



Ernestine's Memories

TRESOR D'ARCHIVES n°13

When we open the boxes in the Archives containing the documents related to the life of Marie Eugenie, we discover unexpected treasures. In box no. 2, in particular, are hidden her childhood memories: Marie Eugenie's letters to her cousins, documents evoking her visits to Lorraine and her visits to Preisch after the foundation, letters from her brothers or the spiritual testament of her father, a fairly extensive correspondence with childhood friends or their family. Among these many documents, witnesses of history, we find pages written by a fragile hand, which seem quite old... They are covered with a fine and trembling handwriting and speak to us of the young Anne Eugenie... It is Ernestine's testimony!

Who is Ernestine Pruneau? She had the great joy of being the childhood friend and cousin of Anne Eugenie, of running with her in the streets of Metz or in the woods of Preisch. This article suggests that we go over this touching testimony of Ernestine and stop to read a few passages. Ernestine's words speak for themselves. Let's listen to it! (cf. Archives of the Religious of the Assumption, MO 1 a)

Children's games

"As far back as I can remember in Metz, in a large house on Rue aux Ours where my mother lived with her parents and her children, the kind Eugenie de Brou came to stay with us. Her mother, related to mine, wanted to entrust her to us during a business trip she was to make to Paris (...) A second small bed was put in my room and we went to sleep side by side. What good chats, what fresh bursts of laughter morning and evening! After our prayer together and offering our hearts to God, what a peaceful sleep!"

"We were given permission to go and have our antics in a large hall located very close to the apartment. We settled there with joy, taking our study books and also old fairy tales that we read after working for a long time. Our favorite book—All is in Everything Method—was its introduction. For languages it was perfect. From then on, Eugenie spoke German correctly. In the evening, when my sister and my brother came home in the evening, and also a cousin who has since become a scholar and had kept the best memories of little Eugenie, I say, we played noisier games..."

The celebration and reception when Anne Eugenie's father was appointed MP

"I remember this din of bells ringing, this crowd of greeters coming to announce the honorable news. All of Metz was there. I can still see the happy but calm face of the good young girl. In her

place, I said to myself, I would absolutely lose my mind, I would be so proud, I would hardly think of my little friend and the rubber ball game installed from the top to the bottom of the stairs! She, on the contrary, did me the honors and did not want to let me miss a single game."

"Stagecoaches, coaches, etc., followed in number. Everything had been superbly organized by my friend's mother who combined kindness of heart and a most brilliant mind with an ability as an unparalleled hostess. (...) My good friend dressed in a simple white dress was having fun with all her heart, jumping, frolicking while hearing this good orchestra."

"Eugenie, always perfect and cheerfully resigned to the little annoyances of life, laughed heartily to put an end to my eternal grumbling and urged me to review our past glories instead of seeking an impossible sleep: travel, concert, ball, the conversation of kind guests who had not disdained to chat with two little girls like us, our return to Metz which would be a very amusing new trip, etc."

Human Virtues

Joy and frankness: *"Eugenie, of a frank and cheerful nature, had a great deal of sense for her age and exquisite tactfulness. How often did I perceive that she did me good during her occasional short stays with us; with a word she stopped the mockery, made me obedient, me very independent. Her example influenced even the most scatterbrain."*

Kindness: *"I remember during our games the traits of kindness of my dear Eugenie. I had a broken leg, and I often had to sit and watch the others when they ran and jumped, but with only one leg I could do like the others and maybe better, that was what which is called "hopping on one leg" (...) When Eugenie saw me a little sad, she raised her voice and said: 'come on, let's play Ernestine' (...) I never thanked her for it but deep in my heart, I appreciated this dear child!"*

Finesse and honesty: *"I also remember a little conversation on the fairground in front of a toy store... We admired the toys and Eugenie told me that once, a gentleman they knew wanted her to choose something very expensive, she said to me 'I pretended that I did not like this toy, but that I ardently desired a skipping rope of 1 franc 25 [this sum is not high], he bought it for me and like that I have never abused his generosity!" I was very surprised and later I understood her finesse."*

Reading these lines written by Ernestine, we seem to see a film about Anne Eugenie's childhood. We walk with her on the Street aux Ours, the Street Pierre Hardie, the Street Haut Poirier in Metz and we take a breath of fresh air looking out the windows of the castle of Preisch. We note above all that she was already animated by these natural virtues which will be a lever of education at the Assumption.

The faithful friendship

Ernestine was part of a group of friends that Marie Eugenie greatly appreciated and met again in 1837 during a stay in Lorraine. Here is what she says about it: "I am at the moment, in a house which I really like; they help me, perhaps too much; I find there three childhood friends and their mother, who was particularly good to me in sad moments of my past life. They are women of heart; there is one of them who would willingly follow me into religious life, but I do not believe she is called to it. They were all like me, saddened, lukewarm by an entourage of unbelieving men and by the influence of those boarding houses in Paris where faith is barely visible. They breathe to find themselves with someone in front of whom they have nothing good to hide; my faith strengthens theirs and we get along well. Only, they believe me much better than I am, because I speak much better than I act. Sometimes I want to laugh at the way we go from our serious conversations to the games and laughter of the boarders, and to the memories of our early childhood, our quarrels and our pleasures." (Marie Eugenie, Letter to Father Combalot n°5, August 24, 1837)

In fact, Josephine Néron, to whom Marie Eugenie alludes in this letter, tried to join the group of young foundresses, but she did not pursue the path.

It is a fact that Anne Eugenie Milleret, Ernestine Pruneau, Josephine Néron, Adèle, Marie, or the other Ernestine (who will become Madame Rupied and will welcome the Sisters in the port of Dieppe when they have to take the boat) became adult women. They keep, however, between them, this joyful confidence of childhood which makes them feel good. They will always be ready to help each other in the twists and turns of life.

Marie Eugenie who, as we have seen through Ernestine's testimony, already showed a certain number of natural virtues when she was a child, is always surprised that her friends recognize these qualities in her. Thus, she wrote to Father d'Alzon: "Would you believe, Father, that a childhood friend whom I had not seen since the age of 15 told me that she still found me a model of obedience? It was my virtue, she said, to do everything I was told scrupulously, even long after, even when it upset me the most, and that without comment." (Marie Eugenie, Letter to Father d'Alzon n°1592, September 12, 1843)

She keeps, in any case, with her childhood friends, a special bond, as evidenced by this letter addressed to Marie Poujoulat: "Your beautiful sky inspires you and sanctifies you: yes, certainly, dear Marie, I would like to be there with you. I had never felt so much as before the harmony which our souls take on as they mature, and which makes itself felt to me much more urgently than the very friendship of our beautiful childhood days. I was happy to have seen you before your departure, and if it were possible for me to form a desire outside the enclosure where duty encloses them, certainly, my dear Marie, I would like to join the care of my old friendship to those of your new family. And as she felt weak, she recognized that the confidence of the childhood friend had a therapeutic virtue: "It's only with you, my dear Marie, that a long conversation did me good. Wasn't the doctor right in saying that my heart was the master of my health? (Marie Eugenie, Letter to Madame Marie Poujoulat, n°4051, October 18, 1843)

Marie Eugenie seems so close to us through these evocations of her childhood. She repeats to us that human relationships are a gift from God and that we must nurture, throughout our lives, these friendships that God gives us to relish in them a confidence that speaks of the Gospel.

Letters from my mother

In the same "treasure box" is an old envelope bearing an inscription by Marie Eugenie herself: "Letters from my mother". These are the letters that Madame Milleret sent to Caroline, Ernestine Pruneau's mother, in 1831-1832, when the Milleret family was going through the difficult times of bankruptcy. Madame Pruneau and Madame Milleret were friends and confidants. Thanks to these letters, we discover the dark events of those years and the female outlook on this ordeal. This will be the subject of an upcoming Archive Treasure!

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Illustrations:

- 1: testimony of Ernestine Pruneau
- 2: Testimony of Ernestine Pruneau on the year 1830
- 3: Birth certificate of Anne Eugenie
- 4: Title of the document on the genealogy of Marie Eugenie
- 5: Old inventory