



Adèle Hugo junior, by Gustave Simon

My dear Suzanne,

You have asked me for a few notes about Adèle Hugo, Victor Hugo's second daughter. I will make them as brief as I can so as not to exceed the guidelines you have given me.

When on 28 July 1830 Victor Hugo told Charles Nodier the news of the birth of 'a big chubby and healthy girl,' he added: 'Here's one of my works that looks as though it will live on,' and, indeed, Adele died at the age of 85.

The life of this young girl turned out to be a hard and austere one; when she was 21 it was shattered by the coup d'état of 1851. Her father, the police on his trail, left France to go into exile. Madame Victor Hugo stayed back with her daughter in their flat in the Rue de la Tour-d'Auvergne. They saw very few friends; they ate frugally; they were subject to police harassment and when the Empire was established, they had to auction off their furniture. Adèle had to relinquish her little bits and pieces, her music collection, her books, for which she got a price of 313 francs; she kept this money carefully and would use it later to furnish her room. In August 1852, she joined her father in Jersey, and followed him to Guernsey when the poet was expelled from the island.

Madame Victor Hugo wrote on 25 November 1855 to her friend Madame Paul Meurice: 'My daughter is very brave; she is proud by nature. She doesn't get upset over missing some ball; she understands the greatness of persecution. Its miseries are blotted out for her by its golden glow.' The fact was that for a young girl suddenly and abruptly cut off from the world the days of exile were long and difficult to fill. Adèle spent them writing, drawing, looking after her little garden; but most of all by composing, because she was a musician. Ambrose Thomas, the author of *Mignon* and *Hamlet*, thought so much of her talent that after perusing her melodies he wrote to Madame Hugo; 'I found throughout charming elements, gracefulness, originality, and a notable poetic feeling.'

Her intense labours affected her health. The doctors prescribed rest and a change of air. She was 28. Exile had prevented her from fulfilling her destiny and from enjoying the delights of young woman's life, but she raised not a single word of recrimination or complaint. Under the weight of these difficulties to which she had become resigned she became reclusive. Madame Victor Hugo, to bring her daughter out of her depression, took a short trip with her to Paris in 1858, and another to London in 1859.

When Victor Hugo returned to France in 1870, Adèle, whose health was permanently affected, went into a convalescent home in Saint-Mandé and then in Suresnes. I went to visit her from time to time: she was 78. She was happy to talk of her memories; of the composer Adam, her friend during her youth; she had remained faithful to the old-school composers, and her greatest joy was to attend the Sunday concerts in the pleasure garden at Suresnes. She still played music and often talked about the Latin and Greek authors whose works she had on her table. I will always remember how feistily she railed against those men who used to try to prevent women from learning Latin and Greek. She loved the shady places in the park at Suresnes, and there was nothing more touching than seeing the daughter of Victor Hugo walking with the great poet's grandson and recalling with him the memories of the past.

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