

Memoirs of Madame de Montespan — Volume 2 eBook

Memoirs of Madame de Montespan — Volume 2

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Being the Historic Memoirs of the Court of Louis XIV.

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XVII.

Monsieur's Jealousy.—Diplomacy.—Discretion.—The Chevalier de Lorraine's Revenge.—The King's Suspicions.—His Indignation.—Public Version of the Matter.—The Funeral Sermon.

After six months of wedlock, Henrietta of England had become so beautiful that the King drew every one's attention to this change, as if he were not unmindful of the fact that he had given this charming person to his brother instead of reserving her for himself by marrying her.

Between cousins german attentions are permissible. The Court, however, was not slow to notice the attentions paid by the King to this young English princess, and Monsieur, wholly indifferent though he was as regarded his wife, deemed it a point of honour to appear offended thereat. Ever a slave to the laws of good breeding, the King showed much self-sacrifice in curbing this violent infatuation of his. (I was Madame's maid of honour at the time.) As he contemplated a Dutch expedition, in which the help of England would have counted for much, he resolved to send a negotiator to King Charles. The young Princess was her brother's pet; it was upon her that the King's choice fell.

She crossed the Channel under the pretext of paying a flying visit to her native country and her brother, but, in reality, it was to treat of matters of the utmost importance.

Upon her return, Monsieur, the most curious and inquisitive of mortals, importuned her in a thousand ways, seeking to discover her secret; but she was a person both faithful and discreet. Of her interview and journey he got only such news as was already published on the housetops. At such reticence he took umbrage; he grumbled, sulked, and would not speak to his wife.

The Chevalier de Lorraine, who in that illustrious and luckless household was omnipotent, insulted the Princess in the most outrageous manner. Finding such daily slights and affronts unbearable, Madame complained to the Kings of France and England, who both exiled the Chevalier.

Monsieur de Lorraine d'Armagnac, before leaving, gave instructions to Morel, one of Monsieur's kitchen officials, to poison the Princess, and this monster promptly executed the order by rubbing poison on her silver goblet.



I no longer belonged to Madame's household,—my marriage had caused a change in my duties; but ever feeling deep attachment for this adorable princess, I hastened to Saint Cloud directly news reached me of her illness. To my horror, I saw the sudden change which had come over her countenance; her horrible agony drew tears from the most callous, and approaching her I kissed her hand, in spite of her confessor, who sought to constrain her to be silent. She then repeatedly told me that she was dying from the effects of poison.

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This she also told the King, whom she perceived shed tears of consternation and distress.

That evening, at Versailles, the King said to me, "If this crime is my brother's handiwork, his head shall fall on the scaffold."

When the body was opened, proof of poison was obtained, and poison of the most corrosive sort, for the stomach was eaten into in three places, and there was general inflammation.

The King summoned his brother, in order to force him to explain so heinous a crime. On perceiving his mien, Monsieur became pale and confused. Rushing upon him sword in hand, the King was for demolishing him on the spot. The captain of the guard hastened thither, and Monsieur swore by the Holy Ghost that he was guiltless of the death of his dear wife.

Leaving him a prey to remorse, if guilty he were, the King commanded him to withdraw, and then shut himself up in his closet to prepare a consolatory message to the English Court. According to the written statement, which was also published in the newspapers, Madame had been carried off by an attack of bilious colic. Five or six bribed physicians certified to that effect, and a lying set of depositions, made for mere form's sake, bore out their statements in due course.

The Abbe de Bossuet, charged to preach the funeral sermon, was apparently desirous of being as obliging as the doctors. His homily led off with such fulsome praise of Monsieur, that, from that day forward, he lost all his credit, and sensible people thereafter only looked upon him as a vile sycophant, a mere dealer in flattery and fairy-tales.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Madame Scarron.—Her Petition.—The King's Aversion to Her.—She is Presented to Madame de Montespan.—The Queen of Portugal Thinks of Engaging Her.—Madame de Montespan Keeps Her Back.—The Pension Continued.—The King's Graciousness.—Rage of Mademoiselle d'Aumale.

As all the pensions granted by the Queen-mother had ceased at her demise, the pensioners began to solicit the ministers anew, and all the petitions, as is customary, were sent direct to the King.

One day his Majesty said to me, "Have you ever met in society a young widow, said to be very pretty, but, at the same time, extremely affected? It is to Madame Scarron that I allude, who, both before and after widowhood, has resided at the Marais."



I replied that Madame Scarron was an extremely pleasant person, and not at all affected. I had met her at the Richelieus' or the Albrets', where her charm of manner and agreeable wit had made her in universal request. I added a few words of recommendation concerning her petition, which, unfortunately, had just been torn up, and the King curtly rejoined, "You surprise me, madame; the portrait I had given to me of her was a totally different one."

That same evening, when the young Marquis d'Alincour spoke to me about this petition which had never obtained any answer, I requested him to go and see Madame Scarron as soon as possible, and tell her that, in her own interest, I should be pleased to receive her.

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She lost no time in paying me a visit. Her black attire served only to heighten the astounding whiteness of her complexion. Effusively thanking me for interesting myself in her most painful case, she added:

“There is, apparently, some obstacle against me. I have presented two petitions and two memoranda; being unsupported, both have been left unanswered, and I have now just made the following resolve, madame, of which you will not disapprove. M. Scarron, apparently well off, had only a life interest in his property. Upon his death, his debts proved in excess of his capital, and I, deeming it my duty to respect his intentions and his memory, paid off everybody, and left myself nothing. To-day, Madame la Princesse de Nemours wishes me to accompany her to Lisbon as her secretary, or rather as her friend.

“Being about to acquire supreme power as a sovereign, she intends, by some grand marriage, to keep me there, and then appoint me her lady-in-waiting.”

“And you submit without a murmur to such appalling exile?” I said to Madame Scarron. “Is such a pretty, charming person as yourself fitted for a Court of that kind, and for such an odd sort of climate?”

“Madame, I have sought to shut my eyes to many things, being solely conscious of the horribly forlorn condition in which I find myself in my native country.”

“Have you reckoned the distance? Did the Princess confess that she was going to carry you off to the other end of the world? For her city of Lisbon, surrounded by precipices, is more than three hundred leagues from Paris.”

“At the age of three I voyaged to America, returning hither when I was eleven.”

“I am vexed with Mademoiselle d’Aumale—

[Mademoiselle d’Aumale, daughter of the Duc de Nemours, of the House of Savoy. She was a blonde, pleasant-mannered enough, but short of stature. Her head was too big for her body; and this head of hers was full of conspiracies and coups d’etat. She dethroned her husband in order to marry his brother.—*Editor’s Note.*]

for wanting to rob us of so charming a treasure. But has she any right to act in this way? Do you think her capable of contributing to your pleasure or your happiness? This young Queen of Portugal, under the guise of good-humour, hides a violent and irascible temperament. I believe her to be thoroughly selfish; suppose that she neglects and despises you, after having profited by your company to while away the tedium of her journey? Take my word for it, madame, you had better stay here with us; for there is no real society but in France, no wit but in our great world, no real happiness but in

Paris. Draw up another petition as quickly as possible, and send it to me. I will present it myself, and to tell you this is tantamount to a promise that your plea shall succeed.”

Mademoiselle d’Aubigne, all flushed with emotion, assured me of her gratitude with the ingenuous eloquence peculiar to herself. We embraced as two friends of the Albret set should do, and three days later, the King received a new petition, not signed with the name of Scarron, but with that of D’Aubigne.

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The pension of two thousand francs, granted three years before her death by the Queen-mother, was renewed. Madame Scarron had the honour of making her courtesy to the King, who thought her handsome, but grave in demeanour, and in a loud, clear voice, he said to her, "Madame, I kept you waiting; I was jealous of your friends."

The Queen of Portugal knew that I had deprived her of her secretary, fellow-gossip, reader, Spanish teacher, stewardess, confidante, and lady-in-waiting. She wrote to me complaining about this, and on taking leave of the King to go and reign in Portugal, she said, with rather a forced air of raillery:

"I shall hate you as long as I live, and if ever you do me the honour of paying me a visit some day at Lisbon, I'll have you burned for your pains."

Then she wanted to embrace me, as if we were equals, but this I deprecated as much from aversion as from respect.

CHAPTER XIX.

La Fontaine.—Boileau.—Moliere.—Corneille.—Louis XIV.'s Opinion of Each of Them.

The King's studies with his preceptor, Perefuxe, had been of only a superficial sort, as, in accordance with the express order of the Queen-mother, this prelate had been mainly concerned about the health of his pupil, the Queen being, above all, desirous that he should have a good constitution. "The rest comes easily enough, if a prince have but nobility of soul and a sense of duty," as the Queen often used to say. Her words came true.

I came across several Spanish and Italian books in the library of the little apartments. The "Pastor Fido," "Aminta," and the "Gerusalemme" seemed to me, at first, to be the favourite works. Then came Voiture's letters, the writings of Malherbe and De Balzac, the Fables of La Fontaine, the Satires of Boileau, and the delightful comedies of Moliere. Corneille's tragedies had been read, but not often.

Until I came to Court, I had always looked upon Corneille as the greatest tragic dramatist in the world, and as the foremost of our poets and men of letters. The King saved me from this error.

Book in hand, he pointed out to me numberless faults of style, incoherent and fantastic imagery, sentiment alike exaggerated and a thousand leagues removed from nature. He considered, and still considers, Pierre Corneille to be a blind enthusiast of the ancients, whom we deem great since we do not know them. In his eyes, this declamatory poet was a republican more by virtue of his head than his heart or his intention,—one of those men more capricious than morose, who cannot reconcile

themselves to what exists, and prefer to fall back upon bygone generations, not knowing how to live like friendly folk among their contemporaries.

He liked La Fontaine better, by reason of his extreme naturalness, but his unbecoming conduct at the time of the Fouquet trial proved painful to his Majesty, who considered the following verses passing strange:

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“. . . Trust not in kings Their favour is but slippery; worse than that, It costs one dear, and errors such as these Full oft bring shame and scandal in their wake.”

“Long live Moliere!” added his Majesty; “there you have talent without artifice, poetry without rhapsody, satire without bitterness, pleasantry that is always apt, great knowledge of the human heart, and perpetual raillery that yet is not devoid of delicacy and compassion. Moliere is a most charming man in every respect; I gave him a few hints for his ‘Tartuffe,’ and such is his gratitude that he wants to make out that, without me, he would never have written that masterpiece.”

“You helped him, Sire, to produce it, and above all things, to carry out his main idea; and Moliere is right in thinking that, without a mind free from error, such as is yours, his masterpiece would never have been created.”

“It struck me,” continued the King, “that some such thing was indispensable as a counterbalance in the vast machinery of my government, and I shall ever be the friend and supporter, not of Tartuffes, but of the ‘Tartuffe,’ as long as I live.”

“And Boileau, Sire?” I continued; “what place among your favourites does he fill?”

“I like Boileau,” replied the prince, “as a necessary scourge, which one can pit against the bad taste of second-rate authors. His satires, of too personal a nature, and consequently iniquitous, do not please me. He knows it, and, despite himself, he will amend this. He is at work upon an ‘Ars Poetica,’ after the manner of Horace. The little that he has read to me of this poem leads me to expect that it will be an important work. The French language will continue to perfect itself by the help of literature like this, and Boileau, cruel though he be, is going to confer a great benefit upon all those who have to do with letters.”

CHAPTER XX.

Birth of the Comte de Vegin.—Madame Scarron as Governess.—The King’s Continued Dislike of Her.—Birth of the Duc du Maine.—Marriage of the Nun.

The King became ever more attached to me personally, as also to the peculiarities of my temperament. He had witnessed with satisfaction the birth of Madame de la Valliere’s two children, and I thought that he would have the same affection for mine. But I was wrong. It was with feelings of trepidation and alarm that he contemplated my approaching confinement. Had I given birth to a daughter, I am perfectly certain that, in his eyes, I should have been done for.

I gave birth to the first Comte de Vegin, and, grasping my hand affectionately, the King said to me, “Be of good courage, madame; present princes to the Crown, and let those

be scandalised who will!" A few moments later he came back, and gave me a million for my expenses.

It was, however, mutually arranged that the newborn Infant should be recognised later on, and that, for the time being, I was to have him brought up in secrecy and mystery.

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When dissuading Madame Scarron from undertaking a journey to Lisbon, I had my own private ends in view. I considered her peculiarly fitted to superintend the education of the King's children, and to maintain with success the air of mysterious reserve which for a while was indispensable to me. I deputed my brother, M. de Vivonne, to acquaint her with my proposals,—proposals which came from the King as well,—nor did I doubt for one moment as regarded her consent and complacency, being, as she was, alone in Paris.

“Madame,” said M. de Vivonne to her, “the Marquise is overjoyed at being able to offer you an important position of trust, which will change your life once for all.”

“The gentle, quiet life which, thanks to the kindness of the King, I now lead, is all that my ambition can desire,” replied the widow, concealing her trouble from my brother; “but since the King wishes and commands it, I will renounce the liberty so dear to me, and will not hesitate to obey.”

Accordingly she came. The King had a few moments' parley with her, in order to explain to her all his intentions relative to the new life upon which she was about to enter, and M. Bontems—[First Groom of the Chamber, and Keeper of the Privy Purse.]—furnished her with the necessary funds for establishing her household in suitable style.

A month afterwards, I went incognito to her lonely residence, situate amid vast kitchen-gardens between Vaugirard and the Luxembourg. The house was clean, commodious, thoroughly well appointed, and, not being overlooked by neighbours, the secret could but be safely kept. Madame Scarron's domestics included two nurses, a waiting-maid, a physician, a courier, two footmen, a coachman, a postilion, and two cooks.

Being provided with an excellent coach, she came to Saint Germain every week, to bring me my son, or else news of his welfare.

Her habitually sad expression somewhat pained the King. As I soon noticed their mutual embarrassment, I used to let Madame Scarron stay in an inner room all the time that his Majesty remained with me.

In the following year, I gave birth to the Duc du Maine. Mademoiselle d'Aubigne, who was waiting in the drawing-room, wrapped the child up carefully, and took it away from Paris with all speed.

On her way she met with an adventure, comic in itself, and which mortified her much. When told of it, I laughed not a little; and, in spite of all my excuses and expressions of regret, she always felt somewhat sore about this; in fact, she never quite got over it.

Between Marly and Ruel, two mounted police officers, in pursuit of a nun who had escaped from a convent, bethought themselves of looking inside Madame Scarron's carriage. Such inquisitiveness surprised her, and she put on her mask, and drew down the blinds. Observing that she was closely followed by these soldiers, she gave a signal to her coachman, who instantly whipped up his horses, and drove at a furious rate.

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At Nanterre the gendarmes, being reinforced, cried out to the coachman to stop, and obliged Madame Scarron to get out. She was taken to a tavern close by, where they asked her to remove her mask. She made various excuses for not doing so, but at the mention of the lieutenant-general of police, she had to give in.

"Madame," inquired the brigadier, "have you not been in a nunnery?"

"Pray, monsieur, why do you ask?"

"Be good enough to answer me, madame; repeat my question, and I insist upon a reply. I have received instructions that I shall not hesitate to carry out."

"I have lived with nuns, but that, monsieur, was a long while ago."

"It is not a question of time. What was your motive for leaving these ladies, and who enabled you to do so?"

"I left the convent after my first communion. I left it openly, and of my own free will. Pray be good enough to allow me to continue my journey."

"On leaving the convent, where did you go?"

"First to one of my relatives, then to another, and at last to Paris, where I got married."

"Married? What, madame, are you married? Oh, young lady, what behaviour is this? Your simple, modest mien plainly shows what you were before this marriage. But why did you want to get married?"

As he said this, the little Duc du Maine, suffering, perhaps, from a twinge of colic, began to cry. The brigadier, more amazed than ever, ordered the infant to be shown as well.

Seeing that she could make no defence, Madame Scarron began to shed tears, and the officer, touched to pity, said:

"Madame, I am sorry for your fault, for, as I see, you are a good mother. My orders are to take you to prison, and thence to the convent specified by the archbishop, but I warn you that if we catch the father of your child, he will hang. As for you, who have been seduced, and who belong to a good family, tell me one of your relatives with whom you are on friendly terms, and I will undertake to inform them of your predicament."

Madame Scarron, busy in soothing the Duc du Maine, durst not explain for fear of aggravating matters, but begged the brigadier to take her back to Saint Germain.

At this juncture my brother arrived on his way back to Paris. He recognised the carriage, which stood before the inn, with a crowd of peasants round it, and hastened to

rescue the governess, for he soon succeeded in persuading these worthy police officers that the sobbing dame was not a runaway nun, and that the new-born infant came of a good stock.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Saint Denis View.—Superstitions, Apparitions.—Projected Enlargement of Versailles.—Fresh Victims for Saint Denis.

One evening I was walking at the far end of the long terrace of Saint Germain. The King soon came thither, and pointing to Saint Denis, said, "That, madame, is a gloomy, funereal view, which makes me displeased and disgusted with this residence, fine though it be."

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"Sire," I replied, "in no other spot could a more magnificent view be found. Yonder river winding afar through the vast plain, that noble forest divided by hunting roads into squares, that Calvary poised high in air, those bridges placed here and there to add to the attractiveness of the landscape, those flowery meadows set in the foreground as a rest to the eye, the broad stream of the Seine, which seemingly is fain to flow at a slower rate below your palace windows,—I do not think that any more charming combination of objects could be met with elsewhere, unless one went a long way from the capital."

"The chateau of Saint Germain no longer pleases me," replied the King. "I shall enlarge Versailles and withdraw thither. What I am going to say may astonish you, perhaps, as it comes from me, who am neither a whimsical female nor a prey to superstition. A few days before the Queen, my mother, had her final seizure, I was walking here alone in this very spot. A reddish light appeared above the monastery of Saint Denis, and a cloud which rose out of the ruddy glare assumed the shape of a hearse bearing the arms of Austria. A few days afterwards my poor mother was removed to Saint Denis. Four or five days before the horrible death of our adorable Henrietta, the arrows of Saint Denis appeared to me in a dream covered in dusky flames, and amid them I saw the spectre of Death, holding in his hand the necklaces and bracelets of a young lady. The appalling death of my cousin followed close upon this presage. Henceforth, the view of Saint Denis spoils all these pleasant landscapes for me. At Versailles fewer objects confront the eye; a park of that sort has its own wealth of natural beauty, which suffices. I shall make Versailles a delightful resort, for which France will be grateful to me, and which my successors can neither neglect nor destroy without bringing to themselves dishonour."

I sympathised with the reasons which made Saint Germain disagreeable to his Majesty. Next summer the causes for such aversion became more numerous, as the King had the misfortune to lose the daughters which the Queen bore him, and they were carried to Saint Denis.

CHAPTER XXII.

M. de Lauzun.—His Pretensions.—Erroneous Ideas of the Public.—The War in Candia.—M. de Lauzun Thinks He Will Secure a Throne for Himself.—The King Does Not Wish This.

The Marquis de Guilain de Lauzun was, and still is, one of the handsomest men at Court. Before my marriage, vanity prompted him to belong to the list of my suitors, but as his reputation in Paris was that of a man who had great success with the ladies, my family requested him either to come to the point or to retire, and he withdrew, though unwilling to break matters off altogether.

When he saw me in the bonds of matrimony, and enjoying its liberty, he recommenced his somewhat equivocal pursuit of me, and managed to get himself talked about at my expense. Society was unjust; M. de Lauzun only dared to pay me homage of an insipid sort. He had success enough in other quarters, and I knew what I owed to some one as well as what I owed to myself.

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Ambition is the Marquis's ruling passion. The simple role of a fine gentleman is, in his eyes, but a secondary one; his Magnificency requires a far more exalted platform than that.

When he knew that war in Candia had broken out, and which side the kings of Christendom would necessarily take, his ideas became more exalted still. He bethought himself of the strange fortunes of certain valiant warriors in the time of the Crusades. He saw that the Lorraines, the Bouillons, and the Lusignans had won sceptres and crowns, and he flattered himself that the name of Lauzun might in this vast adventurous career gain glory too.

He begged me to get him a command in this army of Candia, wherein the King had just permitted his own kinsmen to go and win laurels for themselves. He was already a full colonel of dragoons, and one of the captains of the guard. The King, who till then liked him well enough, considered such a proposition indecent, and, gauging or not gauging his intentions, he postponed until a later period these aspirations of Lauzun to the post of prince or sovereign.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Abbe d'Estrees.—Singular Offers of Service.—Madame de Montespan Declines His Offer of Intercession at the Vatican.—He Revenges Himself upon the King of Portugal.—Difference between a Fair Man and a Dark.

Since the reign of Gabrielle d'Estrees, who died just as she was about to espouse her King, the D'Estrees family were treated at Court more with conventional favour than with esteem. The first of that name was lieutenant-general, destined to wield the baton of a French marshal, on account of his ancestry as well as his own personal merit. The Abbe d'Estrees passed for being in the Church what M. de Lauzun was in society,—a man who always met with success, and who also was madly ambitious.

While still very young, he had been appointed to the bishopric of Laon, which, in conjunction with two splendid abbeys, brought him in a handsome revenue. The Duc and Duchesse de Vendome were as fond of him as one of their own kin, doing nothing without first consulting him, everywhere praising and extolling his abilities, which were worthy of a ministry.

This prelate desired above all things to be made a cardinal. Under Henri IV. he could easily have had his wish, but at that time he was not yet born. He imagined that on the strength of my credit he could procure the biretta for himself.

As soon as he saw me recognised as a mistress, he paid assiduous court to me, never losing an opportunity of everywhere sounding my praise. One day he said to me:



“Madame, every one pities you on account of the vexation and grief which the Marquis de Montespan has caused you. If you will confide in me,—that is, if you will let me represent your interests with the Cardinals and the Holy Father,—I heartily offer you my services as mediator and advocate

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with regard to the question of nullity. At an early age I studied theology and ecclesiastical law. Your marriage may be considered null and void, according to this or that point of view. You know that upon the death of the Princesse de Nemours, Mademoiselle de Nemours and Mademoiselle d'Aumale, her two daughters, came to reside with Madame de Vendome, my cousin, a relative and a friend of their mother. The eldest I first of all married to Duc Charles de Lorraine, heir to the present Duc de Lorraine. His Majesty did not approve of this marriage, which was contrary to his politics. His Majesty deigned to explain himself and open out to me upon the subject. I at once consulted my books, and found all the means necessary for dissolving such a marriage. So true, indeed is this, that I forthwith remarried Mademoiselle de Nemours to the Duc de Savoie. This took place under your very eyes. Soon afterwards I married her younger sister to the King of Portugal, and accompanied her to Lisbon, where the Portuguese gave her a fairly warm reception. Her young husband is tall and fair, with a pleasant, distinguished face; he loves his wife, and is only moderately beloved in return. Is she wrong or is she right? Now, I will tell you. The monarch is well-made, but a childish infirmity has left one whole side of him somewhat weak, and he limps. Mademoiselle d'Aumale, or to speak more correctly, the Queen of Portugal, writes letter upon letter to me, describing her situation. She believed herself pregnant, and had even announced the news to Madame de Vendome, as well as to Madame de Savoie, her sister. Now it appears that this is not the case. She is vexed and disgusted. I am about to join her at Lisbon. She is inclined to place the crown upon the young brother of the King, requesting the latter to seek the seclusion of a monastery. I can see that this new idea of the youthful Queen's will necessitate my visiting the Vatican. Allow me, madame, to have charge of your interests. Do not have the slightest fear but that I shall protect them zealously and intelligently, killing thus two birds with one stone."

"Pray accept my humble thanks," I replied to the Bishop. "The reigning Sovereign Pontiff has never shown me any favour whatever, and is in nowise one of my friends. What you desire to do for me at Rome deserves some signal mark of gratitude in return, but I cannot get you a cardinal's hat, for a thousand reasons.

"Mademoiselle de Nemours, when leaving us, promised to hate me as long as she lived, and to have me burnt at an 'auto da fe' whenever she got the chance. Do not let her know that you have any regard for me, or you might lose her affection.

"I hope that the weak side of her husband, the King, may get stronger, and that you will not help to put the young monarch in a convent of monks.

"In any case, my lord Bishop, do not breathe it to a living soul that you have told me of such strange resolutions as these; for my own part, I will safely keep your secret, and pray God to have you in his holy keeping."

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The Bishop of Laon was not a man to be rebuffed by pleasantries such as this. He declared the King of Portugal to be impotent, after what the Queen had expressly stated. The Pope annulled the marriage, and the Queen courageously wedded her husband's brother, who had no congenital weakness of any sort, and who was, as every one knew, of dark complexion.

At the request of the Queen, the Bishop of Laon was afterwards presented with the hat, and is, today, my lord Cardinal d'Estrees.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mademoiselle de Valois.—Mademoiselle d'Orleans.—Mademoiselle d'Alencon.—M. de Savoie.—His Love-letters.—His Marriage with Mademoiselle de Valois.—M. de Guise and Mademoiselle d'Alencon.—Their Marriage Ceremony.—Madame de Montespan's Dog.—Mademoiselle d'Orleans.—Her Marriage with the Duke of Tuscany.—The Bishop de Bonzy.

By his second wife, Marguerite de Lorraine, Gaston de France had three daughters, and being devoid of energy, ability, or greatness of character, they did not object when the King married them to sovereigns of the third-rate order.

Upon these three marriages I should like to make some remarks, on account of certain singular details connected therewith, and because of the joking to which they gave rise.

Mademoiselle de Montpensier had flatly refused the Duc de Savoie, because Madame de Savoie, daughter of Henri IV., was still living, ruling her estate like a woman of authority; and therefore, to this stepmother, a king's daughter, Mademoiselle had to give way, she being but the daughter of a French prince who died in disgrace and was forgotten.

Being refused by the elder princess, M. de Savoie, still quite young, sought the hand of her sister, Mademoiselle de Valois. He wrote her a letter which, unfortunately, was somewhat singular in style, and which, unfortunately too, fell into the hands of Mademoiselle de Montpensier. Like her late father, Gaston, she plumed herself upon her wit and eloquence; she caused several copies of the effusion to be printed and circulated at Court. I will include it in these Memoirs, as it cannot but prove entertaining. The heroes of Greece, and even of Troy, possibly delivered their compliments in somewhat better fashion, if we may judge by the version preserved for us by Homer.

From his royal highness the Duc de Savoie to his most honoured cousin, mademoiselle de Valois.



My dear cousin:—As the pen must needs perform the office of the tongue, and as it expresses the feelings of my heart, I doubt not but that I am at great disadvantage, since the depth of these feelings it cannot express, nor rightly convince you that, having given all myself to you, nothing remains either to give or to desire, save to find such affection pleasantly reciprocated. Thus, in these lines, I earnestly beseech you to return my love,—lines which give you the first hints of that fire which your many lovely qualities have lighted in my soul. They create in me an inconceivable impatience closely to contemplate that which now I admire at a distance, and to convince you by various proofs that, with matchless loyalty and passion,

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I am, dear Cousin, Your most humble slave and servant, *Emmanuel*.

Gentle as an angel, Mademoiselle de Valois desired just what everybody else did. The youngest of the three princesses was named Mademoiselle d'Alencon. With a trifle more wit and dash, she could have maintained her position at Court, where so charming a face as hers was fitted to make its mark; but her fine dark eyes did but express indifference and vacuity, seemingly unconscious of the pleasure to be got in this world when one is young, good-looking, shapely, a princess of the blood, and cousin german of the King besides.

Marguerite de Lorraine, her mother, married her to the Duc de Guise, their near relative, who, without ambition or pretension, seemed almost astonished to see that the King gave, not a dowry, but a most lovely verdure—[Drawing-room tapestry, much in vogue at that time]—, and an enamelled dinner-service.

The marriage was celebrated at the chateau, without any special ceremonies or preparations; so much so that two cushions, which had been forgotten, had to be hastily fetched. I saw what was the matter, and motioning the two attendants of the royal sacristy, I whispered to them to fetch what was wanted from my own apartment.

Not knowing to what use these cushions were to be put, my 'valet de chambre' brought the flowered velvet ones, on which my dogs were wont to lie. I noticed this just as their Highnesses were about to kneel down, and I felt so irresistibly inclined to laugh that I was obliged to retire to my room to avoid bursting out laughing before everybody.

Fortunately the Guises did not get to know of this little detail until long after, or they might have imagined that it was a planned piece of malicious mockery. However, it is only fair to admit that the marriage was treated in a very off-hand way, and it is that which always happens to people whose modesty and candour hinder them from posing and talking big when they get the chance. A strange delusion, truly!

Mademoiselle d'Orleans, the eldest child of the second marriage, is considered one of the prettiest and most graceful of blondes. Her endowments were surely all that a princess could need, if one except reserve in speaking, and a general dignity of deportment.

When it was a question of giving her to Prince de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, she was all the while sincerely attached to handsome Prince Charles de Lorraine, her maternal cousin. But the King, who, in his heart of hearts, wanted to get hold of Lorraine for himself, could not sanction this union; nay, he did more: he opposed it. Accordingly the Princess, being urged to do so by her mother, consented to go to Italy, and as we say at Court, expatriate herself.

The Bishop of Nziars, named De Bonzy, the Tuscan charge d'affaires, came, on behalf of the Medici family, to make formal demand of her hand, and had undertaken to bring her to her husband with all despatch. He had undertaken an all too difficult task.

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“Monsieur de Bonzy,” said she to the prelate, “as it is you who here play the part of interpreter and cavalier of honour as it is you, moreover, who have to drag me away from my native country, I have to inform you that it is my intention to leave it as slowly as possible, and to contemplate it at my leisure before quitting it forever.”

And, indeed, the Princess desired to make a stay more or less long in every town en route. If, on the way, she noticed a convent of any importance, she at once asked to be taken thither, and, in default of other pastime or pretext, she requested them to say complines with full choral accompaniment.

If she saw some castle or other, she inquired the name of its owner, and, though she hardly knew the inmates, was wont to invite herself to dinner and supper.

The Bishop of Beziers grew disconsolate. He wrote letters to the Court, which he sent by special courier, and I said to the King, “Pray, Sire, let her do as she likes; she will surely have time enough to look at her husband later on.”

Near Saint Fargeau, when the Princess heard that this estate was her sister’s, Mademoiselle sent a gentleman with her compliments, to ask if she would give her shelter for twenty-four hours. Instead of twenty-four hours’ stay, she proceeded to take up her abode there; and, provided with a gun and dogs, she wandered all over the fields, always accompanied by the worthy Bishop, at whose utter exhaustion she was highly amused.

At length she left her native land, and joined her husband, who seemed somewhat sulky at all this delay.

“I cannot love you just yet,” quoth she, weeping; “my heart is still another’s, and it is impossible to break off such attachments without much time and much pain. Pray treat me with gentleness, for if you are severe, I shall not do you any harm, but I shall go back to the Luxembourg to my mother.”

CHAPTER XXV.

Random Recollections.—Madame de Montespan Withdraws from Politics.—The Queen’s Dowry.—First Campaign in Flanders.—The Queen Meets the King.—Some One Else Sees Him First.—The Queen’s Anger at La Valliere.

In compiling these Memoirs, I have never pretended to keep a strictly regular diary, where events are set down chronologically and in their proper order. I write as I recollect; some of my recollections are chronicled sooner, and others later. Thus it happens that the King’s first conquests are only now mentioned in the present chapter, although they occurred in the year 1667, at the beginning of my credit and my favour.

I was naturally inclined for politics, and should have liked the hazard of the game; but I suppose that the King considered me more frivolous and giddy than I really was, for, despite the strong friendship with which he has honoured me, he has never been gracious enough to initiate me into the secrets of the Cabinet and the State.

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If this sort of exclusion or ostracism served to wound my self-respect, it nevertheless had its special advantage for me, for in epochs less glorious or less brilliant (that is to say, in times of failure), they could never cavil at advice or counsel which I had given, nor blame me for the shortcomings of my proteges or creatures.

The King was born ambitious. This prince will not admit it; he gives a thousand reasons in justification of his conquests. But the desire for conquest proves him to be a conqueror, and one is not a conqueror without being ambitious. I think I can explain myself by mentioning the treaty drawn up at the time of his marriage. It was stipulated that the Infanta should have rights over the Netherlands, then possessed by Don Balthazar, Prince of Spain. But it was agreed to give the Princess Maria Theresa a handsome dowry, in lieu of which she signed a paper renouncing her rights.

Her father, King Philip IV., died at the close of the year 1665, and the Queen-mother besought our King not to take advantage of the minority of the young Charles II., his brother-in-law, by troubling Spain afresh with his pretensions.

Hardly had Anne of Austria been interred, when the King informed the Spanish Court of his claims. In the spring of the following year, he himself led an army into Spanish Flanders, where his appearance was not expected. These fine provinces, badly provisioned and badly fortified, made but a merely formal resistance to Conde, Turenne, Crequi, and all our illustrious generals, who, led by the King in person, wrought the troops to a wild pitch of enthusiasm.

The King had left the Infanta, his wife, at Compiègne, and it was there that we awaited either news of the army or orders to advance.

From Compiègne we went to La Fere, where we heard that the King was coming to receive us. Suddenly it was rumoured that the Duchesse de la Valliere had just arrived, and that she was acting in accordance with orders received.

The Queen began to weep, and, sobbing, bewailed her destiny. She was seized by convulsions and violent retching, much to the alarm of her ladies and the physicians.

Next day, after mass, the Duchesse and the Marquise de la Valliere came to make their courtesy to the Queen, who, staring at them, said not a word. When dinner-time came, she gave orders that no food should be served to them, but the officials supplied this to them in secret, fearing to be compromised.

In the coach, the Queen complained greatly of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and the Princesse de Bade, one of the ladies-in-waiting, said to me, "Could you have believed that, with such gentleness, one could also display such impudence?" The Duchesse de Montausier, I know not why, expressed herself to me in the same terms of amazement. I replied that, "Were I in that fair lady's place, I should dare to show myself least of all to

the Queen, for fear of grieving her Majesty.” I was often rebuked afterwards for this speech, which, I admit, I delivered somewhat thoughtlessly.

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On leaving La Fere, the Queen gave particular orders to let the Duchess have no relays, so that she could not follow; but the Master of the Horse had caused these to be brought to her from Versailles, so nothing was wanting.

On putting my head out of window, when we turned a corner of the road, I saw that La Valliere's coach, with six horses, was following quite close behind; but I took care not to tell the Queen, who believed those ladies were a long way off.

All at once, on a height, we saw a body of horsemen approaching. The King could be plainly distinguished, riding at their head. La Valliere's coach immediately left the main road, and drove across country, while the Queen called out to have it stopped; but the King embraced its occupants, and then it drove off at a gallop to a chateau already fixed upon for its reception.

I like to be just, and it is my duty to be so. This mark of irreverence towards the Queen is the only one for which Mademoiselle de la Valliere can be blamed; but she would never have done such a thing of her own accord; it was all the fault of the Marquise, blinded as she was by ambition.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The King Contemplates the Conquest of Holland.—The Grand Seignior's Embassy.—Madame de Montespan's Chance of Becoming First Lady of the Harem.—Anxiety to Conclude Negotiations with so Passionate an Ambassador.—Help Sent to Candia.—With Disastrous Results.—Death of the Duc de Beaufort.—Why It Is Good to Carry About the Picture of One's Lady-love.

Having gained possession of the Netherlands in the name of the Infanta, his consort, the King seriously contemplated the subjugation of the Dutch, and possibly also the invasion of these rich countries. Meanwhile, he privately intimated as much to the princes of Europe, promising to each of them some personal and particular advantage in exchange for a guarantee of assistance or neutrality in this matter.

The Grand Seignior, hearing that the Pope and the Venetians were urging our Cabinet to come to the help of Candia,

[This important island of Candia, the last powerful bulwark of Christendom against the Turk, belonged at that time to Venice. *Editor's Note.*]

lost no time in sending a splendid embassy to Paris, to congratulate the young King upon his conquest of Flanders, and to predict for him all success in the paths along which ambition might lead him.



Being naturally fond of show and display, the King left nothing undone which might give brilliance to the reception of so renowned an embassy. The Court wore an air of such splendour and magnificence that these Mussulmans, used though they were to Asiatic pomp, seemed surprised and amazed at so brilliant a reception, at which nothing, indeed, had been forgotten.

The ambassador-in-chief was a pleasant young man, tall, shapely, and almost as good-looking as the King. This Turk had splendidly shaped hands, and eyes that shone with extraordinary brilliance. He conceived an ardent passion for me, a passion that went to such lengths that he sacrificed thereto all his gravity, all his stately Ottoman demeanour.

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When I passed by, he saluted me, placing his hand to his heart, stopping to gaze at me intently, and watch me as long as possible. Being introduced (either by chance or design) to my Paris jeweller, he seized a gold box upon which he saw my portrait, and, giving the jeweller a considerable sum, refused to part with the picture, however much they begged him to do so.

One fine morning, in spite of his turban, he got into the large chapel of the chateau during mass, and while the Court of France was adoring the true God, Ibrahim knelt down in front of me, which made every one laugh, including the King.

All such absurdities caused the ministers to give him the required reply with all speed, and they were not backward in granting him a farewell audience.

When the time came for him to go, Ibrahim burst into tears, exclaiming that, in his country, I should be in the first rank, whereas at Saint Germain I was only in the second; and he charged his interpreter to tell the King of France that the unhappy Ibrahim would never get over this visit to his Court.

The King replied, with a smile, that he had “better become a Christian, and stay with us.”

At these words the ambassador turned pale, and glancing downwards, withdrew, forgetting to salute his Majesty.

Then he returned, and made all his bows quite nicely; nor would he quit the capital before he had sent me his portrait, some pretty verses in Italian, which he had caused to be composed, and besides this, a set of amber ornaments, the most beautiful of any worn by ladies of the harem.

Despite this imposing and costly embassy, despite the ambassador’s compliment, who referred to the King as “Eldest Son of the Sun,” this same Son of the Sun despatched seven thousand picked troops to help Venice against the Turks. To this detachment the Venetian Republic sent fourteen vessels laden with their own soldiers, under the leadership of our Duc de Beaufort, Grand Admiral of France, and Lieutenant-General Duc de Navailles.

Had these troops arrived in the nick of time, they would have saved Candia, but by a sudden accident all was lost, and after so terrible a reverse, the Isle of Candia, wrested from the potentates of Europe and Christendom, fell a prey to the infidels.

A pistol-shot fired at a Turk blew up several barrels of gunpowder belonging to a large magazine captured from the enemy. Our troops, thinking that a mine had been sprung, fled in headlong confusion, never even caring to save their muskets. The Turks butchered them in the most frightful manner. In this huge massacre, some of our most

promising officers perished, and the Duc de Beaufort was never found either among the wounded or the slain.

The young Comte de Guiche, of whom I shall presently speak, had his hand smashed, and if on his breast he had not worn a portrait of Madame,—[The ill-fated Duchesse d'Orleans.]—the sword of a Turk would have struck him to the heart.



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The King felt sorry that he had only despatched seven thousand men thither. But when M. de Louvois informed him that the whole detachment had been almost annihilated, he regretted having sent so many.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Danger of Harboursing a Malcontent.—The King's Policy with Regard to Lorraine.—Advice of Madame de Thiangès.—Conquest of Lorraine.—The Lorraines Surrender to the Emperor.

The petty princes placed too near a great potentate are just like the shrubs that grow beside an old oak tree, whose broad shade blights them, while its roots undermine and sap them, till at last they are weakened and destroyed.

When young Gaston, son of Henri IV., seeking to get free from Richelieu's insolent despotism, withdrew to the Duc de Lorraine, the Cardinal uttered a cry of joy, and remarked to Louis XIII., that vindictive, jealous prince, "Oh, what a good turn the Duc d'Orleans has just done you to-day! By going to stay with M. de Lorraine, he will oust him!"

The Court soon got to know that M. de Lorraine had given Monsieur a most cordial reception, and that the latter, who, like his father, was very susceptible, had proposed for the hand of the Princesse Marguerite, a charming person, and sister to the reigning Duke.

King Louis XIII. openly opposed this marriage, which nevertheless was arranged for, and celebrated partly at Nancy and partly at Luneville.

Such complacence earned for M. de Lorraine the indignation of the King and his minister, the Cardinal. They waged against him a war of revenge, or rather of spoliation, and as the prince, being unable then to offer any serious resistance, was sensible enough to surrender, he got off with the sacrifice of certain portions of his territory. He also had to witness the demolition by France of the fine fortifications of Nancy.

Things were at this juncture when our young King assumed the management of affairs. The policy pursued by Louis XIII. and his Cardinal seemed to him an advantageous one, also; he lured to his capital M. de Lorraine, who was still young and a widower, and by every conceivable pretext he was prevented from marrying again. Lorraine had a nephew,—[Prince Charles.]—a young man of great promise, to whom the uncle there and then offered to make over all his property and rights, if the King would honour him with his protection and marry him to whomsoever he fancied. The King would not

consent to a marriage of any kind, having a firm, persistent desire in this way to make the line of these two princes extinct.

I was talking about this one day in the King's chamber, when my sister De Thianges had the hardihood to say:

"I hear that the Messieurs de Lorraine are about to take their departure, and that, having lost all hope of making themselves beloved, they have resolved to make themselves feared."

The King looked impassively at my sister, showing not a sign of emotion, and he said to her:

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"Do you visit there?"

"Sire," replied Madame de Thiangés, unabashed, "augment the number, not of your enemies, but of your friends; of all policies that is the best." The King never said a word.

Soon afterwards, the Lorraines appealed secretly to the Empire and the Emperor. The King was only waiting for such an opportunity; he forthwith sent Marshal de Créqui at the head of twenty thousand men, who invaded Lorraine, which had already been ravaged, and the Duchy of Bar, which had not.

The manifesto stated the motives for such complaint, alleging that the Duke had not been at the pains to observe the Treaty of Metz with regard to the surrender of Harsal, and, as a punishment, his entire sovereignty would be confiscated.

A large army then marched upon Peronne; it had been formed at Saint Germain, and was divided into two columns. The first went to join the Duc de Créqui, who occupied Lorraine; the other took up its position near Sedan, to keep the Flemish and Dutch in check in case of any attempted rebellion.

The Lorraines, in despair, gave themselves up to the Emperor, who, aware of their fine soldierly qualities, bestowed upon both high posts of command. They caused great losses to France and keen anxiety to her King.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Embassy of the King of Arda.—Political Influence Exercised by the Good Looks of Madame de Montespan.—Gifts of the Envoys.—What the Comte de Vegin Takes for a Horse.—Madame de Montespan Entertains Them in Her Own House.—Three Missionaries Recommend Her to Them.

From the wilds of Africa, the King of Arda sent an embassy no less brilliant and far more singular than that of the Turks. This African prince, hearing of the French King's noble character and of his recent conquests, proposed to form with him a political and commercial alliance, and sought his support against the English and the Dutch, his near neighbours.

The King said to me; "Madame, I believe Ibrahim has proclaimed your charms even to the Africans; you bring embassies to me from the other end of the globe. For Heaven's sake, don't show yourself, or these new envoys will utterly lose their heads, too."

The envoys referred to were notable for their rich, semibarbaric dress, but not one of them was like Ibrahim. They brought the King a present, in the shape of a tiger, a panther, and two splendid lions. To the Queen they gave a sort of pheasant covered

with gold and blue feathers, which burst out laughing while looking intensely grave, to the great diversion of every one. They also brought to the princess a little blackamoor, extremely well-made, who could never grow any bigger, and of which she, unfortunately, grew very fond.—[Later on the writer explains herself more fully.—*Editor's Note.*]

These Africans also came in ceremonious fashion to present their respects to me. They greeted me as the “second spouse of the King” (which greatly offended the Queen), and in the name of the King of Arda, they presented me with a necklace of large pearls, and two bracelets of priceless value,—splendid Oriental sapphires, the finest in the world.

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I gave orders for my children to be brought to them. On seeing these, they prostrated themselves. The little Comte de Vein, profiting by their attitude, began to ride pick-a-back on one of them, who did not seem offended at this, but carried the child about for a little while.

The ceremony of their presentation will, doubtless, have been described in various other books; but I cannot forbear mentioning one incident. As soon as the curtains of the throne were drawn aside, and they saw the King wearing all his decorations and ablaze with jewels, they put their hands up to their eyes, pretending to be dazzled by the splendour of his presence, and then they flung themselves down at full length upon the ground, the better to express their adoration.

I invited them to visit me at the Chateau de Clagny, my favourite country-seat, and there I caused a sumptuous collation to be served to them in accordance with their tastes. Plain roast meat they ate with avidity; other dishes seemed to inspire them with distrust,—they looked closely at them, and then went off to something else.

I do not interfere in affairs of State, but I wanted to know from what source in so remote a country they could have obtained any positive information as to the secrets of the Court of France. Through the interpreter, they replied that three travellers—missionaries—had stayed for a couple of months with their master, the King of Arda, and the good fathers had told them “that Madame de Montespan was the second spouse of the great King.” These same missionaries had chosen the sort of presents which they were to give me.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Comte de Vegin, Abbe of Saint Germain des Pres.—Revenues Required, but Not the Cowl.—Discussion between the King and the Marquise.—Madame Scarron Chosen as Arbitrator.—An Unanswerable Argument.

The wealthy abbey of Saint Germain des Pres—[Yielding a revenue of five hundred thousand livres.]—was vacant; the King appointed thereto his son, the Comte de Vegin, and as the Benedictine monks secretly complained that they should have given to them as chief a child almost still in its cradle, the King instructed the grand almoner to remind them that they had had as abbots in preceding reigns princes who were married and of warlike tastes. “Such abuses,” said the prelate, “were more than reprehensible; his Majesty is incapable of wishing to renew them. As to the Prince’s extreme youth, that is in no way prejudicial to you, my brethren, as monseigneur will be suitably represented by his vicar-general until such time as he is able to assume the governorship himself.”

“Is it your intention to condemn my son to be an ecclesiastic?” I asked the King, in amazement.

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"Madame, these are my views," he answered: "If the Comte de Vegin as he grows up should continue to show pluck and a taste for things military, as by birth he is bound to do, we will relieve him of the abbey on the eve of his marriage, while he will have profited thereby up to that time. If, on the contrary, my son should show but inferior mental capacity, and a pusillanimous character, there will be no harm in his remaining among the Church folk; he will be far better off there than elsewhere. The essential thing for a parent is to study carefully and in good time the proper vocation for his children; the essential thing for the ruler of an Empire is to employ the right people to do the work in hand."

"Will my son, on receiving this abbey, have to wear the dress of his office?" I asked. "Imagine the Comte de Vegin an abbe!"

"Do not feel the slightest repugnance on that score," added the King. "The Electors of the German Empire are nearly all of them ecclesiastics; our own history of France will show you that the sons of kings were bishops or mere abbés; the grandson of the Duc de Savoie is a cardinal and an archbishop, and King Charles X., my grandfather's paternal uncle, nearly became King of France and cardinal at one and the same time."

At this moment Madame Scarron came in. "Madame, we will make you our judge in the argument that we are now having," said his Majesty. "Do you think there is any objection to our giving to little Vegin the dress of an abbe?"

"On the contrary, Sire," replied the governess, smiling, "such a dress will inspire him betimes with reserve and modesty, strengthening his principles, and making far more profitable to him the excellent education which he is now receiving."

"I am obliged to you for your opinion," said the King, "and I flatter myself, madame, that you see things in the same light that I do."

When the King had gone, Madame Scarron asked me why I disapproved of this abbey.

"I do not wish to deny so rich a benefice to my son," I replied, "but it seems to me that he might enjoy the revenues therefrom, without being obliged to wear the livery. Is not the King powerful enough to effect this?"

"You are hardly just, madame," replied the governess, in a serious tone. "If our religion be a true one, God himself is at the head of it, and for so supreme a Chief the sons of kings are but of small account."

With an argument such as this she closed my mouth, leaving me quite amazed, and next day she smiled with delight when she presented the little Comte de Vegin dressed as a little abbe.



She was careful to see that the crozier, mitre, and cross were painted on the panels of his carriage, and let the post of vicar-general be given to one of her pious friends who was presented to me.

CHAPTER XXX.

Once a Queen, Always a Queen.—An Anonymous Letter.—The Queen's Confidence.—She Has a Sermon Preached against Madame de Montespan.—Who the Preacher was.—One Scandal May Avert Another.

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I related how, near La Fere, at the time of the Flanders campaign, Madame de la Valliere's coach, at the risk of offending the Queen, left the main road and took a short cut across country, so as to get on ahead, and arrive before anybody else. By this the Duchess thought to give her royal friend a great mark of her attachment. On the contrary, it was the first cause for that coolness which the King afterwards displayed.

"Fain would he be beloved, yet loved with tact."

The very next day his Majesty, prevailed upon La Valliere to say that such a style of travelling was too fatiguing for her. She had the honour of dining with the Queen, and then she returned to the little chateau of Versailles, so as to be near her children.

The King arranged with Madame de Montausier, lady-in-waiting to the Queen, that I should use her rooms to dress and write in, and that his Majesty should be free to come there when he liked, and have a quiet chat with me about matters of interest.

The Queen, whom I had managed to please by my amusing talk, always kept me close to her side, both when taking long walks or playing cards. At a given signal, a knock overhead, I used to leave the Queen, excusing myself on the score of a headache, or arrears of correspondence; in short, I managed to get away as best I could.

The King left us in order to capture Douai, then Tournay, and finally the whole of Flanders; while the Queen continued to show me every sign of her sincere and trustful friendship.

In August, on the Day of Our Lady, while the King was besieging Lille, a letter came to the Queen, informing her that her husband had forsaken Madame de la Valliere for her Majesty's lady-in-waiting, the Marquise de Montespan. Moreover, the anonymous missive named "the prudent Duchesse de Montausier" as confidante and accomplice.

"It is horrible—it is infamous!" cried the Queen, as she flung aside the letter. "I shall never be persuaded that such is the case. My dear little Montespan enjoys my friendship and my esteem; others are jealous of her, but they shall not succeed. Perhaps the King may know the handwriting; he shall see it at once!" And that same evening she forwarded the letter to him.

The Comte de Vegin had been born, and the Queen was absolutely ignorant of his existence. My pregnancy with the Duc du Maine had likewise escaped her notice, owing to the large paniers which I took to wearing, and thus made the fashion. But the Court is a place where the best of friends are traitors. The Queen was at length convinced, after long refusing to be so, and from that day forward she cordially detested me.

While the King was conquering Holland, she instructed her chief almoner to have a sermon of a scandalous sort to be preached, which, delivered with all due solemnity in her presence, should grieve and wound me as much as possible.

On the day appointed, a preacher, totally unknown to us, gets into the pulpit, makes a long prayer for the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and then, rising gracefully, bows low to the Queen. Raising his eyes to heaven, he makes the sign of the cross and gives out the following text: "Woman, arise and sin no more. Go hence; I forgive thee."

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As he uttered these words, he looked hard at my pew, and soon made me understand by his egordium how interesting his discourse would be to me. Written with rare grace of style, it was merely a piece of satire from beginning to end,—of satire so audacious that it was constantly levelled at the King.

The orator brought before us in succession lifelike portraits of the Queen, of her august spouse, of my children, of M. de Montespan, and of myself. Upon some he lavished praise; others he vehemently rebuked; while to others he gave tender pity. Anon he caused the lips of his hearers to curl in irony, and again, roused their indignation or touched them to tears.

Any one else would have been bored by such a rigmarole; it rather amused me.

That evening, and for a week afterwards, nothing else but this sermon was talked of at Versailles. The Queen had received complete satisfaction. Before me she was at pains not to laugh, and I was pleased to see that her resentment had almost disappeared.

Upon his return, the King was for punishing such an offence as this. Things are not easily hidden from him; his Majesty desired to know the name and rank of the ecclesiastic. The entire Court replied that he was a good-looking young Franciscan.

The chief almoner, being forced to state the monastery from which the preacher came, mentioned the Cordeliers of Paris. There it transpired that the monk told off by the prior for this enterprise had been too frightened to execute it, and had sent, as his deputy, a young actor from Orleans,—a brother of his, who thus could not say no.

So, as it happened, Queen Maria Theresa and her chief almoner (an exemplary person) had caused virtue to be preached to me by a young play-actor! The King dared not take further proceedings in so strange a matter, for fear lest one scandal might beget a far greater one. It was this that caused Madame Cornuel to remark, “The pulpit is in want of comedians; they work wonders there!”

CHAPTER XXXI.

The King Alters His Opinion about Madame Scarron.—He Wants Her to Assume Another Name.—He Gives Her the Maintenon Estates.—She and Madame de Montespan Visit These.—A Strange Story.

At first the King used to feel afraid of Madame Scarron, and seemingly laughed at me when I endeavoured to persuade him that there was nothing affected or singular about her. The Marquis de Beringhen, for some reason or other, had prejudiced his Majesty against her, so that very often, when the King heard that she was visiting me, he never got beyond the vestibule, but at once withdrew. One day she was telling me, in her

pleasant, original way, a funny tale about the famous Brancas, and I laughed till I cried again,—in fact, until I nearly made myself quite ill.

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The King, who was listening at the door, was greatly tickled by the story. He came in smiling and thoroughly self-possessed. Then, addressing the governess, he said, "Madame, allow me to compliment you and to thank you at the same time. I thought you were of a serious, melancholy disposition, but as I listened to you through the keyhole, I am no longer surprised that you have such long talks with the Marquise. Will you do me the favour of being as amusing some other time, if I venture to make one of the party?"

The governess, courtesying, blushed somewhat; and the King continued, "Madame, I am aware of your affection for my children; that is a great recommendation to me; banish all restraint; I take the greatest pleasure in your company."

She replied, "It was the fear of displeasing you which, despite myself, caused me to incur your displeasure."

The King continued, "Madame, I know that the late M. de Scarron was a man of much wit and also of agreeable manners. My cousin, De Beaufort, used to rave about him, but on account of his somewhat free poems, his name lacks weight and dignity. In fact, his name in no way fits so charming a personality as yours; would it grieve you to change it?"

The governess cleverly replied that all that she owed to the memory of her defunct husband was gratitude and esteem.

"Allow me, then, to arrange matters," added the King. "I am fond of sonorous names; in this I agree with Boileau."

A few days afterwards we heard that the splendid Maintenon estates were for sale. The King himself came to inform the widow of this, and, giving her in advance the fee for education, he counted out a hundred thousand crowns wherewith instantly to purchase the property.

Forthwith the King compelled her to discard this truly ridiculous author's name, and styled her before everybody Madame de Maintenon.

I must do her the justice to state that her gratitude for the King's liberality was well-nigh exaggerated, while no change was perceptible in her manners and bearing. She had, naturally, a grand, dignified air, which was in strange contrast to the grotesque buffoonery of her poet-husband. Now she is exactly in her proper place, representing to perfection the governess of a king's children.

Spiteful persons were wont to say that I appeared jealous on seeing her made a marquise like myself. Good gracious, no! On the contrary, I was delighted; her parentage was well known to me. The Duchesse de Navailles, my protectress, was a

near relative of hers, and M. d'Aubigne, her grandfather, was one of King Henri's two Chief Gentlemen of the Chamber.

Madame de Maintenon's father was, in many respects, greatly to blame. Without being actually dishonest, he squandered a good deal of his fortune, the greater part being pounced upon by his family; and had the King forced these harpies to disgorge, Madame de Maintenon could have lived in opulence, eclipsing several of the personages at Court.

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I am glad to be able to do her justice in these Memoirs, to the satisfaction of my own self-respect. I look upon her as my own handiwork, and everything assures me that this is her conviction also, and that she will always bear it in mind.

The King said to us, "Go and see the Chateau de Maintenon, and then you can tell me all about it. According to an old book, I find that it was built in the reign of Henri II. by Nicolas de Cointerot, the King's minister of finance; a 'surintendant's' castle ought to form a noteworthy feature of the landscape."

Madame de Maintenon hereupon told us a most extraordinary story. The lady who sold this marquisate had retired two years previously to the island of Martinique, where she, at the present moment, owned the residence of Constant d'Aubigne, the same house where the new Marquise de Maintenon had spent her childhood with her parents, so that while one of these ladies had quitted the Chateau de Maintenon in order to live in Martinique, the other had come from Martinique in order to reside at the Chateau de Maintenon. Truly, the destinies of some are strange in this world.

The chateau appeared to be large, of solid proportions, and built in a grandly simple style, befitting a minister of dignity and position. The governess shed tears of emotion when setting foot there for the first time. The six priests, whom the surintendant had appointed, officiated in the large chapel or little church attached to the castle.

They approached us in regular procession, presenting holy water, baskets of flowers and fruit, an old man, a child, and two little lambs to the Marquise. The villagers, dressed out with flowers and ribbons, also came to pay, their respects to her. They danced in the castle courtyard, under our balcony, to the sound of hautbois and bagpipes.

We gave them money, said pleasant things to everybody, and invited all the six clerics to sup with us. These gentry spoke with great respect of the other Madame de Maintenon, who had become disgusted with her property, and with France generally, because, for two winters running, her orange-groves and fig-trees had been frost-bitten. She herself, being a most chilly, person, never left off her furs until August, and in order to avoid looking at or walking upon snow and ice, she fled to the other end of the world.

"The other extreme will bring her back to us," observed Madame de Maintenon to the priests. "Though his Majesty were to give me Martinique or Saint Domingo, I certainly would never go and live there myself."

When we returned, all these little details greatly amused the King. He, too, wanted to go and see the castle of another Fouquet, but, as we complained of the bad roads, he ordered these to be mended along the entire route.



CHAPTER XXXII.

The Second Comte de Vexin.—He is made Abbe of Saint Denis.—Priests or Devils?—
The Coronation Diadem.—Royalty Jokes with the Monks.

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My poor little Comte de Vegin died. We all mourned for him as he deserved; his pretty face would have made every one love him; his extreme gentleness had nothing of the savage warrior about it, but at any rate, he was the best-looking cardinal in Christendom. He made such funny speeches that one could not help recollecting them. He was more of a Mortemart than a Bourbon, but that did not prevent the King from idolising him.

The King thought of conferring the Abbey of Saint Germain des Pres upon his younger brother; to this I was opposed, imagining, perhaps without reason, that such succession would bring bad luck. So the King presented him to the Abbey of Saint Denis, the revenue of which was equally considerable, and he conferred upon him the title of Comte de Vexin, caring nothing for the remarks I made concerning the similarities of such names and distinctions.

The second Comte de Vegin bid fair to be a man of reflection and of genius. He obviously disliked his little abbe's dress, and we always kept saying, "It's only for the time being, my little fellow."

When, after his nomination, the monks of Saint Denis came to make their obeisance to him, he asked if they were devils, and continually covered his face so as not to see them.

The King arrived, and with a few flattering words managed to soothe the priests' outraged dignity, and when they asked the little prince if he would honour them by a visit of inspection to Suger's room,

[Suger was Abbe of Saint Denis, and a famous minister of Queen Blanche. Editor's Note.]

which had just been restored, he replied with a sulky smile, "I'll come and see you, but with my eyes shut."

Then the priests mildly remonstrated because the coronation diadem had not been brought back to their store of treasures, but was still missing.

"So, in your treasure-house at Saint Denis you keep all the crowns of all the reigns?" asked the prince.

"Yes, Sire, and where could they be better guarded than with us? Who has most may have least."

"With all their rubies, diamonds, sapphires, and emeralds?"

"Yes, Sire; and hence the name treasure."



The King replied, "If this be the case, I will send you my coronation crown. At that time my brow was not so big; you will find the crown small, I tell you."

Then one of the monks, in the most serious manner, said, "It's not as small as it was; your Majesty has enlarged it a good deal."

Madame de Maintenon burst out laughing, and I was not slow to follow her example; we saw that the King could hardly maintain his gravity. He said to the priest, "My father, you turn a pretty compliment in a most praiseworthy manner; you ought to have belonged to the Jesuits, not to the Benedictines."

We burst out laughing anew, and this convent-deputation, the gloomiest-looking, most funereal one in the world, managed to cause us some diversion, after all.

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To make amends for our apparent frivolity, his Majesty himself took them to see his splendid cabinet of medals and coins, and sent them back to their abbey in Court carriages.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

M. de Lauzun Proposes for the Hand of Mademoiselle de Thianges.—Letter from the Duc de Lorraine.—Madame de Thianges Thinks that Her Daughter Has Married a Reining Prince.—The King Disposes Otherwise.—The Duc de Nevers.

The brilliant Marquis de Lauzun, after paying court to myself, suddenly, turned his attention to Mademoiselle de Thianges,—my sister's child. If a fine figure and a handsome face, as well as the polished manners of a great gentleman, constitute a good match, M. de Lauzun was, in all respects, worthy of my niece. But this presumptuous nobleman had but a slender fortune. Extravagant, without the means to be so, his debts grew daily greater, and in society one talked of nothing but his lavish expenditure and his creditors. I know that the purses of forty women were at his disposal. I know, moreover, that he used to gamble like a prince, and I would never marry my waiting-maid to a gambler and a rake.

Both Madame de Thianges and myself rejected his proposals, and though resolved to let him have continued proofs of our good-will, we were equally determined never to accept such a man as son-in-law and nephew.

Hereupon the letter which I am about to transcribe was sent to me by a messenger:

Prince Charles de Lorraine to madame la marquise de Montespan.

Madame:—My unfortunate uncle and I have always loved France, but France has forced us both to break off all relations with her and to become exiles!!! Despite the kindness and generosity wherewith the Imperial Court seeks to comfort us in our misfortune, the perpetual cry of our hearts calls us back to our fatherland,—to that matchless land where my ancestors have ever been beloved.

My uncle is guilty of no crime but that of having formerly received in his palace a son of good King Henri IV., after his humiliation by a shameless minister. My dear uncle proposed to resign all his property in my favour, and to meet the wishes of his Majesty as to the wife that should be mine.

When my uncle asked for the hand of Mademoiselle de Montpensier, on my behalf, my cousin replied that a ruined and dismantled throne did not augur well for a dowry, and she further remarked that we were not on good terms with the King.

When I begged Cardinal Mazarin to grant me the hand of the present Madame de Mazarin, his Eminence replied, "Would you like to be a cardinal? I can manage that; but as regards my niece, the Queen is going to get her married immediately."

When, before God and man, I wedded Mademoiselle de Nemours, whose worthy mother led her to the altar, his Majesty refused to sign the marriage contract, and told Madame de Nemours that it would never be considered valid.

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Soon afterwards the Bishop of Laon, who has complete influence over Madame de Vendome, declared as null and void—a marriage negotiated and consecrated by himself, and thus a bond made in heaven has been broken on earth.

Such treatment as this, I confess, seemed to us to exceed the bounds of humanity and of justice. My uncle and I quitted France,—the France that persecutes and harasses us, that desires the destruction of our family and the forcible union of our territory with her own.

The late Queen, of illustrious and glorious memory, disapproved of Richelieu's injustice towards us. Under the ministry of the Cardinal, his successor, she often, in noble fashion, held out to us a helping hand. How comes it that the King, who in face is her living image, does not desire to be like her in heart?

I address myself to you, madame, who by your beauty and Spiritual charm hold such imperious sway over his decisions, and I implore you to undertake our defence. My uncle and I, his rightful and duteous heir, offer the King devoted homage and unswerving fealty. We offer to forget the past, to put our hearts and our swords at his service. Let him withdraw his troops and those standards of his that have brought terror and grief to our unhappy Lorraine. I offer to marry Mademoiselle de Thianges, your beautiful and charming niece, and to make her happy, and to surrender all any estates to the King of France, if I die without male issue or heirs of any sort.

I know your kind-heartedness, madame, by a niece who is your picture. In your hands I place her interests and my fate. I await your message with impatience, and I shall receive it with courage if you fail to obtain that which you ought to obtain.

Be assured, madame, of my unbounded admiration and respect.

CHARLES

I at once went to my house at Clagny, whither I privately summoned Madame de Thianges. On reading this letter, my sister was moved to tears, for she had always deeply felt how unjustly this family had been treated. She was also personally attached to this same Prince Charles, whom to see was to love.

We read this letter through thrice, and each time we found it more admirable; the embarrassing thing was how to dare to let his Majesty know its contents. However temperate the allusions to himself, there was still the reproach of injustice and barbarity, set against the clemency of Anne of Austria, and her generous compassion.

My sister said to me, "Go boldly to work in the matter. Despite your three children, the King leaves you merely a marquise; and for my own part, if my daughter becomes Duchesse de Lorraine, I promise you the Principality of Vaudemont."



"It is quite true," I replied; "his conduct is inexplicable. To Madame Scarron, who was only the governess of his children, he gives one of the first marquisates of France, while to me, who have borne these three children (with infinite pain), I admit he has only given some jewelry, some money, and this pretty castle of Clagny."

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"You are as clever as can be, my dear Athenais," said Madame de Thianges, "but, as a matter of fact, your cleverness is not of a business kind. You don't look after yourself, but let yourself be neglected; you don't push yourself forward enough, nor stand upon your dignity as you ought to do.

"The little lame woman had hardly been brought to bed of Mademoiselle de Blois, when she was made Duchesse de Vaujours and de la Valliere.

"Gabrielle d'Estrees, directly she appeared, was proclaimed Duchesse de Beaufort.

"Diane de Poitiers was Duchesse de Valentinois and a princess. It's only you who are nobody, and your relations also are about the same! Make the most of this grand opportunity; help the Prince of Lorraine, and the Prince of Lorraine will help you."

On our return from the chateau, while our resolution was yet firm, we went laughing to the King. He asked the reason of our gaiety. My sister said with her wonted ease, "Sire, I have come to invite you to my daughter's wedding."

"Your daughter? Don't you think I am able to get her properly married?" cried the King.

"Sire, you cannot do it better than I can myself. I am giving her a sovereign as husband, a sovereign in every sense of the term."

It seemed to me the King flushed slightly as he rejoined, "A sovereign on his feet, or a sovereign overthrown?"

"How do you mean, Sire?" said my sister.

"Madame de Thianges," replied the King, "pray, let us be friends. I was informed two days ago of the proposals of the Messieurs de Lorraine; it is not, yet time to give them a definite reply. It behoves, me to give your daughter in marriage, and I have destined her for the Duc de Nevers, who is wealthy, and my friend."

"The Duc de Nevers!" cried my sister; "why, he's cracked for six months in the year."

"Those who are cracked for a whole twelvemonth deserve far more pity," replied the King.

Then, turning to me, he observed, "You make no remark, madame? Does your niece's coronation provide you also with illusions?"

I easily perceived that we had been cherishing an utterly fantastic scheme, and I counselled Madame de Thianges to prefer to please the King; and, as she was never able to control her feelings, she sharply replied, "Madame la Marquise, good day or good night!"



The King, however, did not relax his persistence in giving us the Duc de Nevers as son-in-law and nephew; and as this young gentleman's one fault is to require perpetual amusement, partly derived from poetry and partly from incessant travelling, my niece is as happy with him as a woman who takes her husband's place well can be. As soon as he gets to Paris, he wants to return to Rome, and hardly has he reached Rome, when he has the horses put to for Paris.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Mademoiselle de Mortemart, Abbess of Fontevrault.—She Comes to Court.—The Cloister.—Her Success at Court.—Her Opinion Respecting Madame de Montespan's Intimacy with the King.

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My second sister, Mademoiselle de Mortemart, was so unfortunate as to fall in love with a young Knight of Malta, doomed from his birth and by his family to celibacy. Having set out upon his caravans,—[Sea-fights against the Turks and the pirates of the Mediterranean.]—he was killed in combat by the Algerians.

Such was Mademoiselle de Mortemart's grief that life became unbearable to her. Beautiful, witty, and accomplished, she quitted the world where she was beloved, and, at the, age of seventeen, took the veil at Fontevrault.

So severely had she blamed the conduct of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, while often vehemently denouncing that which she termed the disorder at Court, that, since the birth of the Duc du Maine, I had not gone to the convent to see her. We were like unto persons both most anxious to break off an intimacy and yet who had not done so.

The Duc de Lorraine was known to her. He wrote to her, begging her to make it up with me, so as to further his own ends. To gratify him, and mainly because of her attachment to Prince Charles, my sister actually wrote to me, asking for my intervention and what she termed my support.

Nuns always profess to be, and think that they are, cut off from the world. But the fact is, they care far more for mundane grandeur than we do. Madame de Thianges and her sister would have given their very heart's blood to see my niece the bride of a royal prince.

One day the King said to me, "The Marquise de Thianges complains that I have as yet done nothing for your family; there is a wealthy abbey that has just become vacant; I am going to give it to your sister, the nun; since last night she is the Abbess of Fontevrault."

I thanked the King, as it behoved me to do, and he added, "Your brother shall be made a duke at once. I am going to appoint him general of Royal Galleys, and after one or two campaigns he will have a marshal's baton."

"And what about me, Sire?" said I. "What, may it please your Majesty, shall I get from the distribution of all these favours and emoluments?" I laughingly asked the question.

"You, madame?" he replied. "To you I made a present of my heart, which is not altogether worthless; yet, as it is possible that, when this heart shall have ceased to beat, you may have to maintain your rank, I will give you the charming retreat of Petit-Bourg, near Fontainebleau."

Saying this, his face wore a sad look, and I was sorry that I asked him for anything. He is fond of giving, and of giving generously, but of his own accord, without the least prompting. Had I refrained from committing this indiscretion, he might, possibly, have made me a duchess there and then, renaming Petit-Bourg Royal-Bourg.

The new abbess of Fontevrault, caring less now for claustral seclusion, equipped her new residence in very sumptuous style. In a splendid carriage she came to thank the King and kiss hands. With much tact and dignity she encountered the scrutiny of the royal family and of the Court. Her manners showed her to have been a person brought up in the great world, and possessed of all the tact and delicacy which her position as well as mine required.

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As she embraced me, she sighed; yet, instantly recovering herself, she made the excuse that so many ceremonious greetings and compliments had fatigued her.

It was not long before the King joined us, who said, "Madame, I never thought that there was much amusement to be got by wearing the veil. Now, you must admit that days in a convent seem very long to any one who has wit and intelligence."

"Sire," replied my sister, "the first fifteen or twenty months are wearisome, I readily confess. Then comes discouragement; after that, habit; and then one grows resigned to one's fetters from the mere pleasure of existence."

"Did you meet with any good friends among your associates?"

"In such assemblies," rejoined the Abbess, "one can form no attachment or durable friendship. The reason for this is simple. If the companion you choose is religious in all sincerity, she is perforce a slave to every little rule and regulation, and to her it would seem like defrauding the Deity to give affection to any one but to Him. If, by mischance, you meet with some one of sensitive temperament, with a bright intellect that matches your own, you lay yourself open to be the mournful sharer of her griefs, doubts, and regrets, and her depression reacts upon you; her sorrow makes your melancholy return. Privation conjures up countless illusions and every chimera imaginable, so that the peaceful retreat of virgins of the Lord becomes a veritable hell, peopled by phantoms that groan in torture!"

"Oh, madame!" exclaimed the King. "What a picture is this! What a spectacle you present to our view!"

"Fortunately," continued Mademoiselle de Mortemart, "in convents girls of intelligence are all too rare. The greater number of them are colourless persons, devoid of imagination or fire. To exiles like these, any country, any climate would seem good; to flaccid, crushed natures of this type, every belief would seem authoritative, every religion holy and divine. Fifteen hundred years ago these nuns would have made excellent vestal virgins, watchful and resigned. What they need is abstinence, prohibitions, thwartings, things contrary to nature. By conforming to most rigorous rules, they consider themselves suffering beings who deserve heavy recompense; and the Carmelite or Trappist sister, who macerates herself by the hair-shirt or the cilex, would look upon God as a false or wicked Being, if, after such cruel torment, He did not promptly open to her the gates of Paradise.

"Sire," added the Abbess de Fontevault, "I have three nuns in my convent who take the Holy Communion every other day, and whom my predecessor could never bring herself to absolve for some old piece of nonsense of twenty years back."

"Do you think you will be able to manage them, madame?" asked the King, laughing.

“I am afraid not,” replied my sister. “Those are three whom one could never manage, and your Majesty on the throne may possibly have fewer difficulties to deal with than the abbess or the prior of a convent.”

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The King was obliged to quit us to go and see one of the ministers, but he honoured the Abbess by telling her that she was excellent company, of which he could never have too much.

My sister wished to see Madame de Maintenon and the Duc du Maine; so we visited that lady, who took a great liking to the Abbess, which was reciprocated.

When my sister saw the young Duc du Maine, she exclaimed, "How handsome he is! Oh, sister, how fond I shall be of such a nephew!"

"Then," said I, "you will forgive me, won't you, for having given birth to him?"

"When I reproached you," she answered, "I had not yet seen the King. When one has seen him, everything is excusable and everything is right. Embrace me, my dear sister, and do not let us forget that I owe my abbey to you, as well as my independence, fortune, and liberty."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Cannot reconcile themselves to what exists
Domestics included two nurses, a waiting-maid, a physician
Extravagant, without the means to be so
Happy with him as a woman who takes her husband's place can be
Poetry without rhapsody
Present princes and let those be scandalised who will!
Satire without bitterness
Talent without artifice
The pulpit is in want of comedians; they work wonders there
Then comes discouragement; after that, habit
Trust not in kings
What they need is abstinence, prohibitions, thwartings
When one has seen him, everything is excusable
Would you like to be a cardinal? I can manage that