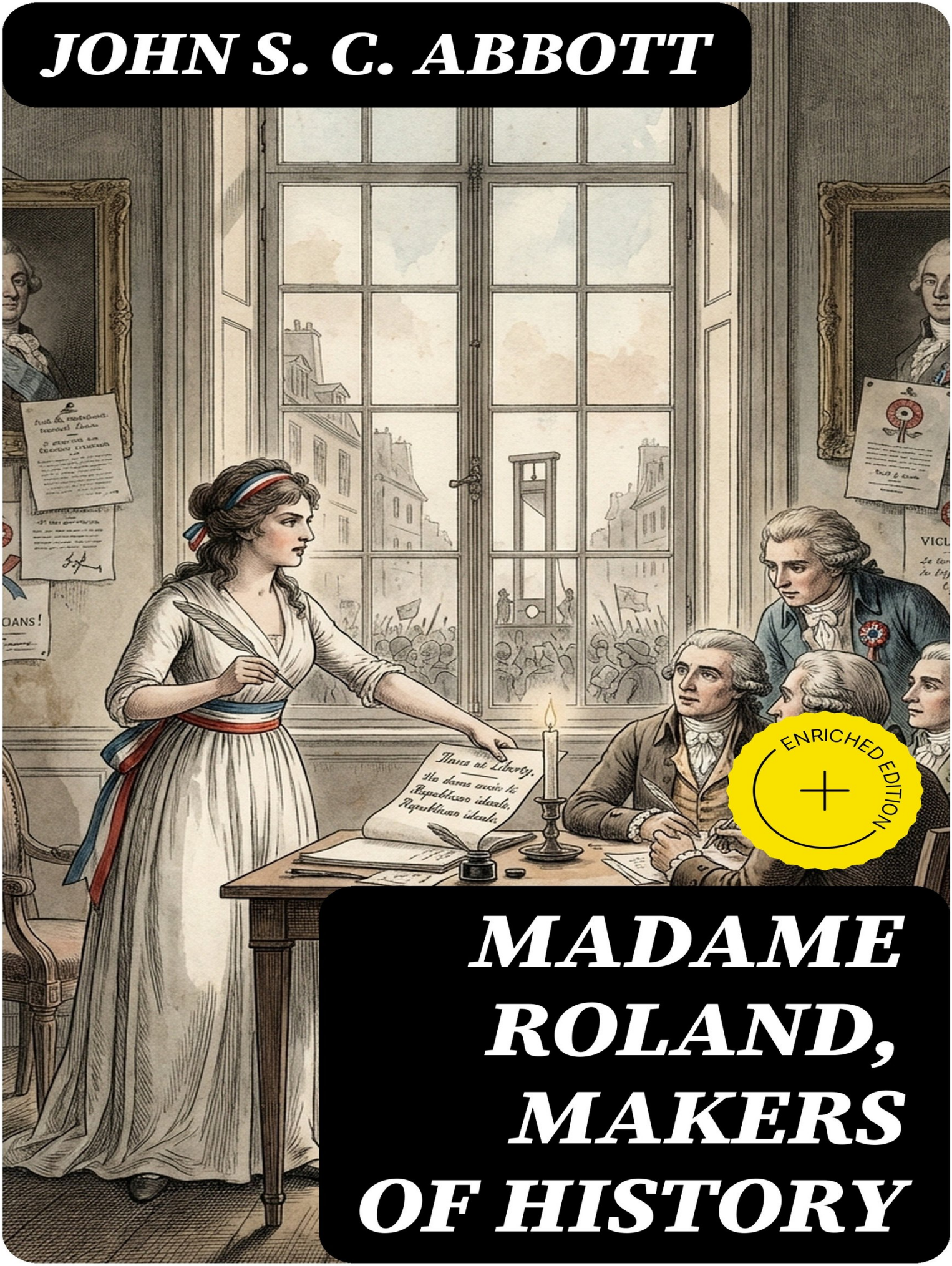
JOHN S. C. ABBOTT




# MADAME ROLAND, MAKERS OF HISTORY

**John S. C. Abbott**

# Madame Roland, Makers of History

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Tyler Ashford*

EAN 8596547234449

Edited and published by DigiCat, 2022

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# Introduction

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At the uneasy crossroads where private conscience confronts public upheaval, John S. C. Abbott’s Madame Roland, Makers of History follows a singular mind moving from the quiet discipline of study to the loud, combustible arena of revolutionary politics, showing how convictions forged in solitude must adapt, resist, or break when confronted by crowds, councils, and crises, and how a woman’s moral voice—cultivated in letters, debate, and domestic counsel—can both guide and be imperiled by the very forces it seeks to humanize, in late-eighteenth-century France where the ideal of civic virtue becomes a daily test amid shifting alliances and accelerating events.

This book is a nineteenth-century narrative biography that situates Madame Roland within the political and social convulsions of revolutionary France, written by the American historian John S. C. Abbott for the Makers of History series. Composed for a broad audience, it blends accessible storytelling with instructive reflection characteristic of popular history from the mid-nineteenth century. The setting spans domestic interiors, ministerial offices, and the fervent meeting rooms of Paris, always anchored in the turbulence that reshaped Europe at the century’s close. Abbott presents a life intimately connected to national events, but he keeps his focus on character, choice, and consequence.

Abbott’s narrative traces Jeanne-Marie Roland’s formation through education, reading, and disciplined

habits, then follows her partnership in marriage as it opens a path from private conviction to public influence. Without lingering on minutiae, he sketches scenes briskly, pausing for moral commentary and clear summaries that keep the arc intelligible even when the political backdrop is complex. The voice is earnest and lucid, occasionally dramatic but never opaque. Readers encounter a portrait shaped by letters and conversation, by salons and the corridors of administration, and by the steady press of events that force principles into decisions with real stakes.

At its core, the book examines the tensile strength of virtue under pressure, asking how steadfast ideals fare amid agitation, intrigue, and the temptations of expediency. It probes the boundaries of women’s agency in an age when public voice was often mediated through domestic roles, showing how counsel, correspondence, and hospitality became tools of influence. Abbott returns repeatedly to the friction between moderation and zeal, between reasoned reform and uncompromising fervor. He also explores friendship, loyalty, and responsibility, noting how alliances form and strain as circumstances evolve, and how the demands of conscience can collide with the necessities of survival.

Stylistically, the volume reflects nineteenth-century narrative history: selected episodes are arranged for clarity, characters are sketched in bold lines, and the author’s judgments are stated plainly. Abbott synthesizes prior accounts and period recollections into a continuous story, preferring momentum to exhaustive documentation, and turning complex deliberations into intelligible turning points.

Descriptions of scenes and customs serve the argument of character, not antiquarian display. The result is a biography that reads with the pace of a novel while preserving the instructive aims of history, a balance that invites readers to weigh conduct as carefully as they track events.

For contemporary readers, Madame Roland matters because it illuminates how civic ideals are forged and contested when institutions wobble and rhetoric accelerates. The book’s attention to persuasion, correspondence, and networks speaks to an age of rapid communication, where private words can shape public currents. Its portrait of a woman navigating power without formal office enriches current conversations about representation and political labor. Perhaps most enduring is its insistence that ethics and strategy cannot be separated for long: Abbott’s narrative encourages reflection on fortitude, restraint, and compromise, and on the costs of standing firm when both sides demand unqualified allegiance.

Approached as both story and meditation, this volume rewards patience with its measured pacing and clear scaffolding, while acknowledging the interpretive habits of its century. Some emphases reflect the moral sensibilities of its time, yet within that frame the figure that emerges is intellectually serious, politically engaged, and tested by circumstances larger than any one life. Readers will find a window onto revolutionary Paris that is personal rather than panoramic, and a guide who prefers clarity to irony. Read today, Abbott’s work offers a disciplined lens on conscience

in crisis, inviting engagement rather than mere spectacle or detached summary.

# Synopsis

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John S. C. Abbott’s Madame Roland, a volume in his nineteenth-century Makers of History series, presents a concise biography of Jeanne-Marie Roland set within the convulsions of the French Revolution. Abbott weaves personal portraiture with political narrative, following her from private study to public consequence. He emphasizes character, motive, and moral trial, using episodes from domestic and political life to illuminate the pressures placed upon conviction during revolutionary change. The book traces the interplay between ideas and events, showing how a disciplined mind, strengthened by reading and correspondence, became influential in councils where policy, conscience, and survival clashed.

Abbott begins with Roland’s formative years, portraying a Parisian childhood shaped by severe application to study and a taste for history. The narrative stresses her self-education through classical historians and modern moralists, which instilled admiration for civic virtue and suspicion of corruption. Family circumstances exposed her to both artisanal discipline and the limits of status, encouraging a resolve to live meaningfully. By tracing early friendships, reading habits, and careful introspection, Abbott presents the incipient framework of a political consciousness. He prepares the reader to see how a private ethic, honed long before upheaval, would later meet the demands of public life.

In Abbott’s account, marriage to Jean-Marie Roland transforms study into partnership. Her husband’s administrative career and devotion to order provided a channel for her disciplined intellect, and their household became a workshop of letters, travel, and reformist conversation. The biography shows her learning the mechanics of bureaucracy while refining a style of lucid counsel. Provincial postings and periodic returns to Paris widened their circle, joining practical expertise to philosophical purpose. Abbott describes a union of mutual respect that made her salon and correspondence a school of civic responsibility, preparing both partners to step, cautiously yet decisively, into the widening arena of national affairs.

As revolution accelerates, Abbott situates Roland within the ascendancy of the Girondin tendency. Paris gatherings at her home crystallize into a network of legislators, writers, and administrators seeking constitutional change and legal order amid turbulence. When her husband enters ministerial office, the biography underscores her role in shaping arguments and drafting communications that articulate programmatic clarity while challenging hesitation at court. Abbott charts the volatile rhythm of street pressure and cabinet debate, presenting her voice as insistent on accountability yet wary of vengeance. This section emphasizes how influence without office can stiffen allies and define a party’s tone.

Abbott then follows the widening breach between Girondins and Jacobins as external war and internal scarcity intensify suspicion. He recounts the ministry’s trials, the

mounting pressure of urban crowds, and the catastrophic violence that discredits moderation while hardening factions. In this portrait, Roland argues for legality and principled firmness, yet finds that language cannot easily restrain fear or hunger. Conflicts in assembly, press, and club expose the risks of moral suasion when authority is fragile. The dismissal of allies and the growth of extremism foreshadow personal danger, and the narrative turns from persuasion at a salon to peril in the streets.

The crackdown on the Girondins brings arrests and separations that Abbott renders with restrained drama. Roland’s transfer from influence to confinement becomes the setting for a final demonstration of composure, as she records reflections on duty, friendship, and the uses of history. The biography dwells on prison routines, letters, and remembered scenes that frame her interior resourcefulness without sentimental excess. Legal proceedings loom, alliances fray under pressure, and the costs of political speech become stark. Abbott maintains narrative tension while avoiding sensationalism, allowing her voice to stand against the times as the decisive passage of her story approaches.

Abbott closes with an assessment of character and circumstance that situates Madame Roland among the moral figures of his series. He emphasizes the obligations and hazards of influence exercised without formal authority, and the burdens placed on integrity when institutions fail. The book’s lasting interest lies in its portrait of a mind tested by speed and scale of change, and in its inquiry into how rhetoric shapes responsibility. Without leaning on

archival novelty, it offers a clear, accessible narrative that links private virtue to public consequence. In this way, the biography endures as a study of conscience under revolutionary strain.

# Historical Context

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Marie-Jeanne Phlipon, later Madame Roland, came of age in late eighteenth-century Paris under the Ancien Régime, where monarchy, Catholic Church, and corporate institutions framed public life. Louis XVI's government confronted mounting debts from war and structural fiscal inequities, while grain shortages and depressed trade stirred unrest. Royal censors monitored print, yet Enlightenment works spread through lending libraries and salons. Urban guilds and provincial intendants mediated economic regulation. This was a world of legal privilege and constrained participation, but also of expanding literacy and political curiosity. The biography's stage is the capital and provinces of France, poised on the brink of revolutionary transformation.

Educated in religious schools and by voracious private reading, Phlipon absorbed classical republican exemplars and Enlightenment moralists, especially Plutarch and Rousseau. In 1780 she married Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, an experienced administrator and inspector of manufactures, whose postings in Lyon and Amiens exposed the couple to provincial commerce and regulation. Their domestic partnership combined intellectual collaboration with civic ambition, typical of reformist families navigating royal bureaucracy. Salons and correspondence allowed talented women to influence opinion despite formal exclusion from office. These milieus cultivated Roland's

disciplined style and austere virtues, preparing her to engage the public questions that soon overwhelmed France’s traditional institutions.

In 1789 the crown convoked the Estates-General to resolve the fiscal crisis, catalyzing the National Assembly, abolition of feudal dues, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. A constitutional monarchy emerged, with ministries answerable to law and a restructured administrative map. Political clubs multiplied—the Jacobins, Cordeliers, and provincial networks—while a liberal press debated sovereignty and rights. Deputies from the Gironde and allied moderates promoted legal reforms, economic liberalism, and wariness of Parisian street power. In Paris, the Rolands’ salon gathered deputies, journalists, and officials, articulating a principled, parliamentary republicanism that valued civic virtue and nationwide representation.

Foreign war in 1792 intensified factionalism and mobilized the sans-culottes. Jean-Marie Roland became minister of the interior during the Legislative Assembly’s last months, tasked with supervising local authorities, public order, and the press. A forthright ministerial letter to the king, drafted in the Rolands’ circle, condemned royal vetoes and provoked dismissal in June. After the 10 August insurrection toppled the monarchy, Roland resumed office within the Provisional Executive Council. The couple’s correspondence and memoranda, circulated among Girondin allies, defended constitutional legality and administrative probity while urging national vigilance—positions that set

them at odds with radical club leaders and the Paris Commune.

With the National Convention proclaiming the Republic, debates over executive authority, war policy, and popular sovereignty sharpened. The September Massacres revealed the volatility of extralegal violence. Girondins pressed for due process and provincial autonomy, while the Montagnards, aligned with the Commune and militant sections, demanded centralized energy to defeat enemies within and without. Newspapers, pamphlets, and club oratory shaped reputations and strategy. Madame Roland, through disciplined hosting and persuasive drafting, helped articulate a moderate republican program grounded in honesty in administration, civil liberties, and national breadth. Her stance drew admiration among provincial deputies and hostility from those favoring coercive, insurgent tactics.

Escalating military pressures, supply crises, and currency instability in 1793 empowered emergency institutions. The Revolutionary Tribunal tried political offenders; the Committee of Public Safety coordinated war and internal security; price controls and surveillance reflected sans-culotte demands. Insurrections in late May and early June forced the Convention to purge leading Girondins, inaugurating a systematic repression of that circle. Arrests, domiciliary searches, and political prisons became routine. In confinement, Roland’s careful notes and memoir fragments preserved a Girondin interpretation of events, emphasizing probity, measured reform, and the dangers of

unchecked popular force. Her writings from these months underpin later portraits of conviction under pressure.

Roland’s papers and letters were published posthumously in the 1790s, influencing how subsequent generations understood Girondin ideals. Nineteenth-century historians such as François Mignet, Adolphe Thiers, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Thomas Carlyle offered competing syntheses of the Revolution, often drawing on these materials. Their narratives, translated into English, shaped Anglo-American readerships that prized liberal institutions and moral exemplarity. John S. C. Abbott, an American clergyman-historian, relied on such sources and on contemporary memoirs to craft an accessible life of Madame Roland for the Makers of History series. His emphasis on character, domestic virtue, and civic duty reflects that historiographical tradition.

Composed for a mid-nineteenth-century audience shaped by the upheavals of 1848 and American debates over republican order, Abbott’s biography treats the French Revolution as both inspiration and caution. It emphasizes principled administration, parliamentary restraint, and national legality, and it criticizes mob coercion and punitive radicalism. Portraying a woman who exercised influence through intellect, sociability, and prose, the work engages contemporary discussions of women’s political agency without advocating formal political rights. By dramatizing the passage from reform to extremity, it delivers moral instruction consistent with its series’ aims and with U.S. popular historiography, while registering a transatlantic preference for orderly, law-governed liberty.

# Madame Roland, Makers of History

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MADAME ROLAND.

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# PREFACE.

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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**[1q]**. I know not where to look for a career more full of suggestive thought.

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# ENGRAVINGS.

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# MADAME ROLAND

# Chapter I.

## Childhood.

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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[1]. 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[2], 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**[3q]**. 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**[4q]**. 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**[5q]**. She was placid, contented, and cheerful, and, though uninquiring in her devotion, undoubtedly sincere in

*Character of Madame Phlippon.*

her piety. In every event of life she recognized the overruling 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**[6q]**. Both parents lived in her and for her. She was their earthly all**[2q]**. 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**[5]** 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**[7q]**. 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