use of opiates.

From Auxerre she visited Blois, and she also planned a visit to Spa for the benefit of her health. Her next sojourn was at Rouen, where, early in 1807, she received permission to reside,

[1] The poetess of Copenhagen. Her correspondence with Bonstetten has been published.

until the following 1st of April, at the Chateau d'Acosta, in Auberge-en-Ville, Seine-et-Oise. She went there; she even succeeded, while there, in paying surreptitious visits to Paris, but the circumstance came to Napoleon's ears, and she was ordered to withdraw at once to a greater distance from the capital. In May, therefore, she returned once more to Coppet, where she entertained her friends, and made her preparations for yet another journey to Germany. On December 3, 1807, she announced her departure to the Prefect, alleging her desire that her younger son, Albert, should be instructed in the German language. Attended by Schlegel, she arrived, on the 14th, at Munich, where she made the acquaintance of Schelling, who had married Schlegel's divorced wife. After a short stay, she moved on to Vienna, where the Imperial family received her with civility, and where, in April, Albert de Staël became a pupil at the Military Academy. In June 1808 she travelled to Weimar and Frankfort, and in July of the same year we find her once again at Coppet.

Such is, in brief outline, the chronicle of the exterior events of Madame de Staël's life during the period in which the inner life of the heart approached, and reached, and passed its crisis. Napoleon's persecution of her did not amount, as yet, to much more than a policy of pin-pricks; and he explained his attitude clearly enough to her son, Auguste, in an interview accorded to him

at Chambéry. "Your mother," he said, "would not be six months at Paris before I should be obliged to lock her up at Bicêtre or the Temple, and that is a thing I should be sorry to do, as it would make a stir, and damage me in public opinion." If he had imprisoned her, he added, he would relent, and release her, but he would not recall her from exile. She might go to Rome, to Naples, to Vienna, to Berlin, to Milan, to Lyons. If she wanted to write libels about him, she had better go to London. All the rest of Europe was open to her; but to Paris she would not be allowed to come. There, and in that neighbourhood, no one might live who disliked the Emperor and made jokes at his expense.

Hence the unceremonious expulsion from Seine-et-Oise; hence also the fact that the indignity there endured interfered in no respect with the dignity and outward splendour of the salon at Coppet. One could fill a page with the names of distinguished personages who, at one time or another, were guests there. Benjamin Constant, Schlegel, and Sismondi were *habitués*. Other names upon our list would be those of Madame Récamier, Prospere de Barante,[1] Werner, the German poet, Karl Ritter, the German geographer, Baron de Voght,[2] the Duchess of Courland, Monti, Pictet, editor of the *Biblio-*

[1] Son of the Prefect of Geneva, afterwards in the diplomatic service.

[2] Philanthropist, economist, and writer on agricultural subjects. The Emperor of Austria gave him his title.

thèque, Madame Vigée Le Brun, Oelenschläger, the Danish poet, Cuvier, Bonstetten, Frederika Brun, and Benjamin Constant's cousin, Rosalie. An impressionist picture has been bequeathed to us from the pen of almost every one of them, and there would be little to be gained by troubling to arrange the pictures in their order, or selecting them otherwise than at random. The picture drawn by Madame Vigée Le Brun may serve to begin with.

"I paint her in antique costume. She is not beautiful, but the animation of her countenance takes the place of beauty. To aid the expression I wished to give her, I entreated her to recite tragic verses while I painted. She declaimed passages from Corneille and Racine. . . . I find many persons established at Coppet: the beautiful Madame Récamier, the Comte de Sabran,[1] a young Englishman, Benjamin Constant, etc. Its society is continually renewed. They come to visit the illustrious exile who is pursued by the rancour of the Emperor. Her two sons are now with her, under the instruction of the German scholar Schlegel; her daughter is very beautiful, and has a passionate love of study. Madame de Staël receives with grace and without affectation; she leaves her company free all the morning, but they unite in the evening. It is only after dinner that they can converse with her. She then walks in her salon, holding in her hand a little green branch; and her words have an ardour quite peculiar to her. It is impossible to interrupt her. At these times she produces on one the effect of an improvisatrice."

[1] Elzéar de Sabran, stepson of Madame de Boufflers.

Next we may quote the report of the Genevan writer, Petit-Senn, who apparently was not quite sure whether he ought to be shocked or not. The circle, according to him—

"Presented the aspect of a synod of quite novel character. The different systems of religion were strongly contrasted there. Catholicism was represented by Mathieu de Montmorency, Quietism by M. de Langallerie, Illuminism by M. de Divonne, Rationalism by Baron Voght, Calvinism by the Pastor Maulinie. Even Benjamin Constant, then occupied with his work on Religions, brought his tribute to the theological conferences—conferences which borrowed no austerity from the accidents of the time or the place. The conversations at dinner and in the evening were chiefly on religious subjects of the most mystic nature, and were seldom changed even for the news of the day or for brief musical entertainments."

Our third picture may be that drawn by Baron de Voght, above referred to, in a letter to Madame Récamier.

"It is to you that I owe my most amiable reception at Coppet. It is no doubt to the favourable expectations aroused by your friendship that I owe my intimate acquaintance with this remarkable woman. I might have met her without your assistance,—some casual acquaintance would no doubt have introduced me,—but I should never have penetrated to the intimacy of this sublime and beautiful soul, and should never have known how much better she is than her

reputation. *She is an angel sent from heaven to reveal the divine goodness upon earth.* To make her irresistible, a pure ray of celestial light embellishes her spirit and makes her amiable from every point of view.

"At once profound and light, whether she is discovering a mysterious secret of the soul or grasping the lightest shadow of a sentiment, her genius shines without dazzling, and when the orb of light has disappeared, it leaves a pleasant twilight to follow it. . . . No doubt a few faults, a few weaknesses, occasionally veil this celestial apparition; even the initiated must sometimes be troubled by these eclipses which the Genevan astronomers in vain endeavour to predict.

"My travels so far have been limited to Lausanne and Coppet, where I often stay three or four days. The life there suits me perfectly; the company is even more to my taste. I like Constant's wit, Schlegel's learning, Sabran's amiability, Sismondi's talent and character, the simple truthful disposition and just intellectual perceptions of Auguste, the wit and sweetness of Albertine—I was forgetting Bonstetten—an excellent fellow, full of knowledge of all sorts, ready in wit, adaptable in character—in every way inspiring one's respect and confidence.

"Your sublime friend looks on and gives life to everything. She imparts intelligence to those around her. In every corner of the house someone is engaged in composing a great work. . . . Corinne is writing her delightful letters about Germany, which will no doubt prove to be the best thing she has ever done.

"*The Shunammitish Widow,* an Oriental

melodrama which she has just finished, will be played in October. Coppet will be flooded with tears. Constant and Auguste are both composing tragedies; Sabran is writing a comic opera, and Sismondi a history; Schlegel is translating something, Bonstetten is busy with philosophy, and I am busy with my letter to Juliette."

A month later, Baron de Voght resumes:—

"Since my last letter, Madame de Staël has read us several chapters of her work. Everywhere it bears the marks of her talent. I wish I could persuade her to cut out everything in it connected with politics, and all the metaphors which interfere with its clarity, simplicity, and accuracy. What she needs to demonstrate is not her Republicanism but her wisdom. . . . Mlle de Jenner played in one of Werner's tragedies which was given last Friday before an audience of twenty. She, Werner, and Schlegel played perfectly. . . .

"The arrival in Switzerland of M. Cuvier has been a happy distraction for Madame de Staël; they spent two days together at Geneva, and were well pleased with each other. On her return to Coppet she found Middleton there, and in receiving his confidences forgot her troubles. Yesterday she resumed her work.

"The poet[1] whose mystical and sombre genius has caused us such profound emotions, starts, in a few days' time, for Italy.

"I accompanied Corinne to Massot's. To alleviate the tedium of the sitting, a musical

[1] Monti.

performance had been arranged, a Mlle Romilly playing pleasantly on the harp, and the studio was a veritable temple of the Muses. . . .

"Bonstetten gave us two readings of a Memoir on the Northern Alps. It began very well, but afterwards it bored us. . . . Madame de Staël resumed her reading, and there was no longer any question of being bored. It is marvellous how much she must have read and thought over to be able to find the opportunity of saying so many good things. One may disagree with her, but one cannot help delighting in her talent. . . .

"And now we are here at Geneva, trying to reproduce Coppet at the Hotel des Balances. I am delightfully situated, with a wide view over the valley of Savoy, between the Alps and the Jura. . . . Yesterday evening the illusion of Coppet was complete. I had been with Madame de Staël, to call on Madame Rilliet,[1] who is so charming at her own fireside. On my return I played chess with Sismondi. Madame de Staël, Mlle Randall,[2] and Mlle Jenner sat on the sofa chatting with Bonstetten and young Barante. We were as we had always been—as we were in the days that I shall never cease regretting."

In conclusion we may survey the scene through the eyes of Cousin Rosalie—eyes that, as we know, were sharply observant, though prejudiced, and prone to see faults. Our first letter is written not long after Necker's death.

[1] *Née* Huber, the companion of Madame de Staël in her girlhood.

[2] An English lady, a protégée of Madame de Staël, and, after her death, of the Duchesse de Broglie.

"The other day I saw Bonstetten, who told me about Madame de Staël and her sorrow. She displays it at Geneva, and utilises it to give entertainments to the Duchess of Courland. Coppet, all the summer, has been the *rendezvous* of the savants of Germany and Geneva. There have been prodigious outbursts of wit and learning. Never, said M. de Bonstetten, has there been such an outpouring of ideas. He assured me that it might have tired anyone to death, and that it was a pleasure thereafter to meet people whose conversation was commonplace."

About the same time M. Constant d'Arlens visited Coppet, and Rosalie reports the gossip that he brought home with him.

"Schlegel used to address the lady of the house with irony or severity; Benjamin was ill, and grumbled all day long, like a spoiled child. Moreover, he shows himself shockingly fond of little Albertine. He and her mother combine to overwhelm her with caresses and misguided attentions."

Finally we may give Rosalie's account of a performance of *Merope* at which she was herself present.

"I had a kind and friendly reception. The performance fulfilled all my expectations. I had never seen this beautiful tragedy played. The simplicity of the subject and of the action, the unaccentuated elevation of the sentiments, the sustained beauty of the lines, the verisimilitude of the events represented—all these things contribute

to one's interest and illusion. I was at Messena, and Madame de Staël was indeed the august and unhappy queen. She had recovered the dignity and grace which she ordinarily lacks. The tone of her voice and the expression of her face suited her part. She never for an instant ceased to realise her *rôle*. M. Cramer also gave me great pleasure as Narbas. The other actors were, in my opinion, mediocre or bad; but the general effect was such that one forgave them. The spectacle as a whole was agreeable and well arranged, and the spectators were well placed for seeing and hearing. One feels obliged to the celebrated lady for having taken up this noble kind of entertainment. Conversation gains from it. People are, to some extent, fishing for invitations. It is a pity that she does not maintain in her house the tone which would make women anxious to go there. They have a long repertory, and are going to play *Mahomet*. Benjamin thinks he is going to play very well, but for my part I shall feel very anxious about his *début*."

Such is our setting. The Coppet Salon which our quotations conjure up must have been, as has been said, "something like Holland House but more Bohemian, something like Harley Street but more select, something like Gad's Hill—which it resembled in the fact that the members of the house parties were expected to spend their mornings at their desks—but on a higher social plane; a centre at once of high thinking and frivolous behaviour, of hard work and desperate

love-making, which sometimes paved the way for trouble."

One visualises the scene easily as one stands in the large Coppet drawing-room, in which so many ornaments, so many pictures, so many articles of furniture are relics of the celebrated epoch. One thinks at first only of the outward glitter and the intellectual distinction; and one is tempted to say that here life was lived as it should be lived—as all persons of intelligence and leisure and reasonable contempt for the conventions would like to live. Not until one's thoughts penetrate beneath the surface do the doubts arise; but then they come in great force, and slowly strengthen into certainties.

For this society was in the main a society of exiles—of uprooted men and women, whose lives, by no fault of their own, lacked aim and continuity. Only a few of them were really happy and contented—those who were placid and passionless like Madame Récamier, and those who, like Sismondi, were absorbed in their intellectual occupations. The rest were only making believe furiously, and trying to persuade themselves that movement was the same thing as life. Madame de Staël, whose movements were the most agitated, was probably the farthest from true happiness. She wrote of Coppet as "the place where I bored myself so terribly for so many years."

Only boredom was far from being her only, or even her worst distress. One cannot fail to be

reminded of that at the moment when the liveried attendant of the visitors exhibits the miniature of Benjamin Constant—"homme de lettres qui visitait le chateau de temps en temps." One remembers then that the period of Madame de Staël's triumphant theatrical representations—the period of the house parties that were famous throughout Europe—was also the period of the stormy passages which culminated in her final severance from her lover.

The visitors whom she entertained knew little or nothing about that. Sainte-Beuve, indeed, relates how one of them, concealed behind some bushes in the garden, inadvertently overheard a quarrel in which tears were mingled with reproaches and recriminations. He seems, however, to have kept his own counsel at the time; and before strangers appearances must have been in the main preserved. At all events, it is not to the memoirs of contemporaries that we have to go for the details of the story. For these we must go back to the Constant correspondence and the *Journal Intime.*

CHAPTER XVIII

Theatrical performances at Coppet — Extracts from the *Journal Intime* — Benjamin Constant renews his acquaintance with Charlotte Dutertre—He proposes marriage and is accepted—Madame de Staël pursues him and drags him back to Coppet.

In 1805, Madame de Staël told persons in her confidence that she meant to marry Benjamin Constant later, when she had started her sons in their professions; but his letters to his family at this period show no disposition to fall in with her proposals. The deaths of Madame Talma and of Madame de Charrière appear, for the time being, to have expelled all thoughts of other women from his mind. In the former, he writes, he has lost "the person whom I trusted the most, and who had the most disinterested affection for me—a woman, in short, who often gave me pleasure, and never caused me pain." He had intended to visit the latter on her deathbed; "but her extreme weakness rendered all emotion dangerous, and I feared to make her worse, and so precipitate the hour which I was told was inevitable." There follow melancholy reflections on death and the links which it severs: "None of these losses are replaced. The time for forming new ties is over; the world is depopulated; and

though I am not yet old, I have more friends in the grave than on the earth." For the rest, the letters deal with politics and money matters. The bankruptcy of Madame Récamier's husband is mentioned. The request is made that the writer's letters may not be addressed to the "care of" Madame de Staël, since he is not her guest, though he is occupying a separate apartment in the house in which she is staying at Geneva; but that is the only occurrence of her name.

Of the Diary for 1805 only a few fragments have been preserved. The principal fact that transpires is that Benjamin's friends are still trying to find a wife for him. "It is evident," he writes, "that it is open to me to marry either Antoinette or Adrienne, and that, if I do not do so, I am renouncing with a light heart an income of thirty thousand francs." But he does renounce that income. "It would be the best plan, so far as my work is concerned, but Madame de Staël has resumed possession of me." It is not until 1806 that the plot, as related in the Diary, thickens.

The entries have evidently been printed in the wrong order, and it is impossible to be sure of reprinting them in the right order; but it seems probable that the passages relating to the theatrical performances ought to come first. At any rate, we may give them separately.

"There is a rehearsal of *Merope*, and I allow myself to be induced to play 'Zopyre' in *Mahomet*, in order that I may have the pleasure

of insulting the impostor. Nevertheless, I am ill. The kind of life which I am leading is opposed to physical and moral health. My ideas are shattered by this agitation of society—a monotonous agitation, for wit no less than folly may become monotonous."

"A performance of *Merope*, admirably played. A complete success, *quoique point de bienveillance*. I hear of the death of Madame de Charrière de Tuyll. Another devoted friend is lost to me. The world is depopulated for my heart."

"I learn the part of 'Zopyre,' in which I shall display a superb combination of strength with paternal affection. But I am dissatisfied with the first rehearsal; my gestures are bad."

"A rehearsal of *La fausse Agnès*, which goes very badly. *Mahomet* will go much better. I have got over my nervousness."

"The public performance of *Mahomet* took place yesterday. I played very well. The success was complete. We also played *Les Plaideurs*. Schlegel, who was comic in tragedy, is not at all gay in comedy."

"Performance of *Phèdre*. Madame de Staël plays admirably. I have acute pains in my side. Nature is treating me very cavalierly this winter."

It was natural that Madame de Staël should play admirably, for she had been taught elocution by the great Clairon; but Benjamin Constant's estimate of his own performance was not that of the spectators. Geneva passed upon it a

criticism which, as it was based upon a pun, can only be given in French: "Je ne sais pas si c'était le roi d'Epire, mais je sais bien que c'était le pire des rois." None the less, his interest in the drama became so keen that he prepared a French version of *Wallenstein* for the Coppet stage.

All this, however, is by the way. One relates it merely to note the make-believe of gaiety that coincided with the developing drama of the heart. Benjamin Constant was very anxious, during this period, to serve Madame de Staël's interests as a friend. He tried hard, though without success, to obtain her the permission which she sought to visit Paris. But the storm of which Sainte-Beuve's story gave us the indication is already raging beneath the surface, though the cause which was to bring it to a climax does not yet transpire. We will follow it stage by stage.

"Lausanne is dull. Still, if a quiet life were all I wanted, I should find it here. Passed the evening at La Chaumière. Antoinette makes herself agreeable."

"Got up at five o'clock in the morning. I ought always to do so, as I should get on better with my work, and should avoid a series of melancholy reflections which invariably assail me when I awake.

"Called on Madame la Générale. Antoinette's hand is offered to me. I refuse it. I shall regret it, but the form of Madame de Staël rises as a reproach between me and all my projects.

"Dined with d'Arlens. Spent the evening at Dorigny. I think Antoinette likes me. She is good and sweet. If I could but—— How restful it would be! Why not profit peaceably by the friendship that is here offered to me? Is not real happiness to be found only in the common lot?"

"A letter from Madame de Staël. It is the collapse of the universe, and the movement of chaos. And yet, with all her faults, I prefer her to everything else. I decide to rejoin her at Auxerre. I am in a state of uncertainty about everything, like a vessel driven by two opposing tempests."

"My father being ill, I go to Dôle, and am detained there several days. My father is gentle and affectionate with me, and that does me good. But a letter from Madame de Staël overtakes me. All the volcanoes in the world make less of a blaze than she does. What am I to do? The struggle wears me out. I must lie down in my bark and go to sleep in the midst of the tempest."

"My father is better, and I start for Auxerre. The chief cause of the agitation of my life is the need of loving. I must satisfy it at all costs."

"I go to Coppet, where Madame de Staël is back again. The poet Monti arrives there. He has a superb face, gentle and proud. His declamations in verse are very remarkable. He is a true poet, passionate, impetuous, weak, nervous, mobile, the Italian analogue of Chénier, though of more value than Chénier.

"In the evening I have a terrible scene with

Madame de Staël. I announce that I will definitely break with her, and then there is a second scene. Fury; reconciliation impossible; departure difficult. I must get married."

"I hear of the bankruptcy of M. Récamier. Here is trouble for another of my friends! Does misfortune only befall the good? *Madame de Staël has reconquered me.*"

"Back at Geneva, where I establish myself to get on more steadily with my work. I re-read several passages of my book on philosophy. I am satisfied with it, but I have still much ground to cover, and town life does not allow me to get on with it. One cannot desert all one's friends and sulk with the whole world. Still, I am sick to death of society gossip. To-day it has given me a fever. I pass the evening with Amélie Fabri."

"Dinner with Madame de Germany, and supper with Argand; the whole business very tiresome.

"It is still my inclination to break with Madame de Staël; but every time that I feel that inclination I am destined to receive the contrary impression on the following day. Nevertheless, her impetuosity and her imprudences are a torment and a perpetual danger to me. Let us break it off, then, if we can. It is my one chance of a quiet life."

"Schlegel is very ill; his fears are ridiculous. He demands doctors right and left. There comes a German physician, who proves to be

a man of learning and intelligence. Decidedly there is more profundity in that nation than in ours.

"A letter from Madame Lindsay, who always writes as if I were persecuting her to let me see her. A singular device, for I do not even dream of doing so. One finds the queerest ideas with this half of the human race, as witness the wrath of Mme C. because I permitted myself to say that her son was like her."

"I enter to-day, October 25, 1806, upon my fortieth year. All my life has been agitated, but never have I suffered such anguish and uncertainty as at present."

"Off again to Paris, to work on behalf of Madame de Staël."

"A journey to my farm near Etampes. What an oyster's life is that of a farmer! But perhaps it is the better sort of life."

So the Diary for the year concludes. The passages quoted, though stormy, are only the premonitory symptoms of the storm to come. If they show the writer tiring of his mistress, at least they do not show him attracted by any other woman. That new fact does not appear in the correspondence until 1807, when Charlotte comes into the story.

We have met her before in this narrative. She was Mlle von Hardenberg, afterwards Madame von Marenholz, and now Madame Dutertre, the wife of a French *émigré* for whom we have seen the Diarist expressing his contempt.

He had first met her at Brunswick in the days of the *liaison* with Madame de Charrière. There are references to her, not in the best taste, in the letters to Madame de Charrière. It would seem that she threw herself at Benjamin Constant's head, and that, while flirting with her, he laughed at her, and then repented and felt ashamed. He therefore begs Madame de Charrière to burn the letters relating to her, since, "if they fell into the hands of strangers, they would give the final blow to my moribund reputation;" and the presumption is that Madame de Charrière complied with the request.

Strangely enough, however, Charlotte was not forgotten, and we have noted the mention of her name in the letters to Cousin Rosalie. The writer sent no message, but merely made inquiries. Or rather, he wanted to know whether Charlotte, on her part, remembered and inquired. To that extent—though to that extent only—his heart had travelled back to her. She had been a very restful woman, not in the least exacting; she had not, like Madame de Staël, made scenes with him. There was a certain tranquillity even in the consecration of memories and sighs to her. And now he met her again.

He was at Paris at the time, "working for Madame de Staël"; and he writes on this subject, and on others.

"I have seen Fouché several times. I will not weary of serving Madame de Staël, but I

meet with a great deal of opposition. I am going to write a novel which will be the history of my life. All serious work has become impossible to me in the midst of my tormented life. . . .

". . . I have finished my novel in a fortnight. I have read it to Hochet, who is very pleased with it."

The novel thus dashed off in a fortnight was *Adolphe*—the one vital and enduring book that Benjamin Constant wrote. He is sometimes called Adolphe after his hero, just as Madame de Staël is called Corinne after her heroine. He did not publish it, however, until several years later, and discussion of it may for the present be deferred. Our business now is with the impression which Charlotte made upon her reappearance. Allusions to her alternate with allusions to Madame de Staël—her business and her anger—to the writer's work, and to his health.

"I am now at my country seat, and more quiet. I have resumed my great work on Religion, and I am getting on very well with it. It has made great progress, but now I am off again to join Madame de Staël at Acosta. She wants me for her business, which seems to be taking a turn for the better. More travelling! More packing!"

"A letter from my father, who demands my presence. He wants me to go to Besançon and get myself in a further mess with his new family.[1] I will not do it. Dinner with M. de Wimont. One man bores me as much as another. I have

[1] Benjamin's father had married his housekeeper.

seen Garat about Madame de Staël's permit. I hope she will have time to finish the publication of *Corinne*. The articles which I have just published on this work have had a great succsss."

"I often visit Madame Dutertre. She has a great charm for me. There is something piquant in her intelligence, and she has that sweetness and goodness which always have the effect of making me happy. I feel that a union with her would be the repose of my life. If M. Dutertre is willing to break ties to which he seems to attach little importance, my future is there, and Charlotte accepts the proposal."

Benjamin means, that is to say, to marry Madame Dutertre if M. Dutertre can be persuaded to divorce her. He was ultimately persuaded by means of a considerable cash payment. In the meantime, however, Madame de Staël had obtained at least an inkling of what was happening.

"A letter from Madame de Staël. What a Fury! Heaven save us from each other!

"Passed the evening at Madame Récamier's with Fauriel. I read them my novel, which affected them strangely. The character of the hero revolts them. Decidedly people cannot understand me."

"My eyes are getting worse. I have consulted V——. It is a weakening of the optic nerve, and what I want is rest. They applied a seton. The physical pain is nothing. A letter from Madame de Staël arrives at this moment, and her insults find me covered with blood and fainting."

Madame de Staël, however, had reason for her jealousy, and her lover was not so ill that he could not press his suit with Madame Dutertre.

"Called upon Madame Dutertre, whose appearance has much improved. I make proposals to her which she does not reject. This evening I shall be master of the citadel. The resistance has lasted long enough."

"I go to the country with Charlotte. She is an angel of sweetness and charm. I love her more and more every day. She is gentle and lovable. How mad a fool I was to repel her twelve years ago! What a mad passion for independence it was that dominated me, and ended by placing me under the domination of the most imperious creature in the world!"

"We return to Paris. Mad days; delights of love. What the devil does it all mean? It is twelve years since I felt anything of the sort—how mad! This woman whose love I have refused a hundred times, who has always loved me, whom I have repeatedly repulsed, whom I quitted without regret eighteen months ago, to whom I have written a hundred indifferent letters, from whom I took away my own letters only last Monday—this same woman is turning my head to-day. Evidently the comparison with Madame de Staël is the cause of it all. The contrast between her impetuosity, her egoism, her constant occupation with herself, and Charlotte's calm, humility, and modesty, and sweetness, makes the latter a thousand times more dear to me. I am tired of the 'man-woman,' whose iron hand has

held me enchained for ten years, when I have with me a woman who is really a woman to intoxicate and enchant me. If I can marry her, I hesitate no longer. Everything depends upon the line taken by M. Dutertre."

For a moment there ensues reaction, and an alarming premonition.

"Passed the evening with Charlotte. Can it be that the fever is passing and the boredom beginning? I am devilishly afraid it is. She is full of charm, it is true, but there is little variety about her, and she is of a very restless temperament."

It seems, however, that he has wronged her, or misread his heart, for now we read :—

"A touching letter from Charlotte. I am unjust to her. She is an angel. A stiff and bitter letter from Madame de Staël. My God, how she bores me!"

"People are talking about me, not in the kindest manner. They are already talking of the effect of the double divorce, arranged for a purpose settled in advance. No matter. Charlotte is an angel, and an insipid society need not think that its opinion will prevent me from marrying her. And yet, what obstacles there are! I shudder at the thought of a wife who will not be received anywhere. Perhaps I shall bury myself at Lausanne. Otherwise I am sure I shall commit suicide within six months."

"Lunch with Gérando. . . . Pack up my

manuscripts. I have twelve thousand francs at my disposal. Will that help me to bring about a rupture and a marriage in which I shall find peace?"

Hardly has he written that, however, than the old influence reasserts itself. Benjamin is back with Madame de Staël, "under pretence of helping her with her affairs." He speaks of "scenes," and the consciousness on both sides that rupture is imminent. M. Dutertre, meanwhile, is feigning jealousy and raising his price, and Benjamin wavers in spite of the contrast between Charlotte's sweet reasonableness and "this fury who pursues me, foaming at the mouth, with a dagger in her hand." At last, however, his agreement is concluded. The husband's application for divorce is despatched to Germany. But then:—

"Madame de Staël is on my track again. She will no longer hear of the breach of our relations. My simplest course is not to see her again, but to wait at Lausanne for the orders of Charlotte—that angel whom I bless for saving me. Schlegel writes that Madame de Staël says she will kill herself if I leave her. I don't believe a word of it, but it is an untimely rumour for my ears. I feel that I shall be regarded as a monster if I do abandon her; if I do not abandon her, I shall die. I regret her, and I hate her."

Then he is lured to Coppet in a melting mood, but, after a scene of reconciliation, makes his escape to Lausanne. In vain.

"Alas! What was the use of flight? Madame de Staël is here, and all my plans are overturned. There is a frightful scene, lasting till five o'clock in the morning. I am violent, and put myself in the wrong. Instead of finding support here [from his relatives], I only meet with anathemas against a woman capable of a double divorce. Poor dear Charlotte, I will not desert you."

None the less, he is dragged off again to Coppet, and compelled to take part in the theatrical performances. Charlotte does not write, and he is afraid that the agony of his mind may cause him to forget his lines. He observes that the Chevalier de Langallerie—the head of a sect of mystics at Lausanne—is fascinated by Madame de Staël. He wishes she would yield herself to him, "as that would give her something to do." He adds: "I have lunched with the Chevalier, and done what I can to induce Madame de Staël to accept the consolations which he offers her." But it is useless: "she is not ready to become religious." He is only comforted when a long letter from Charlotte at last arrives. "How sensible she is!" he exclaims. "How reasonable, and how affectionate!" It is a further comfort to discover that his aunt, Madame de Nassau, is not so scandalised as he had supposed. "She says she will receive Charlotte with every kindness," and it is to be presumed that the rest of the family will follow her lead. He will act at once, therefore; he will be off on the morrow. But then:—

"What did I say? Everything is upside down again, and this effort is impossible to me. My letter is torn up. Some magic power overrules me. I am going to Coppet. Good God! What am I going to do there?"

"She came; she threw herself at my feet; she uttered fearful cries of pain and desolation. A heart of iron could not have resisted. I am back at Coppet with her, and I have promised to remain for six weeks, and Charlotte is expecting me at the end of the month. Good God! What am I to do? I am trampling my future and my happiness under foot."

One of the things which he does is to adapt *Wallenstein* for Madame de Staël's theatre. He works desperately hard at it, composing no less than 328 lines of verse in a single day. He is rather pleased with the result; he reads the first act to the company, and is applauded, though his acting is a sorry performance. But he still drags at his chains, though occasionally tempted to let them be riveted on him afresh.

"A letter from Charlotte, more loving and more sure of me than ever. Would she forgive me if she knew where I am and what I am doing? How slowly the time passes! Into what abysm have I thrown myself? A terrible scene in the evening. Shall I get out of it alive? I have to pass my time in lying and deception to avoid the frenzy which frightens me. If it were not for the hope afforded by Madame de Staël's approaching departure for Vienna, this existence would be

intolerable to me. To console myself I pass my time in imagining how things will go if they go well. This is my castle in the air. Charlotte finishes her arrangements and makes her preparations in secret. Madame de Staël starts for Vienna, suspecting nothing. I marry Charlotte, and we spend the winter pleasantly at Lausanne. If that can be contrived, I shall know how to profit by my happiness."

"My tragedy makes great progress; it is a pleasant occupation for me. The time passes, but the dangers remain. Madame de Staël is very useful to me for my tragedy, and she is so good and so gentle to me, that if it were not for the recollection of past violences, the attachment would revive. Nevertheless, my social position is curious. Here am I between two women—one of whom has wronged me by refusing to marry me, while the other, by marrying me, will do me an injury."

"Madame de Staël resumes her terrible character. I work furiously to deaden my feelings. I read two acts to Chateauvieux, who is delighted with them. What a torture it is to live with a person who is always feeling the pulse of her own sensibility, and gets angry when one does not take sufficient interest in this self-analysis!

"A letter from Charlotte. She knows everything. She is sad and discouraged, but remains faithful to me. I will not desert her. My God! If only the other would take her departure!"

"Went to Lausanne. Everybody disapproves

of my return to Coppet. *Phèdre* is produced again. Madame de Staël plays admirably. My tragedy is becoming a pretext to prolong my stay."

"Charlotte's character is admirably loyal and reasonable, but her vacillating conduct might push her to extremes, especially when she arrives at Besançon and finds that I am not there. My father writes that he wants to come to me here—there remained but that! Madame de Staël is certainly very good, and of great intelligence. My piece will be superb. I have only 180 lines to write to finish it."

"Charlotte is at Besançon in despair, and my future is in peril. I can hesitate no longer. My father will serve me as a pretext, and I am off."

"Besançon.—I find Charlotte very ill. She is in delirium, and shudders at the sound of my voice, crying out: 'That is the man who is killing me.' I throw myself at the feet of Providence, to ask pardon for my criminal follies, and pray for strength to get out of this terrible position."

"After some days of suffering and anguish, Charlotte begins to recover. Her courage and her confidence in me have returned to her, and my happiness is assured.

"Nevertheless, I have again written three times to Madame de Staël—letters which will perhaps cause her pain. But it must be so. The final moment is approaching."

CHAPTER XIX

Stormy scenes at Coppet—Benjamin's confidences to his aunt—His endeavours to escape—He joins Charlotte at Brevans.

THE *Journal Intime* breaks off abruptly in 1807, not to be resumed until 1811; so that, for the rest of our story, we have to seek other sources of information. The material, however, is abundant. We know what Benjamin told his aunt and his cousin; we know what Rosalie told her brother Charles.

Rosalie, at this stage, was only partly in her cousin's confidence. His letters to her do not mention Charlotte, though they are full of his desire for a definitive separation from Madame de Staël. "My love for her," he writes, "is only friendship, and I know that this friendship will be flouted as soon as it ceases to be the determining factor of my life;" and he adds that his wish to act with consideration is reducing him to despair. "The end of a *liaison* that has lasted so long with a person whose qualities are so admirable, the idea that I cannot induce her to accept my friendship as a substitute for a tie which is no longer a source of happiness to either of us, the strange feeling that nothing that I may do to-day will in the least diminish her dissatisfaction with what

I am going to do presently—all this darkens my thoughts and makes my life heavy and melancholy."

He protests that he is being treated badly: "Returning here [to Paris at the end of June 1807], I found letters awaiting me, too cruel to be addressed to a highway robber, and she has written others to mutual friends in which she says the most awful things about my character. It is hard to have to submit to that after having accompanied her, for the last year, from inn to inn, accommodating myself to a life absolutely opposed to my tastes and exceedingly bad for my health, resigning myself to be misunderstood and misjudged by the world—all because she was in exile and was unhappy." The "perpetual movement," he exclaims, is a weariness to him; but he none the less lets himself be lured back to Coppet, where furious scenes are once more enacted. He complains of "a combination of violence and affection which shakes my soul to its foundations." Argument is in vain. Madame de Staël threatens to kills herself if she is abandoned. "Her children, her servants, her friends, her acquaintances are all in her confidence with regard to this threat, and they all regard me as a monster because I do not appease her sufferings." But what is to be done? "I pass my days in disputing with her, and my nights in weeping over her."

Benjamin, as we have already seen, fled from his tumultuous surroundings and sought refuge at Lausanne, where Madame de Staël speedily came

to fetch him. His own narrative of the incident, however, is tame and cold compared with that of his cousin Rosalie, who, at least at that hour, held Madame de Staël in abhorrence. "When," she writes, "he was alarmed for his failing eyesight, instead of consoling him, she wrote him insulting letters. When, in his convalescence, he came to his father's house for rest, she had him taken away by her valet Eugène and her pedant Schlegel, threatening to follow and kill herself before their eyes if he did not come. You can imagine my uncle's annoyance and indignation." It seemed an occasion, therefore, for Rosalie to call at Coppet and speak her mind. "I spoke to her," she tells her brother, "with the greatest frankness. I told her that, when she was free, my wish was that she should marry Benjamin, as an act of reparation, and because of their similarity of mind, character, etc. I added that, in not marrying, they had shown their contempt for each other, and that, subsequently, the preferences which she had displayed for other men had put Benjamin in the most awkward position, that he did not deserve such treatment, and that she could not reproach me with anything except my desire for his happiness and good name. She replied that, sooner than lose him, she would marry him whenever I liked, and that I had better occupy myself with hastening the event. I did not allow myself to be suppressed, but the conversation ended more amiably than it began, and on such a note that we may

see each other again." And then follows the account of the most impetuous of all the scenes in which Madame de Staël sought happiness in love. It is a long letter, but it is so graphically expressed that it must be given in full.

"My friendship had not the strength to contend against the furious passions of this terrible woman. I have already told you about my conversation with the too celebrated one, my promise to hold my tongue about it until their departure, and their plans for playing a tragedy. The tragedy was a great success. Never has *Hermione* been played with so much fire and conviction. After the performance, which was indeed very agreeable and very brilliant, they went away. Benjamin stayed behind, vaguely promising to join them in a few days' time, but fully resolved upon breaking off his relations with her, while remaining upon friendly terms. He was very agitated, and most uncertain how to set about it, but quite sure that no method would be satisfactory. He was taken in hand by the Chevalier[1] and Lisette, who, seeing him unhappy, tried to help him after their fashion. He tried their moral opium; but his reason and intelligence did not like the taste of it. In the midst of all that, the lady, observing that he did not come to her, sent her horses, her carriage, her servants—the whole caravan, in short—to fetch him.

"Early one morning he enters the room, and announces: 'I am going to Coppet;' and then he falls into a fit of despair that would have touched your heart. I cried bitterly for him. My aunt

[1] M. de Langallerie.

and Madame de Nassau met, and he accepted their advice—that he should put an end to the situation by offering the lady the alternative of an early marriage or an amicable rupture. He sets out, believing himself firm in this resolve.

"On the following day, before nine o'clock, we see him arrive on horseback, ready to drop from fatigue. He tells us that, in answer to the reproaches with which she greeted him, he had made the proposal agreed upon. Her reply was to assemble her children and their tutor and say: 'There is the man who obliges me to choose between despair and the necessity of compromising your existence and your fortune.' Benjamin answers this unworthy accusation with a formal protest that he will never marry her. Then she gets up, throws herself, screaming, on the ground, passes her handkerchief round her neck to throttle herself, and in fact makes one of those fearful scenes which she can always make when she chooses, and which poor Benjamin cannot resist. He was weak enough to end by speaking words of tenderness. On the following morning, however, he woke early, and once more perceived the horror of his position. He comes downstairs, finds his horse in the yard, mounts, and rides here without stopping. We did what we could, and Madame de Nassau, who is very fond of him, though she blames his weakness, joined us in consoling him and fortifying his resolutions.

"When we had agreed upon a reasonable plan, she left us, and Benjamin was beginning to calm himself when we heard screams below. He recognised her voice. My first impulse was to leave the room and lock him in. Going out, I find her

on her back on the staircase, with her bosom bare, and her dishevelled locks sweeping the steps. 'Where is he?' she screams. 'I must find him again.' My idea is to say that he is not here. She has been looking for him all over the town. My aunt lifts her to her feet, and leads her into your room. Meanwhile Benjamin is knocking at the door of the drawing-room, and I have to open it. She hears him, runs to him, throws herself into his arms, and then falls on the floor again, uttering the most bitter reproaches. 'What right have you,' I ask her, 'to make him miserable, and torment his life?' Whereupon she overwhelms me with the most cruel insults that you can imagine. In my indignation at this dreadful scene, at the gentleness of my aunt, whom she has been cunning enough to flatter, and at the fact that Benjamin does not take my part as he ought, I go out to tell Madame de Nassau all about it, and remain at her house while she comes here. She did not show any anger, however, but only spoke to Benjamin. The upshot of it all was that she carried him off to Coppet for six weeks. He writes us letters thence, full of friendship, but fairly calm, acquiescing in a strength greater than his own, and, as it were, touched by this last terrible proof of her love. What do you think of this conclusion?"

The conclusion, however, was not yet. We have only reached the stage at which, as we have seen from the Diary, Benjamin found himself held by the double promise to stay six weeks with Madame de Staël, and to meet Charlotte at the

end of the month. Madame de Nassau knew about Charlotte though Rosalie did not, and our best definition of Benjamin's attitude towards the two women is to be found in the letters which he wrote, not to his cousin, but to his aunt.

One feels that this aunt must have been a very charming and also a very sensible old lady. She evidently realised—what so many ladies fail to realise—that fault-finding is not the same thing as helpful counsel, and that sympathy with the love troubles of a man of forty generally means making the best of a bad situation. The entanglement with Madame de Staël did not please her, but she did not waste her time in deploring it. Charlotte, the twice-divorced, was not the wife she would herself have selected for her nephew; but she respected her nephew's choice, and promised to be not only polite but cordial. He rewarded her with such confidences as aunts do not often receive.

The degree and character of the confidence subsisting between them may perhaps be best measured by an extract from a letter which has no direct bearing on the writer's personal affairs. Benjamin was reporting the death of Madame Cottin, the novelist. "She was very ugly," he writes, "but she had inspired grand passions. A young man committed suicide on her doorstep because of her cruelty, and her kindnesses caused the death of an old man of seventy. The story is the antithesis of that of the lance of Achilles.

She died in a very religious frame of mind at the age of thirty-four. Religion—I say it in all sincerity—religion is an admirable thing, because no antecedents stand in its way. It can be grafted on ambition, on love, on any passion whatsoever, and the graft is successful at all periods of life."

An aunt to whom a nephew could write, without rebuke, like that was an aunt whom he could trust with his secrets without fear of censorious criticism; and Benjamin's letters to Madame de Nassau are indeed of an open-hearted and convincing candour. His love for Charlotte veritably bubbles over. She is "so pure, so natural, and so sweet," that he cannot be an hour in her company without feeling that his whole life has been lifted on to a new plane of happiness and tranquillity. He insists that this is no transitory impression, but that Charlotte has always affected him thus every time that he has met her during the last four years. At the same time he is most sensible of his obligations towards Madame de Staël, and most anxious not to cause her any avoidable pain; and it seems to him a fresh charm in Charlotte's character that she shares his feelings in this respect, and makes no objection to his paying yet another visit to Coppet. He is aware that he is guilty of deception, and that the world would judge him severely if it knew the facts; but he protests that, throughout the whole of his tortuous transactions, his motives have always been good. The happiness of Madame de

Staël, no less than of Charlotte, is, in some sense, a deposit in his charge. He must therefore postpone his union with the latter until the former is provided with "the distractions of which she stands in need." And so forth, through a long series of letters, in the tone of a man who suffers at once from hypertrophy of the conscience and atrophy of the will.

This was in 1808. The Coppet gaieties were renewed in the summer of that year. Tieck, the sculptor, came there to make a bust of the hostess, who was repeating her triumphs on the amateur stage, alike as authoress and actress. The house was full of people. Benjamin was revising, and preparing to print, his tragedy; and meanwhile, masked by the outward show of levity and merriment, the drama of real life progressed. Charlotte, accompanied by her aunt, the Princess von Hardenberg, came to Lausanne; and the Princess dined at Coppet, though she left Charlotte at home. Charlotte was affectionately received by Madame de Nassau, and the secret of her betrothal to Benjamin was kept; but further developments were prevented by the intervention of Benjamin's father. It was his wish, it appeared, that this marriage, so often delayed, should now take place; and his wish would seem to have given Benjamin resolution to act. It was arranged that Charlotte should go on a three months' visit to M. Juste de Constant at Brevans, and that Benjamin should join her there. He

did not tell Madame de Staël—he did not dare to tell her—but he started.

"I hope," he writes on December 6, "that, on Saturday evening or Sunday morning, I shall be at Brevans. I am within sight of port; but my course is from shoal to shoal, and there are still two or three reefs of rock to be passed. The quiet, if quiet there is, will be a new sensation for me."

The next letter, dated from Brevans on December 15, shows him at least in some respects a man of energy.

"Here I am, my dear aunt, after travelling through such quantities of snow as I never saw before. My sledge upset. I spent four days on the journey, with eight horses, and a whole army of men to clear the track. At last I have arrived, with my purse much lightened, but very glad to have got clear of those awful roads. I found my prisoner fairly well in health, very loving, very sweet, and disposed to do whatever she can to please me. My father said nothing to me about my intentions, but I shall execute them without encountering any opposition from him.

"So I reach the goal at which I have aimed so long, with so much constancy, and with such strenuous efforts. There is in Madame Dutertre a gentleness, an abandon, a simplicity of heart which fills my soul with calm. Yet it often happens that my memories assail me. My heart feels that habits have grown upon it; and the roots that have to be torn up are deep, and bleed in secret."

CHAPTER XX

Benjamin marries Charlotte secretly—They go to Paris and are happy—Madame de Staël is told—Her wrath—Her sons threaten Benjamin with personal violence—He promises to keep the secret of his marriage a little longer—He returns yet again to Coppet—The financial settlement with Madame de Staël.

The Constant marriage received the benediction of a Protestant pastor at Brevans in December 1808; that milestone on the journey, at any rate, was now safely passed. Yet the words quoted at the end of the last chapter expressed a just premonition. The marriage, like the engagement, was a secret from everyone except Madame de Nassau. Madame de Staël, knowing nothing about it, was still seeking happiness in love.

For the moment Benjamin and his wife were out of her reach at Paris, whither they had started early in 1809. His preoccupation with his heart did not quite exclude all other interests. He writes of the publication of *Wallenstein* and of the attention which it has attracted. He mentions that he has received a presentation copy of M. de Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs*, and that the sustained pomposity of the work displeases him. But he is, at the same time, analysing his feelings and asking himself how

far he is really happy. He has, he tells Rosalie, a profound wound in his heart: "Though the surface may heal, the pain will probably remain for ever." And he adds:—

"It seems to me impossible to be happy; the world has misunderstood me. Yet I must not complain, for I have misunderstood myself. If only I had met someone, when I was young enough, who would have wished to make me happy, instead of regarding me simply as created to contribute to her happiness! But everything in life happens too late. When the heart is capable of happiness, the happiness is not there; when the happiness comes, the heart to feel it is lacking."

To his aunt, at the same period, he addresses appeal after appeal on no account to disclose his secret. The maintenance of the mystery, he writes at the end of March, "is more necessary than ever." Charlotte, he protests, is not urging him to dissipate it prematurely; and he can find no words adequate to praise her "goodness," her "generosity," her "heroic devotion." Her character is devoid of egotism, of vanity, of self-interest to a "superhuman" degree; and she is acting in concert with him for the best.

"I will tell you the details," he says, "when I have reached the port towards which I am steering. It is straight sailing at present, but there is still a shoal to be crossed. We are adopting the gentlest, the most generous, the

most delicate course. I cannot guarantee that the result will not, for the moment, be painful; but with two easy consciences and two loving hearts one finds a way out of many difficulties. Perhaps I am urging you too emphatically to keep the secret of which you have so long been the guardian; but it is more important than ever that you should do so, for it is indispensable that the delicacy of our conduct should not figure as irony of the bitterest kind."

None the less, the time was now at hand when Madame de Staël must be told, and the husband and wife came to Switzerland to tell her. It appears that Charlotte told her in Benjamin's presence, in the early days of May, with a shamefaced and apologetic air. She could not help it, she said; Benjamin was "so good." The scene which ensued is said by some of the biographers to have been violent. Probably it was. Madame de Staël was apt to be violent, and she was not likely to be reconciled to her defeat by finding Charlotte "insipid." The letter to Madame de Nassau, however, says nothing of any dispute, but relates chiefly to the singular concession which Madame de Staël was able to obtain.

"I have ensured," Benjamin writes, "the maintenance of our friendship, to which, as you know, I attach great value, by promising to keep my marriage secret a little longer, and leaving her the means of preparing the public mind to believe that the dissolution of our relationship is due to her own will and initiative. . . . Madame

de Hardenberg has seconded my endeavours with all the devotion of profound affection, and all the delicacy of true sensibility, offering and consenting to submit to a difficult situation in order to avoid causing pain. I am indebted to her for all the happiness which I hope to enjoy with her, and all the peace of mind which I have long been desiring."

That is one version; but Rosalie's letter to Charles represents Charlotte as an intimidated rather than a consenting party to the strange transaction.

"She [Madame de Staël] was so violent," is the cousin's account, "and she held out such threats of suicide and worse, that she extorted from them both a promise on their word of honour that they would not make their marriage known yet awhile, and that he would remain at Coppet. All this puts him in the most annoying and ridiculous position, and I don't know how it will end. After the frightful scene which I described to you, I wanted no more of their confidences."

Scene or no scene, Charlotte's goodness of heart was certainly leading her into extraordinary courses; and it is no wonder that Madame de Nassau wrote saying that the situation reminded her of Mrs. Radcliffe's novels. Yet there was a point beyond which even Charlotte would not go. The suggestion that, while Benjamin stayed at Coppet, she should go to Germany, annoyed her. "For the first time since I have known her,"

writes her husband, "I find it difficult to persuade her to follow my advice." It was proposed, as a compromise, that she should go to Berne, but that course also had to be abandoned in deference to her objections. The final decision was that she should go on a visit to Benjamin's father. "I swear to you," Benjamin writes, at this point, to his aunt, "that, if I were offered the treasures of Peru, the youth of Hebe, and the beauty of the Venus de Medicis, I should still prefer Charlotte." Preferring Charlotte, however, he remained with Madame de Staël, and with her came presently to Lyons to see Talma play.

"I have followed her," writes Sismondi to the Comtesse d'Albany, on June 16, "not so much for the purpose of seeing the king of the French stage, as in order not to leave her in her present condition of ill-health and melancholy. Her head to-day is hardly free to enjoy the spectacle which she was so ardently anxious to witness."

Her depression was due to the fact that Benjamin left her at Lyons, and went to Dôle. He was evidently getting very tired of the false and embarrassing position which he occupied. His letters show him reproaching himself for behaving like a truant schoolboy. He has the more reason to reproach himself, because he has received the most cordial letters from Charlotte's relatives in Germany, and because every day brings him some fresh proof of Charlotte's "angelic character." "Our separation," he says,

"has been very painful. However, her reason was convinced, and her confidence in me has not failed, and her affection, after two years' trial, has not diminished. I ask Heaven no other favour than to grant her soon all the happiness which she deserves."

At Dôle, meanwhile, he found that he had not yet escaped from Madame de Staël. She did not follow him, indeed, but she sent her son Auguste to fetch him; and Auguste evidently discharged his errand in the spirit of a fire-eater, for we read:—

"What I am going to tell you, my dear aunt, is strictly confidential. I am convinced—and I have evidence—that if I took my departure in a hurry, Madame de Staël's eldest son, who is nineteen, and who worships his mother, seeing her once more in the condition into which she was thrown by my last departure to Dôle, would go to the point of challenging me. I have had my opportunities of proving that this sort of thing does not frighten me. Consequently I can say without blushing that it would be a terrible thing for me to have to draw my sword against a boy whom I have known almost ever since he was born. I swear to you that, when he came to fetch me at Dôle, he was beside himself with rage, and if he refrained from offensive expressions, that was only because he had promised his mother to do so."

Nor was it only Auguste de Staël who breathed threatenings. His younger brother

Albert was roused to an equal indignation. There was a real danger of "bloody scenes" between Benjamin and these young men. "Though she is incapable of wishing such a thing, she abandons herself to such expressions of violence that they might very well believe that they were serving her interests by proceeding to the last extremity." Meanwhile he hopes, by persuasive gentleness, to bring Madame de Staël to reason. He and she cannot afford to declare open war against each other; their relations have been too confidential, and they share too many secrets. Therefore he is back at Coppet, seeing what can be done. Surely it is not excessive to devote a fortnight to the winding up of a *liaison* which has lasted fifteen years. When he does go, he will go far—not to Lausanne or Dôle, whither he would surely be pursued, but to Paris, where Madame de Staël cannot come; and he expects to be off, at the latest, between the 15th and 20th of August.

Of course the limit of the fortnight was exceeded. Perhaps Benjamin lingered on, hoping to facilitate his departure by wearing out his welcome. More probably he was kept a prisoner by the tears of his mistress and the drawn swords of her sons. At all events, the elastic fortnight was extended to three months, and might have been extended to an even greater length, if it had not been for a very outspoken letter in which Cousin Rosalie repeated the gossip that was

circulating in Lausanne. People were whispering, said Rosalie, that Madame de Staël had said that he was remaining at Coppet from interested pecuniary motives.

He did, indubitably, owe her money. It is easy to suggest—it has, in fact, been suggested—that she deliberately lent him money for the purpose of strengthening her hold upon him; and the measure is certainly one which has sometimes been adopted by desperate women seeking happiness in love. The correspondence, however, indicates a more honourable explanation. Benjamin had been directing Madame de Staël's investments. A balance was due to her; but there could not be a final settlement until the lawyers had unravelled the accounts. They were at work on the business; but it was difficult and tedious, and very likely Madame de Staël did not help to expedite it. But as for the slander, Benjamin not only repudiated it with vehemence, but absolutely declined to believe that it had been circulated by Madame de Staël. In this respect, at all events, he had a chivalrous faith in her which we may share.

The mischievous rumours, however, reflected not only on Benjamin but on his wife. This must not be; and the only way of putting a stop to the gossip was to pack and go. He packed and went, and actually succeeded in getting away without a quarrel, and in the belief that he was entitled to say of his relations with Madame de

Staël—what Gibbon had said of his relations with her mother—that "love subsided in friendship and esteem." "I have done," he writes to Madame de Nassau, on October 19, "all that was in my power to create the friendship that was so necessary to me after a *liaison* of fifteen years' standing, and I shall not be perfectly happy unless I succeed."

Even now, however, the waters which Benjamin navigated were not quite calm. Painful letters followed him from Coppet—"magic pictures" of the misery of a deserted mistress—and disturbed his peace of mind. Madame de Staël had bought his father with money, and the old man was publicly declaring at Lausanne that his sympathies were with her rather than with Charlotte. Doubts, which Madame de Nassau shared, were being thrown upon the validity of his marriage; and he had to admit that certain formalities had been neglected—that Charlotte, for instance, had come to the ceremony without a baptismal certificate—though he protested that the omission did not invalidate the union, but only rendered her liable to a fine.

That was the dark side of the picture. The bright side of it was that he was in Paris—whither Madame de Staël could not pursue him—and that Charlotte was with him, and that her relatives and his friends smiled kindly on the situation. Even the double divorce, it appeared, was not unfavourably regarded. Divorce, said

the Catholics, was forbidden to them by the regulations of their Church, but they saw no reason why Protestants should not avail themselves of the religious privileges of their more liberal creed. And Rosalie was of the same opinion. "Three husbands," she wrote to Charles, "is a large number, but there was someone in the Gospel who had seven husbands and yet seems to have been an honest woman."

At Paris, therefore, Benjamin fulfilled the necessary formalities, and made the fact of his marriage public. There is a delightful humour in the letter in which he tells his aunt that he has done so.

"Good-bye, my dear aunt," he writes. "There have been marriages that have been concluded with greater simplicity and announced with greater expedition than mine. But there has never been a husband whose wife has made him more happy, and every day that passes increases my attachment to her who has restored me the felicity that I had lost."

So far, so good. It only remained for Benjamin to wind up his pecuniary as well as his sentimental relations with Madame de Staël. His next visit to Coppet, in March 1810, had this and no other object, and he found Madame de Staël still sulking and still reluctant to facilitate business. "It is a matter of importance to me," he writes, "to compel Madame de Staël to accept the money which I owe her, and I can only do

this by going into every account in minutest detail. Whenever I have asked her to tell me the amount of my indebtedness to her, she has always replied that she knew nothing about it; and whether her motive be friendship or revenge or a combination of the two sentiments, nothing would please her better than that I should go away leaving her my creditor."

Somehow or other, however, a settlement was arrived at. "It is a proof," says Benjamin, "that Heaven rewards good intentions. For it is only my intentions that have always been good; most of my actions have been awkward and clumsy." It was a true saying in a general way, but hardly true in this particular instance, if we may judge from Rosalie's account of his conduct. "He took her eldest son," she writes, "a man of twenty, and of a very reasonable disposition, as arbitrator and judge. Some papers were missing and had to be sent for from Paris. During the interval he came to see us; and though his behaviour had made us all very uneasy, and I had told him so without mincing my words, we were good friends again, and glad to see each other." "Her children," says a later letter by Charles de Constant, "speak very highly of Benjamin's conduct."

CHAPTER XXI

Mysticism at Coppet—Madame de Staël writes *De L'Allemagne* and goes to France—Her manuscript is confiscated, and she is expelled—She returns to Coppet, and endures petty persecutions.

THE troubles of the heart did not, in the case of Madame de Staël, interfere with the march of intellect; they even coincided with a kind of religious awakening.

All through the months in which her tears and the threats of her sons kept Benjamin Constant separated from his wife, Coppet was full of people among whom a spirit of Revivalism was alive. The pedant Schlegel was inclining to the mystic Quietism of Madame Guyon. His last words to Benjamin, when the lover did at last manage to emancipate himself from the thraldom of his mistress, were an exhortation to him to advance the cause of religion in France —a task which Benjamin only declined because he felt that the case of France was hopeless. Bonstetten, whose tendencies were purely Voltairean, noted the change that had come over the atmosphere in one of his letters to Frederika Brun. "Nothing," he informed that lady, "is more altered than Coppet. You will see that everybody is becoming Catholic, Martin-

istic,[1] mystic, all through Schlegel, and everything is now German. . . . Madame Krudner has also paid a flying visit, and spoke of nothing but Heaven and Hell."

Who was in earnest in these matters, and how far the earnestness went, is a little difficult to say. We have already, however, seen Benjamin Constant complaining in his Diary that the fervour of the Chevalier de Langallerie had failed to persuade Madame de Staël to accept the consolations of religion as a substitute for a *liaison* with him; and it is not at all unlikely that her mysticism was largely due to her known habit of dosing herself with opium, and that the true picture of her mental attitude is that given in the letter which Henri Meister's nephew, Hess, wrote to his uncle on the subject.

"Ah, how I wish," he wrote, "that you could induce a person who is dear to you, Madame de Staël, to share the view you have expressed 'On Serenity in Old Age.' She needs this badly. Never have I see anyone look forward with such dread as she does to the hour when she must give up the idea of making sensations and shining in the world; and as she always goes to extremes in whatever she does, she will only abandon this infatuation for the illusory triumphs of life by plunging into mysticism. She has already made a beginning, and M. Schlegel is working as hard as he can to complete the process. During the

[1] The Martinists were a theurgic sect founded by Martinez Pasqualis (1715–1779). Little is known as to their doctrines.

winter she saw a great deal of a number of people whose religious ideas are of a very extravagant complexion. Madame de Staël fluctuates between these extravagant ideas and a need for society, distraction, and frivolous pleasures. She cannot conceive of the existence of a mean between the two extremes."

The Philistine youth writes unkindly, though not, perhaps, unjustly; but it should be added that the distractions of religion and society did not, any more than the pains of unrequited love, impede the progress of literary work. In the intervals of mystic exaltation and ecstasy, Madame de Staël wrote what is generally esteemed her best book, *De l'Allemagne*. Almost every evening she gathered her fellow-mystics around her—they were nearly all mystics who had been more than once divorced—and read them what she had written during the day. Adam Oelenschläger [1] and Zacharias Werner, the German poets, Mathieu de Montmorency, M. de Sabran, as well as Schlegel, Sismondi, and the unfaithful Benjamin Constant, were included in the audience at her feet.

The work being finished, and the relations with Benjamin being simultaneously placed on their new footing, Madame de Staël was again bitten by that desire to travel, which, like the gadfly, was always driving her from one habitation to another, and never suffering her to find

[1] He enriched German literature with subjects derived from the heroic Scandinavian period.

rest in any. She had some idea of visiting America, where much of her money was invested, with the idea of making a further voyage thence to England; and she even procured passports for that purpose. Paris, however, was, for the time being, the more powerful magnet. She wanted at least to approach the capital in order to superintend the publication of her book; and she went to the Chateau of Chaumont-sur-Loire, whence she moved, on the return of the proprietor, to the Chateau de Fosse. Mathieu de Montmorency, the two Barantes, Schlegel, and Madame Récamier were with her there. Other visitors were from time to time received. The Coppet life—work in the morning and entertainments in the evening—was, so far as might be, reproduced. The scene is depicted in *Dix Années d'Exil.*

"Hardly had we arrived when an Italian musician, who was with me as my daughter's teacher, began to play the guitar. My daughter accompanied on the harp the sweet voice of my beautiful friend, Madame Récamier, and the peasants gathered under our windows, astonished to see this colony of troubadours which had come to give life to the solitude of their master. . . . We often used to sing a charming air composed by the Queen of Holland, with the refrain: 'Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra.' After dinner the idea occurred to us to sit round a green table, and play a paper game instead of talking. We could not bear the thought

of breaking through our practice even when strangers arrived; and our *petit poste*, as we called our pastime, was always continued. Our life passed in this fashion, and if I may judge by my own case, the time hung heavily on no one.

"The opera of *Cinderella* was then making a good deal of stir in Paris, and I wanted to go and see it performed in a bad provincial theatre at Blois. As I left the theatre on foot, the inhabitants of the town followed me in their curiosity, desiring to become acquainted with me as an exile rather than in any other character. This kind of success, which I owed to my misfortunes rather than my talents, annoyed the Minister of Police, who wrote, some time afterwards, to the Prefect of Loir-et-Cher, that I had a Court about me."

A great blow, however, was impending. The last proofs of *De l'Allemagne* were corrected on September 23, 1810. The work had been submitted to the Censor, and alterations had been introduced in deference to his views; but Madame de Staël, in believing her difficulties to be overcome, had reckoned without the police. The news was conveyed to her that the Minister of Police had caused the whole edition to be seized and destroyed, and that she would be required to surrender the manuscript and quit her residence within four-and-twenty hours. Fortunately, she had a copy of the manuscript, and gave up that, retaining the original, with the connivance of the Prefect charged with the execution of the order,

who was a personal friend. She then wrote to Rovigo, asking leave to delay her departure for a few days. He accorded her a week, but no longer, to make her arrangements.

The objection to the book is said to have been that the author wrote of Germany without praising either the French Emperor or France. "Is it to be supposed," Rovigo is reported to have said in conversation, "that we have made war in Germany for eighteen years in order that a person with a well-known name like hers might write a book about Germany without mentioning us? The author ought to have been sent to Vincennes." In his letter, however, he expressly denied that the omission of the Emperor's praises was the determining cause of his action. "Your banishment," he wrote, "is a natural consequence of the course of conduct which you have consistently pursued for several years. . . . We are not yet reduced to looking for examples of behaviour among the peoples which you admire. Your last work is not French in its character; it was I who suppressed it. I regret the loss that your publisher will suffer, but it was impossible for me to allow the publication." And he concluded :—

"I have reasons, Madame, for indicating the ports of Lorient, La Rochelle, Bordeaux, and Rochefort as the only ones at which you will be permitted to embark. I beg you to inform me which of them you have selected."

The point of this postscript was that it forbade

departure from any of the Channel ports. It was suspected that Madame de Staël wanted to go to England, and this obstacle was thrown in her way. Her sons sought an interview with Napoleon on the subject at Fontainebleau, but were met with the threat of arrest. She decided, therefore, with reluctance to retire to Coppet, where she arrived early in October, reflecting upon the degradation of a country in which advancement and even respite from persecution were only to be purchased by serving "the interests of the man who presumes to make his own personality the one object to the advantage of which all human endeavour must tend."

Nor did persecution cease when she reached her home. The Prefect of Geneva received orders to inform her sons that they would not be allowed to return to France without a fresh permit from the police; and he was also instructed to demand that the proof sheets of *De l'Allemagne* should be handed over to him. When, on Madame de Staël's refusal to comply with his orders, he did not insist, he was removed from his office, and a M. Capelle was appointed in his place. The new-comer called upon her, and suggested that the eulogy of the Emperor would be a fitting subject for a pen "worthy of the sort of enthusiasm I had displayed in *Corinne*." In particular he thought she would be well-advised to write an Ode on the birth of the King of Rome. "I told him with a laugh," Madame de Staël says, "that I had no ideas on the subject, and that all

that I could say was that I hoped he would have a good foster-nurse." When she went to Aix-les-Bains, where Albert de Staël had been ordered to take the waters, he sent gendarmes after her to order her to return, and gave instructions that horses were to be refused to her if she tried to travel in any other direction. Schlegel was ordered to leave her; and even the social gaieties of Coppet were interrupted.

"Madame de Staël," said the Prefect, "is leading an agreeable life at home. Her friends, and foreigners, come to see her at Coppet. The Emperor will not allow that." She gave some further theatrical performances, producing two comedies of her own composition, entitled *Le Mannequin* and *Le Capitaine Kernadec*; but most of her old acquaintances were afraid to frequent her, and she could write of herself to Henri Meister as "living here in a kind of prison, at least on the side of France, which makes life very painful." Her friends the Gérandos passed through the neighbourhood without venturing to visit her; and we get an intimate glimpse of the condition of things in letters exchanged between Rosalie de Constant and her brother Charles, who had now come to live at Geneva, and whom Madame de Staël invited to dinner.

"The Staël dinner," writes Charles, "was very fine, but I shall not go there again. It was very tiring, and the display was enough to make one sick." To which Rosalie replied: "All personal

considerations apart, I am glad you are not maintaining your relations with the famous lady; such relations are very dangerous. I am sure she was the cause of the dismissal of the Prefect, and I am sure a note is taken of all those who frequent her. It is her pride to compromise her friends. . . . Every event connected with her makes a noise, and, from all I hear, the system of espionage is complete."

That was what the world saw and noted, and that is what Madame de Staël relates. A letter, however, written to Henri Meister by Madame Rilliet-Huber of Geneva, on November 13, 1810, indicates that her troubles with the police did not constitute the whole of life for her, and fittingly introduces a fresh phase of the subject. She is, we there read, "as lively and brilliant as ever"; and the writer continues:—

"Madame de Staël has taken an apartment at Geneva, where she will take up her residence on the 26th. She will shorten her winter by a stay of several weeks at Lausanne, where she is to meet Benjamin and his wife. This expression *and his wife* proves to you that Madame de Staël's trouble is no longer in that direction, for which we must be grateful to Heaven.

"It appears (this strictly in confidence) that Benjamin repents of his marriage, the fruit of annoyance and a transitory passion, and that, if he could return to the condition of things of three or four years ago—much as he complained of it then—he would do so with unspeakable delight.

Madame de Staël is too good, and no longer loves him enough for his regrets to avenge her. Still, she is not heart-broken about it.

"She has no settled plans for the future, but she is bored here."

There was soon, however, to be relief from boredom; and, in the act of the drama that is to follow, we shall find Madame de Staël playing the double part that, in the previous act, had been played by Benjamin Constant. A new lover had come into her life. A second marriage — a secret marriage — was, or was soon to be, in contemplation.

CHAPTER XXII

Madame de Staël makes the acquaintaince of Rocca and secretly marries him—Benjamin and his wife arrive at Lausanne—Rocca challenges Benjamin, but the duel is avoided—The Constants start for Germany—Extracts from Benjamin's Journal and letters.

"I ALWAYS loved my lovers more than they loved me in return," is one of Madame de Staël's reported sayings; and it remains a fairly true saying when certain necessary qualifications have been made.

She is hardly worthy to be called, in the full sense of the words, *grande amoureuse.* Her dual nature restrained her from esteeming the world well lost for love for many consecutive hours. So far as we have followed her career, we have seen her looking upon love far more as a drawing-room accomplishment than as an affection of the heart. Unless men sighed at her feet, she felt not so much unhappy as uneasy; and when they did sigh, her first impulse was to advertise the conquest. Nothing could have been more public and notorious than the attachment to Benjamin Constant, unless it were the attachment to M. de Narbonne. Consequently, in engaging her heart she also compromised her vanity, and, rather for her vanity's than for her heart's sake, clung to

retreating lovers with desperate and undignified tenacity, yet never mourned for them after she had lost them. For love was more to her than any particular lover; and the post of lover was merely the most important of the offices in her gift, and one which it was her practice to fill as soon as ever it became vacant. We have seen how M. de Narbonne's coldness was Benjamin Constant's opportunity. Benjamin Constant's coldness was now, in turn, to prove the opportunity of Albert-Michel-Jean de Rocca.

Rocca was a soldier who had served both in Spain and against the British expedition to the Isle of Walcheren. At a later date he wrote short books on both campaigns. They have considerable merit; and one of them has been reprinted in a popular Library of Adventures. He had been wounded and left for dead upon the field of battle, but saved by a Spanish maiden, who declared that he was too handsome to be allowed to die. Returning to Geneva to recuperate, he made love to Madame de Staël in his dashing military manner. It is even said that he galloped his horse down a long flight of stone steps in the Old Town in his haste to ride beneath her window, though the people who believe that story are not the people who have seen the steps in question. It was pointed out to him that his mistress was old enough to be his mother,—she was, in fact, forty-five, and he was only twenty-three,—but he replied that the

mention of the word "mother" only gave him an additional motive for loving her. "I will love her," he said, "so dearly that she will end by marrying me;" while the report of Baron de Voght was: "He is fascinated by his relations with Madame de Staël, and the tears of his father cannot induce him to abandon them."

Bonstetten, it is true, thought him merely a rowdy, and Benjamin Constant thought him merely a fire-eater; but no doubt he boasted his two soul sides like the rest of us. At any rate, he loved passionately, and did not love in vain, though he had to submit to an ignominious condition. The marriage, Madame de Staël stipulated, must be kept a secret from the world; she must not be required to change her name; her husband must be presented as her paramour, even when she bore him children. Rocca was sufficiently in love to accept the situation; and the results of her deception were in every way satisfactory to Madame de Staël. The world had never expected her to be moral, and could not say that she was making herself ridiculous. The very society which refused to accept Charlotte because of her double divorce admitted the supposed mistress of Albert de Rocca to its most exclusive circles.

The marriage, however, had not yet been concluded—and one cannot even say for certain how far the intimacy had gone—when, in the winter of 1810–1811, Benjamin Constant and Charlotte

passed through Switzerland on their way to Germany, where they were to visit the family of the latter. All that we know for certain is that, though Benjamin's letters at this period are still full of expressions of affection for Charlotte, he had by no means forgotten Madame de Staël, and that he found Rocca in high favour with her, and very ill-disposed towards him. His own account of the matter is contained in the so-called "Carnet de Benjamin Constant," quoted by Sainte-Beuve in his *Causeries du Lundi.* "My head," he writes, "is in a whirl between Charlotte and Madame de Staël. I gamble and lose twenty thousand francs in a day." And he proceeds in short disjointed sentences :—

"Arrival at Geneva.—My father seizes the first pretext for quarrelling with me.—I go to Lausanne.—Lausanne's curiosity about Charlotte. A combination of ill-will for me, which causes us to be badly received, with jealousy of Madame de Staël, whom they wish to annoy by receiving us well.—Correspondence with my father.—He invents a thousand grievances against me, repudiates his own signature, and goes so far as to accuse me of forgery.—Excursions to Geneva without Charlotte (February 1811).—Madame de Staël takes me back as far as Coppet—the last time in my life that I saw Coppet.—Rows with my father, with Charlotte, and with Madame de Staël.—A miserable life.—Charlotte is not at all a success at Lausanne.—Dinner without Charlotte with Madame de Staël, at d'Arlens'.—Scenes.—

Last journey to Geneva about my business with my father; we settle everything.—He starts for Dôle, and, *en route*, writes me threatening letters, in which he withdraws all the results of the intervention of M. de Louys.—Agitations with Madame de Staël.—She proposes an appointment at Rolle.—I dare not accept it for fear of Charlotte.—Madame de Staël comes to Lausanne: last interview before my departure.—Correspondence after her return to Coppet.—Rocca repeats his proposal to fight a duel.—My reply.—Departure for Germany (May 15, 1811).—Quite a different atmosphere.—No more rows.—Charlotte pleased; no more hostile public opinion.—I resume my work. I gamble and lose my money at roulette."

This is sketchy in manner, and was written too long after the event to be depended upon for accuracy in detail. The details which can be added from the correspondence have no special bearing upon this narrative, as they chiefly relate to his quarrel with his father about money matters. Happily there is no reason to believe that Benjamin behaved otherwise than well. He had to do with a stupid man of choleric disposition, much under the influence of a second wife of humble birth and mischief-making tendencies; but he made the best of a difficult situation. As regards Rocca's challenge, we find a few further particulars in a letter from Benjamin's pen printed (in German) in Karl Fulda's *Chamisson and his Times*.

On April 18, 1811, it appears, Benjamin was

in Geneva on business with a lawyer. Having finished his business, he called on Madame de Staël, and remained to dinner. As he was leaving the house, M. Rocca met him, bluntly stated that he was displeased at the attentions which he observed him to be paying to Madame de Staël, and proposed that they should fight. The tone of the proposal seemed to Benjamin to leave no room for explanations. He could not even point out, he says, that his alleged "attentions" had consisted in calling upon Madame de Staël twice in the course of three months, or that his affection for his wife and the plans that he was making for a long and distant journey were sufficient evidence that he had no desire to poach upon Rocca's preserves; and it was arranged that the hostile meeting should take place on the Bridge over the Arve at nine o'clock on the following morning. Writing, therefore, in uncertainty as to the issue of an encounter which promises to be desperate, he distributes final messages:—

"I beg my wife's forgiveness for all the trouble which I have caused her, and for this last catastrophe, which will be a cause of still greater bitterness to her. I beg her on no account to believe that I did anything to provoke it. My true, deep, and unchangeable love for her was an obstacle which prevented any act of gallantry on my part towards any other woman. I love no one as I love her. She has been an angel to me, and my last sentiments are those of Dante for his beloved.

"I forgive Madame de Staël for the fatality of which she will have been the cause, and I do not hold her responsible for the savagery of a young barbarian. I beg her similarly to pardon me if I have, on certain occasions, caused her grief. I do not inquire whether I was right or wrong; that I did grieve her is a sufficient cause for my repentance.

"I bequeath all my property without exception to my wife. . . ."

The details which follow are of no particular importance; and the chief interest of the letter is as a revelation of Benjamin Constant's *état d'âme.* He not only wanted to love Charlotte; he loved her. Her love (he still thought) was a haven of quiet, safely reached at last after a journey across stormy seas. The ties which now united him to Madame de Staël were (he believed) only of gratitude and obligation. He had yet to learn that even of calm there may come satiety, and that some memories are apt to reassert themselves, even when a man thinks that he has lived them down. His love for the one woman, and his indifference towards the other, made it easier than he had at first thought to avoid the unnecessary duel. He had given his proofs, and could go further than some men without having to fear the charge of cowardice. Consequently he could refuse to fight Rocca for much the same reasons for which he had refused to fight Auguste de Staël. At all events, he did refuse, and, as we

have seen, took his departure from Switzerland for Germany on May 15, 1811, meaning first to visit his wife's relatives, and then to settle at Göttingen, where the resources of a large library would be available for his great work on the History of Religions.

His letters home during the period are those of a healthily happy man. His father is libelling him and threatening him with lawsuits, but he acknowledges no other trouble. Wherever he arrives, he is well received; and he chats lightly to Rosalie of the minor incidents of travel. At Berne he writes:—

"My wife was delighted with the beauty of the neighbourhood, and I think, if I had wished it, she would have been willing to settle there with me. She has the excellent quality of always feeling with incredible intensity the advantages of the present hour—which is a great source of happiness for oneself and others."

At Soleure:—

"They took us to the Hermitage, which is a charming English garden. Formerly there was a Hermit there in the full sense of the word. Nowadays, the Hermit is a tailor who has been dressed up in a monkish garment, and taught to fold his arms across his breast and bend his head, and who, for the rest, makes clothes, sells beer, and receives four pounds of bread, three pounds of meat, and ten batzs a week for carrying on the trade. I think this gives a fairly accurate impression of religion at the present time."

At Basle :—

"On arriving here we met the comedians whom we had seen at Berne, and sat down to *table d'hôte* with them. I began a conversation with one of them; but I was so unfortunate as to state that he had played a secondary part in the piece in which I had seen him, whereas he had played the principal part, and I have never since succeeded in re-starting the conversation."

At Cassel :—

"In a general way, my position here is rather curious. To give you some idea of it, I content myself, without entering into details, with telling you that my wife's family is entirely composed of ministers, superior officers, and favourites of the Court of Westphalia, and that it is in the midst of them that I pass my life. I am the only one of the company who has not a coat with embroidery on every seam, three or four straps on the shoulders, and three or four orders on the breast."

Save for the business details, all the letters are more or less in that tone of light and cheerful persiflage. The name of Madame de Staël is not so much as mentioned; and it is not until we turn to the *Journal Intime* that we discover the continuity of the inner life. But then we do see that a *liaison* of fifteen years' duration was not to be cancelled by strokes of the pen or farewell speeches, but was bound to live in its consequences and in its memories. Those memories were always waiting for Benjamin—lurking to spring

upon him in his weak moments, and he sought escape from them at the gaming-table no less than at the desk. Eliminating the inessential, we may let the Diary speak.

"We stay at Baden. Lured on by a gain of three louis, I play and lose like a fool."

"We start for Heidelberg, where I spend the day with the young de Loys. Arriving at Frankfort, we are overtaken by storms and floods. I find a heap of letters, and no bad news in any of them—an amazing thing."

"We stay at Frankfort. They plague me to death with the accursed title of Baron. I do not cease to gamble, and I do not cease to lose. Let us be off."

"Arrive at Schwalbach, which I find more agreeable than Wiesbaden. But it is also a worse place for me. I pass ten days without doing any work, gambling like a lunatic. Sad life! At last we are back at Frankfort, and thence we go to Cassel. There we find Charlotte's son and her brother. Dinner with Furstenstein; an excellent reception everywhere. Dinner with Hardenberg. It is a curious position for me—the third husband."

"Staying at the Hardenberg Castle. Pleasant family life. I settle down to work pretty well; but the desire for independence attacks me again, and I meditate establishing myself at Göttingen, where I take an apartment. . . . A letter from Madame de Staël. Her position does not get any better, and that distresses me. How cruel

they are to her! And that thought attaches me to her again.

"I read my own work in the evening. . . . Without this interest in my work, what would become of me? Charlotte is a little cross."

"To-day, October 25, 1811, I am forty-four. Have I really made a good use of this two-thirds of my life? I must try and do better with the end of it. I have a sister-in-law who is dry and sharp-tempered—but that is my brother-in-law's business. I have been getting on with my work. My book makes progress. Charlotte is sweet and good. We are packing up to go to Göttingen. These horrible removals! I wonder how many boxes I have packed in the course of my life!"

"Ball till three in the morning. No annoying letters to-day; that is so much time gained. A gay supper at our house. Charlotte made herself very amiable. A visit from her son. I have been reading the Fathers of the Church—a fresh field to be gone over."

"I re-read my novel. How one's impressions fade when the circumstances are altered! I could not write it again now. I have revised the end, which I consider superb. I am persecuted with interruptions. Connected work is impossible here.

"Received a silly letter from Madame de Staël. She is worth less consideration than I thought."

"We decide to pass a month at Brunswick. What a number of souvenirs I find there, and what a number of old friends! Nevertheless, my sadness is profound. I think of my first wife, of

France, of Coppet—the scattered débris of a past that is over and done with. And what is my present state? What my future? My work is my only interest in life. I frequently quarrel with Charlotte. I should not like to wager that we shall end our days together.

" Dinner and evening party at Giesdorf's. An excellent letter from Madame de Staël. Alas! Who knows? Sharp dispute with Charlotte about politics.

" Supper at Munckhausen's. I have seen my first wife again."

CHAPTER XXIII

The campaign of persecution at Coppet—Birth of Madame de Staël's youngest child—It is boarded out—Madame de Staël starts by the only road open to her for England—Vienna—Kiev—Moscow—St. Petersburg—Stockholm—Benjamin Constant at Göttingen—His regrets for Madame de Staël.

As time passed on, the life at Coppet became more and more unbearable, and flight therefrom the only, though a very difficult, alternative. The few faithful friends who still visited Madame de Staël there did so at the risk of punishment. Notably Mathieu de Montmorency was banished to the interior of France, and Madame Récamier was ordered to live at Châlons for showing her this proof of affection. Count Elzéar de Sabran, drawing on his imagination, wrote warning her that worse things were probably in store for her. "If you stay," he predicted, "the Emperor will treat you like Mary Stuart: nineteen years of unhappiness, and tragic catastrophe at the end of them." One is not surprised to read the admission that relief was sought, not only in literary composition, but also in opium.

The drug, however, was not taken to the point of undermining energy; and the idea of flight gained ground, though the act was delayed for several months. Various reasons for the delay

are given in *Dix Années d'Exil*—among others a fear lest Napoleon "should cause to be inserted in the newspapers one of those articles which he knows how to dictate when he wishes to commit moral assassination;" but the true reason is probably to be found in her reluctance to face the risks of a perilous journey either immediately before or immediately after the birth of the child which she bore to Rocca. She arranged at last, however, to leave the child with a doctor at Longirod, in the Jura, and secretly made her preparations to depart.

An application for a passport for America had been refused; so had a request for permission to reside at Rome, though preferred by the author of *Corinne*, and supported by a promise not to publish even so much as a line of verse. Germany was practically a French dependency, and therefore closed to her. There remained England. It was for fear lest she should go to England that Madame de Staël had been refused a passport for the United States; but she might get to England by way of Sweden, getting to Sweden by way of Russia, and to Russia by way of Austria. The Emperor of Austria had been polite to her in the past, and would hardly suffer her to be molested now. He did not love Napoleon, though Napoleon was his son-in-law. These were hypotheses upon which it seemed reasonable to act.

An exile when compelled to live at Coppet, Madame de Staël felt doubly an exile when

compelled to leave it. So she said her silent farewells to whatever reminded her of past days of happiness. "I revisited," she says, "my father's study, where his chair, his table, and his papers remain just as he left them; I kissed every treasured souvenir of his presence; I carried away his cloak, which hitherto I had caused to be left lying on his chair, and took it with me that I might wrap it round me if the harbinger of death drew near." And she tells how she wrote her good-byes to her friends, and continues:—

"On the following day, Saturday, May 23, 1812, at two o'clock in the afternoon, I got into my carriage, saying that I should be back for dinner. I took no luggage whatsoever with me. I carried my fan, and my daughter carried hers, and only my son and M. Rocca took the necessaries for a few days' travel in their pockets. As we drove down the Coppet avenue, leaving the chateau which had become, as it were, an old friend to me, I nearly fainted."

And so to a farm near Berne, where it had been arranged that Schlegel should meet the party, and where, Madame de Staël says, her courage nearly abandoned her, and she felt tempted to return before the Government realised that she had fled. Her children, however, persuaded her to continue, and she did so; her son Auguste returning, after procuring her a passport from the Austrian Minister, to Coppet, to see that her pecuniary interests did not suffer. Albert de Staël, it had

been arranged, was to follow with the servants and the baggage, and it was not until he did so that the Prefect realised that his prisoner had escaped.

Then the people of Geneva also heard the news and talked. For them the interesting fact was not that a distinguished authoress had run away from Napoleon, but that a distinguished neighbour had run away with Rocca. "This last proof of the spitefulness of her enemies," writes Sismondi to the Comtesse d'Albany, "has annoyed her deeply;" while she herself writes to Madame Récamier: "More than anyone have I experienced slander." But she went on, none the less, with her journey, with a mind besieged by many other thoughts, and especially by sentiments of bitterness towards the Emperor. "What is his fatherland?" she asked. "It is the land that submits to him. Who are his fellow-citizens? The slaves who obey his orders." And so on, without any remarkable adventure, through Switzerland, Bavaria, and Tyrol, to Vienna; Rocca, who had quitted her at Berne, having rejoined her at Salzburg.

At Vienna it was necessary to wait for Russian passports. The Emperor was at the time at Dresden, where Napoleon was entertaining the European monarchs before commencing his invasion of Russia; and Madame de Staël's reception in his capital was less courteous than she had expected. Her disgrace in France being

largely due to her laudation of Germany, it was difficult to tell her that she was *persona ingrata*; but spies were, nevertheless, stationed at her door, and instructed to follow her whenever she walked or drove abroad. There was some difficulty, too, about Rocca's status. The marriage having been a secret one, Madame de Staël could not introduce him as her husband; and he was technically a deserter from the French army, whose surrender might be demanded. His reception in official circles was, in the circumstances, impossible—a state of things which his wife must have found humiliating; and she was naturally relieved when permission was accorded to her to start for St. Petersburg by way of Galicia.

In the Austrian provinces, however, her troubles increased. Wherever she arrived, some Jack-in-office was there to worry her; whenever she wanted to rest, she was hustled on. In every posting-house were placarded the Government's instructions to the police to keep an eye on her—a publication of its intentions which reminded her of M. de Sartines' proposal that spies should be dressed in uniform. There was a time when hysteria overcame her, and it was necessary to take her out of her carriage, lay her down on the roadside, and dash water in her face. There was even a time when a commissary of police told her son that, if he carried out his instructions to the letter, he would have to insist on sleeping in her bedroom; to which the fiery Albert re-

plied that, if the commissary did insist, he would find himself pitched out of window. And so on until the Russian frontier was safely crossed on July 14, 1812—the twenty-third anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. The first man to receive her in Russian territory, she says, was an exiled Frenchman who had once been a clerk in Necker's bank.

The Grand Army was already invading; and the direct route to St. Petersburg being already barred, it was necessary to make a détour by way of Moscow, and to be quick, lest that route should be barred also. In Volhynia—the first Russian province which she entered—she was warned that the French were only a week's march behind her. There was quite a chance that she might find herself driven to travel to her destination by way of Odessa and Constantinople. "I consoled myself," she writes, "by thinking of a poem on Richard Cœur-de-Lion which I intend to write if my health and my life permit me." In the meantime, she pressed on to Kiev, where she was "overwhelmed with amiable cares," and invited to a ball which she had no time to attend, by General Miloradovitsch, and thence took the road to Moscow. Her trouble there was to procure horses. Most of those available had been requisitioned for the war; and once again it seemed likely that the Grand Army would overtake the fugitive, and make her look ridiculous. Horses were found, however, and the welcome at Tula was such as to restore self-respect:

"Several gentlemen of the vicinity came to my inn to compliment me on my writings, and the wife of the Governor received me with sherbet and roses, in the Asiatic fashion." And so on to the capital.

The monotony of the intervening scenery haunted Madame de Staël "like certain metaphysical conceptions of which the mind cannot divest itself when once it has laid hold of them." To relieve her imagination, she asked the peasant women to dance for her, and remarked the "modest voluptuousness" of their movements. In due course, however, the gilded cupolas appeared in sight. The party had gained on the Grand Army and was a month ahead of it. There was time to see the Kremlin and to be entertained by the notables of the city before departing by way of Novgorod to St. Petersburg, where, we read, "I saw the English flag, the emblem of liberty, flying on the Neva, and felt that, by embarking on the ocean, I might place myself under the immediate protection of Divine Providence."

Again, at St. Petersburg, Madame de Staël was well received and nobly entertained. "The principles of morality," she discovered, "were not yet firmly fixed in the heads of the Russians." As a consequence, her intimacy with Rocca raised no awkward questions; and the honours shown to her are a proof of the importance attached to Napoleon's victim outside the range of Napoleon's

jurisdiction. Orloff invited her to dinner in his island on the Neva, and Narishkin, the Chamberlain, entertained her at his country seat. She read aloud selected chapters of the suppressed work on Germany, and Stein sought and obtained permission to make copies of them to send to his wife. Suvaroff received her on the eve of his departure for the war which Barclay de Tolly—the Muscovite Cunctator—had already won for him; and, unless her narrative is making an undue use of metaphor, she kissed him before she let him go. When she went over a girls' school conducted under Imperial patronage, one of the pupils was put forward to recite passages from her father's *Cours de morale religieuse.* She was presented to the Empress; and the Emperor Alexander presented himself, and apologised for his autocratic status. A good despot, he admitted, he might be; but, even so, he was "only a happy accident."

There was a temptation to remain, but time was flying, and, as the September days elapsed, the usual signs heralded the coming of the winter. On the day of her visit to Tsarskoe Selo, Madame de Staël noticed that the flowers of the South were blown upon by the winds of the North; and she made up her mind to depart by way of Finland. Practically the whole diplomatic corps, she tells us, came to see her off, and she took ship at Abo, and, in spite of her fear of the sea, arrived safely at Stockholm, where she passed

eight months, mainly occupied in the composition of that *Dix Années d'Exil* from which this narrative of her adventures has been extracted. It was during those eight months that the Grand Army was destroyed, and that the European coalition by which Napoleon's power was ultimately broken was formed.

Benjamin Constant, in the meantime, was sitting at Göttingen, bored to death, and in his boredom thinking of Madame de Staël, and regretting her.

First it was his business relations with her that were complicated, as he tells his aunt, by the risks of a lawsuit brought against him by his father. He owed her money—an uncertain amount, impossible to calculate exactly—and she had refused to take it from him. In the end, after much debate, a sum had been agreed upon which was to be paid to her out of his estate on his death. The unexpected lawsuit raised a doubt whether he would be able to carry out this undertaking; but his father's sudden death removed the difficulty, and enabled sentimental considerations once more to assume the upper hand.

The lovers, though they were both married and not rightly to be classed as lovers any longer, continued to correspond. Most of the correspondence is lost; but we have one of Madame de Staël's letters—a letter which she presumably did not show to Rocca—from which we gather that

Rocca's love had not sufficed to teach her to forget. Two years have elapsed, she reminds Benjamin, since she has seen him, and two months since she has had news of him. What is to become of her in her spiritual loneliness? With whom is she to talk, and how to exist on her own resources? She has kept his letters. She looks at them whenever she opens her desk, though the handwriting makes her tremble. And she concludes:—

"My father and you and Mathieu share a part of my heart that is eternally closed. There I continually suffer, and always in a new way. I live in the past, and were I about to be swallowed up by the waves, my voice would utter these three names—one of which only was harmful to me. Is it possible that you brought such ruin? that such despair as mine could not restrain you? No, you are guilty, and only your admirable intellect can cause me any further illusions. Farewell, farewell! You cannot understand what I suffer."

Yet perhaps he did understand, for he was suffering also. He observes that "Charlotte's character is changing." He hears that Madame de Staël is ill, and talks of going alone to Switzerland. "Why," he asks, "did I marry again? It is a silly situation, and a silly chain. Formerly I was swept along by a torrent. Nowadays, I succumb beneath the weight of a burden." Then there comes news, incomplete and in-

accurate, apparently, of Madame de Staël's departure from Coppet, and the entry in the Diary is as follows :—

"Madame de Staël is travelling with Rocca, but she no longer writes to me. The recollection of her and of Albertine tears my heart to pieces. My heart tires of everything that it possesses, and regrets everything that it has lost. Perhaps, in the end, the sweetness and gentleness of Charlotte will overcome this impression. How sad is life, and what a fool I am! I make my plans for a journey to Vienna, and am reminded of the efforts Madame de Staël made to drag me there with her. As a consequence I am thinking of making with Charlotte the expedition which I refused to make with the most intelligent of women for my companion. God's justice! It is a singular series of follies which has caused me, in order to avoid leaving Paris, to contract a marriage which has stranded me at Göttingen."

There follow quarrels with Charlotte, alternated by reconciliations, and recognitions of her great though placid merit.

"I have the nuisance of moving again. What an inconvenience a wife is! A lively scene with Charlotte. She was really in the wrong, but I am always so in form. I recognise that there is good in Charlotte. . . . She has a mania for sitting up late, which causes me to pass abominably bad nights. And, remember, I got married in order that I might go to bed early. This sort of thing cannot last."

Then the names of Madame de Staël and Charlotte figure side by side in the same day's entry.

"Charlotte is sweet and good. I conjure up chimæras, and blame others for the follies of my own mind. Fundamentally Charlotte is just like all women. I have accused individuals when I should have blamed the sex. But for my work, and for the good advice that I need, I miss Madame de Staël more than ever.

"Profound sadness; discontent with myself and others. The two things always go together."

"A letter from Madame de Staël which proves to me that all is indeed over between us. So be it! It is my own doing. And now let me steer my course through life alone, and not let myself be any more embarrassed by ties which offer less charm than did the old ones."

"I work little and badly. How I lose my time! What an *unarrangeable* life!

"Fresh scenes with Charlotte, but I feel that they are of my own making. Instead of being weak and hard, I ought to be firm and gentle. I feel that I bear the burden of my wife's boredom and of my own as well; it is very heavy. I have lost Madame de Staël, and I shall never recover from the blow."

"Charlotte is back from a visit to Cassel. A long conversation on the inconvenience of divers things. But there is nothing to make such a talk about. The one actual inconvenience of my life is that I am married. *Georges Dandin!*

"On such a day as this, at eleven o'clock in the morning, on the staircase of the Hôtel de la Couronne, at Lausanne, I parted from Madame de Staël, who said that she thought we should never see each other again. It looks like it. Alas! Dear Albertine!

"All the evening my mind was full of recollections and regrets. I think as much of Madame de Staël as I did ten years ago. And yet Charlotte overwhelms me with kindness."

"I work, and, from the moral point of view, am not so bad as I was. Still, I must cease eating my heart out, must accept my position, and make the best of it. I did a silly thing to break, at a time when it might have served me, a tie which I had preserved and endured while it injured me. I regret it; I was a fool. And what now? I must profit by what I have done instead of suffering. Nothing is quite lost. Much remains to me—more than I deserve. Charlotte will do what I wish. Let me then employ my talents, and behave reasonably instead of like a lunatic. Let me make Charlotte happy. I have done harm enough in my life."

CHAPTER XXIV

Madame de Staël arrives in London — Murray the bookseller publishes *De l'Allemagne*—The qualities and defects of the book.

TOWARDS the end of June 1813, Madame de Staël arrived in London. Her first engagement was to attend one of Lady Jersey's receptions. A day or two later, "Murray the bookseller," as Crabb Robinson calls him, waited upon her with proposals for the publication of *De l'Allemagne*. His offer of fifteen hundred guineas was accepted; and Crabb Robinson, who was present at the interview, assisted in drawing up the agreement. Sent at once to the printers, the work appeared in the following October, and was instantly and immensely successful, alike with the public and with the critics. The first edition was exhausted in a few days; and the *Edinburgh Review* proclaimed its author the greatest literary genius of her time—a piece of nonsense thoroughly worthy of the critical organ which declared that Wordsworth's poetry would "never do."

The idea, indeed, seems to have prevailed for a period that Madame de Staël had discovered Germany, and was the only critic, whether English or French, who had studied German

literature and understood German philosophy. And that too was nonsense. *The Sorrows of Werther* had not only been read, but had even been imitated by the sentimental youth of France before the Revolution—not only by Ramond de Carbonnière, in his *Dernières Aventures du jeune Olbon*, but also by Madame de Staël herself in her very earliest essays in fiction. German philosophy had been introduced to French readers not by her, but by her friend and compatriot Villers, the translator of the works of Kant. In England there was Scott who had translated Bürger's ballads, and Coleridge who was steeped in the German erudition with which Madame de Staël was merely sprinkled; and the superiority of the latter authority probably transpired when the two authors met. That, at any rate, seems the most reasonable interpretation of Madame de Staël's well-known remark, that Coleridge was admirable at monologue but had no idea of duologue. He felt doubtless, when German subjects came to the front, that he had nothing to learn but much to teach, and spoke, therefore, as the master addressing the disciple. It was a breach of manners, but the temptation to commit it must have been strong.

Another article of faith with the critics of the period was that Madame de Staël's intellect was of the distinctively masculine type. She certainly exercised her mind on topics of which men, at that date, usually monopolised the discussion. Perhaps she even tried to discuss them after the

manner of a man; but in this she did not succeed. To say that the feminine point of view "keeps breaking in" would be to understate the case. Whether she is dealing with politics or with philosophy, the feminine point of view obtrudes itself on almost every page. Only a woman's blind affection could have made the career of Necker the pivot of the history of revolutionary France; only a woman could have qualified one of Kant's great generalisations with the words, "Pour les âmes sensibles."

The truth is that, in so far as Madame de Staël wrote like a man, she wrote badly, not thinking for herself, but reproducing what men had told her. We have seen how she padded *Corinne* with art criticisms which Schlegel practically dictated. *De l'Allemagne* is full of moral and metaphysical philosophy derived from the same source. As a disquisition it has about as much importance as an undergraduate's notes of a lecture to which he has just listened. A good deal of the lecture is no doubt accurately transcribed; much of the exposition of Kantianism, for instance, may pass as a popular version of the system. But the criticisms passed upon the system, being sentimental and not philosophic, show that its principles have not really been grasped. The feminine point of view, in short, breaks in and reminds the reader of the question which Crabb Robinson addressed to Madame de Staël at Weimar: "Madame, je me demande si vous avez compris le véritable sens des mots."

In looking for the merits of the book, therefore, we must give up the philosophy.

To a large extent, too, we must give up the politics. Madame de Staël had a keen eye for the obvious and the actual, but very little power of perceiving a latent tendency. The provincialism —one might almost say the parochialism—of Germany leapt to her eyes. It was a country without a capital—consequently without any single literary or artistic centre dictating laws of taste. Patriotism, in the French and English sense of the word, was lacking, and so were men of action. It was only in speculation that the German genius was remarkable.

That was the superficial view of Germany which almost any observer would have felt warranted in taking at the time when Madame de Staël visited Weimar and Berlin; but much had happened since then, and, to the discerning, certain potentialities had been revealed. The stricken field of Jena had awakened a good many Germans from their dogmatic slumbers; the lesson of defeat had been learnt. Stein had set to work to re-organise the Prussian army; Körner had sung his patriotic songs; the spirit of Pangermanism had begun to stir, and was soon to find its visible expression in the battle of the nations at Leipzig. But Pangermanism was a development which Madame de Staël did not foresee. Judged by that test, again her work must be condemned as wanting in vision.

In truth, her real interests were not in either metaphysical or political philosophy. When she wrote of such matters, she wrote as one giving a performance for which she had been carefully coached. The personalities of politics were always more to her than its principles; and her utterances were spontaneous, original, and acute only when she discussed social and sentimental questions: the rights and wrongs of her sex, the manners and tone of good society, love, happiness, marriage, and divorce. It is mainly, if not entirely, in relation to these questions that her picture of Germany is valuable.

For what reason the French censor found her remarks on these matters objectionable it is difficult at this date to see. The picture decidedly is not one that vain Germans would be likely to regard as flattering. Though they are credited with solid qualities, they are denied all the graces which make life agreeable. Their powers of conversation are held up to ridicule and contempt. Talk, as distinguished from argument, is, Madame de Staël maintains, impossible in a language in which an unfinished sentence conveys no meaning because the verb which gives the key to the mystery has to be held in reserve. Social intercourse, it is added, is made barbarous by the rigidity of German etiquette. "Everyone is kept in his place as if it were the post of duty;" whereas, in France, the salon had anticipated the career in being open to the talents. The good

manners of the upper classes, in so far as these are to be described as good, are by no means diffused through the community; the mercantile classes are ignorant and coarse. And so forth, till the impartial reader gathers the impression that the German rather than the French censor was the proper functionary to take offence.

On these matters, however, Madame de Staël writes with a gusto which is still entertaining because her comments are still largely true. She holds our attention because she is not lecturing but sounding the personal note; and she sounds that note even more emphatically when she treats of sentimental themes. Nothing is more characteristic than her insertion, in the midst of her examination of the various German systems of Ethics, of a chapter entitled "De l'amour dans le mariage." It was a subject on which she had begun to think before she was married, and which continued to haunt her long after she was left a widow, though one suspects that the word "marriage" became a form of speech employed to describe her relations not with her husband but with her lovers.

"In an unhappy marriage," she bursts out, "there is a violence of distress surpassing all other sufferings in the world. A woman's whole soul depends upon the conjugal tie. To struggle against fate alone, to journey to the grave without a friend to support you or to regret you, is an isolation of which the deserts of Arabia give but a faint and feeble idea; and when all the treasure

of your youth has been given in vain, when you can no longer hope that the reflection of these first rays will shine upon the end of your life, when there is nothing in the dusk to remind you of the dawn, and when the twilight is pale and colourless as a livid spectre that precedes the night, your heart revolts, and you feel that you have been robbed of the gifts of God upon earth."

A passionate complaint truly, and one which perhaps comes strangely from the woman who had deserted her first husband for M. de Narbonne, and while living with her second husband continued to write love letters to Benjamin Constant! And yet, in a sense, absolutely sincere, being, as it were, a summary of all the wrongs which she had suffered at the hands of all her lovers!

To those who met Madame de Staël in London, however, it may well have appeared that, whatever her griefs, she suffered chiefly on paper. Two items of sorrowful news reached her. She heard of the death of her second son, Albert, whose head was actually sliced off in a duel with a Cossack officer; and she also heard of the death of her first lover, M. de Narbonne, from typhus fever contracted in a garrison town. But she was none the less delighted to be the lion of the season, succeeding in that character to Maria Edgeworth, who had succeeded to Lord Byron. Miss Berry met her at dinner on the evening of the day on which the news of Narbonne's death had arrived. "One must acknowledge," is the

sardonic comment in her Journal, "that one could not lose an old lover more gaily, as it was said of Charles the Seventh of his kingdom."

Her losses certainly kept her in seclusion no more than did her daughter's attack of the measles. Society was circumscribed in those days. Within its limits she went everywhere and met everybody, straying occasionally beyond its limits to meet the men and women of letters whom the circle did not include. All the memoirs, diaries, and letters of the period are full of her name; the commentators are unanimous in paying tribute to the copious eloquence of her conversation. "She talks folios," is Byron's verdict; and the references to her in Miss Berry's Journal are mostly to the same effect. "Madame de Staël," she says, "came, talked, questioned, and went away again like a flash of lightning, or rather like a torrent;" and she writes, about a month later, to Sir William Gell: "You have just come in time to save Madame de Staël's life, who certainly would have *roared* herself to death in another week." Similarly, to Lady Hardwicke, who complains that she has lost her voice, she offers the consolation that "there cannot certainly be a more convenient visitor to a *dumb* woman than Madame de Staël;" while a letter to Lady Georgiana Morpeth contains the remark: "The Staël left Richmond much about the same time that we left Twickenham, and wherever she is, there will society be also—if it is to be had within ten miles *à la ronde*. Except

during her visit to Bowood, and now that she is for a week at Middleton, she has been constantly in town, giving very agreeable dinners and soirées, with two or three women and half a dozen men—*dont elle se charge toute seule*."

The list of the eminent personages whose acquaintance Madame de Staël made or renewed might easily be extended to fill several pages. She entered society through one door with Lady Jersey and through another door with Sir James Mackintosh and Crabb Robinson. At Sir Humphry Davy's house she dined with Sheridan, Whitbread, and Grattan. Visiting Lord Lansdowne's country seat, she met Etienne Dumont and Sir Samuel Romilly. As she was anxious to know Godwin, a party was arranged for the purpose. Lord Liverpool entertained her. The Duchess of Devonshire took her to pay a call in her barouche, and she "related for nearly an hour the works that she thought of writing." She is more than once accused of "monopolising" Curran; and Coleridge, as we have seen, compelled her to listen to him. Byron took a journey of sixty miles in order to be presented, and relates that "she justified what I had heard," but "was still a mortal and made long speeches," adding that she preached politics to the politicians, and that "the sovereign himself was not exempt from this flow of eloquence." Other names which one meets in the various chronicles of her sojourn are those of the Dukes of Sussex and Gloucester,

Lords Stafford and Harrowby, Lady Holland, Wilberforce, Brougham, Malthus, Rogers, whom she ranked next to Scott among the English poets of the day, Croker of the *Quarterly*, and Bowles, the parson sonnetteer. The most jealous of her enemies could not have denied the completeness of her social triumph.

Nor was it in society alone that her personality made its impression. Its influence was exerted through her books no less than through her conversation; and Crabb Robinson tells a striking story of the case of the daughter of a country clergyman, whose perusal of a translation of *Delphine* and *Corinne* "so powerfully affected her in her secluded life as quite to turn her brain." The young woman wrote to the author, asking to be allowed to become her amanuensis, and, not satisfied with the formal refusal of her services conveyed through a private secretary, found a means of being presented. She threw herself at Madame de Staël's feet, and repeated her request, but was admonished on the folly of her desire. "Domestic life," Madame de Staël assured her, "affords more permanent happiness than any that fame can give. You have a father—I have none. You have a home—I was led to travel because I was driven from mine. Be content with your lot; if you knew mine, you would not desire it."

With these words the petitioner was dismissed. "The cure," Crabb Robinson solemnly adds, "was complete. The young woman returned

to her father, became more steadily industrious, and, without ever speaking of her adventure with Madame de Staël, silently profited by it. She is now," he concludes, "living a life of great respectability, and her friends consider that her cure was wrought by the only hand by which it could have been effected."

Evidently Madame de Staël's days throughout that London season and for some months afterwards were well filled. How far she enjoyed the gaieties in which she participated, and how far she merely sought in them deception and escape from the disappointments of the realities, one dares not venture to decide. All that one can say with absolute certainty is that, in the midst of her dissipations and her studies, Madame de Staël did not quite shake herself free from the sentimental chains that bound her. She moved in a blaze of social success and literary glory; she was storing up knowledge for the purpose of writing a great work on the British Constitution—a work which she is said to have asked Murray to commission for a fee of six thousand guineas. She was attended by her husband, whom it was her duty as well as her privilege to love. But, even so, Benjamin Constant, to whom she had meant to say farewell for ever, was never for long out of her thoughts. She had said her last good-byes to him, as she supposed, in November 1812; and already, in August 1813, she was corresponding with him again.

CHAPTER XXV

Benjamin Constant at Göttingen—His intrigue on behalf of the Crown Prince of Sweden—It comes to nothing, and he goes to Paris—Madame de Staël's letters to him—Rocca is not to be "a hindrance"—Napoleon having abdicated, Madame de Staël goes to Paris.

At the time when Madame de Staël was the flashing comet of a London season, Benjamin Constant was boring himself to extinction in small German towns, dining, as we have seen, "with all the Hardenbergs in the world," overwhelmed rather than sustained by the sweetness and goodness of Charlotte. He knew nothing of the marriage with Rocca, whom he supposed merely to have succeeded to his own post as lover. "Hélas! chère Albertine!" had been the exclamation wrung from him by the farewell letter; and then he turned to seek such consolation as he could derive from his social environment and his book about Religion.

One of his neighbours was his first wife, but his heart did not go back to her; he merely remarks, in his letters, upon the curious tastes which she has developed with the years. "She keeps," he writes to his aunt, "one hundred and twenty birds, two squirrels, thirty-six cats, eight dogs, and a number of other miscellaneous

animals. They all live in a large apartment adjoining her bedroom, and she has to employ three women to keep the menagerie in a state of passable cleanliness. Besides this, the small boys of the town amuse themselves by throwing all the stray cats and dogs they can find into her garden, and she takes care of them all until she can find a home for them."

Another letter of about the same date contains an interesting comment on some amorous intrigue of no special importance of which he has heard. "What strikes me in this story," he remarks, "is the utter failure of great public events to disturb our social and conjugal habits. The world is on fire; men kill and ruin one another. All the nations are threatened, and all the individuals are trying their best to keep afloat in the midst of the general shipwreck; and yet women still find time to be unfaithful to their husbands, and—what is more remarkable—the husbands find time to be jealous."

The book is also mentioned. One day the author worked at it from six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night. But little progress is made, and the blame is thrown upon the Göttingen Library. It "is like an ocean in which one loses oneself. Hardly have I read what seems indispensable for my purpose, than I discover something which it is still more indispensable to read. If I stayed here for twenty years I should be no farther on than I am to-day." All the letters, in short, are the letters of a man who

is eating his heart out with boredom—who feels more and more the need of active occupation.

Presently the active occupation was found. The end of Napoleon's dominion was clearly at hand. Benjamin's letters trace the course of his downfall in the form of an allegory, designed to deceive the censor. The Emperor is referred to as Jacqueline, and his battles are called lawsuits. Jacqueline is losing her cases, and is likely to be sent home to her village. Napoleon, that is to say, is losing his battles, and will have to abdicate. And what then? It is not at all certain that a Bourbon Restoration will be acceptable to France. There is room, at all events, for an alternative intrigue.

So an intrigue was set on foot—a poor little intrigue, of which the historians hardly take cognisance, and about which we find little information elsewhere than in the *Journal Intime*. From this, however, we gather that Bernadotte, now the Crown Prince of Sweden, thought that it might be possible to secure the succession to the French throne for himself or his son, and that Benjamin Constant was asked, and consented, to help. He hesitated, it is true. "I must not forget," he writes, "the natural timidity of my disposition, and I must not act like a lunatic to console myself for having acted like a fool." But the hesitation was overcome, and Charlotte raised no objections, but was willing to stay quietly at home while her husband went forth in pursuit of adventures.

The language in which the Diary deals with

the matter is rather cryptic. The Swedish Prince figures there as "Le Béarnais," the Bernadotte family belonging to the department of Béarn. He came to see Benjamin, and invited him to dinner, showed him some "very propitious" letters, made a further appointment, and departed. "Our plans," notes Benjamin, "are developing;" but he adds: "I must make haste if I am to be in at the death." The Prince confers upon him the Order of the Polar Star—"which gives me pleasure;" and then he travels night and day to meet the Prince at Liège, where all his promising schemes collapse, as he relates in enigmatic sentences. When he tries to see the Prince, he hears that he is ill, and perceives that the Prince's attendants are putting obstacles in his way. The Prince makes a speech to the French prisoners, and is not well received. Events meanwhile are moving fast: Talleyrand is active; Louis XVIII. is proclaimed; and the Béarnais returns to Paris without even having set foot in France. But Benjamin goes on to Paris, accompanied by Auguste de Staël, whom he has picked up at Louvain, leaving his wife in Germany.

That is the whole history of the Swedish intrigue; and there has rarely been an intrigue more foolish and futile. Madame de Staël, however, heard of it, and was interested, and it was indirectly the cause of the renewal of her relations with her lover. A letter to Schlegel shows how closely she was watching events.

"What," she asks, "is Benjamin about, and is your Prince making use of him? He owes me something for the zeal with which I sing his praises and defend him against the envy of others." And at the same time she was exchanging letters with Benjamin himself. One of his letters to her is described as being "more passionate than in the days when he loved me most;" and if we had the whole correspondence before us, we should probably be able to say the same of some of her letters to him.

A few of the letters were printed, long ago, in Strodtmann's *Dichter-profile und Character-köpfe*; others were quite recently published by permission of the Baroness de Nolde, great-granddaughter[1] of Madame de Constant, in the American *Critic*. They contain a few, but not very many, political allusions. We read, for instance, that Lord Liverpool considered the Swedish Prince's address to the French, of which he had seen a draft, "the finest thing that he had seen in his life." There is talk, too, about books and publishers. We read of the great success of *De l'Allemagne*, and Madame de Staël offers to arrange with Murray for an English edition of the much-talked-of work on Religions. Albertine's name also occurs again and again. Benjamin, we infer, never wrote without sending the child an affectionate message which called for a reply. But the chief note of the letters was that of lamentation for lost happiness.

[1] By her first husband.

"Benjamin," we read in one of them, "you have destroyed my life! For ten years no day has gone by without suffering on your account. How I loved you! Let us leave all that alone, as it is so cruel—and yet I shall never be able to forgive you, as I have never ceased to suffer. . . . Our life is as a house built on the sand and full of weariness—nothing but sorrow endures."

Another striking passage is: "I do not wish to die without seeing you again, without having spoken to you as I used to speak; but I should wish to die after, because you have hurt me to the depths of my soul, and you will wound me again. Adieu, adieu. I am always as I have been, and you can still tell yourself that I have shed tears only on the death of my unfortunate child and on your letters; the rest is a cloud, but real life is pain."

In one of the letters Madame de Staël writes that she is in very poor health, and may die at any time. One may suspect the appeal *ad misericordiam*, but the same report reached her friends at Geneva. "Her stomach gets worse and worse every day," writes Madame Rilliet-Huber to Henri Meister at a date at which we know her to have been dining out almost daily. Indisposition, however, by no means diverted her thoughts from her old lover. She invited not only him but his wife to visit her, promising that "I shall in no wise accuse her of what I found it too cruel to accuse you of yourself in former days." She assured him at the same time that he might renew his relations with her without fear of the wrath of Rocca.

"M. de Rocca will behave to you as he does to M. de Montmorency. Our mutual attachment is formed for life; he helped me in my misfortune with such noble courage and such tenderness of heart that I shall never forget it. He has become another being, and you will recognise neither his manners nor his conversation. *Do not, then, think of him as a hindrance.* . . . It is not for a week, but for life, that we should settle in the same place; but will you do it?"

Thus, in these fragments of a striking correspondence, we see Madame de Staël form her plans. She is strong enough, she thinks, to tear her way through entanglements—clever enough to thrid the mazes of the most complicated sentimental situations. Since she means well, nothing that she does can be wrong. She will be equally kind to all her lovers, reckoning her husband as one of them. They shall form a happy family, taking it in turns to enjoy the greater share of her favours and the chief place in her regard. For the time being Rocca must give way to Benjamin; he is good and amenable, and he will not mind.

The course of public events, as it happened, was favourable to her purpose. The Allies had beaten Napoleon at Leipzig; they had outflanked him and marched round him in the French campaign of the early months of 1814; they were in Paris, and it was open to the exiles to return. Madame de Staël would doubtless have returned in any case. She who, sitting by the blue waters

of Lake Leman, had sighed for the gutter of the Rue du Bac, could not conceivably have resisted that temptation. Considerations of business as well as of pleasure drew her thither; for now that the Emperor had abdicated, there was more than a chance that the debt of the French Treasury to Necker might be paid. Above all, however, the lover to whom she had said so many last good-byes was there; and she felt that she must hasten to him, even as, long ago, in the days of her youth, she had hastened to Mickleham to meet M. de Narbonne.

"She made me some extraordinary confidences," says Miss Berry, who continued to see her frequently until her departure. We do not know what the confidences were, but we can guess, for though Madame de Staël concealed her marriage, she never made a mystery of her love affairs. Miss Berry, we gather, did not take the confessions very seriously. "Emotion," she says, "is not what she excites nor what she feels except momentarily. She does not dwell long enough upon anything; life, characters, and even feelings pass before her eyes like a magic lantern. She spends herself upon paper, and runs through the world to see all, to hear all, and to say all—to excite herself, and to give it all back to the world, and to the society from whence she has drawn it." "Now she is gone," she adds in a letter, "while *I* am regretting *her*, she will never think more of *me* until we meet again."

Perhaps not. Her mind, as we have seen, was occupied with more engrossing thoughts. She expected much, though, as the event proved, disappointment was in store for her.

It may be that her rich imagination had coloured that letter in which she told Schlegel that Benjamin wrote "more passionately than when he loved me most." It may be, on the other hand, that Benjamin's expressions exceeded the ardour of his inward feelings. The Diary, at all events, expresses no joy at the meeting, but indicates rather that, in so far as he loves her at all, it is not for her own sake but for her daughter's.

"I dine with Don Pedro, and attend a reception at the great Chancellor's. Madame de Staël arrives. I go to see her, and find her altered, pale, and thin. The interview passed without any display of emotion. Albertine is charming—as bright and clever as can be. How I wish that I could pass my life with her!"

And then again :—

"Dinner at Gérando's with Ancillon, a man of wit. Pass the evening at Madame de Staël's. She is altogether changed, absent-minded, almost stiff in her manner, thinking only of herself, listening little, and interesting herself in nothing."

In the letters, too, we find the same note sounded. "My relations, if relations I have, with Madame de Staël," he tells his cousin Rosalie, "are more than simple. I pass weeks without ever seeing

her alone, and days without seeing her at all." And in another letter to the same cousin we find this remarkable passage :—

"Madame de Staël is living, as you know, in a country house near Paris. As she is at a distance from me, I see her less than if she were at Paris. It is true, of course, that her charm and her celebrity attract to her house all the distinguished strangers, both men and women, who are here. But a decline of one's interest affects one very much in the same way as a diminution of one's fortune. A man who would think an income of a thousand crowns wealth if he were penniless, regards it as poverty if he has had an income of ten thousand crowns in his time. Similarly those who have once been lovers relapse into mutual indifference when their affection for each other is only like that which they feel for people in general. Besides, I am a little angry with her, for I cannot speak to any woman in Paris without her spreading the report that I am in love—which is ridiculous at my age, and an inconvenience to me in my public position."

There, clearly, is the little rift within the lute. Widening, it does not, unhappily, make the music mute, but imparts to it a harsh and grating sound. To indifference there succeeds an open quarrel—a very ugly quarrel about money matters. There was a time, as has been related, when Madame de Staël deliberately lent money to Benjamin Constant, in order to make it difficult for him to break off his relations with her. When

he wanted to repay her, she refused to accept repayment, and would not even help him in fixing the amount of the debt. The settlement at which they finally arrived was only the result of his unflinching insistence. He practically forced upon her a mortgage on some of his property, repayable, together with whatever interest should have accrued, out of his estate, at his death. But now, of a sudden, we see Madame de Staël trying to upset that settlement and demanding cash.

Her letters demanding the cash are included in the *Critic's* collection; and it is very painful to read them. The woman who of old had loved—and perhaps still longed to love—takes in them the tone of an indignant dun. Benjamin's conduct, she declares, "passes all that I believed of the human heart." "What a man!" she exclaims. "A man capable of a cowardice which is worse than a theft!" She will only communicate with him through the medium of her solicitor; proceedings shall be instantly begun.

And so forth. It is a dispute for which one instinctively seeks a motive other than pecuniary, and the key to the mystery is the complaint to Rosalie that Madame de Staël cannot see Benjamin speak to another woman without spreading the report that he is in love with her. The report was not only circulated; it was a true report. Benjamin was in love—head over ears in love—with Madame de Staël's bosom friend, Madame Récamier. *Hinc illæ lacrimæ.*

MADAME RECAMIER

From a Painting by François Gérard

Photo by Braun Clément & Cie

MADAME RÉCAMIER

From a Painting by François Gérard

Photo by Braun Clément et Cie

CHAPTER XXVI

Benjamin Constant in love with Madame Récamier—His account of the passion in his Diary—Finding that he loves in vain, he rejoins his wife.

Napoleon's sister, Caroline, Queen of Naples, had asked Madame Récamier to find a good journalist who would write a pamphlet setting forth her husband's claims to consideration in that rearrangement of the map of Europe which the Allies were negotiating at Vienna. Madame Récamier at once thought of Benjamin Constant, whose pamphlet against the Emperor had made a great stir; and as Benjamin Constant was no ordinary journalist to be hired or bought, she flirted with him. For a season he was at least allowed to call her Juliette and to write to her several times a day; and for the sake of those privileges, and in the hope of others which he did not obtain, he duly composed the pamphlet, and even returned the proffered fee of 20,000 francs. We have only to look at the Diary to see how suddenly the passion seized him.

"I pass the evening with Madame Récamier, and this woman, by whose side I lived in Switzerland, and whom I have seen so often and in so many circumstances without her making the

faintest impression upon me, now, all of a sudden, inspires me with violent sentiments. Am I mad, or only silly? But the feeling, I hope, will pass away."

"Alas! The feeling does not pass away; the passionate fever which is only too familiar to me, has invaded my heart and obtained complete dominion over it. It is all up with work, with politics, with literature. The reign of Juliette begins. It is a circumstance apparently of the most trivial character that has thrown me into this irresistible whirlwind of the heart and mind —a matter of advice to be given, and something to be written for the Murats, who have asked Juliette (who is under obligations to them) to apply to me. Her desire to do what they want, the seductions which she has thought it her duty to employ, and the confidential conferences thus necessitated, have turned my head. I feel that it is so. And yet I am aware of the danger to which I am exposing myself, for I have to do with an avowed coquette. But the fascination of the difficulty to be overcome leads me on."

"My life is a torment through the inconceivable agitation into which this woman throws me. It is making me grow old before my time. I pay calls here and there, etc. Any device is good for killing time; my blood is at fever heat. I have seen her alone. Never was her manner more coquettish—that is her charm. It is impossible for me to tell whether I have made the slightest progress in her heart; she does not even seem to be sorry for me. This evening,

after she had given me an appointment and failed to keep it, I almost choked to see how little regret she showed. I had to leave her, and I fell into convulsions in my suffering and my passionate desire.

"What has become of you, peaceful life of Göttingen?"

"I wanted to make her uneasy by my absence; but I could not resist her, and I went to see her. I perceive that she becomes every day more cold and more reasonable. She inspires me with horror. I would never see her again if I thought that that would trouble her. I would give ten years of my life to make her suffer the half of what I am suffering."

To despair succeeds exaltation, in spite of Benjamin's discovery that he has a rival.

"She gave me an appointment, and I ran to keep it. My sufferings moved her. She promised that she would often see me alone, and that she would listen to me. She spoke to me affectionately of my interests and my career. Nevertheless, she made herself so agreeable, in my presence, with M. de Forbin,[1] that I had to seek an interview with him afterwards and arrange that we will fight to-morrow."

"What with Juliette's distress, and her tender promises on condition that I do not fight, and the efforts of the seconds, the matter is arranged,

[1] An *émigré* who had fought against his country, and was presently to be made a peer of France. He and Benjamin Constant fought a duel, as the result of some press polemics, in 1822.

though we are both resolved to assail each other again on the smallest ground of offence."

"I saw her again to-day. Please God, I will not boast. I am too much afraid of some sledge-hammer blow. But I do believe that I have made a little progress. She believed that I was leaving her, and had written to complain. She admits that I love more passionately than anyone, and only doubts the durability of my attachment. She almost confessed to a fear that it would not last long."

The attachment, at any rate, lasted longer than the lady's preferential smiles, for the next entry is :—

"My stars! I give it up. She has made me pass a diabolical day. She is an empty-headed bird, a cloud, without memory, without discrimination, without preferences. Her beauty having made her the object of continual homage, the romantic language to which she has listened has given her an appearance of sensibility which is only skin deep. I never find her in the morning the same person to whom I said good-night the evening before. Her memory is so defective that the pleasure which she has derived from one intimate *tête-à-tête* never suggests to her that she should seek an opportunity for another. She is as kind to everybody as she is to me.

"After this attack of despair and anger I calmed down, and, finding Forbin with her in the evening, I opened my heart to Juliette in his presence. This established confidential relations between the two aspirants to her favours. We

both proceeded to picture our love to her—with the result that I ended by bursting into a mad fit of laughter.

"I must have done with it, and the sooner the better."

So Benjamin tried to argue himself out of his mad passion, and selected a strange confidante to help him.

"Thinking that I might detach myself from Juliette by a cold process of reasoning, I told the whole story of my mad passion to Albertine, though without mentioning the lady's name. I admit that this was absurd, and that I was wrong. Will that cure my foolishness, and shall I continue occupations so shamelessly puerile for a man like me? But alas! she holds my heart in her claws, and never was madness more inopportune."

It was inopportune because Benjamin's political writings were attracting a great deal of notice. Distinction was in store for him if he chose to have it, as was made clear to him by the compliments paid to him whenever he dined out. On the other hand, Juliette was making it clear that she intended to offer him nothing more serious than her friendship. The next passages in the Diary show that conclusion demonstrated to him.

"It seems silly to venture nothing with a woman with whom one is very much in love, and with whom one is often *tête-à-tête* at two o'clock in the morning. I must persevere."

"I have an appointment with Juliette for this evening, and I prepare a written composition in order to arouse her emotions. It was a success. She was really moved; there was more abandon in her manner than ever. And yet I got nothing for my pains. There is a barrier there which I perceive, and which paralyses my endeavours."

"It is all over. Beneath her manner there is nothing but the most complete indifference. Love is not to be looked for? Friendship? That is hardly worth while with a soul so dead as hers. I must go away from her, or I must cure myself. But I have been shouting that into my ears for the last ten months, and I feel that I shall do neither the one thing nor the other."

The cure, indeed, was not to be found yet awhile. On the contrary, a fresh gleam of hope began to shine upon the lover. Juliette had been cruel, and had left a letter unanswered, so that Benjamin was reduced to tears and despair. But he had met Madame Krudner, who had promised to plead for him. "Who knows," he exclaims, "if the heart of Juliette will not be opened to me when attacked by this ally?"

Madame Krudner was, in truth, a strange ally in such a situation. She had been in her time a fashionable beauty, a woman of letters, and a frivolous and unfaithful wife. Her novel *Valérie* had appeared at about the same date as Madame de Staël's *Delphine*, and had been only less successful. Its theme, like that of *Delphine*,

was autobiographical, and it confided to the world the author's passionate attachment for a man who was not her husband. The frailty, however, no less than the confession, belonged to the past. Madame Krudner had found religion, and was the most conspicuous of the mystics of the day. In that capacity she exerted a remarkable influence over the Russian Emperor, who is said to have been especially amenable to such influence, because his mistress had lately forsaken him for his aide-de-camp, and is said to have inspired the idea of the Holy Alliance. It was in that character also that she appealed to Benjamin Constant.

Religion had always interested Benjamin. He had begun, as we have seen, to write a book about religion on the backs of playing-cards in the drawing-room of that Madame de Charrière whom he treated so badly; and he continued to work at it, in the intervals of his amours, for a period of forty years, adding and altering almost until the day of his death. Moreover, religion for him had always meant mysticism rather than moral obligation. He had encountered mysticism at Geneva, where a mystic missionary was once brought before the magistrates and charged with paying excessive attentions to the ladies of his congregation, "under the pretence that he was inspired by God." At Lausanne the Chevalier de Langallerie had almost persuaded him to become a mystic. So that the ground was well prepared, and we read without surprise:—

"Madame de Krudner sent for me. Her conversation did me good. She was adorable in her compassion for the love which tortures me, and promised her help in linking Juliette's soul with mine. At the same time she gave me a manuscript for Juliette. I read it. There are no new ideas in it, but it is touchingly true, and some of the passages penetrated to the depths of my soul. There, yes, there lies truth. I feel that it is so. All my passionate sentiments are subdued. O powerful and good God, complete my cure."

"Madame de Krudner gave me a prayer to write out, and it made me melt into tears. What an amount of good that woman's influence does me! I saw Juliette again, and was gentle and calm, but I fancy she is not very prone to religious ideas. She loses herself altogether in the coquetry which she makes it her business to practise, and in her pleasure or distress at the pain which she causes the three or four aspirants surrounding her. Finally she is willing to do a little good when it is not too much trouble, and sets the mass above everything, sighing sighs which she believes come from her soul, though their real meaning is that she is bored."

"I have seen Juliette again, and—miracle of miracles—she wants to find religion. Madame de Krudner triumphs, and hopes to succeed in uniting us spiritually. I prayed with Juliette."

A good beginning, but quickly followed by disappointment. Neither love nor religion fulfilled the high expectations thus hastily formed of them. First it is the collapse of religion that is noted.

"Spent the evening with Madame de Krudner. There are certainly some good things among these people's beliefs and ideas, but they go too far with their miracles and their descriptions of Paradise, of which they speak as they might of their own bedrooms."

And then we read of the collapse of love.

"Alas! Madame de Krudner was not a true prophet, for Juliette has never treated me more shamefully. Yesterday she made four appointments with me, and did not keep any of them; and, in the evening, I found her the *ne plus ultra* of coquetry, perfidy, lying, and hypocrisy. But Madame de Krudner has given me strength to bear that and to calm myself. It is much. I will once more become a serious man, recover my strength of mind, and resume my pen. I feel that, and I wish it."

The end is assuredly near, if it has not actually come, when a lover can write like that; but the severest blow to Benjamin's passion must have been that struck during the Hundred Days. He was one of the last of the champions of the Bourbons who remained at Paris to defy the Corsican —"this cunning half-barbarian," as he called him. He was still insulting the Emperor in the *Journal des Débâts* after his arrival at Fontainebleau; and he has left it on record that he did so for no other reason than to please Madame Récamier. But Madame Récamier was still unkind.

"How beautiful you looked, standing before

your door," he wrote to her, "like a white angel ascending to heaven, and illuminating with celestial splendour the darkness of the earth. But," he added, "angels have a heart. They love, and it touches them to be loved." And then, having written that, he abandoned his plans for flight to America, accepted the overtures that were made to him, and gave in his allegiance to Napoleon, who nominated him Councillor of State. "My love persists," he writes; and the correspondence certainly persisted. Letters were still being exchanged for some time after the Waterloo *débâcle*; but they grew less frequent and more formal. Such affection as Madame Récamier had bestowed upon Benjamin Constant was transferred to others, and ultimately to Chateaubriand; and Benjamin, on his part, ceasing to be afflicted, went to Brussels to meet his wife.

Madame Constant had travelled 150 leagues in mid-winter on "frightful roads" to join him. Informing Madame Récamier of her arrival, her husband adds, as it were, a testimonial to her merits: "She is an excellent person, with a very loving heart, a very noble soul, and an integrity of character and an honesty which are my admiration." Then, changing the subject, he proceeds to retrospects and reproaches: "When I consider how little advantage women have derived from loving me, I think you were very wise not to do so; though I would congratulate you more warmly if it had cost you a greater effort to refrain. The

only wrong that you have done me was to desire that I should love you—a weakness that lasted five days. I can speak to you on the subject without bitterness because the pain is past."

It had not passed, however, without leaving traces behind. The correspondence did not cease; it did not even cease to be frequent. From London, where Benjamin and Charlotte spent several months after leaving Brussels, letters continued to be despatched, relating ostensibly to various little matters of business, but couched in language unusual in business communications. The most interesting passage is the writer's forecast—so soon to be belied—of the life that he will live on his return to Paris. "I shall work there," he declares, "at matters quite unconnected with politics. I shall not go into Society, for I hate it; and I shall await the end of a life which promises me no further satisfaction, but which I should like to finish in tranquillity, far removed from strangers, giving to the person whose destiny I have taken in charge, and who is an angel in her affection and her goodness, a happiness which I shall try to pretend to share."

CHAPTER XXVII

The Constants in London—The publication of *Adolphe*—The place of *Adolphe* in French literature.

BENJAMIN CONSTANT was well received in London, though some of the leaders of English Society declined the acquaintance of Madame Constant on account of her double divorce. Very likely that was one of the reasons why she complained, as she repeatedly did, that the English climate was unsuitable for her health. The Diary notes that her "equivocal position" was a cause of embarrassment and annoyance. No details are given, however, and that branch of the subject may be passed over. A more interesting entry is this :—

> "I have read my novel to various friends. It has a great success. I am going to have it printed. They are giving me seventy louis for it."

The reference was, of course, to *Adolphe*—the romance, written in 1807, in which the author had promised himself that he would tell the story of his life. He finished it, the Diary tells us, in a fortnight; and it does not appear that he had, at the time, any thought of publishing it. He acquired, however, the habit of reading it aloud

to his friends, much as Rousseau used to read aloud extracts from the *Confessions*; and the habit grew upon him. The listeners generally wept.

At the particular reading to which the Diary alludes Miss Berry was present, and her account of the incident is as follows:—

"In the evening at the Bourkes, where there had been a dinner, Lady Holland, Madame de Lieven, etc., and where Benjamin Constant read his romance, or history; I do not know what to call it, as he has not given it a name. It is very well written—a sad and much too true history of the human heart, but almost ridiculously so with the company before whom it was read. It lasted two hours and a half. The end was so touching that it was scarcely possible to restrain one's tears, and the effort I made to do so made me positively ill. Agnes and I both burst into tears on our return home."

That was the effect on an English audience, and we learn from the Duc de Broglie that the effect on a French audience was similar.

The Duke, be it remarked, was not a friendly witness. He had a poor opinion of the novel, and he did not like the novelist—for reasons which are obvious though he does not mention them. He was in love with, and about to marry, Albertine de Staël; and *Adolphe* was therefore, from his point of view, a work which exposed a skeleton in the cupboard of the family which

he proposed to enter. Its author seemed to be confessing—or perhaps to be boasting—that he had loved, and had tired of, the lady who was to be the mother-in-law of the head of one of the historic houses of France. He knew—for it was notorious—that the confession was founded upon fact. It was a condition of things which offended his dignity as well as his moral sense both before his marriage and afterwards. Looking backwards, in later years, he ignored what he could of the story, and took such revenge as was possible on Benjamin Constant, by holding him up to ridicule and contempt.

Benjamin's relations with Madame Récamier and Madame Krudner gave him his opportunity. He drew a graphic picture of the aspirant to the favours of the coquette spending his nights in the salon of the mystic, "sometimes upon his knees engaged in prayer, and sometimes extended in ecstasy upon the carpet." He added that Benjamin was even anxious to enter into a compact with the Devil in order to obtain the privileges which he had vainly supplicated God to grant. He deplores the bad taste of *Adolphe*, and declares that its effect upon French literature has been that of a taint or an infection. But he admits that, when the author read it aloud in Madame Récamier's drawing-room, the listeners were impressed.

"There were," he writes, "twelve or fifteen of us present. The reading lasted nearly three

hours. The author was tired. As he approached the *dénouement*, his emotion increased, and his fatigue augmented his emotion. At last he could no longer contain himself, but burst into sobs. The contagion affected the whole assembly, already itself much moved, and tears and groans prevailed. Then, suddenly, by one of those rapid transitions which, if we may believe the doctors, are not of rare occurrence, the sobs, having become convulsive, turned to nervous and irresistible bursts of laughter; so that, if anyone had entered at that moment, and surprised the author and his listeners in that condition, he would have been at a loss to know what to think, or how to explain the effect by the cause."

A romance which produced this sort of success when read aloud could hardly fail to attract attention when printed; while the curiosity of the curious was further stimulated by the question whether it should or should not be read as a *roman-à-clef*. It is impossible to say what the author meant the world to think; but we know what he thought his acquaintances were likely to think, from two passages in letters to Madame Récamier.

In June 1816 he professes to regret the publication. "I never," he writes, "see the inconvenience of any course which I adopt until after I have adopted it. I am afraid that a person to whom it does not really bear the most distant application, whether as regards her position or her character, may be hurt. But it is too late."

In October of the same year he reports, with apparent satisfaction: "*Adolphe* has not caused any quarrel with the person whose unjust susceptibility I feared. She has, on the contrary, seen my desire to avoid any allusion that might annoy her. I am told that another person is furious. That woman is very vain. I was not thinking of her at all."

The explanation of the allusions, supposing them to need any, may be found in the letters which passed on the subject between Charles and Rosalie de Constant. It is Charles who writes first.

"In reading *Adolphe*, my dear Rose, you will have observed that Benjamin explains his conduct by depreciating his character; and, as someone used to say, he wished to make it known that his private life was governed by the same principles as his public career. He has caused the English papers to insert the statement that the characters in his novel are not portraits of persons whom anybody knows; but those who have known both him and her will not be deceived by this declaration. Several of his readers will have known Ellénore; her name was Lindsay. She was a young woman, agreeable in company, half French half English, brought to live in concubinage by the machinations of adventurers. She had intelligence, but no education. Her adventures with Benjamin made a good deal of talk in their time. The lady of Coppet has no place in this masterpiece. To sell oneself for

money seems to me the depths of degradation, and I am the less ready to forgive him for that than I should be if he had acted in pure cynicism. This book, my dear Rose, causes me real annoyance. I cannot rid myself of a feeling of attachment to my relatives—especially to those with whom I have been on intimate terms. Benjamin's wit and talents might have shed lustre on us all. He now covers us with mud and shame."

Rosalie replies at length in a letter which constitutes one of the best criticisms ever written alike of the book and of its author.

"You are right. *Adolphe* caused me real pain. It made me feel again something of the suffering which the story on which it is founded caused me. The situation is so well depicted that I fancied myself carried back to the time when I was the witness of an unworthy servitude, and of a weakness based upon a noble sentiment. It is not her, except in the respect of her tyranny. But it is him; and I can quite understand that, after having been so often dragged into prominence, so diversely judged, and so often in contradiction with himself, he has found some satisfaction in explaining himself, and in pointing out the causes of his errors and the motives of his actions in a relation which has so powerfully influenced his life. But I would rather that he had not published the explanation. The story is sad, and inspires only painful sentiments from the beginning to the end. Where the material truth is altered, ideal truth suffers. I find the

end specially painful: the consequences are discouraging. Poor Benjamin! I believe him to be one of the most unhappy men in the world. His mind works with such exactitude that it shows him every side of every question and all the consequences of all the errors into which enthusiasm or weakness lead him. Every year I hope that what is good and great in his nature will gain the upper hand, and place him in the position which he ought to occupy; every year he causes me fresh grief and disappointment. But I will not hate him for faults which do no harm to anyone but himself, and are never inspired by bad intentions; I shall consider that I owe him that share of friendship of which you deprived him so long ago with so much severity. . . . Perhaps if you had remained his friend, that would have checked a good many of his faults. In the days of the terrible scenes I often used to think: 'If he had a real friend—if Charles were here—he might be able to withdraw from this unworthy position.' . . . In the novel you do not appear to perceive any of the beauties of thought and style with which it is replete. I think there are few novels more profoundly moral, or better demonstrating the power of education. What might he not have come to if his own education had been directed by a Christian father and mother! How easy it was to arouse him to an enthusiasm for good, to orderly habits, and even a passion for order! How many truths women can learn in his book concerning the part played by imagination in the passions, concerning their empire over their lovers, and on the manner in which their tender-

ness increases while that of men diminishes. I beg you to read it again without thinking of Benjamin. You will see how full it is of acute and just remarks. . . .

"You must understand that the Lindsay story was invented from beginning to end at Coppet. He had not time in his life to be influenced by two women as he was by one. But at least he has not done her the wrong of introducing her personality into his story; for Ellénore is not in the least like the lady of Coppet, who has much more ludicrous displays of devotion at her command. . . ."

To which Charles rejoins :—

"With you, my dear Rose, I thought I might express myself freely. What you tell me proves that I was wrong. Your determination to defend him will not allow me to open my heart and tell you all that I think; so let us say no more about it. Only I swear to you that everybody mentioned Madame Lindsay in this connection before the arrival of Madame de Staël, whom I have only seen at Lady Hamilton's. I am told, too, that the death of Ellénore is that of a Madame Talma to whom he was much attached. You are profoundly ignorant of your cousin's adventures. Not that he made any secret of them, but that we have had the discretion not to tell you."

What, then, is the truth? It is, of course, as the shrewd Sismondi divined, that the author had deliberately tried to throw his readers off the track. So far as externals went, Mrs. Lindsay was indubitably his model; but the emotions

which he analysed were the emotions which Madame de Staël had caused him. And the external circumstances of the story are of no importance. It is only the psychology that counts.

As a story, indeed, *Adolphe* is rather badly put together. The stage management, and even the stage carpentry, leave much to be desired; the novelists of our time are much better craftsmen. They know how to present a story in pictures, whereas he could only relate one. His novel reads less like a work of fiction than like a statement of a case drawn up for counsel's opinion. But that does not matter; or at all events it does not matter much. Benjamin Constant was doing a new thing, though he did it clumsily—plucking his heart out of his breast, dissecting it, and telling the world, in the form of fiction, not what he had observed or imagined, but what he had felt. Not what he had felt at this or that moment of supreme exaltation, but what he had felt on the whole, during illusion, and after disillusion. He was, in short, the pioneer of the novel of analysed experience—a common *genre* nowadays, but at that time new to literature. He was *fin de siècle*, as the phrase goes, at the very beginning of the nineteenth century.

And, of course, analysing candidly and writing dispassionately, he discovered and expounded a new emotional situation, and broke up the conventional emotional machinery of novels.

The conventions which held the field when he wrote were very simple. Either you loved or you did not; but if you did love you loved tremendously—there was no middle course. The great tragedy was to love in vain; the reasonable expectation was that love would last for ever. Sometimes, of course, it happened that love did not last for ever; sometimes a man loved and rode away. But a conventional explanation was always ready to hand. Men were deceivers ever; women had been the victims of their deceptions through the ages.

To have read *Adolphe* when saturated with these conventions must have been like entering a dark room with a guide carrying a lantern, or like hearing a new witness whose unexpected evidence, abounding in "new facts," upsets the calculations of the Court. It is there shown that a love affair may involve many other tragedies besides that of loving in vain, and that a man who, according to the conventions of fiction, is merely a heartless deceiver, may be quite innocent of any intention to give pain, and may himself be the principal sufferer from the failure of his emotions to answer to the call upon them.

The story is merely of a man who contracted a *liaison*, and got tired of it, and was then divided between his desire for freedom and his sense of responsibility to his mistress—who finds, to his dismay, that he has squandered his emotional substance in riotous living which he has not even

enjoyed. His tragedy is the tragedy of trying to love and failing—of fanning a fire that cannot be made to blaze; the tragedy also of the sense of futility and wasted effort which comes to the lover whose love has flickered out, and who reflects that he has missed what was perhaps his last chance of finding happiness in love.

One does not suppose, of course, that Benjamin Constant was the first man who endured the mental agony of which he writes. He was no more the first than he was the last. Love being, as even the earliest novelists knew, the most intoxicating kind of happiness, no man who has once tasted it puts it away from him of malice aforethought; he is no more tempted to do this than he is tempted to blind or maim himself, or destroy any of his faculties. So much is obvious; and it is obvious, too, that the *cœur sensible*—as they said in those days—must always have felt that there was tragedy in ceasing to love no less than in ceasing to be loved, and have suffered pain from the belief, erroneous though it may have been in many cases, that the extinction of his passion would make a woman miserable for the remainder of her days. But though these emotions were not new to life, they certainly were new to literature. Previous novelists had passed them by — perhaps because they were ashamed of them, perhaps because they did not think that they would attract the public. Benjamin Constant gave them expression be-

cause he was writing not for the public but for himself, and, in writing for himself, had no other wish than to tell the truth.

He had his reward, though hardly in his lifetime. It was his ambition, as he once wrote to Cousin Rosalie, to "leave something behind him"; and, to that end, he laboured for several years at a History of Religion in several volumes. He left it, and its place is in the lumber-room. But he also left *Adolphe*, and the place of *Adolphe* is still upon the bookshelf on which we keep the books we read. Not only is it frequently reprinted; its influence can also be traced in the works of many eminent French writers. The central idea of *L'Education sentimentale*—the idea of the futility of the philandering which leads nowhere—is the secondary idea of *Adolphe*. The story of *Sapho* is actually the story of *Adolphe*, set in a new social environment, and better told, by a better story-teller, with the embroidery characteristic of his genius. And though *Sapho* may not be the most amusing, or the most pathetic, or the most dramatic of Alphonse Daudet's novels, it is the best in the sense that it cuts most deeply into the hidden places of the human heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII

In Paris—Marriage of Albertine to the Duc de Broglie—Trouble about the dowry—Madame de Staël applies to Benjamin Constant for money—He refuses it—A quarrel and a renewal of friendship.

MADAME DE STAËL had reached the autumn of her life, but in the echoes of her activities that still reach us we detect no hint of an autumnal tone. Even failing health hardly relaxed her energies. Her manner was still that of one who felt that there was much to be done, and little time in which to do it; "faint but pursuing" might have been her motto at this stage. She was running after Benjamin Constant, whom she found, as we have seen, more evasive than ever before; she was running after Necker's millions, which a Bourbon might be expected to repay, if only because a Bonaparte had refused to do so; she was running after a husband for her daughter. At the same time she was trying to reconstitute Society in her salon in Paris, at Clichy, where she spent some of the summer months, and at Coppet, to which she paid a brief visit.

"As for Society," she writes to Miss Berry, "it amounts to nothing, though a few remnants of it assemble at my house;" but, in saying this, she did herself less than justice. The Duc de Broglie

speaks very differently. "She was welcomed and run after," he declares, "even at Court and by the Ministers, and humoured in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; her drawing-room was the *rendezvous* of all the strangers whom the Restoration brought to Paris." Among the more distinguished strangers whose names he mentions were Canning and the Duke of Wellington, Sir James Mackintosh, Lord Harrowby, and Humboldt. Even the Russian Emperor paid her a visit—that Lafayette might be presented to him: a fact which she asks Miss Berry to mention casually to her Russian friends, "in order that they may respect me." We hear from other sources of receptions at which she entertained as many as eight hundred guests. The Duc de Broglie, we gather, did not think her extensive hospitality altogether becoming at the hour of the humiliation of her country; but it doubtless appeared to her that, wherever Society could be gathered together, her place was at the head of it.

In the pursuit of the millions, Benjamin Constant was her aide-de-camp. In his letters to Madame Récamier he repeatedly speaks of himself as "running" on her behalf, and as having to prevent or repair indiscretions due to her precipitate hurry to be paid. Services of that material kind he was always ready to render, in order, as it were, to compensate her for his sentimental slackness. In the past the rendering of them had sometimes resulted in the renewal of

the sentiment for which they were intended to be the substitute. But that was no longer possible. As Charlotte had intervened in the past, so Madame Récamier was intervening now.

The relation of the parties to the drama was, indeed, at this stage, curious and confusing. Benjamin, in spite of his new passion, had not lost his affection for his wife. Several of the letters to Madame Récamier invite pity for her sad case. She is a great lady, the husband declares, in her own country; but if she is brought to Paris there is a danger that Society will receive her coldly because of that double divorce. That is his excuse for leaving her in Germany while he is philandering in France; and he appears to offer it in all sincerity. Meanwhile he pays his court to Madame Récamier at Madame de Staël's house; the two ladies remaining meanwhile upon the friendliest terms, though the latter took it upon herself to warn her lover against the former.

"You will come to no good," she told him, "in your present state of mind, whatever the cause of it may be. You offend everybody by not listening to what people say, and not answering when you are spoken to, and refusing to be interested in anything that anybody says to you. You soon will not have a friend left if you go on like this. I, for my part, have ceased to care for you. Your wife will also quarrel with you; and if it is love that accounts for your condition, I

assure you that the person with whom you are in love will never have any affection for you."

This last statement, at any rate, was a true one. Madame de Staël, knowing Madame Récamier from of old, knew that she was as passionless as she was beautiful, and never engaged her heart in any of her innumerable flirtations. The knowledge enabled her to remain her friend in spite of appearances, and to refrain from censorious criticism of her coquetry. Criticism on that head was left to Albertine, who, though young and brought up in the midst of levity, had already acquired serious views of life, and who, in July 1814, wrote to her friend, Mademoiselle de Barante: "Madame Récamier is pretty and good, but a life of trivial coquetry does not elevate the soul. She would be a better woman if she had not squandered her heart here, there, and everywhere."

What Madame de Staël's husband was saying and doing at this period we do not know. Seeing that her marriage to him was still unacknowledged, and that the child which she had borne him was being brought up under a false name in a village in the Jura, the probability is that he said and did very little. He had accepted an undignified position, and he had to make the best of it; perhaps he was glad that he was an invalid and had that excuse for remaining in the background. At all events, he remained there; and one hears little of him except that his wife did at least refuse

to turn him out of her box at the Opera to make room for Benjamin Constant. His case, however, by no means exhausts the complications; and perhaps the strangest fact of all is that the Duc de Broglie, in the midst of this sentimental confusion, was at once associating with Benjamin Constant and making proposals for the hand of Albertine de Staël.

The lovers, it is evident, suited one another admirably. Neither of them was very brilliant, and both of them were very serious. It was said by frivolous observers that in the days of their courtship they conversed chiefly on the principles of taxation; but that is the sort of thing that frivolous people are much too fond of saying about serious people. The only grave barrier between them was a difference of religion; and that hardly mattered, since all serious people, unless they are fanatics, are of the same religion.

The religious difficulty, at all events, does not seem to have been the difficulty raised by the de Broglie family. The Duke's mother, married *en secondes noces* to the Marquis d'Argenson, gave her consent to the match, but his other relatives objected strongly. "Such," he writes, "was the prevalent current of opinion, and so great was the folly of aristocratic prejudice, lately disinterred, that my marriage with the daughter of a great Swedish nobleman was regarded as a *mésalliance.* I was reminded of the opposition between the

Maréchal de Broglie and M. Necker in 1789; our two families were represented to me as Montagues and Capulets; my uncle Amédée, to whom I was under real and recent obligations, denounced me as ungrateful to him. The talk, in short, was loud, and grew louder from hour to hour."

Probably the bridegroom's summary of that talk is not quite exact and complete. The Duc de Broglie's relatives were as serious as he was himself, and they were not in love. Not the dead father-in-law but the living mother-in-law was presumably the obstacle in their eyes. She was serious enough in her own way, but hardly so in theirs. She had lived her private life in public, almost as one giving a performance to appreciative spectators. They can hardly have known less than Gibbon and Miss Berry about her relations with M. de Narbonne; and they can hardly have known less than Barras about her relations with Benjamin Constant, and may easily have shared the doubts expressed in Barras' Journal whether the "great Swedish nobleman" was in fact Albertine de Staël's father. Moreover, even if they entertained no such doubts and regarded the scandals which had raised the question as ancient history, there was still the case of Rocca to be considered. It is all very well for the Duc de Broglie to write that Rocca's malady condemned him to "retirement and absolute silence." Rocca, at any rate, was in

Paris, figuring as *amant en titre*, written of by Byron as "Monsieur l'Amant." One can understand the objections of serious, old-fashioned people to a mother-in-law thus attended and encumbered.

"But I stuck to it," writes the lover. "The marriage was arranged and announced immediately after my mother's arrival, and was only postponed on account of the settlements which depended upon the repayment of two million francs generously lent to the State by M. Necker."

This, however, is another branch of the subject concerning which the Duc de Broglie only tells us a portion of the truth. The actual facts have to be deduced from the correspondence published in the *Critic* to which allusion has already been made. The dowry, it appears from these letters, was a *sine quâ non* of the marriage; and if the Government would not discharge its debt to Necker, it must be provided from some other source. The sudden return of Napoleon from Elba interrupted the negotiations proceeding for the assumption of the liability by the State. Madame de Staël, who had retired to Coppet, could not conveniently lay her hand upon the ready money; and she decided that Benjamin Constant must find it for her. He owed her (as she considered) 80,000 francs; and he had implored her (so she declares) upon his knees to permit him to associate himself with

Albertine's happiness. Now was the time. Benjamin must tear up the old agreement and "place 40,000 francs at Albertine's disposal." In April 1815 she wrote to him to that effect, adding that, in anticipation of his favourable answer, she had promised that sum to the Broglie family.

Unfortunately, however, Benjamin Constant had no more facilities for laying his hands upon ready money than Madame de Staël herself. Most people, in fact, found ready money a scarce commodity during the Hundred Days. He had to excuse himself, therefore, and the correspondence speedily became embittered. "You owe me 80,000 francs" runs through it like a *leit-motif*, there are, as we have already seen, the most violent threats of legal proceedings. There is very little on the subject in the *Journal Intime*, but one entry shows us what was Benjamin's point of view. "A letter," he writes, "from Madame de Staël. She would like me to do nothing to promote my own fortune, and to hand over to her the little that I possess. A delightful arrangement that!" And he adds elsewhere that the quarrel has quite destroyed the remnant of affectionate sentiment which he had still retained for her.

No doubt it had nearly done so, if not quite. Unable at the moment to be generous, Benjamin Constant had only adhered to legal rights freely bestowed upon him; and he was entitled to be angry at reproaches which he esteemed unjust.

Madame de Staël herself admitted as much when she had leisure to be reasonable. "Your justification," she wrote presently, "is perfect;" and her letters, growing gradually milder, may almost be read as an apology presented in instalments. In June, a few days before the battle of Waterloo, she writes: "If I can reconcile myself with God, after having reproached you, I will perhaps become softer." In July she is saying: "I wish that you believed that I am better disposed to you than I was." In August her hopes of recovering Necker's loan having improved through the fall of the Empire, she appeals to Benjamin to do what he can to strengthen Victor de Broglie's devotion to her daughter: "Try to speak of her before him. One can praise her certainly without exaggerating." In September it is: "The state of your health causes me much uneasiness," and also: "I rely entirely on your pride and your zeal in what concerns Albertine;" and finally: "Give my son good advice about my affair. Do not think any more of the one that was in question between us."

So that was the end of that. The restored Bourbons undertook to pay their debt to Necker; the Papal permission for the mixed marriage was obtained; Victor de Broglie set out for Coppet, accompanied by Auguste de Staël and his half-brother, René d'Argenson. They crossed the Jura in the snows of January 1816, at the time when Benjamin Constant was preparing to leave

DUCHESSE DE BROGLIE

From a Painting by François Gérard

Photo by Braun, Clément et Cie

DUCHESSE DE BROGLIE

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Photo by Braun Clément et Cie

Brussels for London. Sismondi joined them, and they went on over the Mont Cenis to Parma, Bologna, Florence, and Pisa, where Madame de Staël and Albertine awaited them. The marriage was celebrated at Pisa on February 20, 1816, Sydney Smith's brother, Bob Smith,[1] acting as witness. It was from Albertine, now Duchesse de Broglie, that Benjamin Constant heard the news. "All the great emotions of my life," she wrote, "make me wish to think of you and speak of you. . . . What a sad combination of circumstances was necessary to prevent you from being present at my wedding! I would not have believed it six years ago!"

"By God's grace, she is happy," Madame de Staël wrote in a letter despatched under the same cover; and Benjamin wrote to Madame Récamier :—

"I know that Albertine is married, and I hope she will be happy. Her husband is an excellent man, and I do not think that she on her part, brought up as she has been, feels any imperious need of an expansive sensibility. By the excesses and reactions of her own enthusiasm Madame de Staël has taught her children to be perfectly rational. At the bottom of my heart I have, together with my affection for her, a kind of grudge similar to that of the Irishman who accused a woman of having changed him at nurse."

[1] Commonly called "Bobus." Co-editor with Canning of the Etonian *Microcosm*, and afterwards Advocate-General of Bengal.

CHAPTER XXIX

Madame de Staël in Italy with the Broglies—Return to Coppet—Distinguished guests—Byron's visit.

LET it be said at once that Albertine de Staël found calm contentment in her married life. Perhaps, if she had been quite enthusiastically and deliriously happy, she would have been a little less prone to quote the Scriptures in her correspondence and to appeal to the consolations of religion. One always suspects something of the sort in the case of the ostentatiously religious; but it is not necessary to insist. The Duc de Broglie, at any rate, was so attached to his wife that, when she died at a comparatively early age, he withdrew from all his public activities; and there is no evidence that the divergence of their creeds was ever, even temporarily, a cause of estrangement. The agreement was that the sons should be brought up as Catholics and the daughters as Protestants; but the whole of their posterity became Catholic in the course of time. Some of Madame de Staël's grandchildren even took Catholic orders. Her great-grandson, Comte d'Haussonville, the present owner of Coppet, an Academician, and the author of *Le Salon de Madame Necker*, was one of the polemists who

combated the anti-clerical policy of MM. Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes in the columns of *Le Gaulois.* A deplorable relapse, no doubt, in the eyes of many readers, but one on which there is no need to comment in the present volume.

The early days of the honeymoon were passed in the north of Italy in the society of Madame de Staël; and the course of events is best traced from the Duc de Broglie's *Reminiscences.*

He speaks, in the first instance, of an excursion to Pescia to see Sismondi, the form and scope of whose work on the History of the French is said to have been determined by the conversations which then took place. Lucca was next visited, and then, on the return to Pisa, Madame de Staël announced that she was bored, and "at the first breath of spring transferred her establishment to Florence." There, once again, she found brilliant society, of which the most distinguished pillar was the Comtesse d'Albany, mistress successively of the Young Pretender, of the poet Alfieri, and of the French painter Fabre.

"Every day," the Duc de Broglie writes, "between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, she kept a gossip and scandal shop. Every member of the little club laid at her feet his tribute of news of no importance, seasoning it with trivial comment. Not all who wished to come were admitted to this gathering. An exception was made in favour of Madame de Staël, and I was invited in her train; but I did

not abuse my privilege. Once was enough for me. Evil speaking has always seemed to me the most childish and foolish thing in the world."

Towards the end of Lent the Duc de Broglie, accompanied by Auguste de Staël, escaped to Rome. The escape was from the insistence of his mother-in-law that he should always be attending receptions, dressed in his best clothes. He refused to call at the French Embassy, and neglected to see the Pope, preferring to spend his time among the monuments and in the picture galleries. As soon as Easter was over he returned to Florence, whence, three days later, the whole party set out for Coppet. At Bologna, where they passed a day, the leaders of Society were afraid, for political reasons, to associate with Madame de Staël, feeling that their connection with Murat's mad enterprise had already compromised them sufficiently. At Milan, on the contrary, Madame de Staël "was well known, and her salon in her inn was never empty." Gonfalonieri, the rising hope of the Italian Liberals, held long and violent arguments with Schlegel, and "dear Monti" also came to call. Benjamin Constant, it will be remembered, said that he had "a superb face"; but the Duc de Broglie declares that he "cut a poor figure," that his "attitude was humble and his conversation not brilliant," and that Madame de Staël tried in vain "to restore him to self-respect and to the good opinion of others."

At Milan the party divided. Madame de Staël, attended by Rocca and Schlegel, returned to Switzerland by the Mont Cenis and Savoy. The Duc and Duchesse de Broglie went to Como, and thence crossed the Simplon. At Coppet, however, all were again reunited; and Coppet was once more gay. The leaders of the Opposition in Genevan politics were welcome there—such men as Etienne Dumont, Pictet Diodati, Frédéric de Chateauvieux, and de Candolle, the naturalist; while open house was also kept for such travellers making the grand tour as came that way, and were worthy to be received.

Lord Lansdowne was one of the visitors—"the perfect model," says the Duc de Broglie, "of the great Whig nobleman." Henry Brougham was also entertained there. Asked some question as to English legal procedure, he sat down and wrote *currente calamo* a long essay on the subject, which is preserved among the Broglie papers. Von Stein — he who had reorganised the Prussian army after Jena—passed through on his way to Italy, pausing to denounce in indignant language the revival of despotic institutions in Central Europe, and expressing himself with extreme disdain concerning his own sovereign, the Prussian Court, and the German Bureaucracy. Laharpe—the friend of the Emperor Alexander, who had organised the liberation of the Canton of Vaud from the dominion of Berne—came over from the house at Lausanne where, living in retirement in

the bosom of his family, he looked down upon the scene of his triumphs, and fought his battles over again. To strike the note of contrast with him, there was the Chevalier de Langallerie—he who had almost persuaded Benjamin Constant to become a mystic—a "fat little man," according to the narrator, who enjoyed his dinner and complained of indigestion, snored in an arm-chair, and awoke to invite pity for himself as a victim of insomnia, yet conversed admirably upon spiritual matters. Finally, to strike the note of contrast with everybody, there was Byron.

He and Madame de Staël had not altogether liked each other when they had met in London. As rival social lions they had roared against each other, stood in each other's light, and interfered with each other's importance. He had protested that her conversation was too copious; she had credited him with "just enough sensibility to ruin a woman's happiness." But now the conditions were different. The principal victim of Byron's sensibility was Byron himself; his admirers had turned on him and hounded him from the country. That was the sort of situation with which Madame de Staël could sympathise. He had hesitated to call, but his apprehensions were quite groundless. Though an English visitor, Mrs. Hervey, fainted in the Coppet drawing-room when she heard his name announced, the Coppet hostess did not mind. Most likely she was angry with the lady. At any rate, she was flattered to be presented with

a copy of *Glenarvon* — the novel in which Byron's character was attacked by Lady Caroline Lamb; and she took the keenest interest in his difference with Lady Byron. "I believe," he writes, "Madame de Staël did her utmost to bring about a reconciliation between us. She was the best creature in the world."

Her difficulty in so exhibiting herself must have been the greater because neither her admiration nor her friendship for the poet was shared by the members of her household. On the occasion of Mrs. Hervey's hysterics the company in general "looked as if his Satanic majesty had been among them;" and if her son-in-law did not follow the example of the others, his reason for refraining was by no means his esteem for Byron's talents, but rather his feeling that he was himself a superior person, capable of seeing through Byron's fanfaronade. This is his account of the matter, and his appreciation of the poet :—

"Lord Byron, an exile of his own free will, having succeeded, not without difficulty, in persuading the world of fashion in his own country that he was, if not the Devil in person, at least a living copy of Manfred or Lara, had settled for the summer in a charming house on the east bank of the Lake of Geneva. He was living with an Italian physician named Polidori, who imitated him to the best of his ability. It was there that he composed a good many of his little poems, and that he tried his hardest to inspire

the good Genevans with the same horror and terror that his fellow-countrymen felt for him; but this was pure affectation on his part, and he only half succeeded with it. 'My nephew,' Louis XIV. used to say of the Duc d'Orléans, 'is, in the matter of crime, only a boastful pretender.' Lord Byron was only a boastful pretender in the matter of vice.

"As he flattered himself that he was a good swimmer and sailor, he was perpetually crossing the Lake in all directions, and used to come fairly often to Coppet. His appearance was agreeable, but not at all distinguished. His face was handsome, but without expression or originality; his figure was round and short; he did not manœuvre his lame legs with the same ease and nonchalance as M. de Talleyrand. His talk was heavy and tiresome, thanks to his paradoxes, seasoned with profane pleasantries out of date in the language of Voltaire, and the commonplaces of a vulgar Liberalism. Madame de Staël, who helped all her friends to make the best of themselves, did what she could to make him cut a dignified figure without success; and when the first moment of curiosity had passed, his society ceased to attract, and no one was glad to see him."

So the summer passed. Madame de Staël, in the leisure which her social duties left her, was at work on her *Considérations sur la Révolution française*—a combined panegyric of her father and of the British Constitution. Rocca was still ill, and she wrote about him to Madame Récamier, telling her what she had previously told Benjamin

Constant, that his nature was changing, and adding: "Such patience, such thorough appreciation of and thankfulness for my care, have made him the most perfect friend that I could imagine"—language which, it will be admitted, was hardly that of passion. To Benjamin, at about the same date, she wrote that her health was failing and her life likely to be short, concluding: "But I value it because it is now a happy one, and I deplore the time of which I was robbed by unhappiness." Evidently she was at last outgrowing the violence of passion, though she was not yet losing, and indeed was never to lose, her political and social interests, and her desire to be always "in the movement."

To her, indeed, as to Voltaire, this passion to be in the movement was to be fatal. The attractions of the French capital lured the sage from Ferney to his death; similarly Madame de Staël, who might have lived long if she had remained at Coppet, heard Paris calling, and could not resist the call, even at a season at which the climate was likely to be unfavourable both to her own health and to that of her husband. Her son-in-law returned before her; but she soon followed him, attended by Rocca and Schlegel, arriving early in November.

"That was her last winter," the Duc de Broglie writes.

CHAPTER XXX

Madame de Staël's last journey to Paris—Her illness and death.

MADAME DE STAËL was already ill when she arrived at Paris. The first symptoms of paralysis had declared themselves. But she would not give in or submit to treatment.

"She resisted the attack," writes the Duc de Broglie, "with heroic impetuosity: invited everywhere, going everywhere, keeping open house, receiving in the morning, at dinner, and in the evening, all the distinguished men of all parties, ranks, and stations, taking the same interest in politics, literature, philosophy, and Society, whether serious or frivolous, intimate or noisy, of the Government or of the Opposition, as in the brightest days of her early youth."

He goes on to name names. M. de Barante, we read, gave a dinner for the purpose of introducing Royer-Collard to Madame de Staël, and Royer-Collard, being a pedant, was shocked by her vivacity. Camille Jordan also reappeared upon the scene. The Duc de Broglie does not mention that Camille Jordan had once been Madame de Staël's lover, but merely, while admitting the charm of his conversation, sniffs at him as "provincial." From other sources we hear

of her as entertaining Pasquier, Fontanes, Lally, and Chateaubriand. An extract from a letter from Madame Rilliet-Huber to Henri Meister may complete the picture.

"Madame de Staël has reached the height of her ambition. Her house is the most animated in Paris, and she exercises all the influence she wishes without encountering any opposition. Her fortune is great; her daughter is charming; Rocca may pass; but I am sorry to say that her health is much disturbed. She writes to me often, and wishes to return to Coppet."

The date of that letter is February 14, 1817; the strain of the season had had time to tell. It was only a few days later that the symptoms became alarming. Attending a reception at the house of the Duc Decazes, Madame de Staël fainted on the staircase. She was lifted to her carriage, and from her carriage to her bed. Dropsy was diagnosed, and when the dropsy got better, paralysis began to set in.

Even so, thanks to her strength of will, she seemed to get better. She rose, and dressed, and "received;" she even gave dinner parties, though she had to leave her children to do the honours of her table. As the weather improved, she was removed from her house in the Rue Royale to another in the Rue Neuve-des-Mathurins, where she sat in the garden in a state of semi-somnolence. It was at this stage, presumably, that she wrote

(or rather dictated) her last pathetic letter to Miss Berry. "Cruel cramps," she said, had deprived her of the use of her hands and feet; for ninety days she had been lying on her back, "like a tortoise, but much more troubled in my mind and my imagination than that animal." She had hoped to start for Switzerland on the 1st of May, but cannot even be sure of starting on the 1st of July. In fact, she passes her time alternately in self-deception and despair: "Truly it is a punishment of Heaven when the most active person in the world finds herself as it were petrified." "May God," she prays, "deliver me from the abyss in which His hand alone can avail me!"

Every physician of note in Paris was called in; and as none of them afforded any relief or held out any hope, the Duc de Broglie posted to Geneva, meaning to bring the celebrated Dr. Butini back with him. Butini would not come. He was an old man, he said, and would not risk his own health in a hopeless case. The next best man was Dr. Jurine, who knew Madame de Staël, and out of affection for her rather than for the sake of his fee, consented to take the journey. But he arrived too late, and his treatment had not even the temporary illusion of success. It was now apparent to all that the effort to live had nearly exhausted itself, and that the end was very near.

Yet the effort continued. "When I arrived at

Paris the 17th of June," writes one of Miss Berry's correspondents, "she was supposed to be at the point of death; she rallied from that attack, and her family indulged great hopes, but which no physician encouraged. . . . I saw her a week before her death; she was as eager as ever on politics. M. de Montmorency was by her bedside, and she disputed with him the great question of liberty as formerly. I dined there on the Sunday; she saw the Duke of Orleans. . . ."

And so we come to the closing scenes, which may be best described in the Duc de Broglie's words.

"Madame de Staël received, day and night, the passionately anxious care of her daughter and of a young English lady who had, for many years, resided at Geneva, and whose life, so stormy and unfortunate, had resolved itself, if I may so say, into ardent and impetuous devotion to our family. Mademoiselle Randall and my wife spent alternate nights at the foot of the bed of pain; my brother-in-law and myself watched alternately in the adjoining room. We could see the fatal moment draw nearer from hour to hour. The nervous agitation became continuous; the interval between the spasms shorter and shorter. Madame de Staël deceived herself no longer. The loftiness of her soul, the vivacity of her mind, and her interest in persons and things never deserted her for a day, an hour, or a minute. What she feared was that she might not see herself die—that she might fall into a sleep from which she would not wake.

"A sad presentiment!

"On the 13th of July, towards eleven o'clock in the evening, at the close of a very painful day, everything seemed quiet in Madame de Staël's room; she was dozing. Mademoiselle Randall was at her pillow, holding one of her hands; my wife had lain down exhausted on a chair bedstead, and my brother-in-law was lying on a sofa. I went home, and threw myself, without undressing, on my bed. Towards five in the morning, I awoke with a start, jumped out of bed, and ran to Madame de Staël's room. Mademoiselle Randall, who had fallen asleep while holding her hand as I have described, had found, on waking, that the hand was cold, and that the arm and the whole body were motionless.

"All was over.

"The doctor in attendance, summoned in haste, found only a lifeless corpse upon the bed."

She had died as she had feared, and as many another would have wished to die—with no priest to mumble formulæ; with no accompaniment of unavailing tears, and no harrowing and protracted deathbed scene; unconscious of all the complications at the hour when the tangle was cut.

The occupant of the second floor of the house placed his apartment at the disposal of the mourners. "I installed M. Rocca, M. Schlegel, and Mademoiselle Randall there," writes the Duc de Broglie, "and I returned to pass the night in the house of the dead. Benjamin Constant came to join me there, and we watched by the body

together. He was touched to the quick, and genuinely moved. After having exhausted personal recollections, we consecrated long hours to serious reflections, discussing all the problems which naturally arise in the soul in the presence of death." An impressive scene truly, and perhaps the most moving in the whole of the troubled history of their love.

Each of the lovers had been unfaithful to the other, and yet each of them had been necessary to the other—a truth which they had proved to themselves again and again, while trying their hardest to disprove it. Both lives had been rich in other interests, both personal and political; but their passion had been the great fact in both lives that always mattered even when they persuaded themselves that it did not matter at all. Though Benjamin Constant had married a second wife and Madame de Staël had taken to herself a second husband, they both found it impossible to respect the barrier which they had themselves set up. We have seen how Benjamin, while apparently living a peaceful domesticated life with Charlotte at Göttingen, noted in his Diary that he was as much occupied with Madame de Staël as he had been ten years before. We have also seen Madame de Staël assuring Benjamin Constant that her marriage to Rocca need be no hindrance to the renewal of her intimacy with him. Their relations towards each other were governed by a Necessity stronger than any moral law.

It is true that, with the passing of the years, the intensity of the emotion had slackened. That was a part of their tragedy—as it is a part of the tragedy of all dramas that are too long drawn out. Both of the lovers had nearly attained fifty years of age; both of them had outgrown the early capacity for passion. Madame de Staël's letters show that she had latterly cherished the memory of a passion rather than the passion itself. Benjamin Constant's Diary shows him fully persuaded in his own mind that the last remnant of his sentiment had perished.

There exists, and has been printed, a character sketch of Madame de Staël which was to have been included in a work which Benjamin Constant began but never finished on the early years and early friends of Madame Récamier. It was written at the time of his foolish unreciprocated passion for that lady, and it is couched in the cold tone of critical and amused approbation. All the inconsistencies—and they were many—in Madame de Staël's character are brought into clear relief. Madame de Staël is depicted as a woman who always does what she wishes to do, and always believes that whatever she does is right, supporting any line of conduct by the appeal to first principles divinely sanctioned.

"If she is in love, and if the object of her love has a will that opposes her own, and speaks of the claims of his family and his duties, or asserts any other title to independence, partial or com-

plete, permanent or transitory, then nothing is more beautiful than to hear Madame de Staël talk with all the energy of the Nouvelle Héloïse of the communion of souls, of devotion, which is the sacred duty of every superior nature, of happiness, and of the sacro-sanctity of two existences indissolubly linked together.

"Is she, on the other hand, a mother, and does one of her children prefer the enthusiasm of an absorbing passion to the obedience which she claims? Then nothing is more sublime than the picture which she draws of the duties of filial piety, the obligations of the family, the rights of a mother, and the necessity of a young man's disengaging himself from frivolous affections in order to enter upon an honourable career; for every man owes an account to Providence for the faculties which Providence has given him, and woe upon him who thinks that he can live for love! In all that Madame de Staël is not an egoist; for she does not mean to be one, and morality is a matter of conscience."

That is the most characteristic passage in the essay. It has been said, most plausibly, to be the criticism of a lover who has definitely ceased to love. Benjamin Constant, when he penned it, would have considered the verdict just. But death came and proved that love was stronger than death. Benjamin Constant was always in love with love even when he was not in love with Madame de Staël; he himself has written that the necessity for love was the ruling passion of his life and the determining factor of his career.

Madame de Staël had loved him to his undoing, but at least she had loved him as no other woman had. It was inevitable, at this solemn hour, that he should remember that—the memories returning to him with a rush—and should forget the rest.

For if he could not love her, at least he could love no other. At the time of the last estrangement he had written that there was no longer anything for him to look forward to in life. He might or might not have continued in that mood if she had lived. But she had passed beyond these voices, and, passing, had set the seal upon his words. The curtain had fallen on the drama. It would never be lifted, and there would be no other drama to follow; he was too old to begin his sentimental life again. So he watched by the bier, engaged with many solemn reflections, mourning not only for his mistress, but also for his own dead youth.

CHAPTER XXXI

The last years of Benjamin Constant.

They buried Madame de Staël, according to her desire, in her father's sepulchre at Coppet. The coffin was met by Bonstetten and Sismondi—the "Mondi"[1] who had still remained faithful when the fear of Napoleon drove away her other friends; and all Geneva, as the Duc de Broglie tells us, followed the funeral. Her will acknowledged her husband, who only survived her a few months, and the child which she had borne to him. The latter had been registered in the name of Giles, and described as the son of American parents. Certain formalities had therefore to be performed in order that the situation might be regularised. Auguste de Staël duly performed them, and fetched the infant from the house of the Protestant minister who had taken charge of it and kept its mother's secret. "I ask you," he wrote to Meister, "to extend to my brother Alphonse the protection and friendship with which you are good enough to honour me. I hope that he will one day be worthy to feel the value of it." There are also

[1] "Die meisten Bekannten fliehen, Frende wanken, nur Mondi nicht."—Bonstetten to Frederika Brun.

some affectionate references to the child in the letters of the Duchesse de Broglie. She finds him backward, takes him for walks, and tries to teach him what little she knows of natural history.

This Rocca episode is not, it must be allowed, an agreeable story for an admirer of Madame de Staël to face, and most of her admirers have therefore slurred over it, hinting apologies as they passed. She could not be expected, they suggest, though without insisting, publicly to change a name which she had made illustrious by her talents; and so she may herself have argued. But the excuse leads rather far. We need not, indeed, concern ourselves about the wrong done to Rocca; he was a fool, and was treated according to his folly. But the case of the child, brought up, with a false *état civil*, under the name of Giles, is pitiful and painful. He was sacrificed, not to his mother's proper pride, but to her vanity. She was more afraid of laughter than of moral reprobation. In most matters, and on most occasions, she could defy the world; but she could not afford to place the weapon of ridicule in her enemies' hands, and shrank from their mockery of her autumnal love. She shrank from it the more, no doubt, because her love for Rocca was not really love, but only make-believe, and a concession to the weakness of the flesh. That is all that there is to be said on the subject, and it is best to say it and have done with it.

Something should be said, however, of the

literary genius which, in the view of Madame de Staël's admirers, partially justified her in adopting different moral standards from those accepted by less gifted persons. She was certainly overrated in her lifetime, and she has probably been underrated since. She was highly esteemed at one time for her contributions to metaphysical and political philosophy, but these are negligible because they were not original. The voice was only an echo, and the echo was not always accurate. In metaphysics the chief credit belongs not to the interpreter who tried, in a few well-chosen words, to tell the world what Kant thought, but to Kant who did the thinking, and, in a less degree, to Schlegel and Crabb Robinson, who expounded the doctrine of Forms and Categories in language which Madame de Staël was capable of understanding. In politics she echoed Necker, and had little to say except that all would have been for the best in the best of all possible worlds if Necker's advice had been followed—a proposition which finds no supporters among serious historians.

Among novels, on the other hand, *Corinne* indubitably counts to a certain extent, and in a certain way. It is a monument of self-deception, just as *Adolphe* is a monument of self-analysis. Both works alike may be described as bitter cries, but the methods of the authors are antithetically opposed. Madame de Staël writes as one who cries for the moon, and can find consolation in pretending that she has got it; Benjamin Constant

as one who has obtained the moon, and only wishes that someone would take it off his hands. He, that is to say, built on a real and she on a fanciful foundation; and the distinction is reflected in the respective fortunes of the two romances. The success of *Corinne* was a brilliant flash in the pan; the success of *Adolphe* was much less brilliant, but has proved much more enduring. For *Adolphe* was true; and, even in fiction, it is truth that tells in the long run.

Personality, however, tells also; and in all Madame de Staël's work it was the personality, not the philosophy, that told. Her version of the philosophy of Kant, for instance, is interesting not because it is sound but because it is sentimental, and because sentiment rather than philosophy was to her the thing that mattered. She wanted to pull wires; she wanted to be witty and wise; she wanted a group of flatterers to hang upon her wise and witty words; but all that was nothing worth unless she could also love and be loved. That is the idea which pervades her writings, giving them such freshness and vitality as they still possess. That was the quality by which she held Benjamin Constant's affection, in spite of his infidelities, for so many years, and compelled him, in spite of quarrels and estrangements, to consecrate a night of memories and sighs to her when she was dead.

Benjamin Constant had still, as it happened, a good many years to live; and the last years of

his life were, from the point of view of the political historian, the most important. So far, he had only been able to give himself to politics by fits and starts. He had lived, like Madame de Staël, though to a less extent, in exile. The love of women had sometimes sapped his energies, and sometimes diverted them into unexpected channels. In so far as he had had any political career at all, it had been a long series of inconsistencies. Now he had a policy and a cause. His action during the Hundred Days had caused him, for a time, to be proscribed, and was a weapon in the hands of his enemies for ever afterwards; but, on his return, he soon became a Deputy, and a leading figure in the ranks of the Liberal Opposition to the Bourbon *régime*. His speeches have been printed, and fill several volumes; but their interest is for the historian rather than the biographer. It suffices here to note the impression which he had made.

"His enunciation," writes M. de Loménie, "was difficult, especially in his first few sentences; but as soon as he warmed to his work attention was captivated by the appearance of his magnificent figure, and his face, so tired, and yet so handsome, so distinguished, so original, set in a frame of long blond locks which fell in curls upon his coat collar, and by the curious combination of German nonchalance, British stiffness, and French vivacity which characterised his personality. Always witty in his expressions of his

emotion, always polite in his persiflage, always cool in his anger, possessed of the art of saying all that there was to be said, he compelled even those whom his utterances profoundly irritated, to listen to him."

"One saw him arrive at the Chamber," writes M. Loève Veimars, "always a few minutes before the opening of the sitting, attired in his Deputy's uniform, embroidered with silver lace, in order to be ready to ascend the tribune, in which that costume was *de rigueur*, at any moment. His head was fair and white. He wore an old round hat, and held under his arm an overcoat, some manuscripts, some books, some printers' proofs, a portfolio of official papers, and his crutch."

For his friends—and especially for the students who loudly shouted applause—he was the enthusiastic champion of liberty; for his enemies he was a man of selfish and extravagant ambition. In truth he was neither the one thing nor the other, but an emotional bankrupt, who could only escape from himself in strife and feverish excitement.

He had, of course, "the good Charlotte"—the most forgiving as well as the most devoted of wives. He knew her worth. He sings her praises in his letters, seeming, as it were, to pat her on the back, in appreciative recognition of her "angelic" qualities. But she could not fill his life, and his affection for her was only the sort of affection that he might have felt for an attentive domestic servant. He had told Madame

Récamier that he would try to make her happy and pretend to share her happiness. Perhaps he did pretend; perhaps there were times when the pretence deceived her. But he himself was never deceived. He had survived his interest in life, and there remained only the effort to escape from the burden of consciousness. He made speeches to escape from it; he fought duels to escape from it; he worked hard at his book on Religions to escape from it; he gambled to escape from it; and all his endeavours were equally in vain.

Sometimes he appeared to be taking himself seriously; at other times he did not. One of his duels—that with M. de Forbin—seems to belong to farcical extravaganza. Crippled with gout, he fired his pistol, sitting in a bath-chair, and honour was declared to be satisfied when the chair was hit. There are stories, too, of his having ridiculed, at the gaming-table, the impassioned arguments which he had just employed in the Chamber; and he certainly suffered in public esteem by his frequentation of such resorts. But he was thoroughly in earnest when he wrote about religion. As Sainte-Beuve justly says: "'I wish I could believe' is written across the pages of his work on that great subject as clearly as 'I wish I could love' is written across the pages of *Adolphe*." Nor was his conduct by any means that of a *farceur* during the days of the Revolution of 1830.

The outbreak found him in the country, where he had just undergone a grave operation, when Lafayette wrote to him: "We are playing a game here in which our heads may be the stakes. Come and lay your own stake on the table." The doctors forbade him to stir, but he defied them, caused himself to be carried in a sedan-chair to the Hôtel de Ville, and supported, in an eloquent harangue, the monarchical solution of the crisis. "They carried him," says M. Loève Veimars, "from the Hôtel de Ville to the Palais Royal. It was a banner torn and tattered by many combats that they thus unfolded and displayed with enthusiasm before the fire of the enemy." His reward, apart from his self-satisfaction, was a gift of 200,000 francs from Louis-Philippe; and his enemies naturally declared that he had been bought, though his friends avow that, in accepting the gift, he stipulated that he should still be considered free to oppose the Government if he disagreed with its measures.

At the height of his political influence and success, however, he remained a supremely unhappy man, as is clear from his letters to his cousins. Sometimes it is his failing health that is his trouble. He fell one day, while descending from the tribune, and thenceforward suffered from lameness in addition to his gout, and had to walk with crutches. "The axe," he writes to Rosalie, "has been laid to the root of the tree." Perhaps he will live for another ten or twenty years, but

only from day to day, "thanking nature like the man who every morning thanked the Sultan because his head was still on his shoulders." His chest, too, is affected. It gets worse every winter. "One of these winters it will be all over with me, and that winter is not very distant." A little later, he says:—

"Thirty years ago I said to myself that, after I was fifty, I would not worry about my health except for the purpose of avoiding acute suffering, and I am more faithful to this resolution than I expected to be. My stomach is getting weak, and my eyes are failing. I do nothing to fortify the former, and I do not spare the latter. If I lose my sight before my death, I will keep quiet and ruminate on my past life. Meanwhile I remain active by habit, like the knight in *Ariosto*, who went on fighting, forgetting that he was dead."

And then it is:—

"Yes, dear Rosalie, the years roll by, taking our strength with them, and bringing infirmities in their train. Bit by bit, they deprive us of all our pleasures, leaving us for sustenance only the past which is sorrowful, and for perspective only the future which is short. I thank you for what you say as to the use to which I have put my life. I have not done the quarter of what I meant to do,and if I were not very much ashamed of having wasted my time and my powers, I should be very proud of all the kind things that people are saying about what I have achieved in spite of the waste. For

the rest, what does it matter? A ditch is there, awaiting the laborious as well as the lazy, the famous as well as the obscure, closing complacently without caring what it covers. I should like to see you before I descend into it; but I dare no longer make plans. . . . I work, as they say, to 'leave something behind me.' This me, what will become of it, and what will it have in common with that which I shall have left? No matter! I work because habit compels me and the time is heavy on my hands."

Last of all we may quote this passage from a letter written to Charles de Constant on the occasion of the death of his wife:—

"Thus is the world depopulated for those who are advanced in life. All that is dear to them forsakes them, and the world is no longer for them anything but a vast desert, to be crossed with courage. But courage is not the same thing as happiness."

When that was written, the end was very near, though there was still time for one more failure. On November 18, 1830, Benjamin Constant presented himself unsuccessfully as a candidate for a vacant chair in the French Academy. To the author of *Adolphe* the Academicians preferred a M. Viennet, whoever he may have been; and about three weeks afterwards, on December 8, he died.

Life had disappointed him; success had come

to him too late to be gratifying; he had but recently written that he was glad that he was sixty years of age, and that his pilgrimage was nearly over. But his funeral was a blaze of triumph, and the people mourned for him as for a hero. A civic wreath was laid upon his seat in the Chamber. A demand was made that the entire Chamber, in costume, should attend his obsequies, and that a mourning crape should be attached for several days to the flag placed in the Hall of Session, above the President's chair. Crape was also hung from the windows of many of the houses in the streets through which the procession passed. The students, who idolised him, unharnessed the horses from the funeral car and drew it themselves to Père Lachaise. Lafayette pronounced the funeral oration over his grave. "From nine o'clock to eleven," writes one of Miss Berry's correspondents, "there were eight or nine processions at a time crossing the Tuileries Gardens, headed by tricoloured flags, with his name and 'Liberté et Droit' written upon them. The procession reached almost the whole length of the boulevards; nothing similar was ever seen at Paris except at the funeral of General Foy."

A great tribute truly, though if he had known that it was to be paid, his cynicism would have stood between him and any sublime sense of exaltation. The passion of his life was not to be applauded, but to be loved; and it would have meant more to him to know that his wife, whom

he had so often treated so badly, mourned for him in all sincerity.

"Dear good cousin," she wrote to Rosalie, "I only write you a few lines to-day to say that I owe to your letter a few moments of respite from my grief. It is so full of friendship for my poor Benjamin, so full of understanding of his noble character and his loving and tormented heart, so indulgent for the need which he felt for excitement and agitation — precisely because it was inseparable from the need of liberty and the hatred of all oppression."

Things being as they were, he would have asked, one imagines, no better testimonial, no kinder epitaph. We may read it as the proof that in one at least of his aspirations he had succeeded. "Rendons Charlotte heureuse" is one of the good resolutions of the Diary, repeated in one of the letters to Madame Récamier, to whom Benjamin Constant wrote: "I should like to finish my days in tranquillity, giving to the person of whose destiny I have taken charge, and who is angelic in her affection and goodness, a happiness which I will try to pretend to share."

It was a happiness which he assuredly did not succeed in sharing; for he asked more from life, and from women, than Charlotte — than any woman, for that matter—had it in her power to give him. But Charlotte refused to make her own limitations a ground of quarrel with him; she was not jealous of his past, and did not try to

disturb him in the sanctuary of his inner life, but yielded herself to deception, and had her reward in happiness, still cherishing her idol in spite of her knowledge that it had feet of clay. Nor did her love or her adoration cease with death. Years afterwards, when Charles de Constant called upon her in Paris, she received him, standing by her husband's bust.

THE END

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