

Introduction

Charles de Saint Denis, Lord of Saint-Evremond, Marshal of France, was one of the few distinguished Frenchmen, exiled by Louis XIV, whose distinguished abilities as a warrior and philosopher awarded him a last resting place in Westminster Abbey. His tomb, surmounted by a marble bust, is situated in the nave near the cloister, located among those of Barrow, Chaucer, Spenser, Cowley and other renowned Englishmen.

His epitaph, written by the hand of a Briton, is singularly replete with the most eminent qualities, which the great men of his period recognized in him, though his life was extraordinarily long and stormy. He was moreover, a profound admirer of Ninon de l'Enclos during his long career, and he did much toward shaping her philosophy, and enabling her to understand the human heart in all its eccentricities, and how to regulate properly the passion of love.

During his long exile in England, the two corresponded at times, and the letters here given are the fragments of a voluminous correspondence, the greater part of which has been lost. They are to be found in the un-translated collated works of Saint-Evremond, and are very curious, inasmuch as they were written when Ninon and Saint-Evremond were in their eighties.

Saint-Evremond always claimed, that his extremely long and vigorous life was due to the same causes which Ninon de l'Enclos attributed to her great age – that is, to an unflagging zeal in observing the doctrines of the Epicurean philosophy. These ideas appear in his letter to Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, written to her under the sobriquet of “Leontium,” and which is translated and appended to this correspondence.

As an evidence of Saint-Evremond's unimpaired faculties at a great age, the charms of his person attracted the attention of the Duchess of Sandwich, one of the beauties of the English Court, and she became so enamored of him, that a liaison was the result, which lasted until the time of Saint-Evremond's death. They were like two young lovers just beginning their career, instead of a youth over eighty years of age, and a maiden who had passed forty. Such attachments were not uncommon among persons who lived calm, philosophical lives; their very manner of living inspiring tender regard, as was the case of the great affection of the Marquis de Sévigné, who although quite young, and his rank an attraction to the great beauties of the Court, nevertheless aspired to capture the heart of Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, who was over sixty years of age. What Ninon thought about the matter, appears in her letters on the preceding pages.