

## MATERNAL INFLUENCE.

FROM THE FRENCH.

THE age of Louis XV. was a bad age; a king without power, a nobility without dignity, a clergy without virtue; the loose manners of the regency mixed with the gothic prejudices of the middle ages; all the feudal race in embroidered coats; princes, dukes, marquises, gentlemen, making an art of corruption, and a merit of debauchery; noble by the grace of God, philosophers by the grace of Diderot; empty, foolish creatures, aspiring to profound thoughts, and taking refuge in incredulity, on the faith of the facetiæ of Voltaire or of a tale of Voisenon! Such was the age in which Rousseau appeared.

Below this gilded troop there was a people which looked on, amused with this grand spectacle, the actors of which, stripped all at once of their coat of mail, and of their feudal appurtenances, began to appear a less pure and formidable race. Bowed down beneath the weight of their long servitude, the people had remained barbarous in the midst of civilization, ignorant in the midst of science, miserable in the midst of riches; they had been instructed neither in their rights nor in their duties, and they suddenly found themselves face to face with their masters, like a lion before his prey, free in his strength and in his ferocity.

And what did power oppose to these imminent perils? Where was the legislation which should protect the citizens, and the evangelical worship which was to reform the manners? Power apprehended nothing, it went on as before, without thinking of the future; employing the Bastille to control the nobility, the Sorbonne to control the philosophers, and having neither strength to modify laws, which had remained barbarous amidst the progress of the age, nor yet to awaken the clergy, stupidly occupied with the miracles of St. Paris in the company of the encyclopedists.

One man, one man alone, at this juncture, thought of the future destinies of the country; and this man was not even a Frenchman, he was the son of a poor watchmaker of Geneva, named Rousseau. Struck with the universal disorganization, he conceived one of those lucid ideas which are attached, by imperceptible threads, the destinies of humanity. His aim was to give citizens to the country, while he appeared only to think of giving mothers to our children! The mother's milk shall be the milk of liberty! Conceiving the regeneration of France beneath the veil of an isolated education, he removes his pupil from the falsehood of public education: in this place, so vast, in which one saw merely the child

and its tutor, the genius of Rousseau comprised all that might constitute a great people; he knew that ideas of individual liberty do not fail speedily to become ideas of national liberty. While educating a man, he thought of forming a nation.

And what would be the means of this great revolution? Amidst so much vileness, who would dare to animate souls with the sacred love of truth? There is in the heart of woman a something of republicanism which incites her to heroism and self-sacrifice; and it is there that Rousseau looks for support: it is there, also, that he finds the power. He does not come as a severe moralist to impose sad and important duties: it is a family *fête* which he convokes, it is a mother which he presents to the adoration of the world, seated near the cradle, a beautiful child lying on her bosom, her countenance beaming with joy, beneath the tender looks of her husband.

Thus was the family to be regenerated, and by means of the family the nation. Thus woman worked, without knowing it, a universal regeneration. Rousseau had enlisted them on his side, without placing them in his confidence; and while Europe thought that it only owed to him the happiness of the children, and the virtue of the mothers, he had laid the foundation of the liberty of the human race.

Such was the influence of Rousseau on woman, and of the latter on the nation. All that he expected from women he obtained; they were wives and mothers. One step more, and by entrusting them with the moral education, as much as he had entrusted them with the physical education, of their children, he would have made of maternal love the most powerful promoter of the interests of humanity. Unfortunately he stopped short. He who, speaking of women, had so well observed, "What great things might be done with this lever," dared not to propose to them any thing great; he only left to their tenderness the management of early childhood, and thought their mission accomplished.

Something, then, remains to be done after Rousseau; the impulsion which he gave to moral studies wanted force, because it wanted an agent which we must not seek, among the learned and philosophers, but in the very bosom of the family. Men only educate those who have gold; one may buy a tutor, Nature is more munificent, she gives one to each child. Leave, then, the child under the protection of its mother; it is not without design that Nature has confided it at its birth to the only love which is always faithful, to the only devotedness which terminates but with life.