

JUVENILE ENTERTAINER.

"Torquet ab obscænis jam nunc sermonibus aurem."

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THE JUVENILE ENTERTAINER

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BIOGRAPHY.

FRANCES MARIA.

Frances Maria, of Rochebeaucour, was born Angoumois in France, in 1752.

Nature who has granted to man the gifts of genius and deep thinking ability to invent, and the power to execute, seems to have compensated his imperfections by gifts no less valuable; gentleness of disposition, patience, self command, courage, sensibility, prudence, activity, and regularity of conduct. This last quality is, above all, a prerogative which cannot be refused to a man worthy on so many accounts of love and respect.

With what aptness too is woman endowed from her tender years! Are not young girls daily seen conducting a house, to watch over the details of house-keeping, to manage their little brothers and sisters, to supply, in a word, the loss of their parents, at an age when great boys are capable of no service, and only think of amusing themselves? Frances Maria perfectly confirms these observations. She was the daughter of a gatherer of Rochebeaucour, in Angoumois. Her father was possessed of no fortune, but he was a worthy man, a good husband, and a good father. Though he had received only a common education, as he did not want good sense, he brought up his child much better than the children of the rich inhabitants of great cities are often educated. He had remarked that a man was of a gentle but decided temper, obdurate to all remonstrances delivered with severity; in consequence, he made use of no other methods of management than those of kindness, caresses, and sentiment, and he saw himself no less respected than beloved by her.

His wife was far from showing the sense and tender cares of her husband. She affected great love for her daughter, but this love was equal and unenlightened. Whimsical, capricious, hasty to excess, unreasonable in her demands, and ready to take offence, she was perpetually chiding Maria for mere trifles. On occasions when she ought to have reproved her daughter, she manifested a tenderness, of which the little girl could not divine the reason; when she would have been right to have encouraged

her, she overwhelmed with monacos and harsh treatment, which disgusted the good father, and soured the mind of the child. Thus thwarted in his dearest affections, but irresolute, and desirous of preserving peace in his house, the father concealed within his heart a secret grief. He fell ill, and died within the arms of his afflicted daughter. His wife did not long survive him; and left behind her a little boy of eighteen months old, with Frances, then aged eleven years.

The father of the young orphan was rich only in virtues; he left no inheritance to his daughter but some old furniture, and a little cottage, situated on the skirts of a wood. Frances returned with her little brother to this wild asylum. The wretched have neither relations nor friends! She saw herself deserted and was soon reduced to poverty. Some husbandman in the neighbourhood, however, wished her to keep their geese and sheep, but her attachment to her little brother prevented her from accepting the office, and she resolved to attempt and to suffer every thing rather than abandon him.

In this urgent necessity Maria sold some of her effects, and with the money she bought flax and cotton. From the age of seven years she had been able to make a pair of men's stockings in two days. This habit of employment was of great assistance to her; and she set herself to spinning, sewing, and knitting, alternately. As she was not less active than skilful, she thus provided for her subsistence, and preserved her independence.

Industry and virtue naturally command the esteem of men; and when we no longer stand in need of them, they offer us their services. A girl of twelve years old, living alone in a poor cottage, providing for herself, and taking care of an infant brother, as if he had been her child, was a sight equally unusual and affecting. Accordingly her reputation soon spread abroad. Every body ran from the neighbouring districts to see her, and work was eagerly brought to her. The mothers particularly made it a pleasure to bring their children thither. "Come," said they, "and see a girl of twelve years old, who conducts herself like a woman of thirty, and passes her time in providing food for her little brother."

Plenty, the fruit of industry, insensibly began to reign in the cottage of Frances; she was even enabled to take a good old woman to live with her, who kept the house, and took care of her brother whilst she went with her work to the neighbouring villages. Passing her days in innocence and peace, nothing would have been wanting to the happiness of this virtuous child, had her father still been with her.

Afflicting recollections continually offered themselves to her mind, and spread a gloom over her thoughts. During the hours of the night, and throughout the day, she felt a dreadful void around her. "Dear friend of my childhood," she repeated, "why are you not with your beloved daughter? With what pleasure

should I consecrate to you the product of my labours! O, how it would delight me to return the cares which you lavished on me in my childhood! No, no; never shall I be consoled for so cruel a loss; nothing can make me amends!"

Divided between her attention to her brother, and the tender recollection of her beloved father, the good Frances had already passed three years in her solitude.

Surpassing others no less in the advantages of person than those of the mind, she was of a size and strength much above her age, and her beauty was equal to the amiable qualities of her heart. Some of the richest farmers demanded her in marriage, and would have esteemed themselves happy to have obtained her without a dowry; but they were all very young, and Frances, with a prudence by no means common, dismissed them, preferring a tradesman of a middle age, with a moderate property, because, as she said, he might supply the place of a father to her brother and herself, and assist her in acquiring the experience that she stood in need of.

It was the middle of a severe winter, and the prudent girl waited for the spring, to unite her lot with that of the happy man for whom she destined her heart and her lovely person. But, alas! she was prevented in her design by a fatal accident. For five weeks the earth had been covered with snow; the wolves wandered through the fields in troops; they boldly entered the towns, and even men, when unarmed, became their victims. One morning, as Frances was drawing some bread from the oven, a wolf, followed by five whelps, burst into the room. She instantly seized a knotty stick, and defended herself with such courage, that she would certainly have saved her life had she thought only of herself; but whilst she was encountering the savage beast, she perceived a second enemy advancing towards her brother. Then, uttering a cry of terror, she seized the child by the middle, opened a closet, and there placed him out of danger; but whilst the courageous girl supported herself with one hand, and endeavoured with the other to repulse the voracious animals, the furious wolf sprung at her throat, and suffocated her instantly. The good old woman flying to implore assistance, was also seized and torn in pieces.

Thus died, in her fifteenth year, this young woman, who so well deserved a better fate. Who can refuse their tears? The true model of filial piety, of courage, and fraternal affection, inspired with virtue with sentiment, and grace; who better deserved to have lived and become the mother of a family than she, who fulfilled so well the sacred duties of one without the title? Her brother was living in 1796, and from him these interesting particulars were received.

Modesty, if it were to be recommended for nothing else, this were enough, that the pretending to little, leaves a man at ease; whereas boasting requires a perpetual labour to appear what he is not. If we have sense, modesty best proves it to others; if we have none, it best hides our want of it.