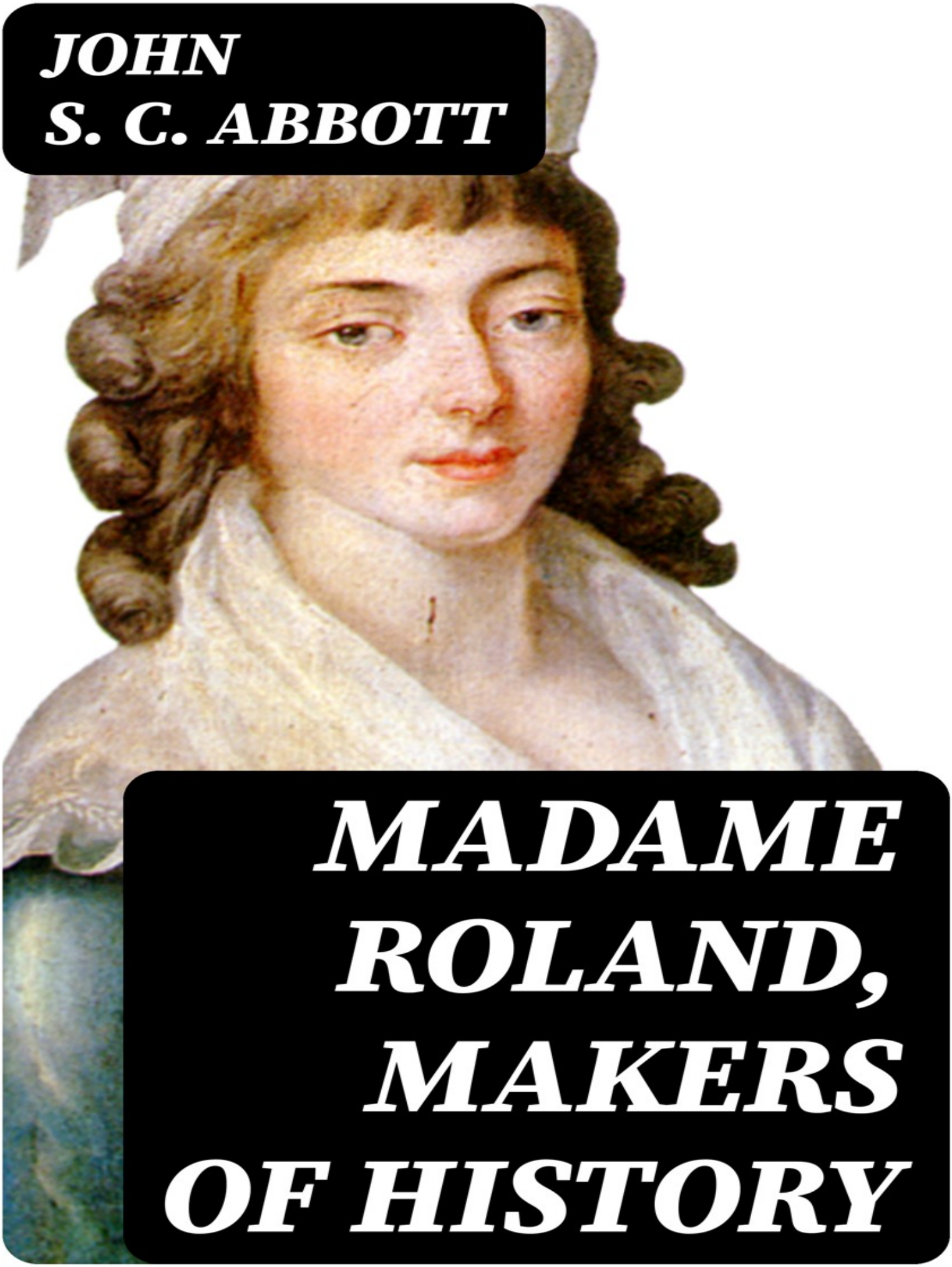
JOHN
S. C. ABBOTT



MADAME ROLAND, MAKERS OF HISTORY

John S. C. Abbott

Madame Roland, Makers of History

EAN 8596547234449

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

MADAME ROLAND.

PREFACE.

Table of Contents

The history of Madame Roland embraces the most interesting events of the French Revolution, that most instructive tragedy which time has yet enacted. There is, perhaps, contained in the memoirs of no other woman so much to invigorate the mind with the desire for high intellectual culture, and so much to animate the spirit heroically to meet all the ills of this eventful life.

Notwithstanding her experience of the heaviest temporal calamities, she found, in the opulence of her own intellectual treasures, an unfailing resource. These inward joys peopled her solitude with society, and dispelled even from the dungeon its gloom. I know not where to look for a career more full of suggestive thought.

ENGRAVINGS.

Table of Contents

MADAME ROLAND

Chapter I.

Childhood.

Table of Contents

1754-1767

Characters developed by the French Revolution. Madame Roland.

Many characters of unusual grandeur were developed by the French Revolution. Among them all, there are few more illustrious, or more worthy of notice, than that of Madame Roland. The eventful story of her life contains much to inspire the mind with admiration and with enthusiasm, and to stimulate one to live worthily of those capabilities with which every human heart is endowed. No person can read the record of her lofty spirit and of her heroic acts without a higher appreciation of woman's power, and of the mighty influence one may wield, who combines the charms of a noble and highly-cultivated mind with the fascinations of female delicacy and loveliness. To understand the secret of the almost miraculous influence she exerted, it is necessary to trace her career, with some degree of minuteness, from the cradle to the hour of her sublime and heroic death.

Gratien Phlippon. His repinings at his lot. Views of Phlippon.

In the year 1754, there was living, in an obscure workshop in Paris, on the crowded Quai des Orfevres, an engraver by the name of Gratien Phlippon. He had married a very beautiful woman, whose placid temperament and cheerful content

contrasted strikingly with the restlessness and ceaseless repinings of her husband. The comfortable yet humble apartments of the engraver were over the shop where he plied his daily toil. He was much dissatisfied with his lowly condition in life, and that his family, in the enjoyment of frugal competence alone, were debarred from those luxuries which were so profusely showered upon others. Bitterly and unceasingly he murmured that his lot had been cast in the ranks of obscurity and of unsparing labor, while others, by a more fortunate, although no better merited destiny, were born to ease and affluence, and honor and luxury. This thought of the unjust inequality in man's condition, which soon broke forth with all the volcanic energy of the French Revolution, already began to ferment in the bosoms of the laboring classes, and no one pondered these wide diversities with a more restless spirit, or murmured more loudly and more incessantly than Phlippon. When the day's toil was ended, he loved to gather around him associates whose feelings harmonized with his own, and to descant upon their own grievous oppression and upon the arrogance of aristocratic greatness. With an eloquence which often deeply moved his sympathizing auditory, and fanned to greater intensity the fires which were consuming his own heart, he contrasted their doom of sleepless labor and of comparative penury with the brilliance of the courtly throng, living in idle luxury, and squandering millions in the amusements at Versailles, and sweeping in charioted splendor through the Champs Elysée.

His hostility to the Church. Origin of the

Phlippon was a philosopher, not a Christian. Submission was a virtue he had

never learned, and never wished to learn. Christianity, as he saw it developed before him only in the powerful enginery of the Roman Catholic Church, was, in his view, but a formidable barrier against the liberty and the elevation of the people—a bulwark, bristling with superstition and bayonets, behind which nobles and kings were securely intrenched. He consequently became as hostile to the doctrines of the Church as he was to the institutions of the state. The monarch was, in his eye, a tyrant, and God a delusion. The enfranchisement of the people, in his judgment, required the overthrow of both the earthly and the celestial monarch. In these ideas, agitating the heart of Phlippon, behold the origin of the French Revolution. They were diffused in pamphlets and daily papers in theaters and *cafés*. They were urged by workmen in their shops, by students in their closets. They became the inspiring spirit of science in encyclopedias and reviews, and formed the chorus in all the songs of revelry and libertinism. These sentiments spread from heart to heart, through Paris, through the provinces, till France rose like a demon in its wrath, and the very globe trembled beneath its gigantic and indignant tread.

French Revolution.

Madame Phlippon was just the reverse of her husband. She was a woman in whom faith, and trust, and submission predominated. She surrendered her will, without questioning, to all the teachings of the Church of Rome. She was placid, contented, and cheerful, and, though uninquiring in her devotion, undoubtedly sincere in her piety. In every event of life she recognized the overruling

Character of Madame Phlippon.

hand of Providence, and feeling that the comparatively humble lot assigned her was in accordance with the will of God, she indulged in no repinings, and envied not the more brilliant destiny of lords and ladies. An industrious housewife, she hummed the hymns of contentment and peace from morning till evening. In the cheerful performance of her daily toil, she was ever pouring the balm of her peaceful spirit upon the restless heart of her spouse. Phlippon loved his wife, and often felt the superiority of her Christian temperament.

Birth of Jane Maria. Adored by her parents. Discontent of Phlippon.

Of eight children born to these parents, one only, Jeanne Manon, or *Jane Mary*, survived the hour of birth. Her father first received her to his arms in 1754, and she became the object of his painful and most passionate adoration. Her mother pressed the coveted treasure to her bosom with maternal love, more calm, and deep, and enduring. And now Jane became the central star in this domestic system. Both parents lived in her and for her. She was their earthly all. The mother wished to train her for the Church and for heaven, that she might become an angel and dwell by the throne of God. These bright hopes gilded a prayerful mother's hours of toil and care. The father bitterly repined. Why should his bright and beautiful child—who even in these her infantile years was giving indication of the most brilliant intellect—why should she be doomed to a life of obscurity and toil, while the garden of the Tuileries and the Elysian Fields were thronged with children, neither so beautiful nor so intelligent, who were reveling in boundless wealth, and living in a world of

luxury and splendor which, to Phlippon's imagination, seemed more alluring than any idea he could form of heaven? These thoughts were a consuming fire in the bosom of the ambitious father. They burned with inextinguishable flame.

His complainings to his child. Early traits of character. Love of books.

The fond parent made the sprightly and fascinating child his daily companion. He led her by the hand, and confided to her infantile spirit all his thoughts, his illusions, his day-dreams. To her listening ear he told the story of the arrogance of nobles, of the pride of kings, and of the oppression by which he deemed himself unjustly doomed to a life of penury and toil. The light-hearted child was often weary of these complainings, and turned for relief to the placidity and cheerfulness of her mother's mind. Here she found repose—a soothing, calm, and holy submission. Still the gloom of her father's spirit cast a pensive shade over her own feelings, and infused a tone of melancholy and an air of unnatural reflection into her character. By nature, Jane was endowed with a soul of unusual delicacy. From early childhood, all that is beautiful or sublime in nature, in literature, in character, had charms to rivet her entranced attention. She loved to sit alone at her chamber window in the evening of a summer's day, to gaze upon the gorgeous hues of sunset. As her imagination roved through those portals of a brighter world, which seemed thus, through far-reaching vistas of glory, to be opened to her, she peopled the sun-lit expanse with the creations of her own fancy, and often wept in uncontrollable emotion through the influence of these gathering thoughts.

Books of impassioned poetry, and descriptions of heroic character and achievements, were her especial delight. Plutarch's Lives, that book which, more than any other, appears to be the incentive of early genius, was hid beneath her pillow, and read and re-read with tireless avidity. Those illustrious heroes of antiquity became the companions of her solitude and of her hourly thoughts. She adored them and loved them as her own most intimate personal friends. Her character became insensibly molded to their forms, and she was inspired with restless enthusiasm to imitate their deeds. When but twelve years of age, her father found her, one day, weeping that she was not born a Roman maiden. Little did she then imagine that, by talent, by suffering, and by heroism, she was to display a character the history of which would eclipse the proudest narratives in Greek or Roman story.

Jane's thirst for reading.
Her love of flowers.
Jane's personal appearance.

Jane appears never to have known the frivolity and thoughtlessness of childhood. Before she had entered the fourth year of her age she knew how to read. From that time her thirst for reading was so great, that her parents found no little difficulty in furnishing her with a sufficient supply. She not only read with eagerness every book which met her eye, but pursued this uninterrupted miscellaneous reading to singular advantage, treasuring up all important facts in her retentive memory. So entirely absorbed was she in her books, that the only successful mode of withdrawing her from them was by offering her flowers, of which she was passionately fond. Books and flowers continued, through all the vicissitudes of

her life, even till the hour of her death, to afford her the most exquisite pleasure. She had no playmates, and thought no more of play than did her father and mother, who were her only and her constant companions. From infancy she was accustomed to the thoughts and the emotions of mature minds. In personal appearance she was, in earliest childhood and through life, peculiarly interesting rather than beautiful. As mature years perfected her features and her form, there was in the contour of her graceful figure, and her intellectual countenance, that air of thoughtfulness, of pensiveness, of glowing tenderness and delicacy, which gave her a power of fascination over all hearts. She sought not this power; she thought not of it; but an almost resistless attraction and persuasion accompanied all her words and actions.

Thirst for knowledge. Intellectual gifts.

It was, perhaps, the absence of playmates, and the habitual converse with mature minds, which, at so early an age, inspired Jane with that insatiate thirst for knowledge which she ever manifested. Books were her only resource in every unoccupied hour. From her walks with her father, and her domestic employments with her mother, she turned to her little library and to her chamber window, and lost herself in the limitless realms of thought. It is often imagined that character is the result of accident—that there is a native and inherent tendency, which triumphs over circumstances, and works out its own results. Without denying that there may be different intellectual gifts with which the soul may be endowed as it comes from the hand of the Creator, it surely is not difficult to perceive that the

peculiar training through which the childhood of Jane was conducted was calculated to form the peculiar character which she developed.

A walk on the Boulevards. Phlippon's talk to his child. Youthful dreams.

In a bright summer's afternoon she might be seen sauntering along the Boulevards, led by her father's hand, gazing upon that scene of gayety with which the eye is never wearied. A gilded coach, drawn by the most beautiful horses in the richest trappings, sweeps along the streets—a gorgeous vision. Servants in showy livery, and out-riders proudly mounted, invest the spectacle with a degree of grandeur, beneath which the imagination of a child sinks exhausted. Phlippon takes his little daughter in his arms to show her the sight, and, as she gazes in infantile wonder and delight, the discontented father says, "Look at that lord, and lady, and child, lolling so voluptuously in their coach. They have no right there. Why must I and my child walk on this hot pavement, while they repose on velvet cushions and revel in all luxury? Oppressive laws compel me to pay a portion of my hard earnings to support them in their pride and indolence. But a time will come when the people will awake to the consciousness of their wrongs, and their tyrants will tremble before them." He continues his walk in moody silence, brooding over his sense of injustice. They return to their home. Jane wishes that her father kept a carriage, and liveried servants and out-riders. She thinks of politics, and of the tyranny of kings and nobles, and of the unjust inequalities of man. She retires to the solitude of her loved chamber window, and reads of Aristides the Just, of

Themistocles with his Spartan virtues, of Brutus, and of the mother of the Gracchi. Greece and Rome rise before her in all their ancient renown. She despises the frivolity of Paris, the effeminacy of the moderns, and her youthful bosom throbs with the desire of being noble in spirit and of achieving great exploits. Thus, when other children of her age were playing with their dolls, she was dreaming of the prostration of nobles and of the overthrow of thrones—of liberty, and fraternity, and equality among mankind. Strange dreams for a child, but still more strange in their fulfillment.

Influence of Jane's parents over her. Education in convents.

The infidelity of her father and the piety of her mother contended, like counter currents of the ocean, in her bosom. Her active intellect and love of freedom sympathized with the speculations of the so-called philosopher. Her amiable and affectionate disposition and her pensive meditations led her to seek repose in the sublime conceptions and in the soul-soothing consolations of the Christian. Her parents were deeply interested in her education, and were desirous of giving her every advantage for securing the highest attainments. The education of young ladies, at that time, in France, was conducted almost exclusively by nuns in convents. The idea of the silence and solitude of the cloister inspired the highly-imaginative girl with a blaze of enthusiasm. Fondly as she loved her home, she was impatient for the hour to arrive when, with heroic self-sacrifice, she could withdraw from the world and its pleasures, and devote her whole soul to devotion, to meditation, and to study. Her mother's spirit of

religion was exerting a powerful influence over her, and one evening she fell at her feet, and, bursting into tears, besought that she might be sent to a convent to prepare to receive her first Christian communion in a suitable frame of mind.

Jane sent to a convent. Parting with her mother. Madame Roland's account of her first night in the convent.

The convent of the sisterhood of the Congregation in Paris was selected for Jane. In the review of her life which she subsequently wrote while immured in the dungeons of the Conciergerie, she says, in relation to this event, "While pressing my dear mother in my arms, at the moment of parting with her for the first time in my life, I thought my heart would have broken; but I was acting in obedience to the voice of God, and I passed the threshold of the cloister, tearfully offering up to him the greatest sacrifice I was capable of making. This was on the 7th of May, 1765, when I was eleven years and two months old. In the gloom of a prison, in the midst of political storms which ravage my country, and sweep away all that is dear to me, how shall I recall to my mind, and how describe the rapture and tranquillity I enjoyed at this period of my life? What lively colors can express the soft emotions of a young heart endued with tenderness and sensibility, greedy of happiness, beginning to be alive to the beauties of nature, and perceiving the Deity alone? The first night I spent in the convent was a night of agitation. I was no longer under the paternal roof. I was at a distance from that kind mother, who was doubtless thinking of me with affectionate emotion. A dim light diffused itself through the

room in which I had been put to bed with four children of my own age. I stole softly from my couch, and drew near the window, the light of the moon enabling me to distinguish the garden, which it overlooked. The deepest silence prevailed around, and I listened to it, if I may use the expression, with a sort of respect. Lofty trees cast their gigantic shadows along the ground, and promised a secure asylum to peaceful meditation. I lifted up my eyes to the heavens; they were unclouded and serene. I imagined that I felt the presence of the Deity smiling upon my sacrifice, and already offering me a reward in the consolatory hope of a celestial abode. Tears of delight flowed down my cheeks. I repeated my vows with holy ecstasy, and went to bed again to taste the slumber of God's chosen children."

Jane's books of study.

Her thirst for knowledge was insatiate, and with untiring assiduity she pursued her studies. Every hour of the day had its appropriate employment, and time flew upon its swiftest wings. Every book which fell in her way she eagerly perused, and treasured its knowledge or its literary beauties in her memory. Heraldry and books of romance, lives of the saints and fairy legends, biography, travels, history, political philosophy, poetry, and treatises upon morals, were all read and meditated upon by this young child. She had no taste for any childish amusements; and in the hours of recreation, when the mirthful girls around her were forgetting study and care in those games appropriate to their years, she would walk alone in the garden, admiring the flowers, and gazing upon the fleecy clouds in the sky. In all the beauties of nature her eye ever recognized the hand of God, and she

ever took pleasure in those sublime thoughts of infinity and eternity which must engross every noble mind. Her teachers had but little to do. Whatever study she engaged in was pursued with such spontaneous zeal, that success had crowned her efforts before others had hardly made a beginning.

Her proficiency in music and drawing.

In music and drawing she made great proficiency. She was even more fond of all that is beautiful and graceful in the accomplishments of a highly-cultivated mind, than in those more solid studies which she nevertheless pursued with so much energy and interest.

Scenes in the convent.

The scenes which she witnessed in the convent were peculiarly calculated to produce an indelible impression upon a mind so imaginative. The chapel for prayer, with its somber twilight and its dimly-burning tapers; the dirges which the organ breathed upon the trembling ear; the imposing pageant of prayer and praise, with the blended costumes of monks and hooded nuns; the knell which tolled the requiem of a departed sister, as, in the gloom of night and by the light of torches, she was conveyed to her burial—all these concomitants of that system of pageantry, arranged so skillfully to impress the senses of the young and the imaginative, fanned to the highest elevation the flames of that poetic temperament she so eminently possessed.

Impressions made by them. Poetic enthusiasms.

God thus became in Jane's mind a vision of poetic beauty. Religion was the inspiration of enthusiasm and of sentiment. The worship of the Deity was

blended with all that was ennobling and beautiful. Moved by these glowing fancies, her susceptible spirit, in these tender years, turned away from atheism, from infidelity, from irreligion, as from that which was unrefined, revolting, vulgar. The consciousness of the presence of God, the adoration of his being, became a passion of her soul. This state of mind was poetry, not religion. It involved no sense of the spirituality of the Divine Law, no consciousness of unworthiness, no need of a Savior. It was an emotion sublime and beautiful, yet merely such an emotion as any one of susceptible temperament might feel when standing in the Vale of Chamouni at midnight, or when listening to the crash of thunder as the tempest wrecks the sky, or when one gazes entranced upon the fair face of nature in a mild and lovely morning of June, when no cloud appears in the blue canopy above us, and no breeze ruffles the leaves of the grove or the glassy surface of the lake, and the songs of birds and the perfume of flowers fill the air. Many mistake the highly poetic enthusiasm which such scenes excite for the spirit of piety.

Taking the veil. Taking the black veil. Effect upon Jane.

While Jane was an inmate of the convent, a very interesting young lady, from some disappointment weary of the world, took the veil. When one enters a convent with the intention of becoming a nun, she first takes the white veil, which is an expression of her intention, and thus enters the grade of a novice. During the period of her novitiate, which continues for several months, she is exposed to the severest discipline of vigils, and fastings, and solitude, and prayer, that she may

distinctly understand the life of weariness and self-denial upon which she has entered. If, unintimidated by these hardships, she still persists in her determination, she then takes the black veil, and utters her solemn and irrevocable vows to bury herself in the gloom of the cloister, never again to emerge. From this step there is no return. The throbbing heart, which neither cowls nor veils can still, finds in the taper-lighted cell its living tomb, till it sleeps in death. No one with even an ordinary share of sensibility can witness a ceremony involving such consequences without the deepest emotion. The scene produced an effect upon the spirit of Jane which was never effaced. The wreath of flowers which crowned the beautiful victim; the veil enveloping her person; the solemn and dirge-like chant, the requiem of her burial to all the pleasures of sense and time; the pall which overspread her, emblematic of her consignment to a living tomb, all so deeply affected the impassioned child, that, burying her face in her hands, she wept with uncontrollable emotion.

Lofty aspirations. Remark of Napoleon.

The thought of the magnitude of the sacrifice which the young novice was making appealed irresistibly to her admiration of the morally sublime. There was in that relinquishment of all the joys of earth a self-surrender to a passionless life of mortification, and penance, and prayer, an apparent heroism, which reminded Jane of her much-admired Roman maidens and matrons. She aspired with most romantic ardor to do, herself, something great and noble. While her sound judgment could not but condemn this abandonment of life, she was inspired with

the loftiest enthusiasm to enter, in some worthy way, upon a life of endurance, of sacrifice, and of martyrdom. She felt that she was born for the performance of some great deeds, and she looked down with contempt upon all the ordinary vocations of every-day life. These were the dreams of a romantic girl. They were not, however, the fleeting visions of a sickly and sentimental mind, but the deep, soul-moving aspirations of one of the strongest intellects over which imagination has ever swayed its scepter. One is reminded by these early developments of character of the remark of Napoleon, when some one said, in his presence, "It is nothing but imagination." "Nothing but imagination!" replied this sagacious observer; "*imagination rules the world!*"

Jane's contempt of ease and luxury. Her self-denial.

These dim visions of greatness, these lofty aspirations, not for renown, but for the inward consciousness of intellectual elevation, of moral sublimity, of heroism, had no influence, as is ordinarily the case with day-dreams, to give Jane a distaste for life's energetic duties. They did not enervate her character, or convert her into a mere visionary; on the contrary, they but roused and invigorated her to alacrity in the discharge of every duty. They led her to despise ease and luxury, to rejoice in self-denial, and to cultivate, to the highest possible degree, all her faculties of body and of mind, that she might be prepared for any possible destiny. Wild as, at times, her imaginings might have been, her most vivid fancy never could have pictured a career so extraordinary as that to which reality introduced her; and in all the annals of ancient story, she could find no record of sufferings and privations

more severe than those which she was called upon to endure. And neither heroine nor hero of any age has shed greater luster upon human nature by the cheerful fortitude with which adversity has been braved.

Chapter II.

Youth.

Table of Contents

Convent life. Its influence upon Jane.

The influence of those intense emotions which were excited in the bosom of Jane by the scenes which she witnessed in her childhood in the nunnery were never effaced from her imaginative mind. Nothing can be conceived more strongly calculated to impress the feelings of a romantic girl, than the poetic attractions which are thrown around the Roman Catholic religion by nuns, and cloisters, and dimly-lighted chapels, and faintly-burning tapers, and matins, and vespers, and midnight dirges. Jane had just the spirit to be most deeply captivated by such enchantments. She reveled in those imaginings which clustered in the dim shades of the cloister, in an ecstasy of luxurious enjoyment. The ordinary motives which influence young girls of her age seem to have had no control over her. Her joys were most highly intellectual and spiritual, and her aspirations were far above the usual conceptions of childhood. She, for a time, became entirely fascinated by the novel scenes around her, and surrendered her whole soul to the dominion of the associations with which she was engrossed. In subsequent years, by the energies of a vigorous philosophy, she disenfranchised her intellect from these illusions, and, proceeding to another extreme, wandered in the midst of the cheerless mazes of unbelief; but her fancy retained the traces of these early impressions