

XVIII – Life Is Joyous When It Is Without Sorrow

Saint-Evremond to Ninon de l'Enclos:

The very last letter I receive from Mademoiselle de l'Enclos always seems to me to be better than the preceding ones. It is not because the sentiment of present pleasure dims the memory of the past, but the true reason is, your mind is becoming stronger and more fortified every day.

If it were the same with the body as with the mind, I should badly sustain this stomach combat of which you speak. I wanted to make a trial of mine against that of Madame Sandwich, at a banquet given by Lord Jersey. I was not the vanquished.

Everybody knows the spirit of Madame Sandwich; I see her good taste in the extraordinary esteem she has for you. I was not overcome by the praises she showered upon you, any more than I was by my appetite. You belong to every nation, esteemed alike in London as in Paris. You belong to every age of the world, and when I say that you are an honor to mine, youth will immediately name you to give luster to theirs. There you are, mistress of the present and of the past. May you have your share of the right to be so considered in the future! I have not reputation in view, for that is assured to all time; the one thing I regard as the most essential is life, of which eight days are worth more than centuries of post mortem glory.

If any one had formerly proposed to you to live as you are now living, you would have hanged yourself! (The expression pleases me.) However, you are satisfied with ease and comfort after having enjoyed the liveliest emotions.

L'esprit vous satisfait, ou du moins vous console:

Mais on préférerait de vivre jeune et folle,
Et laisser aux vieillards exempts de pas-
sions

La triste gravité de leurs reflexions.

(Mental joys satisfy you, at least they console,
But a young jolly life we prefer on the whole,
And to old chaps, exempt from passion's sharp stings,
Leave the sad recollections of former good things.)

Nobody can make more of youth than I, and as I am holding to it by memory, I am following your example, and fit in with the present as well as I know how.

Would to Heaven, Madame Mazarin had been of your opinion! She would still be living, but she desired to die the beauty of the world.

Madame Sandwich is leaving for the country, and departs admired in London as she is in Paris.

Live, Ninon, life is joyous when it is without sorrow.

I pray you to forward this note to M. l'Abbé de Hautefeuille, who is with Madame la Duchesse de Bouillon. I sometimes meet the friends of M. l'Abbé Dubois, who complain that they are forgotten. Assure him of my humble regards.

[Translator's Note – The above was the last letter Saint-Evremond ever wrote Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, and with the exception of one more letter to his friend, Count Magalotti, Councilor of State to His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Tuscany, he never wrote any other, dying shortly afterward at the age of about ninety. His last letter ends with this peculiar Epicurean thought in poetry:

Je vis éloigné de la France,
Sans besoins et sans abondance,
Content d'un vulgaire destin;
J'aime la vertu sans rudesse,
J'aime le plaisir sans mollesse,

J'aime la vie, et n'en crains pas la fin.

(I am living far away from France,
No wants, indeed, no abundance,

Content to dwell in humble sphere;
Virtue I love without roughness,
Pleasures I love without softness,
Life, too, whose end I do not fear.)]