

# **THE STORY OF MY CHILDHOOD**

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The Story of My Childhood by J. Michelet

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**J. MICHELET**

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MY CHILDHOOD**



THE STORY

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OF

MY CHILDHOOD.

BY

Athanasie Michellet

MADAME & MICHELET.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

MARY FRAZIER CURTIS.

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## DEDICATION

TO THE AUTHOR'S HUSBAND.\*

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HERE is the story for which you so often asked me, and which I have had pleasure in writing for you.

Of my far-off childhood, "L'Oiseau" gathered but the smiles; and now you ask for all,— its aspirations, its dreams, and its griefs.

Accept, then, my Past, obscure sometimes through tears. Take, too, another, better tribute, truly worthy of yourself. With the child's, take also her father's heart, which is enshrined within this little book. For, in so loving him, already I loved you.

OCTOBER, 1866.

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\* M. J. MICHELET, author of "L'Histoire de France," "L'Amour," "La Femme," "L'Oiseau," &c.

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## INTRODUCTION

BY THE TRANSLATOR.

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**T**HE autobiography of Madame Michelet, if the translator judges rightly, will prove itself to be the sweetest picture of child-life — and the strangest — that has ever been offered to New-England readers.

Recollections of childhood, unless they exhibit, as in the present work, the germ and the growth of sentiments belonging to a maturer age, are but too commonly insipid to all but the individuals with whom they originate. We have here an example of the development of noble affections, whose history is closed with the period of infancy and early youth. Lovely as these are, their charm is incomplete without a knowledge of their sequel. I mean the child's love of Nature and her filial devotion, which were inseparably connected in the beginning, and were prolonged

into after-life, with singular felicity, in those works upon natural history, which, although published under the name of her illustrious husband, owe their initiative to the suggestion of Madame Michélet, and many of their pages directly to her pen.

The character of her father, and its ever-present influence upon herself, she has delineated in language so graceful, that it asks no commentary. She was the child of his later years, and his tenderness was the only consolation of her melancholy childhood; for even childhood can be made to suffer precociously.

In their secluded home, the recital by himself of her father's formerly eventful life was, during many years, the only food of her imagination. The eloquent narrator spoke of Toussaint at St. Domingo, and of Napoléon at Elba; passing, as the former has himself expressed it, "from the first of black men to the first of whites." After the downfall of the Empire, he sought refuge on the borders of the Mississippi, whence he brought back to France a young and beautiful wife.

In America he was destined to end his days. His family, who had remained behind, were dispersed; and his daughter's subsequent history has been thus resumed in the introductory portion of the little work called "L'Oiseau:" —

“Wounded to the heart, I also left the paternal roof: my mother, my sister, my brothers, the friendships of my childhood, all had disappeared. I entered on a life of trial and of loneliness. At first I lived at Bayonne, and the waves rolling from America to break along the coast seemed to image forth my father’s death. The white sea-birds came to tell me they had seen him.

“What was left to me? Only my native land, my native air; and these I was soon forced to leave. My way lay northward, to listen to a foreign tongue, and dwell under a hostile sky, in a land where the earth wears mourning for six months in the year. During the long winter, when even my imagination was extinguished by my failing health, I could only with great difficulty recall the idea of a southern clime. In default of any other little pet which might have consoled me, I made friends of two little turtle-doves, reminding me of those which my mother had loved so much. They knew me, were fond of me, and made themselves happy at my fireside. There was no summer in my heart; but I offered them a semblance of it.

“Deeply stricken, I became dangerously ill: I believed myself to be very near to the unknown world. However friendly and attentive I had proved a foreign hospitality to be, I desired nothing more than a return to France. Most affectionate care, and a marriage which seemed to restore my father’s love and his protecting arm, yet failed for a long time to bring me back to the life of this world. I had looked upon death so nearly, or rather had already gone so far beyond its gates, that nature itself, the living creation, that first love of