

Memoirs of Madame de Montespan — Volume 5 eBook

Memoirs of Madame de Montespan — Volume 5

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Being the Historic Memoirs of the Court of Louis XIV.

BOOK 5.

CHAPTER I.

The Prince de Mont-Beliard.—He Agrees to the Propositions Made Him.—The King's Note.—Diplomacy of the Chancellor of England.—Letter from the Marquis de Montespan.—The Duchy in the Air.—The Domain of Navarre, Belonging to the Prince de Bouillon, Promised to the Marquise.

There was but a small company this year at the Waters of Bourbonne,—to begin with, at any rate; for afterwards there appeared to be many arrivals, to see me, probably, and Mademoiselle de Nantes.

The Chancellor Hyde was already installed there, and his establishment was one of the most agreeable and convenient; he was kind enough to exchange it for mine. A few days afterwards he informed me of the arrival of the Prince de Mont-Beliard, of Wurtemberg, who was anxious to pay his respects to me, as though to the King's daughter. In effect, this royal prince came and paid me a visit; I thought him greatly changed for such a short lapse of years.

We had seen each other—as, I believe, I have already told—at the time of the King's first journey in Flanders. He recalled all the circumstances to me, and was amiable enough to tell me that, instead of waning, my beauty had increased.

“It is you, Prince, who embellish everything,” I answered him. “I begin to grow like a dilapidated house; I am only here to repair myself.”

Less than a year before, M. de Mont-Billiard had lost that amiable princess, his wife; he had a lively sense of this loss, and never spoke of it without tears in his eyes.

“You know, madame,” he told me, “my states are, at present, not entirely administered, but occupied throughout by the officers of the King of France. Those persons who have my interests at heart, as well as those who delight at my fears, seem persuaded that this provisional occupation will shortly become permanent. I dare not question you on this subject, knowing how much discretion is required of you; but I confess that I should pass quieter and more tranquil nights if you could reassure me up to a certain point.”

“Prince,” I replied to him, “the King is never harsh except with those of whom he has had reason to complain. M. le Duc de Neubourg, and certain other of the Rhine princes, have been thick-witted enough to be disloyal to him; he has punished them for



it, as Caesar did, and as all great princes after him will do. But you have never shown him either coldness, or aversion, or indifference. He has commanded the Marechal de Luxembourg to enter your territory to prevent the Prince of Orange from reaching there before us, and your authority has been put, not under the domination, but under the protection, of the King of France, who is desirous of being able to pass from there into the Brisgau.”



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Madame de Thianges, Madame de Nevers, and myself did all that lay in our power to distract or relieve the sorrows of the Prince; but the loss of Mademoiselle de Chatillon, his charming spouse, was much more present with him than that of his states; the bitterness which he drew from it was out of the reach of all consolation possible. The Marquise de Thianges procured the Chancellor of England to approach the Prince, and find out from him, to a certain extent, whether he would consent to exchange the County of Mont-Beliard for some magnificent estates in France, to which some millions in money would be added.

M. de Wurtemberg asked for a few days in which to reflect, and imagining that these suggestions emanated from Versailles, he replied that he could refuse nothing to the greatest of kings. My sister wrote on the day following to the Marquis de Louvois, instead of asking it of the King in person. M. de Luvois, who, probably, wished to despoil M. de Mont-Beliard without undoing his purse-strings, put this overture before the King maliciously, and the King wrote me immediately the following letter:

Leave M. de Mont-Beliard alone, and do not speak to him again of his estates. If the matter which occupies Madame de Thianges could be arranged, it would be of the utmost propriety that a principality of such importance rested in the Crown, at least as far as sovereignty. The case of the Principality of Orange is a good enough lesson to me; there must be one ruler only in an empire. As for you, my dear lady, feel no regret for all that. You shall be a duchess, and I am pleased to give you this title which you desire. Let M. de Montespan be informed that his marquisate is to be elevated into a duchy with a peerage, and that I will add to it the number of seigniories that is proper, as I do not wish to deviate from the usage which has become a law, *etc.*

The prince's decision was definite, and as his character was, there was no wavering. I wrote to him immediately to express my lively gratitude, and we considered, the Marquise and I, as to the intermediary to whom we could entrust the unsavoury commission of approaching the Marquis de Montespan. He hated all my family from his having obtained no satisfaction from it for his wrath. We begged the Chancellor Hyde, a personage of importance, to be good enough to accept this mission; he saw no reason to refuse it, and, after ten or eleven days, he received the following reply, with which he was moderately amused:

Chateau Saint ELIX At the world's end.



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I am sensible, my Lord, as I should be, of the honour which you have wished to do me, whilst, notwithstanding, permit me to consider it strange that a man of your importance has cared to meddle in such a negotiation. His Majesty the King of France did not consult me when he wished to make my wife his mistress; it is somewhat remarkable that so great a prince expects my intervention today to recompense conduct that I have disapproved, that I disapprove, and shall disapprove to my last breath. His Majesty has got eight or ten children from my wife without saying a word to me about it; this monarch can surely, therefore, make her a present of a duchy without summoning me to his assistance. According to all laws, human and divine, the King ought to punish Madame de Montespan, and, instead of censuring her, he wishes to make her a duchess! . . . Let him make her a princess, even a highness, if he likes; he has all the power in his hands. I am only a twig; he is an oak.

If madame is fostering ambition, mine has been satisfied for forty years; I was born a marquis; a marquis—apart from some unforeseen catastrophe—I will die; and Madame la Marquise, as long as she does not alter her conduct, has no need to alter her degree.

I will, however, waive my severity, if M. le Duc du Maine will intervene for his mother, and call me his father, however it may be. I am none the less sensible, my lord, of the honour of your acquaintance, and since you form one of the society of Madame la Marquise, endeavour to release yourself from her charms, for she can be an enchantress when she likes.... It is true that, from what they tell me, you were not quite king in your England.

I am, from out my exile (almost as voluntary as yours), the most obliged and grateful of your servants,

De GONDRIN Montespan.

The Marquise de Thianges felt a certain irritation at the reading of this letter; she offered all our excuses for it to the English Chancellor, and said to me: "I begin to fear that the King of Versailles is not acting with good faith towards you, when he makes your advancement depend on the Marquis de Montespan; it is as though he were giving you a duchy in the moon."

I sent word to the King that the Marquis refused to assist his generous projects; he answered me:

"Very well, we must look somewhere else."

Happily, this domestic humiliation did not transpire at Bourbonne; for M. de la Bruyere had arrived there with Monsieur le Prince, and that model satirist would unflinchingly have made merry over it at my expense.



The best society lavished its attentions on me; Coulanges, whose flatteries are so amusing, never left us for a moment.

The Prince, after the States were over, had come to relax himself at Bourbonne, which was his property. After having done all in his power formerly to dethrone his master, he is his enthusiastic servitor now that he sees him so strong. He was fascinated with Mademoiselle de Nantes, and asked my permission to seek her hand for the Duc de Bourbon, his grandson; my reply was, that the alliance was desirable on both sides, but that these arrangements were settled only by the King.



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In spite of the insolent diatribe of M. de Montespan, the waters proved good and favourable; my blood, little by little, grew calm; my pains, passing from one knee to the other, insensibly faded away in both; and, after having given a brilliant fete to the Prince de Mont-Beliard, the English Chancellor, and our most distinguished bathers, I went back to Versailles, where the work seemed to me to have singularly advanced.

The King went in advance of us to Corbeil; Madame de Maintenon, her pretty nieces, and my children were in the carriage. The King received me with his ordinary kindness, and yet said no word to me of the harshness which I had suffered from my husband. Two or three months afterwards he recollected his royal word, and gave me to understand that the Prince de Bourbon was shortly going to give up Navarre, in Normandy, and that this vast and magnificent estate would be raised to a duchy for me.

It has not been yet, at the moment that I write. Perhaps it is written above that I shall never be a duchess. In such a case, the King would not deserve the inward reproaches that my sensibility addresses him, since his good-will would be fettered by destiny.

It is my kindness which makes me speak so.

CHAPTER II.

The Venetian Drummer.—The Little Olivier.—Adriani's Love.—His Ingratitude.—His Punishment.—His Vengeance.—Complaint on This Account.

At the great slaughter of Candia, M. de Vivonne had the pleasure of saving a young Venetian drummer whom he noticed all covered with blood, and senseless, amongst the dead and dying, with whom the field was covered far and wide. He had his wounds dressed and cared for by the surgeons of the French navy, with the intention of giving him me, either as a valet de chambre or a page, so handsome and agreeable this young Italian was. Adriani was his name. He presented him to me after the return of the expedition to France, and I was sensible of this amiable attention of my brother, for truly the peer of this young drummer did not exist.

Adrien was admirable to see in my livery, and when my carriage went out, he attracted alone all the public attention. His figure was still not all that it might be; it developed suddenly, and then one was not wrong in comparing him with a perfect model for the Academy. He took small time in losing the manners which he had brought with him from his original calling. I discovered the best 'ton' in him; he would have been far better seated in the interior than outside my equipage. Unfortunately, this young impertinent gave himself airs of finding my person agreeable, and of cherishing a passion for me; my first valet de chambre told me of it at once. I gave him to the King, who had sometimes noticed him in passing.



Adrien was inconsolable at first at this change, for which he was not prepared, but his vanity soon came uppermost; he understood that it was an advancement, and took himself for a great personage, since he had the honour of approaching and serving the King.



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The little Olivier—the first assistant in the shop of Madame Camille, my dressmaker—saw Adrien, inspired him with love, and herself with much, and they had to be married. I was good-natured enough to be interested in this union, and as I had never any fault to find with the intelligent services and attentions of the little modiste, I gave her two hundred louis, that she might establish herself well and without any waiting.

She had a daughter whom she was anxious to call Athenais. I thought this request excessive; I granted my name of Francoise only.

The young couple would have succeeded amply with their business, since my confidence and favour were sufficient to give them vogue; but I was not slow in learning that cruel discord had already penetrated to their household, and that Adrien, in spite of his adopted country, had remained at heart Italian. Jealous without motive, and almost without love, he tormented with his suspicions, his reproaches, and his harshness, an attentive and industrious young wife, who loved him with intense love, and was unable to succeed in persuading him of it. From her condition, a modiste cannot dispense with being amiable, gracious, engaging. The little Olivier, as pretty as one can be, easily secured the homage of the cavaliers. For all thanks she smiled at the gentlemen, as a well brought up woman should do. Adrien disapproved these manners,—too French, in his opinion. One day he dared to say to his wife, and that before witnesses: “Because you have belonged to Madame de Montespan, do you think you have the same rights that she has?” And with that he administered a blow to her.

This indecency was reported to me. I did not take long in discovering what it was right to do with Adrien. I had him sent to Clagny, where I happened to be at the time.

“Monsieur the Venetian drummer,” I said to him, with the hauteur which it was necessary to oppose to his audacity, “Monsieur le Marechal de Vivonne, who is always too good, saved your life without knowing you. I gave you to the King, imagining that I knew you. Now I am undeceived, and I know, without the least possibility of doubt, that beneath the appearance of a good heart you hide the ungrateful and insolent rogue. The King needs persons more discreet, less violent, and more polite. Madame de Montespan gave you up to the King; Madame de Montespan has taken you back this morning to her service. You depend for the future on nobody but Madame de Montespan, and it is her alone that you are bound to obey. Your service in her house has commenced this morning; it will finish this evening, and, before midnight, you will leave her for good and all. I have known on all occasions how to pardon slight offences; there are some that a person of my rank could not excuse; yours is of that number. Go; make no answer! Obey, ingrate! Disappear, I command you!”

At these words he tried to throw himself at my feet. “Go, wretched fellow!” I cried to him; and, at my voice, my lackeys ran up and drove him from the room and from the chateau.

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Almost always these bad-natured folks have cowardly souls. Adrien, his head in a whirl, presented himself to my Suisse at Versailles, who, finding his look somewhat sinister, refused to receive him. He retired to my hotel in Paris, where the Suisse, being less of a physiognomist, delivered him the key of his old room, and was willing to allow him to pass the night there.

Adrien, thinking of naught but how to harm me and give me a memorable proof of his vengeance, ran and set fire to my two storehouses, and, to put a crown on his rancour, went and hanged himself in an attic.

About two o'clock in the morning, a sick-nurse, having perceived the flames, gave loud cries and succeeded in making herself heard. Public help arrived; the fire was mastered. My Suisse sought everywhere for the Italian, whom he thought to be in danger; he stumbled against his corpse. What a scene! What an affliction! The commissary having had his room opened, on a small bureau a letter was found which he had been at the pains of writing, and in which he accused me of his despair and death.

The people of Paris have been at all times extravagance and credulity itself. They looked upon this young villain as a martyr, and at once dedicated an elegy to him, in which I was compared with Medea, Circe, and Fredegonde.

It is precisely on account of this elegy that I have cared to set down this cruel anecdote. My readers, to whom I have just narrated the facts with entire frankness, can see well that, instead of having merited reproaches, I should only have received praise for my restraint and moderation.

It is, assuredly, most painful to have to suffer the abuse of those for whom we have never done aught; but the outrages of those whom we have succoured, maintained, and favoured are insupportable injuries.

CHAPTER III.

The Equipage at Full Speed.—The Poor Vine-grower.—Sensibility of Madame de Maintenon.—Her Popularity.—One Has the Right to Crush a Man Who Will Not Get Out of the Way.—What One Sees.—What They Tell You.—All Ends at the Opera.—One Can Be Moved to Tears and Yet Like Chocolate.

Another event with a tragical issue, and one to which I contributed even less, served to feed and foster that hatred, mixed with envy, which the rabble populace guards always so persistently towards the favourites of kings or fortune.



Naturally quick and impatient, I cannot endure to move with calm and state along the roads. My postilions, my coachmen know it, driving in such fashion that no equipage is ever met which cleaves the air like mine.

I was descending one day the declivity of the Coeur-Volant, between Saint Germain and Marly. The Marquises de Maintenon and d'Hudicourt were in my carriage with M. le Duc du Maine, so far as I can remember. We were going at the pace which I have just told, and my outriders, who rode in advance, were clearing the way, as is customary. A vine-grower, laden with sticks, chose this moment to cross the road, thinking himself, no doubt, agile enough to escape my six horses. The cries of my people were useless. The imprudent fellow took his own course, and my postilions, in spite of their efforts with the reins, could not prevent themselves from passing over his body; the wheels followed the horses; the poor man was cut in pieces.



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At the lamentations of the country folk and the horrified passers-by, we stopped. Madame de Maintenon wished to alight, and when she perceived the unfortunate vine-grower disfigured with his wounds, she clasped her hands and fell to weeping. The Marquise d'Hudicourt, who was always simplicity itself, followed her friend's example; there was nothing but groans and sorrowful exclamations. My coachman blamed the postilions, the postilions the man's obstinacy.

Madame de Maintenon, speaking as though she were the mistress, bade them be silent, and dared to say to them before all the crowd: "If you belonged to me, I would soon settle you." At these words all the spectators applauded, and cried: "Vive Madame de Maintenon!"

Irritated at what I had just heard, I put my head out of the door, and, turning to these sentimental women, I said to them: "Be good enough to get in, mesdames; are you determined to have me stoned?"

They mounted again, after having left my purse with the poor relations of the dead man; and as far as Ruel, which was our destination, I was compelled to listen to their complaints and litanies.

"Admit, madame," I declared to Madame de Maintenon, "that any person except myself could and would detest you for the harm you have done me. Your part was to blame the postilions lightly and the rustic very positively. My equipage did not come unexpectedly, and my two outriders had signalled from their horses."

"Madame," she replied, "you have not seen, as I did, those eyes of the unhappy man forced violently from their sockets, his poor crushed head, his palpitating heart, from which the blood soaked the pavement; such a sight has moved and broken my own heart. I was, as I am still, quite beside myself, and, in such a situation, it is permissible to forget discretion in one's speech and the proprieties. I had no intention of giving you pain; I am distressed at having done so. But as for your coachmen I loathe them, and, since you undertake their defence, I shall not for the future show myself in your equipage."

[In one of her letters, Madame de Maintenon speaks of this accident, but she does not give quite the same account of it. It is natural that Madame de Montespan seeks to excuse her people and herself if she can.—*Editor's Note.*]

At Ruel, she dared take the same tone before the Duchesse de Richelieu, who rebuked her for officiousness, and out of spite, or some other reason, Madame de Maintenon refused to dine. She had two or three swooning fits; her tears started afresh four or five times, and the Marquise d'Hudicourt, who dined only by snatches, went into a corner to sob and weep along with her.



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“Admit, madame,” I said then to Madame de Maintenon, “your excessive grief for an unknown man is singular. He was, perhaps, actually a dishonest fellow. The accident which you come back to incessantly, and which distresses me also, is doubtless deplorable; but, after all, it is not a murder, an ambush, a premeditated assassination. I imagine that if such a catastrophe had happened elsewhere, and been reported to us in a gazette or a book, you would have read of it with interest and commiseration; but we should not have seen you clasp your hands over your head, turn red and pale, utter loud cries, shed tears, sob, and scold a coachman, postilions, perhaps even me. The event, would, nevertheless, be actually the same. Admit, then, madame, and you, too, Madame d’Hudicourt, that there is an exaggeration in your sorrow, and that you would have made, both of you, two excellent comedians.”

Madame de Maintenon, piqued at these last words, sought to make us understand, and even make us admit, that there is a great difference between an event narrated to you by a third party, and an event which one has seen. Madame de Richelieu shut her mouth pleasantly with these words: “We know, Madame la Marquise, how much eloquence and wit is yours. We approve all your arguments, past and to be. Let us speak no further of an accident which distresses you; and since you require to be diverted, let us go to the Opera, which is only two leagues off.”

She consented to accompany us, for fear of proving herself entirely ridiculous; but to delay us as much as possible, she required a cup of chocolate, her favourite dish, her appetite having returned as soon as she had exhausted the possibilities of her grief.

CHAPTER IV.

Charles II., King of England.—How Interest Can Give Memory.—His Grievances against France.—The Two Daughters of the Duke of York.—William of Orange Marries One, in Spite of the Opposition of the King.—Great Joy of the Allies.—How the King of England Understands Peace.—Saying of the King.—Preparations for War.

The King, Charles Stuart, who reigned in England since the death of the usurper, Cromwell, was a grandson of Henri IV., just as much as our King. Charles II. displayed the pronounced penchant of Henri IV. for the ladies and for pleasure; but he had neither his energy, nor his genial temper, nor his amiable frankness. After the death of Henrietta of England, his beloved sister, he remained for some time longer our ally, but only to take great advantage from our union and alliance. He had made use of it against the Dutch, his naval and commercial rivals, and had compelled them, by the aid of the King of France (then his friend), to reimburse him a sum of twenty-six millions, and to pay him, further, an annual tribute of twelve or fifteen thousand livres for the right of fishing round his island domains.



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All these things being obtained, he seemed to recollect that Cardinal de Richelieu had not protected his father, Stuart; that the Cardinal Mazarin had declared for Cromwell in his triumph; that the Court of France had indecently gone into mourning for that robber; that there had been granted neither guards, nor palace, nor homages of state to the Queen, his mother, although daughter and sister of two French kings; that this Queen, in a modest retirement—sometimes in a cell in the convent of Chaillot, sometimes in her little pavilion at Colombes!—had died, poisoned by her physician, without the orator, Bossuet, having even frowned at it in the funeral oration;

[Mademoiselle de Montpensier, in her Memoirs, says that this Queen, already languishing, had lost her sleep, and was given soporific pills, on account of which Henrietta of France awoke no more; but it is probable that the servants, and not the doctors, committed this blunder.]

that the unfortunate Henrietta daughter of this Queen and first wife of Monsieur had succumbed to the horrible tortures of a poisoning even more visible and manifest; whilst her poisoners, who were well known, had never been in the least blamed or disgraced.

On all these arguments, with more or less foundation, Charles II. managed to conclude that he ought to detach himself from France, who was not helpful enough; and, by deserting us, he excited universal joy amongst his subjects, who were constantly jealous of us.

Charles Stuart had had children by his mistresses; he had had none by the Queen, his wife. The presumptive heir to the Crown was the Duke of York, his Majesty's only brother.

The Duke of York, son-in-law—as I have noticed already—of our good Chancellor, Lord Hyde, had himself only two daughters, equally beautiful, who, according to the laws of those islanders, would bear the sceptre in turn.

Our King, who read in the future, was thinking of marrying these two princesses conformably with our interests, when the Prince of Orange crossed the sea, and went formally to ask the hand of the elder of his uncle.

Informed of this proceeding, the King at once sent M. de Croissy-Colbert to the Duke of York, to induce him to interfere and refuse his daughter; but, in royal families, it is always the head who makes and decides marriages. William of Orange obtained his charming cousin Mary, and acquired that day the expectation of the Protestant throne, which was his ambition.

At the news of this marriage, the allies, that is to say, all the King's enemies, had an outburst of satisfaction, and gave themselves up to puerile jublations. The King of Great Britain stood definitely on their side; he made common cause with them, and

soon there appeared in the political world an audacious document signed by this prince, in which, from the retreat of his island, the empire of fogs, he dared to demand peace from Louis of Bourbon, his ancient ally and his cousin german, imposing on him the most revolting conditions.



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According to the English monarch, France ought to restore to the Spaniards, first Sicily, and, further, the towns of Charleroi, Ath, Courtrai, Condo, Saint Guilain, Tournai, and Valenciennes, as a condition of retaining Franche-Comte; moreover, France was compelled to give up Lorraine to the Duke Charles, and places in German Alsace to the Emperor.

The King replied that “too much was too much.” He referred the decision of his difficulties to the fortune of war, and collected fresh soldiers.

Then, without further delay, England and the States General signed a particular treaty at La Hague, to constrain France (or, rather, her ruler) to accept the propositions that his pride refused to hear.

CHAPTER V.

The Great Mademoiselle Buys Choisy.—The President Gonthier.—The Indemnity.—The Salmon.—The Harangue as It Is Not Done in the Academy.

The King had only caused against his own desire the extreme grief which Mademoiselle felt at the imprisonment of Lauzun. His Majesty was sensible of the wisdom of the resolution which she had made not to break with the Court, and to show herself at Saint Germain, or at Versailles, from time to time, as her rank, her near kinship, her birth demanded. He said to me one day: “My cousin is beginning to look up. I see with pleasure that her complexion is clearing, that she laughs willingly at this and that, and that her good-will for me is restored. I am told that she is occupied in building a country-house above Vitry. Let us go to-day and surprise her, and see what this house of Choisy is like.”

We arrived at a sufficiently early hour, and had time to see everything. The King found the situation most agreeable; those lovely gardens united high up above the Seine, those woods full of broad walks, of light and air, those points of view happily chosen and arranged, gave a charming effect; the house of one story, raised on steps of sixteen stairs, appeared to us elegant from its novelty; but the King blamed his cousin for not having put a little architecture and ornament on the facade.

“Princes,” said he, “have no right to be careless; since universal agreement has made us Highnesses, we must know how to carry our burden, and to lay it down at no time, and in no place.”

Mademoiselle excused herself on the ground of her remoteness from the world, and on the expense, which she wished to keep down.

“From the sight of the country,” said the King, “you must have a hundred to a hundred and twelve, acres here.”



“A hundred and nine,” she answered.

“Have you paid dear for this property?” went on the King. “It is the President Gonthier who has sold it?”

“I paid for this site, and the old house which no longer exists, forty thousand livres,” she said.

“Forty thousand livres!” cried the King. “Oh, my cousin, there is no such thing as conscience! You have not paid for the ground. I was assured that poor President Gonthier had only got rid of his house at Choisy because his affairs were embarrassed; you must indemnify him, or rather I will indemnify him myself, by giving him a pension.”



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Mademoiselle bit her lip and added:

“The President asked sixty thousand first; my men of business offered him forty, and he accepted it.”

Mademoiselle has no generosity, although she is immensely rich; she pretended not to hear, and it was M. Colbert who sent by order the twenty thousand livres to the President.

Mademoiselle, vain and petty, as though she were a bourgeoisie of yesterday, showed us her gallery, where she had already collected the selected portraits of all her ancestors, relations, and kindred; she pointed out to us in her winter salon the portrait of the little Comte de Toulouse, painted, not as an admiral, but as God of the Sea, floating on a pearl shell; and his brother, the Duc du Maine, as Colonel-General of the Swiss and Grisons. The full-length portrait of the King was visible on three chimneypieces; she was at great pains to make a merit of it, and call for thanks.

Having followed her into her state chamber, where she had stolen in privately, I saw that she was taking away the portrait of Lauzun. I went and told it to the King, who shrugged his shoulders and fell to laughing.

“She is fifty-two years old,” he said to me.

A very pretty collation of confitures and fruits was served us, to which the King prayed her to add a ragout of peas and a roasted fowl.

During the repast, he said to her: “For the rest, I have not noticed the portrait of Gaston, your father; is it a distraction on my part, or an omission on yours?”

“It will be put there later,” she answered. “It is not time.”

“What! your father!” added the King. “You do not think that, cousin!”

“All my actions,” added the Princess, “are weighed in the balance beforehand; if I were to exhibit the portrait of my father at the head of these various pictures, I should have to put my stepmother, his wife, there too, as a necessary pendant. The harm which she has done me does not permit of that complacence. One opens one’s house only to one’s friends.”

“Your stepmother has never done you any other harm,” replied the King, “than to reclaim for her children the funds or the furniture left by your father. The character of Margaret of Lorraine has always been sweetness itself; seeing your irritation, she begged me to arbitrate myself; and you know all that M. Colbert and the Chancellor did to satisfy you under the circumstances. But let us speak of something else, and cease these discussions. I have a service to ask of you: here is M. le Duc du Maine already big;



everybody knows of your affection for him, and I have seen his portrait with pleasure, in one of your salons. I am going to establish him; would it be agreeable to you if I give him your livery?"

"M. le Duc du Maine," said the Princess, "is the type of what is gracious, and noble, and beautiful; he can only do honour to my livery; I grant it him with all my heart, since you do me the favour of desiring it. Would I were in a position to do more for him!"



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The King perfectly understood these last words; he made no reply to them, but he understood all that he was meant to understand. We went down again into the gardens.

The fishermen of Choisy had just caught a salmon of enormous size, which they had been pursuing for four or five days; they had intended to offer it to Mademoiselle; the presence of the King inspired them with another design. They wove with great diligence a large and pretty basket of reeds, garnished it with foliage, young grass, and flowers, and came and presented to the King their salmon, all leaping in the basket.

The fisherman charged with the address only uttered a few words; they were quite evidently improvised, so that they gave more pleasure and effect than those of academicians, or persons of importance. The fisherman expressed himself thus:

“You have brought us good fortune, Sire, by your presence, as you bring fortune to your generals. You arrive on the Monday; on the Tuesday the town is taken. We come to offer to the greatest of kings the greatest salmon that can be caught.”

The King desired this speech to be instantly transcribed; and, after having bountifully rewarded the sailors, his Majesty said to Mademoiselle:

“This man was born to be a wit; if he were younger, I would place him in a college. There is wit at Choisy in every rank of life.”

CHAPTER VI.

Departure of the King.—Ghent Reduced in Five Days.—Taking of Ypres.—Peace Signed.—The Prince of Orange Is at Pains Not to Know of It.—Horrible Cruelties.

I have related in what manner Charles II., suddenly pronouncing in favour of his nephew, the Prince of Orange, had signed a league with his old enemies, the Dutch, in order to counteract the success of the King of France and compel him to sign a humiliating and entirely inadmissible peace.

The King left Versailles suddenly on the 4th of February, 1678, taking, with his whole Court, the road to Lorraine, while waiting for the troops which had wintered on the frontiers, and were investing at once Luxembourg, Charlemont, Namur, Mons, and Ypres, five of the strongest and best provisioned places in the Low Countries. By this march and manoeuvre, he wished to hoodwink the allied generals, who were very far from imagining that Ghent was the point towards which the Conqueror's intentions were directed.

In effect, hardly had the King seen them occupied in preparing the defence of the above named places, when, leaving the Queen and the ladies in the agreeable town of Metz,



he rapidly traversed sixty leagues of country, and laid siege to the town of Ghent, which was scarcely expecting him.

The Spanish governor, Don Francisco de Pardo, having but a weak garrison and little artillery, decided upon releasing the waters and inundating the country; but certain heights remained which could not be covered, and from here the French artillery started to storm the ramparts and the fort.



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The siege was commenced on the 4th of March; upon the 9th the town opened its gates, and two days later the citadel. Ypres was carried at the end of a week, in spite of the most obstinate resistance. Our grenadiers performed prodigies, and lost all their officers, without exception. I lost there one of my nephews, the one hope of his family; my compliments to the King, therefore, were soon made.

He went to Versailles to take back the Queen, and returned to Ghent with the speed and promptitude of lightning. The same evening he sent an order to a detachment of the garrison of Maestricht to hasten and seize the town and citadel of Leuwe, in Brabant, which was executed on the instant. It was then that the Dutch sent their deputation, charged to plead for a suspension of hostilities for six weeks. The King granted it, although these blunderers hardly merited it. They undertook that Spain should join them in the peace, and finally, after some difficulties, settled more or less rightly, the treaty was signed on the 10th of August, just as the six weeks were about to expire.

The Prince of Orange, naturally bellicose, and, above all things, passionately hostile to France, pretended to ignore the existence of this peace, which he disapproved. The Marechal de Luxembourg, informed of the treaty, gave himself up to the security of the moment; he was actually at table with his numerous officers when he was warned that the Prince of Orange was advancing against him. The alarm was quickly sounded; such troops and cavalry as could be were assembled, and a terrible action ensued.

At first we were repulsed, but soon the Marshal rallied his men; he excited their indignation by exposing to them the atrocity of M. d'Orange, and after a terrible massacre, in which two thousand English bit the dust, the Marechal de Luxembourg remained master of the field.

He was victorious, but in this unfortunate action we lost, ourselves, the entire regiment of guards, that of Feuquieres, and several others besides, with an incredible quantity of officers, killed or wounded.

The name of the Prince of Orange, since that day, was held in horror in both armies, and he would have fallen into disgrace with the States General themselves had it not been for the protection of the King of England, to whom the Dutch were greatly bound.

On the following day, this monster sent a parliamentary officer to the French generals to inform them that during the night official news of the peace had reached him.

CHAPTER VII.

Mission of Madame de Maintenon to Choisy.—Mademoiselle Gives the Principalities of Eu and Dombes in Exchange for M. de Lauzun.—He Is Set at Liberty.



The four or five words which had escaped Mademoiselle de Montpensier had remained in the King's recollection. He said to me: "If you had more patience, and a sweeter and more pliant temper, I would employ you to go and have a little talk with Mademoiselle, in order to induce her to explain what intentions she may have relative to my son."



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"I admit, Sire," I answered him, "that I am not the person required for affairs of that sort. Your cousin is proud and cutting; I would not endure what she has made others endure. I cannot accept such a commission. But Madame de Maintenon, who is gentleness itself, is suitable—no one more so for this mission; she is at once insinuating and respectful; she is attached to the Duc du Maine. The interests of my son could not be in better hands."

The King agreed with me, and both he and I begged the Marquise to conduct M. du Maine to Choisy.

Mademoiselle de Montpensier received him with rapture. He thanked her for what she had done for him, in granting him her colours, and upon that Mademoiselle asked his permission to embrace him, and to tell him how amiable and worthy of belonging to the King she found him. She led him to the hall, in which he was to be seen represented as a colonel-general of Swiss.

"I have always loved the Swiss," she said, "because of their great bravery, their fidelity, and their excellent discipline. The Marechal de Bassompierre made his corps the perfection which it is; it is for you, my cousin, to maintain it."

She passed into another apartment, where she was to be seen represented as Bellona. Two Loves were presenting her, one with his helm adorned with martial plumes, the other with his buckler of gold, with the Orleans-Montpensier arms. The laurel crown, with which Triumphs were ornamenting her head, and the scaled cuirass of Pallas completed her decoration. M. le Duc du Maine praised, without affectation, the intelligence of the artist; and as for the figure and the likeness, he said to the Princess: "You are good, but you are better." The calm and the naivety of this compliment made Mademoiselle shed tears. Her emotion was visible; she embraced my son anew.

"You have brought him up perfectly," she said to Madame de Maintenon. "His urbanity is of good origin; that is how a king's son ought to act and speak:

"His Majesty," said Madame de Maintenon, "has been enchanted with your country-house; he spoke of it all the evening. He even added that you had ordered it all yourself, without an architect, and that M. le Notre would not have done better."

"M. le Notre," replied the Princess, "came here for a little; he wanted to cut and destroy, and upset and disarrange, as with the King at Versailles. But I am of a different mould to my cousin; I am not to be surprised with big words. I saw that Le Notre thought only of expenditure and tyranny; I thanked him for his good intentions, and prayed him not to put himself out for me. I found there thickets already made, of an indescribable charm; he wanted, on the instant, to clear them away, so that one could testify that all this new park was his. If you please, madame, tell his Majesty that M. le Notre is the sworn enemy of Nature; that he sees only the pleasures of proprietorship in the future, and

promises us cover and shade just at that epoch of our life when we shall only ask for sunshine in which to warm ourselves.”



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She next led her guests towards the large apartments. When she had come to her bedroom, she showed the Marquise the mysterious portrait, and asked if she recognised it.

“Ah, my God! 'tis himself!” said Madame de Maintenon at once. “He sees, he breathes, he regards us; one might believe one heard him speak. Why do you give yourself this torture?” continued the ambassadress. “The continual presence of an unhappy and beloved being feeds your grief, and this grief insensibly undermines you. In your place, Princess, I should put him elsewhere until a happier and more favourable hour.”

“That hour will never come,” cried Mademoiselle.

“Pardon me,” resumed Madame de Maintenon; “the King is never inhuman and inexorable; you should know that better than any one. He punishes only against the protests of his heart, and, as soon as he can relent without impropriety or danger, he pardons. M. de Lauzun, by refusing haughtily the marshal’s baton, which was offered him in despite of his youth, deeply offended the King, and the disturbance he allowed himself to make at Madame de Montespan’s depicted him as a dangerous and wrong-headed man. Those are his sins. Rest assured, Princess, that I am well informed. But as I know, at the same time, that the King was much attached to him,—and is still so, to some extent, and that a captivity of ten years is a rough school, I have the assurance that your Highness will not be thought importunate if you make today some slight attempt towards a clemency.”

“I will do everything they like,” Mademoiselle de Montpensier said then; “but shall I have any one near his Majesty to assist and support my undertaking? I have no more trust in Madame de Montespan; she has betrayed us, she will betray us again; the offence of M. de Lauzun is always present in her memory, and she is a lady who does not easily forgive. As for you, madame, I know that the King considers you for the invaluable services of the education given to his children. Deign to speak and act in favour of my unhappy husband, and I will make you a present of one of my fine titled territories.”

Madame de Maintenon was too acute to accept anything in such a case; she answered the Princess that her generosities, to please the King, should be offered to M. le Duc du Maine, and that, by assuring a part of her succession to that young prince, she had a sure method of moving the monarch, and of turning his paternal gratitude to the most favourable concessions. The Princess, enchanted, then said to the negotiatrice:

“Be good enough to inform his Majesty, this evening, that I offer to give, at once, to his dear and amiable child the County of Eu and my Sovereignty of Dombes, adding the revenues to them if it is necessary.”

Madame de Maintenon, who worships her pupil, kissed the hand of Mademoiselle, and promised to return and see her immediately.



That very evening she gave an account to the King of her embassy; she solicited the liberty of the Marquis de Lauzun, and the King commenced by granting “the authorisation of mineral waters.”



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Meanwhile, Mademoiselle, presented by Madame de Maintenon, went to take counsel with the King. She made a formal donation of the two principalities which I have named. His Majesty, out of courtesy, left her the revenues, and, in fine, she was permitted to marry her M. de Lauzun, and to assure him, by contract, fifty thousand livres of income.

CHAPTER VIII.

M. de Brisacier and King Casimir.—One Is Never so Well Praised as by Oneself.—He Is Sent to Get Himself Made a Duke Elsewhere.

The Abbe de Brisacier, the famous director of consciences, possessed enough friends and credit to advance young Brisacier, his nephew, to the Queen's household, to whom he had been made private secretary. Slanderers or impostors had persuaded this young coxcomb that Casimir, the King of Poland, whilst dwelling in Paris in the quality of a simple gentleman, had shown himself most assiduous to Madame Brisacier, and that he, Brisacier of France, was born of these assiduities of the Polish prince.

When he saw the Comte Casimir raised to the elective throne of Poland, he considered himself as the issue of royal blood, and it seemed to him that his position with the Queen, Maria Theresa, was a great injustice of fortune; he thought, nevertheless, that he ought to remain some time longer in this post of inferiority, in order to use it as a ladder of ascent.

The Queen wrote quantities of letters to different countries, and especially to Spain, but never, or hardly ever, in her own hand. One day, whilst handling all this correspondence for the princess's signature, the private secretary slipped one in, addressed to Casimir, the Polish King.

In this letter, which from one end to the other sang the praises of the Seigneur Brisacier, the Queen had the extreme kindness to remind the Northern monarch of his old liaison with the respectable mother of the young man, and her Majesty begged the prince to solicit from the King of France the title and rank of duke for so excellent a subject.

King Casimir was not, as one knows, distrust and prudence personified; he walked blindfold into the trap; he wrote with his royal hand to his brother, the King of France, and asked him a brevet as duke for young Brisacier. Our King, who did not throw duchies at people's heads, read and re-read the strange missive with astonishment and suspicion. He wrote in his turn to the suppliant King, and begged him to send him the why and the wherefore of this hieroglyphic adventure. The good prince, ignorant of ruses, sent the letter of the Queen herself.



Had this princess ever given any reason to be talked about, there is no doubt that she would have been lost on this occasion; but there was nothing to excite suspicion. The King, no less, approached her with precaution, in order to observe the first results of her answers.

“Madame,” he said, “are you still quite satisfied with young Brisacier, your private secretary?”



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“More or less,” replied the Infanta; “a little light, a little absent; but, on the whole, a good enough young man.”

“Why have you recommended him to the King of Poland, instead of recommending him to me directly?”

“To the King of Poland!—I? I have not written to him since I congratulated him on his succession.”

“Then, madame, you have been deceived in this matter, since I have your last letter in my hands. Here it is; I return it to you.”

The princess read the letter with attention; her astonishment was immense.

“My signature has been used without authority,” she said. “Brisacier alone can be guilty, being the only one interested.”

This new kind of ambitious man was summoned; he was easily confounded. The King ordered him to prison, wishing to frighten him for a punishment, and at the end of some days he was commanded to quit France and go and be made duke somewhere else.

This event threw such ridicule upon pretenders to the ducal state, that I no longer dared speak further to the King of the hopes which he had held out to me; moreover, the things which supervened left me quite convinced of the small success which would attend my efforts.

CHAPTER IX.

Compliment from Monsieur to the New Prince de Dombes.—Roman History.—The Emperors Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and Verus.—The Danger of Erudition.

Monsieur, having learnt what his cousin of Montpensier had just done for my Duc du Maine, felt all possible grief and envy at it. He had always looked to inherit from her, and the harshest enemy whom M. de Lauzun met with at his wedding was, undoubtedly, Monsieur. When M. le Duc du Maine received the congratulations of all the Court on the ground of his new dignity of Prince de Dombes, his uncle was the last to appear; even so he could not refrain from making him hear these disobliging words,—who would believe it?—“If I, too, were to give you my congratulation, it would be scarcely sincere; what will be left for my children?”

Madame de Maintenon, who is never at a loss, replied: “There will be left always, Monseigneur, the remembrance of your virtues; that is a fair enough inheritance.”



We complained of it to the King; he reprimanded him in a fine fashion. "I gave you a condition so considerable," said he, "that the Queen, our mother, herself thought it exaggerated and dangerous in your hands. You have no liking for my children, although you feign a passionate affection for their father; the result of your misbehaviour will be that I shall grow cool to your line, and that your daughter, however beautiful and amiable she may be, will not marry my Dauphin."

At this threat Monsieur was quite overcome, and anxious to make his apologies to the King; he assured him of his tender affection for M. le Duc du Maine, and would give him to understand that Madame de Maintenon had misunderstood him.



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“It is not from her that your compliment came to us; it is from M. le Duc du Maine, who is uprightness itself, and whose mouth has never lied.”

Monsieur then started playing at distraction and puerility; the medal-case was standing opened, his gaze was turned to it. Then he came to me and said in a whisper: “I pray you, come and look at the coin of Marcus Aurelius; do you not find that the King resembles that emperor in every feature?”

“You are joking,” I answered him. “His Majesty is as much like him as you are like me.”

He insisted, and his brother, who witnessed our argument, wished to know the reason. When he understood, he said to Monsieur: “Madame de Montespan is right; I am not in the least like that Roman prince in face. The one to whom I should wish to be like in merit is Trajan.”

“Trajan had fine qualities,” replied Monsieur; “that does not prevent me from preferring Marcus Aurelius.”

“On what grounds?” asked his Majesty.

“On the grounds that he shared his throne with Verus,” replied Monsieur, unhesitatingly.

The King flushed at this reply, and answered in few words: “Marcus Aurelius’s action to his brother may, be called generous; it was none the less inconsiderate. By his own confession, the Emperor Verus proved, by his debauchery and his vices, unworthy, of the honour which had been done him. Happily, he died from his excesses during the Pannonian War, and Marcus Aurelius could only do well from that day on.”

Monsieur, annoyed with his erudition and confused at his escapade, sought to change the conversation. The King, passing into his cabinet, left him entirely, in my charge. I scolded him for his inconsequences, and he dared to implore me to put his daughter “in the right way,” to become one day Queen of France by marrying Monsieur le Dauphin, whom she loved already with her whole heart.

CHAPTER X.

The Benedictines of Fontevault.—The Head in the Basin.—The Unfortunate Delivery.—The Baptism of the Monster.—The Courageous Marriage.—Foundation of the Royal Abbey of Fontevault.

Two or three days after our arrival at Fontevault, the King, who loves to know all the geographical details of important places, asked me of the form and particulars of the celebrated abbey. I gave him a natural description of it.



“They are two vast communities,” I told him, “which the founder, for some inexplicable whim, united in one domain, of an extent which astonishes the imagination.”

The Community of Benedictine Nuns is regarded as the first, because of the abbatorial dignity it possesses. The Community of Benedictine Monks is only second,—a fact which surprises greatly strangers and visitors. Both in the monastery and the convent the buildings are huge and magnificent, the courts spacious, the woods and streams well distributed and well kept.



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“Every morning you may see a hundred and fifty to two hundred ploughs issue from both establishments; these spread over the plain and till an immense expanse of land. Carts drawn by bullocks, big mules, or superb horses are ceaselessly exporting the products of the fields, the meadows, or the orchards. Innumerable cows cover the pastures, and legions of women and herds are employed to look after these estates.

“The aspect of Fontevrault gives an exact idea of the ancient homes of the Patriarchs, in their remote periods of early civilisation, which saw the great proprietors delighting in their natal hearth, and finding their glory, as well as their happiness, in fertilising or assisting nature.

“The abbess rules like a sovereign over her companion nuns, and over the monks, her neighbours. She appoints their officers and their temporal prince. It is she who admits postulants, who fixes the dates of ordinations, pronounces interdictions, graces, and penances. They render her an account of their administration and the employment of their revenues, from which she subtracts carefully her third share, as the essential right of her crosier of authority.”

“Have you invited the Benedictine Fathers to your fete in the wood?” the King asked me, smiling.

“We had no power, Sire,” I answered. “There are many young ladies being educated with the nuns of Fontevrault. The parents of these young ladies respectful as they are to these monks, would have looked askance at the innovation. The Fathers never go in there. They are to be seen at the abbey church, where they sing and say their offices. Only the three secular chaplains of the abbess penetrate into the house of the nuns; the youngest of the three cannot be less than fifty.

“The night of the feast the monks draw near our cloister by means of a wooden theatre, which forms a terrace, and from this elevation they participate by the eye and ear in our amusements; that is enough.”

“Has Madame de Mortemart ever related to you the origin of her abbey?” resumed the King. “Perhaps she is ignorant of it. I am going to tell you of it, for it is extremely curious; it is not as it is related in the books, and I take the facts from good authority. You must hear of it, and you will see.

“There was once a Comtesse de Poitiers, named Honorinde, to whom fate had given for a husband the greatest hunter in the world. This man would have willingly passed his life in the woods, where he hunted, night and day, what we call, in hunter’s parlance, ‘big game.’ Having won the victory over a monstrous boar, he cut off the head himself, and this quivering and bleeding mask he went to offer to his lady in a basin. The young woman was in the first month of her pregnancy. She was filled with repugnance and fright at the sight of this still-threatening head; it troubled her to the prejudice of her fruit.



“Eight, or seven and a half, months afterwards, she brought into the world a girl who was human in her whole body, but above had the horrible head of a wild boar! Imagine what cries, what grief, what despair! The cure of the place refused baptism, and the Count, broken down and desolate, ordered the child to be drowned.



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“Instead of throwing it into the water, his servant scrupulously went straight to the monastery where your sister rules. He laid down his closed packet in the church of the monks, and then returned to his lord, who never had any other child.

“The religious Benedictines, not knowing whence this monster came, believed there was some prodigy in it. They baptised in this little person all that was not boar, and left the surplus to Providence. They brought up the singular creature in the greatest secrecy; it drank and lapped after the manner of its kind. As it grew up it walked on its feet, and that without the least imperfection; it could sit down, go on its knees, and even make a courtesy. But it never articulated any distinct words, and it had always a harsh and rough voice which howled and grunted. Its intelligence never reached the knowledge of reading or writing; but it understood easily all that could be said to it, and the proof was that it replied by its actions.

“The Comte de Poitiers having died whilst hunting, Honorinde learnt of her old serving-man in what refuge, in what asylum, he had long ago deposited the little one. This good mother proceeded there, and the monks, after some hesitation, confessed what had become of it. She wished to see it; they showed it her. At its aspect she felt the same inward commotion which had, years before, perverted nature. She groaned, fainted, burst into tears, and never had the courage and firmness to embrace what she had seen.

“Her gratitude was not less lively and sincere; she handed a considerable sum to the Benedictines of Fontevrault, charging them to continue their good work and charity.

“The reverend Prior, reflecting that his hideous inmate came of a great family, and of a family of great property, resolved to procure it as a wife for his nephew. He sounded the young man, who looked fixedly at his future bride, and avowed that he was satisfied.

“She is a good Christian,” he replied to his uncle, since you have baptised her here. She is of a good family, since Honorinde has recognised her. There are many as ugly as she is to be seen who still find husbands. I will put a pretty mask on her, and the mask will give me sufficient illusion. Benedicte, so far as she goes, is well-made; I hope to have fine children who will talk.

“The Prior commenced by marrying them; he then confided in Honorinde, who, not daring to noise abroad this existence, was compelled to submit to what had been done.

“The marriage of the young she-monster was not happy. She bit her husband from morning to night. She did not know how to sit at table, and would only eat out of a trough. She needed neither an armchair, a sofa, nor a couch; she stretched herself out on the sand or on the pavement.



“Her husband, in despair, demanded the nullification of his marriage; and as the courts did not proceed fast enough for his impatience, he killed his companion, Benedicte, with a pistol-shot, at the moment when she was biting and tearing him before witnesses.



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“Honorinde had her buried at Fontevrault, and over her tomb, at the end of the year, she built a convent, to which her immense property was given, where she retired herself as a simple nun, and of which she was appointed first abbess by the Pope who reigned at the time.

“There, madame,” added the King, “is the somewhat singular origin of the illustrious abbey which your sister rules with such eclat. You must have remarked the boar’s head, perfectly imitated in sculpture, in the dome; that mask is the speaking history of the noble community of Fontevrault, where more than a hundred Benedictine monks obey an abbess.”

CHAPTER XI.

Fine Couples Make Fine Children.—The Dauphine of Bavaria.—She Displeases Madame de Montespan.—First Debut Relating to Madame de Maintenon, Appointed Lady-in-waiting.—Conversation between the Two Marquises.

The King, in his moments of effusion and abandonment (then so full of pleasantness), had said more than once: “If I have any physical beauty, I owe it to the Queen, my mother; if my daughters have any beauty, they owe it to me: it is only fine couples who get fine children.”

When I saw him decided upon marrying Monseigneur le Dauphin, I reminded him of his maxim. He fell to smiling, and answered me: “Chance, too, sometimes works its miracles. My choice for my son is a decided thing; my politics come before my taste, and I have asked for the daughter of the Elector of Bavaria, whose portrait I will show you. She is not beautiful, like you; she is prettier than Benedicte, and I hope that she will not bite Monseigneur le Dauphin in her capricious transports.”

The portrait that the King showed me was a flattering one, as are, in general, all these preliminary samples. For all that, the Princess seemed to me hideous, and even disagreeable, especially about her eyes, that portion of the face which confirms the physiognomy and decides everything.

“Monseigneur will never love that woman,” I said to the King. “That constrained look in the pupil, those drooping eyes,—they make my heart ache.”

“My son, happily,” his Majesty answered, “is not so difficult as you and I. He has already seen this likeness, and at the second look he was taken; and as we have assured him that the young person is well made, he cries quits with her face, and proposes to love her as soon as he gets her.”



“God grant it!” I added; and the King told me, more or less in detail, of what important personages he was going to compose his household. The eternal Abbe Bossuet was to become first chaplain, as being the tutor-in-chief to the Dauphin; the Duchesse de Richelieu, for her great name, was going to be lady of honour; and the two posts of ladies in waiting were destined for the Marquise de Rochefort, wife of the Marshal, and for Madame de Maintenon, ex-governess of the Duc du Maine. The gesture of disapproval which escaped me gave his Majesty pain.



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“Why this air of contempt or aversion?” he said, changing colour. “Is it to the Marechale de Rochefort or the Marquise de Maintenon that you object? I esteem both the one and the other, and I am sorry for you if you do not esteem them too.”

“The Marechale de Rochefort,” I replied, without taking any fright, “is aged, and almost always sick; a lady of honour having her appearance will make a contrast with her office. As to the other, she still has beauty and elegance; but do you imagine, Sire, that the Court of Bavaria and the Court of France have forgotten, in so short a time, the pleasant and burlesque name of the poet Scarron?”

“Every one ought to forget what I have forgotten,” replied the King, “and what my gratitude will not, and cannot forget, I am surprised that you, madame, should take pleasure in forgetting.”

“She has taken care of my children since the cradle, I admit it with pleasure,” said I to his Majesty, without changing my tone; “you have given her a marquise for recompense, and a superb hotel completely furnished at Versailles. I do not see that she has any cause for complaint, nor that after such bounty there is more to add.”

“Of eight children that you have brought into the world, madame, she has reared and attended perfectly to six,” replied the King. “The estate of Maintenon has, at the most, recompensed the education of the Comtes de Vegin, whose childhood was so onerous. And for the remainder of my little family, what have I yet done that deserves mention?”

“Give her a second estate and money,” I cried, quite out of patience, “since it is money which pays all services of that nature; but what need have you to raise her to great office, and keep her at Court? She dotes, she says, on her old chateau of Maintenon; do not deprive her of this delight. By making her lady in waiting, you would be disobliging her.”

“She will accept out of courtesy,” he said to me, putting on an air of mockery. And as the time for the Council was noted by him on my clock, he went away without adding more.

Since M. le Duc du Maine had grown up, and Mademoiselle de Nantes had been confided to the Marquise de Montchevreuil, Madame de Maintenon continued to occupy her handsome apartment on the Princes' Court. There she received innumerable visits, she paid assiduous court to the Queen, who had suddenly formed a taste for her, and took her on her walks and her visits to the communities; but this new Marquise saw me rarely. Since the affair of the vine-grower, killed on the road, she declared that I had insulted her before everybody, and that I had ordered her imperiously to return to my carriage, as though she had been a waiting-maid, or some other menial. Her excessive sensibility readily afforded her this pretext, so that she neglected and visibly overlooked me.

As she did not come to me, I betook myself to her at a tolerably early hour, before the flood of visitors, and started her on the history of the lady in waiting.



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“His Majesty has spoken of it to me,” she said, “as of a thing possible; but I do not think there is anything settled yet in the matter.”

“Will you accept,” I asked her, “supposing the King to insist?”

“I should like a hundred times better,” she replied, “to go and live in independence in my little kingdom of Maintenon, and with my own hands gather on my walls those velvet, brilliant peaches, which grow so fine in those districts. But if the King commands me to remain at Court, and form our young Bavarian Princess in the manners of this country, have I the right, in good conscience, to refuse?”

“Your long services have gained you the right to desire and take your retirement,” I said to her; “in your place, I should insist upon the necessities of my health. And the Court of France will not fall nor change its physiognomy, even if a German or Iroquois Dauphine should courtesy awry, or in bad taste.”

Madame de Maintenon began to laugh, and assured me that “her post as lady in waiting would be an actual burden, if the King had destined her for it in spite of herself, and there should be no means of withdrawing from it.”

At this speech I saw clearly that things were already fixed. Not wishing to call upon me the reproaches of my lord, I carried the conversation no further.

CHAPTER XII.

The “Powder of Inheritance.”—The Chambre Ardente.—The Comtesse de Soissons’s Arrest Decreed.—The Marquise de Montespan Buys Her Superintendence of the Queen’s Council.—Madame de Soubise.—Madame de Maintenon and the King.

At the time of the poisonings committed by Madame de Brinvilliers, the Government obtained evidence that a powder, called “the powder of inheritance,” was being sold in Paris, by means of which impatient heirs shortened the days of unfortunate holders, and entered into possession before their time.

Two obscure women, called La Vigoureuse and La Voisine, were arrested, having been caught redhanded. Submitted to the question, they confessed their crime, and mentioned several persons, whom they qualified as “having bought and made use of the said powder of inheritance.”

We saw suddenly the arrest of the Marechal de Luxembourg, the Princesse de Tingry, and many others. The ‘Chambre Ardente’—[The French Star Chamber.]—issued a warrant also to seize the person of the Duchesse de Bouillon and the Comtesse de



Soissons, the celebrated nieces of the Cardinal Mazarin, sisters-in-law, both, of my niece De Nevers, who was dutifully afflicted thereby.

The Comtesse de Soissons had possessed hitherto an important office, whose functions suited me in every respect,—that of the superintendence of the Queen's household and council. I bought this post at a considerable price. The Queen, who had never cared for the Countess, did me the honour of assuring me that she preferred me to the other, when I came to take my oath in her presence.



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Madame la Princesse de Rohan-Soubise had wished to supplant me at that time, and I was aware of her constant desire to obtain a fine post at Court. She loved the King, who had shown her his favours in more than one circumstance; but, as she had a place neither in his esteem nor in his affection, I did not fear her. I despatched to her, very adroitly, a person of her acquaintance, who spoke to her of the new household of a Dauphine, and gave her the idea of soliciting for herself the place of lady in waiting, destined for Madame de Maintenon.

The Princesse de Soubise put herself immediately amongst the candidates. She wrote to the King, her friend, a pressing and affectionate letter, to which he did not even reply. She wrote one next in a more majestic and appropriate style. It was notified to her that she was forbidden to reappear at Court.

The prince had resolutely taken his course. He wished to put Madame de Maintenon in evidence, and what he has once decided he abandons never.

I was soon aware that costumes of an unheard-of magnificence were being executed for the Marquise. Gold, silver, precious stones abounded. I was offered a secret view of her robe of ceremony, with a long mantle train. I saw this extraordinarily rich garment, and was sorry in advance for the young stranger, whose lady in waiting could not fail to eclipse her in everything.

I then put some questions to myself,—asked myself severely if my disapproval sprang from natural haughtiness, which would have been possible, and even excusable, or whether, mingled with all that, was some little agitation of jealousy and emulation.

I collected together a crowd of slight and scattered circumstances; and in this union of several small facts, at first neglected and almost unperceived, I distinguished on the part of the King a gradual and increasing attachment for the governess, and at the same time a negligence in regard to me,—a coldness, a cooling-down, at least, and that sort of familiarity, close parent of weariness, which comes to sight in the midst of courtesies and attentions the most satisfying and the most frequent.

The King, in the old days, never glanced towards my clock till as late as possible, and always at the last moment, at the last extremity. Now he cast his eyes on it a score of times in half an hour. He contradicted me about trifles. He explained to me ingeniously the faults, or alleged faults, of my temper and character. If it was a question of Madame de Maintenon, she was of a birth equal and almost superior to the rest of the Court. He forgot himself so far as to quote before me the subtilty of her answers or the delight of her most intimate conversation. Did he wish to describe a noble carriage, an attitude at once easy and distinguished, it was Madame de Maintenon's. She possessed this, she possessed that, she possessed everything.

Soon there was not the slightest doubt left to me; and I knew, as did the whole Court, that he openly visited the Marquise, and was glad to pass some moments there.



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These things, in truth, never lacked some plausible pretext, and he chose the time when Madame de Montchevreuil and Mademoiselle de Nantes were presenting their homages to Madame de Maintenon.

CHAPTER XIII.

Marie Louise, Daughter of Henrietta of England, Betrothed to the King of Spain.—Her Affliction.—Jealousy of the King, Her Husband.

The unfortunate lady, Henrietta of England, had left, at her death, two extremely young girls, one of them, indeed, being still in the cradle. The new Madame was seized with good-will for these two orphans to such an extent as to complain to the King. They were brought up with the greatest care; they were, both of them, pretty and charming.

The elder was named Marie Louise. It was this one whom Monsieur destined in his own mind for Monseigneur le Dauphin; and the Princess, accustomed early to this prospect, had insensibly adapted to it her mind and hope. Young, beautiful, agreeable, and charming as her mother, she created already the keenest sensation at Court, and the King felt an inclination to cherish her as much as he had loved Madame. But the excessive freedom which this alliance would not have failed to give his brother, both with his son-in-law and nephew, and with the Ministry, prevented his Majesty from giving way to this penchant for Marie Louise. On the contrary, he consented to her marriage with the King of Spain, and the news of it was accordingly carried to Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans. He and his wife felt much annoyance at it. But after communications of that kind there was scarcely any course open to be taken than that of acquiescence. Monsieur conveyed the news to his beloved daughter, and, on hearing that she was to be made Queen of Spain, this amiable child uttered loud lamentations.

When she went to Versailles to thank the King, her uncle, her fine eyes were still suffused with tears. The few words which she uttered were mingled with sighing and weeping; and when she saw the indifference of her cousin, who felicitated her like the rest, she almost fainted with grief and regret.

"My dear cousin," said this dull-witted young lord, "I shall count the hours until you go to Spain. You will send me some 'touru', for I am very fond of it?"

The King could not but find this reflection of his son very silly and out of place. But intelligence is neither to be given nor communicated by example. His Majesty had to support to the end this son, legitimate as much as you like, but altogether in degree, and with a person which formed a perpetual contrast with the person of the King. It was my Duc du Maine who should have been in the eminent position of Monseigneur. Nature willed it so. She had proved it sufficiently by lavishing all her favours on him, all

her graces; but the laws of convention and usage would not have it. His Majesty has made this same reflection, groaning, more than once.



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Marie Louise, having been married by proxy, in the great Chapel of Saint Germain, where the Cardinal de Bouillon blessed the ring in his quality of Grand Almoner of France, left for that Spain which her young heart distrusted.

Her beauty and charms rendered her precious to the monarch, utterly melancholy and devout as he was. He did not delay subjecting her to the wretched, petty, tiresome, and absurd etiquette of that Gothic Court. Mademoiselle submitted to all these nothings, seeing she had been able to submit to separation from France. She condemned herself to the most fastidious observances and the most sore privations, which did not much ameliorate her lot.

A young Castilian lord, almost mad himself, thought fit to find this Queen pretty, and publicly testify his love for her. The jealousy of the religious King flared up like a funeral torch. He conceived a hatred of his wife, reserved and innocent though she was. She died cruelly by poison. And Monseigneur le Dauphin probably cried, after his manner:

“What a great pity! She won’t send me the touru!”

CHAPTER XIV.

The Dauphine of Bavaria.—The Confessor with Spurs.—Madame de Maintenon Disputes with Bossuet.—He Opposes to Her Past Ages and History.—The Military Absolution.

Eight months after the wedding of Marie Louise, we witnessed the arrival of Anne Marie Christine, Princess of Bavaria, daughter of the Elector Ferdinand. The King and Monseigneur went to receive her at Vitry-le-Francais, and then escorted her to Chalons, where the Queen was awaiting her.

The Cardinal de Bouillon celebrated the marriage in the cathedral church of this third-class town. The festivities and jubilations there lasted a week.

The King had been very willing to charge me with the arrangement of the baskets of presents destined for the Dauphine; I acquitted myself of this commission with French taste and a sentiment of what was proper. When the Queen saw all these magnificent gifts placed and spread out in a gallery, she cried out, and said:

“Things were not done so nobly for me; and yet, I can say without vanity, I was of a better house than she.”

This remark paints the Queen, Maria Theresa, better than anything which could be said. Can one wonder, after that, that she should have brought into the world an hereditary prince who so keenly loves ‘touru’, and asks for it!



Madame de Maintenon and M. Bossuet had gone to receive the Princess of Schelestadt. When she was on her husband's territory, and it was necessary, to confess her for the sacrament of matrimony, she was strangely embarrassed. They had not remembered to bring a chaplain of her own nation for her; and she could not confess except in the German tongue.

Madame de Maintenon, who is skilled in all matters of religion, said to the prelate: "I really think, monsieur, that, having educated Monsieur le Dauphin, you ought to know a little German,—you who have composed the treatise on universal history."



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The Bishop of Meaux excused himself, saying that he knew Greek, Syriac, and even Hebrew; but that, through a fatality, he was ignorant of the German language. A trumpeter was then sent out to ask if there was not in the country a Catholic priest who was a German, or acquainted with the German tongue. Luckily one was found, and Madame de Maintenon, who is very, pedantic, even in the matter of toilet and ornaments, trembled with joy and thanked God for it. But what was her astonishment when they came to bring her the priest! He was in coloured clothes, a silk doublet, flowing peruke, and boots and spurs. The lady in waiting rated him severely, and was tempted to send him back. But Bossuet—a far greater casuist than she—decided that in these urgent cases one need hold much less to forms. They were contented with taking away the spurs from this amphibious personage; they pushed him into a confessional,—the curtain of which he was careful to draw before himself,—and they brought the Bavarian Princess, who, not knowing the circumstances, confessed the sins of her whole life to this sort of soldier.

Madame de Maintenon always had this general confession on her conscience; she scolded Bossuet for it as a sort of sacrilege, and the latter, who was only difficult and particular with simple folk, quoted historical examples in which soldiers, on the eve of battle, had confessed to their general.

“Yes,” said the King, on hearing these quotations from the imperturbable man; “that must have been to the Bishop of Puy or the Bishop of Orange, who, in effect, donned the shield and cuirass at the time of the crusades against the Saracens; or perhaps, again, to the Cardinal de la Valette d’Epernon, who commanded our armies under Richelieu successfully.”

“No, Sire,” replied the Bishop; “to generals who were simply soldiers.”

“But,” said the King, “were the confessions, then, null?”

“Sire,” added the Bishop of Meaux, “circumstances decide everything. Of old, in the time of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and much later still, confessions of Christians were public,—made in a loud voice; sometimes a number together, and always in the open air. Those of soldiers that I have quoted to madame were somewhat of the kind of these confessions of the primitive Church; and to-day, still, at the moment when battle is announced, a military almoner gives the signal for confession. The regiments confess on their knees before the Most High, who hears them; and the almoner, raised aloft on a pile of drums, holds the crucifix in one hand, and with the other gives the general absolution to eighty thousand soldiers at once.”

This clear and precise explanation somewhat calmed Madame de Maintenon, and Madame la Dauphine,—displeased at what she had done on arriving,—in order to be regular, learned to confess in French.

CHAPTER XV.



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Pere de la Chaise.—The Jesuits.—The Pavilion of Belleville.—The Handkerchief.

Pere de la Chaise has never done me good or ill; I have no motives for conciliating him, no reason to slander him. I am ignorant if he were the least in the world concerned, at the epoch of the Grand Jubilee, with those ecclesiastical attempts of which Bossuet had constituted himself spokesman. Pere de la Chaise has in his favour a great evenness of temper and character; an excellent tone, which comes to him from his birth; a conciliatory philosophy, which renders him always master of his condition and of his metier. He is, in a single individual, the happy combination of several men, that is to say, he is by turns, and as it may be needful, a man indulgent or severe in his preaching; a man of abstinence, or a good feeder; a man of the world, or a cenobite; a man of his breviary, or a courtier. He knows that the sins of woodcutters and the sins of kings are not of the same family, and that copper and gold are not weighed in the same scales.

He is a Jesuit by his garb; he is much more so than they are by his 'savoir-vivre'. His companions love the King because he is the King; he loves him, and pities him because he sees his weakness. He shows for his penitent the circumspection and tenderness of a father, and in the long run he has made of him a spoiled child.

This Pere de la Chaise fell suddenly ill, and with symptoms so alarming that the cabals each wished to appropriate this essential post of confessor.

The Jansenists would have been quite willing to lay hold of it. The Jesuits, and principally the cordons bleus, did not quit the pillow of the sick man for an instant.

The King had himself informed of his condition every half-hour. There was a bulletin, as there is for potentates. One evening, when the doctors were grave on his account, I saw anxiety and affliction painted on the visage of his Majesty.

"Where shall I find his like?" said he to me. "Where shall I find such knowledge, such indulgence, such kindness? The Pere de la Chaise knew the bottom of my heart; he knew, as an intelligent man, how to reconcile religion with nature; and when duty brings me to the foot of his tribunal, as a humble Christian, he never forgets that royalty, cannot be long on its knees, and he accompanies with his attentions and with deference the religious commands which he is bound to impose on me."

"I hope that God will preserve him to you," I replied to his Majesty; "but let us suppose the case in which this useful and precious man should see his career come to an end; will you grant still this mark of confidence and favour to the Jesuits? All the French being your subjects, would it not be fitting to grant this distinction sometimes to the one and sometimes to the other? You would, perhaps, extinguish by this that hate or animosity by which the Jesuits see themselves assailed, which your preference draws upon them."



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“I do not love the Jesuits with that affection that you seem to suggest,” replied the monarch. “I look upon them as men of instruction, as a learned and well-governed corporation; but as for their attachment for me, I know how to estimate it. This kind of people, strangers to the soft emotions of nature, have no affection or love for anything. Before the triumph of the King my grandfather, they intrigued and exerted themselves to bring about his fall; he opened the gates of Paris, and the Jesuits, like the Capuchins, at once recognised him and bowed down before him. King Henri, who knew what men are, pretended to forget the past; he pronounced himself decidedly in favour of the Jesuits because this body of teachers, numerous, rich, and of good credit, had just pronounced itself in favour of him.

“It was, then, a reconciliation between power and power, and the politics of my grandfather were to survive him and become mine, since the same elements exist and I am encamped on the same ground. If God takes away from me my poor Pere de la Chaise, I shall feel this misfortune deeply, because I shall lose in him, not a Jesuit, not a priest, but a good companion, a trusty and proved friend. If I lose him, I shall assuredly be inconsolable for him; but it will be very necessary for me to take his successor from the Grand Monastery of the Rue Saint Antoine. This community knows me by heart, and I do not like innovations.”

The successor of the Pere de la Chaise was already settled with the Jesuit Fathers; but this man of the vanguard was spared marching and meeting danger. The Court was not condemned to see and salute a new face; the old confessor recovered his health. His Majesty experienced a veritable joy at it, a joy as real as if the Prince of Orange had died.

Wishing to prove to the good convalescent how dear his preservation was to him, the King released him from his function for the rest of the year, and begged him to watch over his health, the most important of his duties and his possessions.

Having learnt that they had neither terraces nor gardens at the grand monastery of the Rue Saint Antoine, his Majesty made a present to his confessor of a very agreeable house in the district of Belleville, and caused to be transported thither all kinds of orange-trees, rare shrubs, and flowers from Versailles. These tasteful attentions, these filial cares, diverted the capital somewhat; but Paris is a rich soil, where the strangest things are easily received and naturalised without an effort.

The Pare de la Chaise had his chariot with his arms on it, and his family livery; and as the income from his benefices remained to him, joined to his office of confessor, he continued to have every day a numerous court of young abbés, priests well on in years, barons, countesses, marquises, magistrates and colonels, who came to Belleville in anxiety about his health, to congratulate themselves upon his convalescence, to ask of him, with submission and reverence, a bishopric, an archbishopric, a cardinal's hat, an important priory, a canonry, or an abbey.



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Having myself to place the three daughters of one of my relatives, I went to see the noble confessor at his pavilion of Belleville. He received me with the most marked distinction, and was lavish in acts of gratitude for all the benefits of the King.

As he crossed his salon, in order to accompany me and escort me out, he let his white handkerchief fall; three bishops at once flung themselves upon it, and there was a struggle as to who should pick it up to give it back to him.

I related to the King what I had seen. He said to me: "These prelates honour my confessor, looking upon him as a second me." In fact, the sins of the King could only throw his confessor into relief and add to his merit.

CHAPTER XVI.

Mademoiselle de Fontanges.—The Pavilions of the Garden of Flora.—Rapid Triumph of the Favourite.—Her Retreat to Val-de-grace.—Her Death.

Madame de Maintenon was already forty-four years old, and appeared to be only thirty. This freshness, that she owed either to painstaking care or to her happy and quite peculiar constitution, gave her that air of youth which fascinated the eyes of the courtiers and those of the monarch himself. I wished one day to annoy her by bringing the conversation on this subject, which could not be diverting to her. I began by putting the question generally, and I then named several of our superannuated beauties who still fluttered in the smiling gardens of Flora without having the youth of butterflies.

"There are butterflies of every age and colour in the gardens of Flora," said she, catching the ball on the rebound. "There are presumptuous ones, whom the first breath of the zephyr despoils of their plumage and discolours; others, more reserved and less frivolous, keep their glamour and prestige for a much longer time. For the rest, the latter seem to me to rejoice without being vain in their advantages. And at bottom, what should any insect gain by being proud?"

"Very little," I answered her, "since being dressed as a butterfly does not prevent one from being an insect, and the best sustained preservation lasts at most till the day after to-morrow."

The King entered. I started speaking of a young person, extremely beautiful, who had just appeared at Court, and would eclipse, in my opinion, all who had shone there before her.

"What do you call her?" asked his Majesty. "To what family does she belong?"



“She comes from the provinces,” I continued, “just like silk, silver, and gold. Her parents desire to place her among the maids of honour of the Queen. Her name is Fontanges, and God has never made anything so beautiful.”

As I said these words I watched the face of the Marquise. She listened to this portrayal with attention, but without appearing moved by it, such is her power of suppressing her natural feeling. The King only added these words:



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“This young person needs be quite extraordinary, since Madame de Montespan praises her, and praises her with so much vivacity. However, we shall see.”

Two days afterwards, Mademoiselle de Fontanges was seen in the salon of the grand table. The King, in spite of his composure, had looks and attentions for no one else.

This excessive preoccupation struck the Queen, who, marking the blandishments of the young coquette and the King’s response, guessed the whole future of this encounter; and in her heart was almost glad at it, seeing that my turn had come.

Mademoiselle de Fontanges, given to the King by her shameless family, feigned love and passion for the monarch, as though he had returned by enchantment to his twentieth year.

As for him, he too appeared to us to forget all dates. I know that he was only now forty-one years old, and having been the finest man in the world, he could not but preserve agreeable vestiges of a once striking beauty. But his young conquest had hardly entered on her eighteenth year, and this difference could not fail to be plain to the most inattentive, or most indulgent eyes.

The King, with a sort of anticipatory resignation, had for six or seven years greatly simplified his appearance. We had seen him, little by little, reform that Spanish and chivalric costume with which he once embellished his first loves. The flowing plumes no longer floated over his forehead, which had become pensive and quite serious. The diagonal, scarf was suppressed, and the long boots, with gold and silver embroidery, were no longer seen. To please his new divinity, the monarch suddenly enough rejuvenated his attire. The most elegant stuffs became the substance of his garments; feathers reappeared. He joined to them emeralds and diamonds.

Allegorical comedies, concerts on the waters recommenced. Triumphant horse-races set the whole Court abob and in movement. There was a fresh carousal; there was all that resembles the enthusiasms of youthful affection, and the deliriums of youth. The youth alone was not there, at least in proportion, assortment, and similarity.

All that I was soliciting for twelve years, Mademoiselle de Fontanges had only to desire for a week. She was created duchess at her debut; and the lozenge of her escutcheon was of a sudden adorned with a ducal coronet, and a peer’s mantle.

I did not deign to pay attention to this outrage; at least, I made a formal resolution never to say a single word on it.

The King came no less from time to time, to pay me a visit, and to talk to me, as of old, of operas and his hunting. I endured his conversation with a philosophical phlegm. He scarcely suspected the change in me.



At the chase, one day, his nymph, whom nothing could stop, had her knot of riband caught and held by a branch; the royal lover compelled the branch to restore the knot, and went and offered it to his Amazon. Singular and sparkling, although lacking in intelligence, she carried herself this knot of riband to the top of her hair, and fixed it there with a long pin.



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Fortune willed it that this coiffure, without order or arrangement, suited her face, and suited it greatly. The King was the first to congratulate her on it; all the courtiers applauded it, and this coiffure of the chase became the fashion of the day.

All the ladies, and the Queen herself, found themselves obliged to adopt it. Madame de Maintenon submitted herself to it, like the others. I alone refused to sacrifice to the idol, and my knee, being once more painful, would not bend before Baal.

With the exception of the general duties of the sovereignty, the prince appeared to have forgotten everything for his flame. The Pere de la Chaise, who had returned to his post, regarded this fresh incident with his philosophic calm, and congratulated himself on seeing the monarch healed of at least one of his passions.

I had always taken the greatest care to respect the Queen; and since my star condemned me to stand in her shoes, I did not spare myself the general attentions which two well-born people owe one another, and which, at least, prove a lofty education.

The Duchesse de Fontanges, doubtless, believed herself Queen, because she had the public homage and the King. This imprudent and conceited schoolgirl had the face to pass before her sovereign without stopping, and without troubling to courtesy.

The Infanta reddened with disapproval, and persuaded herself, by way of consolation, that Fontanges had lost her senses or was on the road to madness.

Beautiful and brilliant as the flowers, the Duchess, like them, passed swiftly away. Her pregnancy, by reason of toilsome rides, hunting parties, and other agitations, became complicated. From the eighth month she fell into a fever, into exhaustion and languor. The terror that took possession of her imagination caused her to desire a sojourn in a convent as a refuge of health, where God would see her nearer and, perhaps, come to her aid.

She had herself transported during the night to the House of the Ladies of Val-de-Grace, and desired that they should place in her chamber several relics from their altars.

Her confinement was not less laboured and sinister. When she saw that all the assistance of art could not stop the bleeding, with which her deep bed was flooded, she caused the King to be summoned, embraced him tenderly, in the midst of sobs and tears, and died in the night, pronouncing the name of God and the name of the King, the objects of her love and of fears.



CHAPTER XVII.

Madame de Sevigne.—Madame de Grignan.—Madame de Montespan at the Carmelites.—Madame de la Valliere.—These Two Great Ruins Console One Another.—An Angel of Sweetness, Goodness, and Kindness.



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Fifteen or twenty days before the death of Mademoiselle de Fontanges, my sister and I were taking a walk in the new woods of Versailles. We met the Marquise de Sevigne near the canal; she was showing these marvellous constructions to her daughter, the Comtesse de Grignan. They greeted us with their charming amiability, and, after having spoken of several indifferent matters, the Marquise said to me: "We saw, five or six days ago, a person, madame, of whom you were formerly very fond, and who charged us to recall her to the memory of her friends. You are still of that number,—I like to think so, and our commission holds good where you are concerned, if you will allow it."

Then she mentioned to me that poor Duchesse de la Valliere, to whom I was once compelled by my unhappy star to give umbrage, and whom, in my fatal thoughtlessness, I had afflicted without desiring it.

Tears came into my eyes; Madame de Sevigne saw them, and expressed her regret at having caused me pain. Madame de Thianges and I asked her if my old friend was much changed. She and Madame de Grignan assured us that she was fresh, in good health, and that her face appeared more beautiful. On the next day I wished absolutely to see her, and drove to the Carmelites.

On seeing my pretty cripple, who hobbled among us with so great a charm, I uttered a cry, which for a moment troubled her. She sank down to salute the crucifix, as custom demands, and, after her short prayer, she came to me. "I did not mention your name to Mesdames de Sevigne," said she; "but, however, I am obliged to them, since they have been able to procure me the pleasure of seeing you once more."

"The general opinion of the Court, and in the world, my dear Duchess," answered I, "is that I brought about your disgrace myself; and the public, that loved you, has not ceased to reproach me with your misfortune."

"The public is very kind still to occupy itself with me," she answered; "but it is wrong in that, as in so many other matters. My retirement from the world is not a misfortune, and I never suspected that the soul could find such peace and satisfaction in these silent solitudes."

"The first days were painful to me, I admit it, owing to the inexpressible difference which struck me between what I found here and what I had left elsewhere. But just as the eye accustoms itself, little by little, to the feeble glimmer of a vault, in the same way my body has accustomed itself to the roughness of my new existence, and my heart to all its great privations."

"If life had not to finish, in fulfilment of a solemn, universal, and inevitable decree, the constraint that I have put upon myself might at length become oppressive, and my yoke prove somewhat heavy. But all that will finish soon, for all undertakings come to an end. I left you young, beautiful, adored, and triumphant in the land of enchantments."

But six years have passed, and they assure me that your own afflictions have come, and that you, yourself, have been forced to drink the bitter cup of deprivation.”



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At these words, pronounced in a melancholy and celestial voice, I felt as though my heart were broken, and burst into tears.

"I pity you, Athenais," she resumed. "Is, then, what I have been told lightly, and almost in haste, only too certain for you? How is it you did not expect it? How could you believe him constant and immutable, after what happened to me?"

"To-day, I make no secret to you of it, and I say it with the peaceful indifference which God has generously granted me, after such dolorous tribulations. I make no secret of it to you, Athenais; a thousand times you plunged the sword and dagger into my heart, when, profiting by my confidence in you, by my sense of entire security, you permitted your own inclination to substitute itself for mine, and a young man seething with desires to be attracted by your charms. These unlimited sufferings exhausted, I must believe, all the sensibility of my soul. And when this corrosive flame had completely devoured my grief, a new existence grew up in me; I no longer saw in the father of my children other than a young prince, accustomed to see his dominating will fulfilled in everything. Knowing how little in this matter he is master of himself, he who knows so well how to be master of himself in everything to do with his numerous inferiors, I deplored the facility he enjoys from his attractions, from his wealth, from his power to dazzle the hearts which he desires to move and subdue.

"Recognise these truths, my dear Marquise," she added, "and gain, for it is time, a just idea of your position. After the unhappiness I felt at being loved no longer, I should have quitted the Court that very instant, if I had been permitted to bring up and tend my poor children. They were too young to abandon! I stayed still in the midst of you, as the swallow hovers and flits among the smoke of the fire, in order to watch over and save her little ones. Do not wait till disdain or authority mingles in the matter. Do not come to the sad necessity of resisting a monarch, and of detesting to the point of scandal that which you have so publicly loved; pity him, but depart. This kind of intimacy, once broken, cannot be renewed. However skilfully it may be patched up, the rent always reappears."

"My good Louise," I replied to the amiable Carmelite, "your wise counsels touch me, persuade me, and are nothing but the truth. But in listening to you I feel overwhelmed; and that strength which you knew how to gain, and show to the world, your former companion will never possess.

"I see with astonished eyes the supernatural calm which reigns in your countenance; your health seems to me a prodigy, your beauty was never so ravishing; but this barbarous garb pierces me to the heart.

"The King does not yet hate me; he shows me even a remnant of respect, with which he would colour his indifference. Permit me to ask from him for you an abbey like that of

Fontevrault, where the felicities of sanctuary and of the world are all in the power of my sister. He will ask nothing better than to take you out, be assured.”



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“Speak to him of me,” answered Louise; “I do not oppose that; but leave me until the end the role of obedience and humility that his fault and mine impose on me. Why should he wish that I should command others,—I who did not know how to command myself at an epoch when my innocence was so dear to me, and when I knew that, in losing that, one is lost?”

As she said these words two nuns came to announce her Serene Highness, that is to say, her daughter, the Princesse de Conti. I prayed Madame de la Valliere to keep between ourselves the communications that had just taken place in the intimacy of confidence. She promised me with her usual candour. I made a profound reverence to the daughter, embraced the mother weeping, and regained my carriage, which the Princess must have remarked on entering.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Reflections.—The Future.—The Refuge of Foresight.—Community of Saint Joseph.—Wicked Saying of Bossuet.

I wept much during the journey; and to save the spectacle of my grief from the passers-by, I was at the pains to lower the curtains. I passed over in my mind all that the Duchess had said to me. It was very easy for me to understand that the monarch’s heart had escaped me, and that, owing to his character, all resistance, all contradiction would be vain. The figure, as it had been supernumerary and on sufferance, which the Duchess had made in the midst of the Court when she ceased to be loved, returned to my memory completely, and I felt I had not the courage to drink a similar cup of humiliation.

I reminded myself of what the prince had told me several times in those days when his keen affection for me led him to wish for my happiness, even in the future,—even after his death, if I were destined to survive him.

“You ought,” he said to me, at those moments, “you ought to choose and assure yourself beforehand of an honourable retreat; for it is rarely that a king accords his respect or his good-will to the beloved confidante of his predecessor.”

Not wishing to ask a refuge of any one, but, on the contrary, being greatly set upon ruling in my own house, I resolved to build myself, not a formal convent like Val-de-Grace or Fontevrault, but a pretty little community, whose nuns, few in number, would owe me their entire existence, which would necessarily attach them to all my interests. I held to this idea. I charged my intendant to seek for me a site spacious enough for my enterprise; and when he had found it, had showed it to me, and had satisfied me with it, I had what rambling buildings there were pulled down, and began, with a sort of joy, the excavations and foundations.



The first blow of the hammer was struck, by some inconceivable fortuity, at the moment when the Duchesse de Fontanges expired. Her death did not weaken my resolutions nor slacken my ardour. I got away quite often to cast an eye over the work, and ordered my architect to second my impatience and spur on the numerous workmen.



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The rumour was current in Paris that the example of "Soeur Louise" had touched me, and that I was going to take the veil in my convent. I took no notice of this fickle public, and persisted wisely in my plan.

The unexpected and almost sudden decease of Mademoiselle de Fontanges had singularly moved the King. Extraordinary and almost incredible to relate, he was for a whole week absent from the Council. His eyes had shed so many tears that they were swollen and unrecognisable. He shunned the occasions when there was an assembly, buried himself in his private apartments or in his groves, and resembled, in every trait, Orpheus weeping for his fair Eurydice, and refusing to be consoled.

I should be false to others and to myself if I were to say that his extreme grief excited my compassion; but I should equally belie the truth if I gave it to be understood that his "widowhood" gave me pleasure, and that I congratulated myself on his sorrow and bitterness.

He came to see me when he found himself presentable, and, for the first few days, I abstained from all reprisal and any allusion. The innumerable labours of his State soon threw him, in spite of himself, into those manifold distractions which, in their nature, despise or absorb the sensibilities of the soul. He resumed, little by little, his accustomed serenity, and, at the end of the month, appeared to have got over it.

"What," he asked me, "are those buildings with which you are busy in Paris, opposite the Ladies of Belle-Chasse? I hear of a convent; is it your intention to retire?"

"It is a 'refuge of foresight,'" I answered him. "Who can count upon the morrow? And after what has befallen Mademoiselle de Fontanges, we must consider ourselves as persons already numbered, who wait only for the call."

He sighed, and soon spoke of something else.

I reminded myself that, to speak correctly, I had in Paris no habitation worthy of my children and of my quality. That little hotel in the Rue Saint Andre-des-Arcs I could count for no more than a little box. I sought amongst my papers for a design of a magnificent hotel which I had obtained from the famous Blondel. I found it without difficulty, with full elevations and sections. The artist had adroitly imitated in it the beautiful architecture of the Louvre; this fair palace would suit me in every respect.

My architect, at a cursory glance, judged that the construction and completion of this edifice would easily cost as much as eighteen hundred thousand livres. This expense being no more than I could afford, I commissioned him to choose me a spacious site for the buildings and gardens over by Roule and La Pepiniere.



Not caring to superintend several undertakings at once, I desired, before everything, that my house in the Faubourg Saint Germain should be complete and when the building and the chapel were in a condition to receive the little colony, I dedicated my "refuge of foresight" to Saint Joseph, the respectful spouse of the Holy Virgin and foster-father of the Child Jesus. This agreeable mansion lacked a large garden. I felt a sensible regret for this, especially for the sake of my inmates; but there was a little open space furnished with vines and fruit-walls, and one of the largest courtyards in the whole of the Faubourg Saint Germain.



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Having always loved society, I had multiplied in the two principal blocks of the sleeping-rooms and the entrance-hall complete apartments for the lady inmates. And a proof that I was neither detested by the world nor unconsidered is that all these apartments were sought after and occupied as soon as the windows were put in and the painting done. My own apartment was simple, but of a majestic dignity. It communicated with the chapel, where my tribune, closed with a handsome window, was in face of the altar.

I decided, once for all, that the Superior should be my nomination whilst God should leave me in this world, but that this right should not pass on to my heirs. The bell of honour rang for twenty minutes every time I paid a visit to these ladies; and I only had incense at high mass, and at the Magnificat, in my quality of foundress.

I went from time to time to make retreats, or, to be more accurate, vacations, in my House of Saint Joseph. M. Bossuet solicited the favour of being allowed to preach there on the day of the solemn consecration. I begged him to preserve himself for my funeral oration. He answered cruelly that there was nothing he could refuse me.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Grow like a dilapidated house; I am only here to repair myself
He contradicted me about trifles
Intimacy, once broken, cannot be renewed
Jealous without motive, and almost without love
The King replied that "too much was too much"
The monarch suddenly enough rejuvenated his attire
There is an exaggeration in your sorrow