

Memoirs of Madame de Montespan — Volume 7 eBook

Memoirs of Madame de Montespan — Volume 7

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Being the Historic Memoirs of the Court of Louis XIV.

BOOK 7.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The King Takes Luxembourg Because It Is His Will.—Devastation of the Electorate of Treves.—The Marquis de Louvois.—His Portrait.—The Marvels Which He Worked.—The Le Tellier and the Mortemart.—The King Destines De Mortemart to a Colbert.—How One Manages Not to Bow.—The Dragonades.—A Necessary Man.—Money Makes Fat.—Meudon.—The Horoscope.

This journey to Flanders did not keep the King long away from his capital. And, withal, he made two fine and rich conquests, short as the space of time was. The important town of Luxembourg was necessary to him. He wanted it. The Marechal de Crequi invested this place with an army of thirty thousand men, and made himself master of it at the end of a week.

Immediately after the King marched to the Electorate of Treves, which had belonged, he said, to the former kingdom of Austrasia. He had no trouble in mastering it, almost all the imperial forces being in Hungary, Austria, and in those cantons where the Ottomans had called for them. The town of Treves humbly recognised the King of France as its lord and suzerain. Its fine fortifications were levelled at once, and our victories were, unhappily, responsible for the firing, pillage, and devastation of almost the whole Electorate. For the Duke of Crequi, faithful executor of the orders of Louvois, imagined that a sovereign is only obeyed when he proves himself stern and inflexible.

In the first years of my favour, the Marquis de Louvois enjoyed my entire confidence, and, I must admit, my highest esteem. Independently of his manners, which are, when he wishes, those of the utmost amiability, I remarked in him an industrious and indefatigable minister, an intelligent man, as well instructed in the mass as in details; a mind fertile in resources, means, and expedients; an administrator, a jurist, a theologian, a man of letters and of affairs, an artist, an agriculturist, a soldier.

Loving pleasure, yet knowing how to despise it in favour of the needs of the State and the care of affairs, this minister concentrated in his own person all the other ministries, which moved only by his impulse and guiding hand.

Did the King, followed by his whole Court, arrive in fearful weather by the side of some vast and swollen river, M. de Louvois, alighting from his carriage, would sweep the horizon with a single glance. He would designate on the spot the farms, granaries, mills, and chateaux necessary to the passage of a fastidious king on his travels. A general repast, appropriate and sufficient, issued at his voice as it had been from the

bowels of the earth. An abundance of mattresses received provisionally the more or less delicate forms, stretched out in slumber or fatigue. And in the depth of the night, by the light of a thousand flaring torches, a vast bridge, constructed hastily, in spite of wind and rain, permitted the royal carriage and the host of other vehicles to cross the stream, and find on the further bank succulent dishes and voluptuous apartments.

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This prodigious energy, which created results by pulverising obstacles, had rendered the minister not only agreeable but precious to a young sovereign, who, unable to tolerate delays and resistance, desired in all things to attain and succeed. The King, without looking too closely at the means, loved the results which were the consequences of such a genius, and he rewarded with a limitless confidence the intrepid and often culpable zeal of a minister who procured him hatred.

When the passions of the conqueror, owing to success, grew calm, he studied more tranquilly both his own desires and his coadjutor's. The King by nature is neither inhuman nor savage, and he knew that Louvois was like Phalaris in these points. Then he was at as much pains to repress this unpopular humour as he had shown indifference before in allowing it to act.

The Marquis de Louvois (who did not like me) had lavished his incense upon me, in order that some fumes of it might float up to the prince. He saw me beloved and, as it were, almost omnipotent; he sought my alliance with ardour. The family of Le Tellier is good enough for a judicial and legal family; but what bonds are there between the Louvois and the Mortemart? No matter: ambition puts a thick bandage over the eyes of those whom it inspires; the Marquis wished to marry his daughter to my nephew, De Mortemart!!!

I communicated this proposition to the King. His Majesty said to me: "I am delighted that he has committed the grave fault of approaching any one else than me about this marriage. Answer him, if you please, that it is my province alone to marry the daughters, and even the sons of my ministers. Louvois has thus far helped me to spend enormous sums. M. Colbert has assisted me to heap up treasure. It is for one of the Colberts that I destine your nephew; for I have made up my mind that the three sisters shall be duchesses."

In effect, his Majesty caused this marriage; and the Marquis de Louvois had the jaundice over it for more than a fortnight.

Since that time his assiduities have been enlightened. He puts respect into his reverences; and when our two coachmen carried our equipages past each other on the same, road, he read some documents in order to avoid saluting me.

In the affair of the Protestants, he caused what was at first only anxiety, religious zeal, and distrust to turn into rebellion. In order to make himself necessary, he proposed his universal and permanent patrols and dragoons. He caused certain excesses to be committed in order to raise a cry of disorder; and a measure which could have been effective without ceasing to be paternal became, in his hands, an instrument of dire persecution.



Madame de Maintenon, having learnt that Louvois, to exonerate himself, was secretly designating her as the real author of these rigorous and lamentable counsels, made complaint of it to the King, and publicly censured his own brother, who, in order to make himself agreeable to the Jesuits, to Bossuet, and to Louvois, had made himself a little hero in his provincial government.

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The great talents of M. de Louvois, and the difficulty of replacing him, became his refuge and safeguard. But, from the moment that he no longer received the intimate confidence of the King, and the esteem of the lady in waiting who sits upon the steps of the throne, he can only look upon himself at Versailles as a traveller with board and lodging.

His revenues are incalculable. The people, seeing his enormous corpulence, maintain, or pretend, that he is stuffed with gold. His general administration of posts alone is worth a million. His other offices are in proportion.

His chateau of Meudon-Fleury, a magical and quite ideal site, is the finest pleasure-house that ever yet the sun shone on. The park and the gardens are in the form of an amphitheatre, and are, in my opinion, sublime, in a far different way from those of Vaux. M. Fouquet, condemned to death, in punishment for his superb chateau, died slowly in prison; the Marquis de Louvois will not, perhaps, die in a stronghold; but his horoscope has already warned that minister to be prepared for some great adversity. He knows it; sometimes he is concerned about it; and everything leads one to believe that he will come to a bad end. He has done more harm than people believe.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Reformed Religion and Painting on Enamel—Petitot and Heliogabalus.—Theological Discussion with the Marquise.—The King's Intervention.—Louis XIV. Renders His Account to the Christian and Most Christian Painter.—The King's Word Is Not to Be Resisted.—Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

At the moment when the first edicts, were issued against the public exercise of the Reformed Religion, the famous and incomparable Petitot, refusing all the supplications of France and of Europe, executed for me, in my chateau of Clagny, five infinitely precious portraits, upon which it was his caprice only to work alternately, and which still demanded from him a very great number of sittings. One of these five portraits was that of the King, copied from that great and magnificent picture of Mignard, where he was represented at the age of twenty, in the costume of a Greek hero, in all the lustre of his youth. His Majesty had given me this little commission for more than a year, and I desired, with all my heart, to be able soon to fulfil his expectation. He destined this miniature for the Emperor of China or the Sultan.

I went to see M. Petitot at Clagny. When he saw me he came to me with a wrathful air, and, presenting me his unfinished enamel, he said to me: "Here, madame, is your Greek hero; his new edicts finish us, but, as for me, I shall not finish him. With the best intentions in the world, and all the respect that is due to him, my just resentment would pass into my brush; I should give him the traits of Heliogabalus, which would probably not delight him."

“Do you think so, monsieur?” said I to my artist. “Is it thus you speak of the King, our master,—of a King who has affection for you, and has proved it to: you so many times?”

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"My memory, recalls to me all that his munificence: has done for my talent in a thousand instances," went on the painter; "but his edicts, his cruel decrees, have upset my heart, and the persecutor of the true Christians no longer merits my consideration or good-will."

I had been ignorant hitherto of the faith which this able man professed; he informed me that he worshipped God in another fashion than ours, and made common cause with the Protestants.

"Well," said I to him then, "what have you to complain of in the new edicts and decrees? They only concern, so far, your ministers,—I should say, your priests; you are not one, and are never likely to be; what do these new orders of the Council matter to you?"

"Madame," resumed Petitot, "our ministers, by preaching the holy gospel, fulfil the first of their duties. The King forbids them to preach; then, he persecutes them and us. In the thousand and one religions which exist, the cause of the priests and the sanctuary becomes the cause of the faithful. Our priests are not imbecile Trappists and Carthusians, to be reduced to inaction and silence. Since their tongues are tied, they are resolved to depart; and their departure becomes an exile which it is our duty to share. If you will entrust me with your portraits which have been commenced, with the exception of that of Heliogabalus, I will finish them in a hospitable land, and shall have the honour of sending them to you, already fired and in all their perfection."

Petitot, until this political crisis, had only exhibited himself to me beneath an appearance of simplicity and good-nature. Now his whole face was convulsed and almost threatening; when I looked at him he made me afraid. I did not amuse myself by discussing with him matters upon which we were, both of us, more or less ignorant. I did all that could be done to introduce a little calm into his superstitious head, and to gain the necessary time for the completion of my five portraits. I was careful not to confide to the King this qualification of Heliogabalus; but as his intervention was absolutely necessary to me, I persuaded him to come and spend half an hour at this chateau of Clagny, which he had deserted for a long time past.

"Your presence," I said to him, "will perhaps take the edge off the theological irritation of your fanatical painter. A little royal amenity, a little conversation and blandishment, à la Louis XIV., will seduce his artistic vanity. At the cost of that, your portrait, Sire, will be terminated. It would not be without."

The surprise of his Majesty was extreme when he had to learn and comprehend that the prodigious talent of Petitot was joined to a Huguenot conscience, and this talent spoke of expatriating itself. "I will go to Clagny to-morrow," replied the prince to me; and he went there, in fact, accompanied by the Marquise de Montchevreuil and Madame la Dauphine, in an elaborate negligé.

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“Good-day, Monsieur Petitot,” said the monarch to our artist, who rose on seeing him enter. “I come to contemplate your new masterpieces. Is my little miniature near completion?”

“Sire,” replied Petitot, “it will not be for another six weeks. All these affairs and decrees have deprived me of many hours; my heart is heavy over it!”

“And why do you busy yourself with these discussions, with which your great talent has no concern?” said the King to him, gently.

“Sire, it is my religion that is more concerned than ever. I am a Christian, and my law is dear to me.”

“And I am Most Christian,” answered his Majesty, smiling. “I profess the religion, I keep the law that your ancestors and mine kept before the Reformation.”

“Sire, this reform has been adopted by a great number of monarchs,—a proof that the Reformation is not the enemy of kings, as is said.”

“Yes, in the case of wise and honest men like yourself, my good friend Petitot; but just as all your brothers have not your talents, so they have not your rectitude and loyalty, which are known to me.”

“Sire, your Majesty overwhelms me; but I beg you to be persuaded that my brothers have been calumniated.”

“Yes, if one is to accuse them in the mass, my dear Petitot; but there are spoil-alls amongst your theologians; intercepted correspondences depose to it. The allied princes, having been unable to crush me by their invasions and artillery, have recourse to internal and clandestine manoeuvres. Having failed to corrupt my soldiers, they have essayed to corrupt my clergy, as they did at Montauban and La Rochelle, in the days of Cardinal Richelieu.”

“Sire, do not believe in any such manoeuvres; all your subjects love and admire you, whatever be their faith and communion.”

“Petitot, you are an admirable painter and a most worthy man. Do not answer me, I beg you. If I believed you had as much genius and aptitude for great affairs as for the wonders of the brush, I would make you a Counsellor of State on the instant, and a half-hour spent with me and my documents and papers of importance would be sufficient to make you believe and think as I do touching what has been discussed between us. Madame de Montespan, in great alarm, has told me that you wished to leave me. You leave me, my good friend! Where will you find a sky so pure and soft as the sky of France? Where will you find a King more tenderly attached to men of merit, more particularly, to my dear and illustrious Petitot?”

At these words, pronounced with emotion, the artist felt the tears come into his eyes. He bent one knee to the ground, respectfully kissed the hand of the monarch, and promised to complete his portrait immediately.

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He kept his word to us. The King's miniature and my four portraits were finished without hesitation or postponement; and Petitot also consented to copy, for his Majesty, a superb Christine of Sweden, a full-length picture, painted by Le Bourdon. But at the final revocation of the Edict of Nantes, he thought his conscience, or rather his vanity, compromised, and quitted France, although the King offered to allow him a chaplain of his communion, and a dispensation from all the oaths, to Petitot himself, to Boyer, his brother-in-law, and the chaplain whom they had retained with them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Lovers' Vows.—The Body-guards.—Racine's Phedre.—The Pit.—Allusions.—The Duel.—M. de Monclar.—The Cowled Spy.—He Escapes with a Fright.—M. de Monclar in Jersey.—Gratitude of the Marquise.—Happy Memory.

Lovers, in the effervescence of their passion, exaggerate to themselves the strength and intensity of their sentiments. The momentary, pleasure that this agreeable weakness causes them to feel, brings them, in spite of themselves, to promise a long duration of it, so that they swear eternal fidelity, a constancy, proof against all, two days after that one which shone on their most recent infidelity. I had seen the King neglect and abandon the amiable La Valliere, and I listened to him none the less credulously and confidently when he said to me: "Athenais, we have been created for each other: if Heaven were suddenly to deprive me of the Queen, I would have your marriage dissolved, and, before the altar and the world, join your destiny, to mine."

Full of these fantastic ideas, in which my, hope and desire and credulity were centred, I had accepted those body-guards of state who never left my carriage. The poor Queen had murmured: I had disdained her murmurs. The public had manifested its disapproval: I had hardened myself and fought against the insolent opinion of that public. I could not renounce my chimera of royalty, based on innumerable probabilities, and I used my guards in anticipation, and as a preliminary.

One of them, one day, almost lost his life in following my carriage, which went along like a whirlwind. His horse fell on the high road to Versailles; his thigh was broken, and his body horribly bruised. I descended from my carriage to see after him. I confided him, with the most impressive recommendations, to the physician or surgeon of Viroflai, who lavished on him his attentions, his skill and zeal, and who sent him back quite sound after a whole month of affectionate care.

The young Baron de Monclar (such was the name of this guard) thought himself happy in having merited my favour by this accident, and he remained sincerely and finally attached to me.



At the time of the temporary triumph of Mademoiselle de Fontanges, the spell which was over my eyes was dissipated. The illusions of my youth were lost, and I saw, at last, the real distance which divided me from the steps of the throne. The health of a still youthful Queen seemed to me as firm and unalterable then as it appeared to me weak and uncertain before. The inconstancy of the monarch warned me of what might be still in store for me, and I resolved to withdraw myself, voluntarily and with prudence, within the just limits of my power.

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M. le Prince de Luxembourg was one of my friends, and in command; I begged him to send me his guards no longer, but to reserve them for the reigning divinity, who had already more than once obtained them.

In these latter days, that is to say, since the eminent favour of the lady in waiting, having become the friend, and no longer the spouse of the prince, I frequently retired from this sight, so repugnant to me, and went and passed entire weeks at Paris, where the works on my large hotel, that had been suspended for divers reasons, were being resumed.

A debutante, as beautiful as she was clever, was drawing the entire capital to the Comedie Francaise. She obtained especial applause in the difficult part of Phedre. My friends spoke marvels of it, and wished to take me there with them. Their box was engaged. We arrived as the curtain was going up. As I took my seat I noticed a certain stir in the orchestra and pit. The majority of glances were directed at my box, in which my apparition had attracted curiosity. I carried my fan to my face, under the pretext of the excessive glow of the lights. Immediately several voices were to be heard: "Take away the fan, if you please." The young and foolish applauded this audacity; but all the better part disapproved.

The actress mentioned came on the scene and brought the incident to an end. Although deeply moved by what had occurred, I paid great attention to the magnificent part of Phedre, which often excited my admiration and profound pity. At some passages, which every one knows by heart, two or three insolent persons abandoned themselves to a petty war of allusions, and accenting these aggressive phrases with their applause, succeeded in directing general attention to me. Officers of the service noticed this beginning of disorder, and probably were concerned at my embarrassment. Some Gardes Francais were called within the barrier of the parterre in order to restrain the disturbers. Suddenly a very lively quarrel broke out in the centre. Two young men with great excitement had come to blows, and soon we saw them sally forth with the openly expressed intention of settling their quarrel on the field.

Was it my name, or a contest as to the talent of the actress, which caused this commotion? My nephew, De Mortemart, was concerned for me, and the Comte de Marcilly assured us that all these wrangles were solely with regard to the wife of Theseus.

Between the two pieces our company learnt that a gentleman from the provinces had insulted my name, and a body-guard, out of uniform, had taken this insult for himself; they had gone out to have an explanation.

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The following day a religious minim of the House of Chaillot came to inform me of the state of affairs. The Baron de Monclar, of the body-guards of the King, had taken sanctuary in their monastery, after having killed, in lawful duel, beneath the outer walls of the Bois du Boulogne, the imprudent young man who, the night before, at the play, had exposed me to the censure of the public. M. de Monclar was quite prepared for the inflexible severity of the King, as well as for the uselessness of my efforts. He only begged me to procure him a disguise of a common sort, so that he might immediately embark from the neighbourhood of Gainville or Bordeaux, and make for England or Spain; every moment was precious.

The sad position in which M. de Monclar had put himself in my behalf filled me with sorrow. I gave a long sigh, and dried my first tears. I racked my sick and agitated head for the reply I ought to make to the good monk, and, to my great astonishment, my mind, ordinarily so prompt and active, suggested and offered me no suitable plan. This indecision, perhaps, rendered the worthy ambassador impatient and humiliated me; when, to end it, I made up my mind to request that M. de Monclar be secretly transferred from the House of Chaillot to my dwelling, where I should have time and all possible facilities to take concert with him as to the best means of action.

Suddenly raising my eyes to the monk of Chaillot, I surprised in his a ferocious look of expectation. This horrible discovery unnerved me,—I gave a cry of terror; all my lackeys rushed in. I ordered the traitor to be seized and precipitated from the height of my balcony into the gardens. His arms were already bound ruthlessly, and my people were lifting him to throw him down, when he eluded their grasp, threw himself at my feet, and confessed that his disguise was assumed with the intent to discover the sanctuary of the Baron de Monclar, the assassin of his beloved brother. “It is asserted, madame,” added this man, rising, “that the Baron is confided to the Minim Fathers of Chaillot. I imagined that you were informed of it, and that by this means my family would succeed in reaching him.”

“If he has killed the nobody who yesterday insulted me so unjustly,” I said then to this villain who was ready for death, “he has done a virtuous act, but one which I condemn. I condemn it because of the law of the Prince, which is formal, and because of the dire peril into which he has run; for that my heart could almost praise and thank him. I was ignorant of his offence; I am ignorant of his place of refuge. Whoever you may be,—the agent of a family in mourning, or of a magistrate who forgets what is due to me,—leave my house before my wrath is rekindled. Depart, and never forget what one gains by putting on the livery of deceit in order to surprise and betray innocence.”

My people conducted this unworthy man to the outer gate, and refused to satisfy some prayers which he addressed to them to be released from his disagreeable bonds. The public, with its usual in consequence, followed the monk with hooting, without troubling as to whether it were abusing a vile spy or a man of worth.

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We waited for a whole month without receiving any news of our guard. At last he wrote to me from the island of Jersey, where he had been cast by a storm. I despatched the son of my intendant, who knew him perfectly; I sent him a letter of recommendation to his Majesty the King of England, who had preserved me in his affections, and to those matters of pure obligation, which I could not refrain from without cruelty, I added a present of a hundred thousand livres, which was enough to furnish an honourable condition for my noble and generous cavalier in the land of exile.

The humour of my heart is of the kind which finishes by forgetting an injury and almost an outrage; but a service loyally rendered is graven upon it in uneffaceable characters, and when (at the solicitation of the King of England) our monarch shall have pardoned M. de Monclar, I will search all through Paris to find him a rich and lovely heiress, and will dower him myself, as his noble conduct and my heart demand.

I admire great souls as much as I loathe ingratitude and villainy.

CHAPTER XL.

Parallel between the Diamond and the Sun.—Taste of the Marquise for Precious Stones.—The King's Collection of Medals.—The Crown of Agrippina.—The Duchess of York.—Disappointment of the Marquise.—To Lend Is Not to Give.—The Crown Well Guarded.—Fright of the Marquise.—The Thief Recognised.—The Marquise Lets Him Hang.—The Difference between Cromwell and a Trunkmaker.—Delicate Restitutions.—The Bourbons of Madame de Montespan.

The diamond is, beyond contradiction, the most beautiful creation of the hands of God, in the order of inanimate objects. This precious stone, as durable as the sun, and far more accessible than that, shines with the same fire, unites all its rays and colours in a single facet, and lavishes its charms, by night and day, in every clime, at all seasons; whilst the sun appears only when it so pleases; sometimes shining, sometimes misty, and shows itself off with innumerable pretensions.

From my tenderest childhood, I was notable amongst all my brothers and sisters for my distinct fondness for precious stones and diamonds. I have made a collection of them worthy of the Princes of Asia; and if my whole fortune were to fail me to-day, my pearls and diamonds, being left to me, would still give me opulence. The King, by a strange accident, shares this taste with me. He has in his third closet two huge pedestals, veneered in rosewood, and divided within, like cabinets of coins, into several layers. It is there that he has conveyed, one by one, all the finest diamonds of the Crown. He consecrates to their examination, their study, and their homage, the brief moments that his affairs leave him. And when, by his ambassadors, he comes to discover some new

apparition of this kind in Asia or Europe, he does all that is possible to distance his competitors.

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When he loved me with a tender love, I had only to wish and I obtained instantly all that could please me, in rare pearls, in superfine brilliants, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies. One day, his Majesty allowed me to carry home the famous crown of Agrippina, executed with admirable art, and formed of eight sprays of large brilliants handsomely mounted. This precious object occupied me for several days in succession, and the more I examined the workmanship, the more I marvelled at its lightness and excellence, which was so great that our jewellers, compared with those of Nero and Agrippina, were as artisans and workmen.

The King, having never spoken to me again of this ornament, I persuaded myself that he had made me a present of it,—a circumstance which confirmed me in the delusions of my hope. I thought then that I ought not to leave in its light case an article of such immense value, and ordered a strong and solid casket in which to enshrine my treasure.

The imperial crown having been encased and its clasps well adjusted by as many little locks of steel, I shut the illustrious valuable in a cupboard in which I had a quantity of jewelry and precious stones. This beautiful crown was the constant object of my thoughts, my affections and my preference; but I only looked at it myself at long intervals, every six months, very briefly, for fear of exciting the cupidity of servants, and exposing the glory of Agrippina to some danger.

When the Princess of Mantua passed through France on her way to marry the Duke of York, whose first wife had left him a widower, the King gave a brilliant reception to this young and lovely creature, daughter of a niece of Cardinal Mazarin.

The conversation was uniformly most agreeable, for she spoke French with fluency, and employed it with wit. There was talk of open-work crowns and shut crowns. The Marquis de Dangeau, something of a savant and antiquary, happened to remark that, under Nero, that magnificent prince, the imperial crown had first been wrought in the form of an arch, such as is seen now.

The King said then: "I was ignorant of that fact; but the crown of the Empress, his mother, was not closed at all. The one which belongs to me is authentic; Madame la Marquise will show it to us:"

A gracious invitation in dumb show completed this species of summons, and I was obliged to execute it. I returned to the King in the space of a few minutes, bringing back in its new case the fugitive present, which a monarch asked back again so politely and with such a good grace.

The crown of Agrippina, being placed publicly on a small round table, excited general attention and admiration. The Italian Princess, Madame de Maintenon, the Duc de Saint Aignan, and Dangeau himself went into raptures over the rare perfection of these

marvellously assorted brilliants. The King, drawing near, in his turn examined the masterpiece with pleasure. Suddenly, looking me in the face, he cried:

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“But, madame, this is no longer my crown of Agrippina; all the diamonds have been changed!”

Imagine my trouble, and, I must say, my confusion! Approaching the wretched object, and casting my eyes over it with particular attention, I was not slow in verifying the King's assertion. The setting of this fine work had remained virtually the same; but some bold hand had removed the antique diamonds and substituted—false!

I was pale and trembling, and on the verge of swooning. The ladies were sorry for me. The King did me the honour of declaring aloud that I had assuredly been duped, and I was constrained to explain this removal of the crown into a more solid and better case for its preservation.

At this naive explanation the King fell to laughing, and said to the young Princess: “Madame, you will relate, if you please, this episode to the Court of London, and you will tell the King, from me, that nothing is so difficult to preserve now as our crowns; guards and locks are no more of use.”

Then, addressing me, his Majesty said, playfully:

“You should have entrusted it to me sooner; I should have saved it. It is said that I understand that well.”

My amour-propre, my actual honour, forbade me to put a veil over this domestic indignity. I assembled all my household, without excepting my intendant himself. I was aggrieved at the affront which I had met with at the King's, and I read grief and consternation on all faces. After some minutes' silence, my intendant proposed the immediate intervention of authority, and made me understand with ease that only the casket-maker could be the culprit.

This man's house was visited; he had left Paris nearly two years before. Further information told us that, before disposing of his property, he had imprudently indulged in a certain ostentation of fortune, and had embarked for the new settlements of Pondicherry.

M. Colbert, who is still living, charged our governor to discover the culprit for him; and he was sent back to us with his hands and feet bound.

Put to the question, he denied at first, then confessed his crime. One of my chamber—maids, to whom he had made feigned love, introduced him into my house while I was away, and by the aid of this imprudent woman he had penetrated into my closets. The crown of Agrippina, which it had been necessary to show him because of the measures, had become almost as dear to him as to myself; and his ambition of another kind inspired him with his criminal and fatal temerity.

He did no good by petitioning me, and having me solicited after the sentence; I let him hang, as he richly deserved.

The King said on this occasion: "This casketmaker has, at least, left us the setting, but M. Cromwell took all."

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The fortunate success of this affair restored me, not to cheerfulness, but to that honourable calm which had fled far away from me. I made a reflection this time on my extreme imprudence, and understood that all the generousities of love are often no more than loans. I noticed amongst my jewels a goblet of gold, wrought with diamonds and rubies, which came from the first of the Medici princesses. I waited for the King's fete to return this magnificent ornament to him nobly. I had a lily executed, all of emeralds and fine pearls; I poured essence of roses into the cup, placed in it the stem of the lily, in the form of a bouquet for the prince, and that was my, present for Saint Louis's day.

I gave back to the King, by degrees, at least three millions' worth of important curiosities, which were like drops of water poured into the ocean. But I was anxious that, if God destined me to perish by a sudden death, objects of this nature should not be seen and discovered amid my treasure.

As to my other diamonds, either changed in form or acquired and collected by myself, I destine them for my four children by the King. These pomps will have served to delight my eyes, which are pleased with them, and then they will go down to their first origin and source, belonging again to the Bourbons whom I have made.

CHAPTER XLI.

The Duchesse de Lesdiguieres.—Her Jest.—“The Chaise of Convenience.”—Anger of the Jesuits.—They Ally Themselves with the Archbishop of Paris.—The Forty Hours' Prayers.—Thanks of the Marquise to the Prelate.—His Visit to Saint Joseph.—Anger of the Marquise.—Her Welcome to the Prelate.

The insult offered me at the Comedie Francaise by a handful of the thoughtless immediately spread through the capital, and became, as it is easy to imagine, the talk of all the salons. I was aware that the Duchesse de Lesdiguieres was keenly interested in this episode, and had embellished and, as it were, embroidered it with her commentaries and reflections. All these women who misconduct themselves are pitiless and severe. The more their scandalous conduct brands them on the forehead, the more they cry out against scandal. Their whole life is bemired with vice, and their mouth articulates no other words than prudence and virtue, like those corrupt and infected doctors who have no indulgence for their patients.

The Duchesse de Lesdiguieres, for a long time associated with the Archbishop of Paris, and known to live with that prelate like a miller with his wife, dared to say, in her salon that my presence at Racine's tragedy was, at the least, very useless, and the public having come there to see a debutante, certainly did not expect me.

The phrase was repeated to me, word for word by my sister De Thianges, who did not conceal her anger, and wished to avenge me, if I did not avenge myself. The Marquise

then informed me of another thing, which she had left me in ignorance of all along, from kind motives chiefly, and to prevent scandal.

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“You remember, my sister,” said the Marquise to me, “a sort of jest which escaped you when Pere de la Chaise made the King communicate, in spite of all the noise of his new love affair and the follies of Mademoiselle de Fontanges? You nicknamed that benevolent Jesuit ‘the Chaise of Convenience.’ Your epigram made all Paris laugh except the hypocrites and the Jesuits. Those worthy men resolved to have full satisfaction for your insult by stirring up the whole of Paris against you. The Archbishop entered readily into their plot, for he thought you supplanted; and he granted them the forty Hours’ Prayers, to obtain from God your expulsion from Court. Harlay, who is imprudent only in his debauches, preserved every external precaution, because of the King, whose temper he knows; he told the Jesuits that they must not expect either his pastoral letter or his mandate, but he allowed them secret commentaries, the familiar explanations of the confessional; he charged them to let the other monks and priests into the secret, and the field of battle being decided, the skirmishes began. With the aid and assistance of King David, that trivial breastplate of every devotional insult, the preachers announced to their congregations that they must fast and mortify themselves for the cure of King David, who had fallen sick. The orators favoured with some wit embellished their invectives; the ignorant and coarse amongst the priests spoiled everything. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed for a whole week in the churches, and it ended by an announcement to Israel, that their cry had reached the firmament, that David had grown cold to Bathsheba (they did not add, nevertheless, that David preferred another to Bathsheba with his whole heart). But the Duchesse de Fontanges gave offence neither to the Archbishop of Paris nor to the Jesuits. Her mind showed no hostility. The beauty was quite incapable of saying in the face of the world that a Jesuit resembled a ‘Chaise of Convenience.’

“The Duchesse de Lesdiguieres, covered with rouge and crimes, has put herself at the head of all these intrigues,” added my sister; “and without having yet been able to subdue herself to the external parade of devotion, she has allowed herself to use against you all the base tricks of the most devout hypocrites.”

“Let me act,” I said to my sister; “this lady’s good offices call for a mark of my gratitude. The Forty Hours’ Prayer is an attention that is not paid to every one; I owe M. de Paris my thanks.”

I went and sat down at my writing-table, and wrote this fine prelate the following honeyed missive:

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I have only just been informed, monseigneur, of the pains you have been at with God for the amelioration of the King and of myself. The gratitude which I feel for it cannot be expressed. I pray you to believe it to be as pure and sincere as your intention. A good bishop, as perfect and exemplary as yourself, is worthy of taking a passionate interest in the regularity of monarchs, and ours must owe you the highest rewards for this new mark of respect which it has pleased you to give him. I will find expressions capable of making him feel all that he owes to your Forty Hours' Prayer, and to that Christian and charitable emotion cast in the midst of a capital and a public. To all that only your mandate of accusation and allegorical sermons are lacking. Cardinals' hats, they say, are made to the measure of strong heads; we will go seek, in the robing-rooms of Rome, if there be one to meet the proportions of your ability. If ladies had as much honourable influence over the Vicar of Jesus Christ as simple bishops allow them, I should solicit, this very day, your wished-for recompense and exaltation. But it is the monarch's affair; he will undertake it. I can only offer you, in my own person, M. Archbishop of Paris, my prayers for yours. My little church of Saint Joseph has not the same splendour as your cathedral; but the incense that we burn there is of better quality than yours, for I get it from the Sultan of Persia. I will instruct my little community tomorrow to hold our Forty Hours' Prayer, that God may promptly cure you of your Duchesse de Lesdiguières, who has been damning you for fourteen years.

Deign to accept these most sincere reprisals, and believe me, without reserve,
Monsieur the Archbishop,

The marquise de Montespan.

This letter cast the camp into alarm. There were goings and comings between the Episcopal Palace and the Jesuits of the Rue Saint Antoine, and from this professed house to their College of Louis le Grand. The matadores of the society were of opinion that I should be conciliated by every possible means, and it was arranged that the Archbishop should pay me a visit at Saint Joseph's, on the earliest possible occasion, to exculpate his virtuous colleagues and make me accept his disclaimers. He came, in effect, the following week. I made him wait for half an hour in the chapel, for half an hour in my parlour, and I ascended into my carriage, almost in his presence, without deigning either to see or salute him.

The mother of four legitimised princes was not made to support such outrages, nor to have interviews with their insolent authors.

Alarms, anxieties of consciences, weak but virtuous, have always found me gentle, and almost resigned; the false scruples of hypocrites and libertines will never receive from me aught but disdain and contempt.

CHAPTER XLII.

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The Verse of Berenice.—Praises of Boileau.—The King's Aversion to Satirical Writers.—The Painter Le Brun.—His Bacchus.—The Waterbottle.—The Pyramid of Jean Chatel Injurious to the Jesuits.—They Solicit Its Demolition.—Madame de Maintenon's Opposition.—Political Views of Henri IV. on This Matter.—The Jesuits of Paris Proclaim the Dedication of Their College to Louis the Great.—The Gold Pieces.

Whatever be the issue of a liaison which cannot probably be eternal, I have too much judgment and equity to deny the King the great talents which are his by nature, or to dispute the surname of Great which has been given him in his lifetime, and which the ages to come must surely preserve. But here I am writing secret Memoirs, where I set down, as in a mirror, the most minute traits of the personages whom I bring on the stage, and I wish to relate in what manner and with what aim this apotheosis affected the mind of those who flattered the prince in their own interest.

The painters and sculptors, most artful of courtiers in their calling, had already represented the King, now with the attributes of Apollo, now in the costume of the god Mars, of Jupiter Tonans, Neptune, lord of the waves; now with the formidable and vigorous appearance of the great Hercules, who strangled serpents even in his cradle.

His Majesty saw all these ingenious allegories, examined them without vanity, with no enthusiasm, and seemed to regard them as accessories inherent to the composition, as conventional ornaments, the good and current small change of art. The adulations of Racine, in his "Berenice," having all a foundation of truth, please him, but chiefly for the grace of the poetry; and he sometimes recited them, when he wished to recall and quote some fine verse.

The praises of Boileau, although well versified, had not, however, the fortune to please him. He found those verses too methodical for poetry; and the poet, moreover, seemed to him somewhat a huckster, and in bad taste. The satirists might do what they liked, they never had his friendship. Perhaps he feared them.

When Le Brun started preparing the magnificent cradle of the great gallery, he composed for the ceiling rich designs or cartoons, which in their entirety should represent the victories and great military or legislative achievements of the prince. His work being finished, he came to present it to his Majesty, who on that day was dining with me. In one of the compartments the painter had depicted his hero in the guise of Bacchus; the King immediately took up a bottle of clear water and drank a big glass. I gave a great peal of laughter, and said to M. le Brun, "You see, monsieur, his Majesty's decision in that libation of pure water."

M. le Brun changed his design, seeing the King had no love for Bacchus, but he left the Thundering Jove, and all the other mythological flatteries, in regard to which no opinion had been given.

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The Jesuits for a long time past had groaned at seeing, exactly opposite the Palace,—[In the midst of the semicircle in front of the Palais de Justice.]—in the centre of Paris, that humiliating pyramid which accused them of complicity with, or inciting, the famous regicide of the student, Jean Chatel, assassin of Henri IV. Pere de la Chaise, many times and always in vain, had prayed his Majesty to render justice to the virtues of his order, and to command the destruction of this slanderous monument. The King had constantly refused, alleging to-day one motive, to-morrow another. One day, when the professed House of Paris came to hand him a respectful petition on the subject, his Majesty begged Madame de Maintenon to read it to him, and engaged us to listen to it with intelligence, in order to be able to give an opinion.

The Jesuits said in this document that the Parliament, with an excessive zeal, had formerly pushed things much too far in this matter. “For that Jean Chatel, student with the Jesuit Fathers, having been heard to say to his professor that the King of Navarre, a true Huguenot, ought not to reign over France, which was truly Catholic, the magistrates were not, therefore, justified in concluding that that Jesuit, and all the Jesuits, had directed the dagger of Jean Chatel, a madman.”

The petition further pointed out that “the good King Henri IV., who was better informed, had decided to recall the Society of Jesus, had reestablished it in all his colleges, and had even chosen a confessor from their ranks.

“This fearful pyramid,

[This monument represented a sort of small square temple, built of Arcueil stone and marble. Corinthian fluted pillars formed its general decoration, and enshrined the four fulminatory inscriptions. Independently of the obelisk, the cupola of this temple bore eight allegorical statues, of which the one was France in mourning; the second, Justice raising her sword, and the others the principal virtues of the King. On the principal side these words occurred: “Passer-by, whosoever thou be, abhor Jean Chatel, and the Jesuits who beguiled his youth and destroyed his reason.”—*Editor’s Note.*]

surcharged with wrathful inscriptions,” added the petition, “designates our Society as a perpetual hotbed of regicidal conspiracy, and presents us to credulous people as an association of ambitious, thankless and corrupt assassins!”

“In the name of God, Sire, do away with this criminal and dangerous memento of old passions, unjust hatreds, and the spirit of impiety which, after having led astray magistrates devoid of light, serves to-day only to beguile new generations, whom excess of light blinds,” *etc., etc.*

When this letter was finished, the King said:

“I have never seen, the famous pyramid; one of these days I will escape, so that I can see it without being observed.” And then his Majesty asked me what I thought of the petition. I answered that I did not understand the inconsistency of M. de Sully, who, after consenting to the return of the Jesuits, had left in its place the monument which accused and branded them. I put it on Sully, the minister, because I dared not attack Henri IV. himself.

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The King answered me: "There are faults of negligence such as that in every government and under the best administrations. King Henri my grandfather was vivacity itself. He was easily irritated; he grew calm in the same way. For my part, I think that he pardoned the Jesuits, as he had the Leaguers, in the hope that his clemency would bring them all into peaceful disposition; in which he was certainly succeeding when a miscreant killed him."

Madame de Maintenon, begged to give her opinion, expressed herself in these terms: "Sire, this petition cannot be other than extremely well done, since a society of clever minds have taken the work in hand. We have not the trial of Jean Chatel before our eyes, with his interrogatories; it is impossible for us, then, to pronounce on the facts. In any case, there is one thing very certain: the Jesuits who are living at present are innocent, and most innocent of the faults of their predecessors.

"The sentences and anathemas which surcharge the pyramid, as they say, can in no way draw down upon them the anger of passers-by and the populace, for these inscriptions, which I have read, are in bad Latin. This monument, which is very rich and even elegant in itself, is placed upon the site of the destroyed house of the assassin Chatel. The most ignorant of your Parisians knows this circumstance, which he has learnt from family traditions. It is good that the people see every day before their eyes this solitary pyramid, which teaches how King's assassins are punished and what is done with the houses in which they were born.

"King Henri IV., for all his gaiety, had wits enough for four; he left the pyramid standing, like those indulgent people who compromise a great lawsuit, but do not on that account destroy the evidence and documents.

"This monument, besides, is the work of the Parliament of Paris; that illustrious assembly has raised it, and perhaps your Majesty might seem to accuse justice by destroying what it has once done for a good cause."

The King smiled at the conclusions of the lady in waiting, and said to both of us: "This is between us three, I pray you, ladies; I will keep Pere de la Chaise amused with promises some day."

Madame de Maintenon, for a brief time in her first youth a Calvinist, cherished always in the bottom of her heart a good share of those suspicions that Calvin's doctrine is careful to inspire against the Jesuits.

On the other hand, she retained amongst the Parliament a large number of friends whom she had known formerly at M. Scarron's, the son of a counsellor of the chamber. I understood that in those circumstances she was well pleased to prove to the gentlemen of Parliament that the interests of their house were kept in good hands, and

that she would not abandon her friends of the Place Royale and the Marais for all the Jesuits and all the pyramids in the world.

The Parliament, which was informed of her conduct and fidelity, bore her infinite goodwill for it. The first president, decorated with his blue riband, came; to express his formal thanks, and begged her to accept in perpetuity a key of honour to the High Chamber.

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[In famous and unusual causes, princes, ambassadors, and keys of honour came and occupied the lanterns, that is to say, elegant and well furnished tribunes, from which all that passed in the grand hall of the Parliament could be seen.]

The Jesuits, for perseverance and tenacity, can be compared with spiders who repair, or start again every instant at a damaged or broken thread. When these good fathers knew that their petition had not triumphed offhand, they struck out for some new road to reach the generous heart of the monarch. Having learnt that an alderman, full of enthusiasm, had just proposed in full assembly at the Hotel de Ville to raise a triumphal monument to the Peacemaker of Europe, and to proclaim him Louis the Great at a most brilliant fete, the Jesuit Fathers cleverly took the initiative, and whilst the Hotel de Ville was deliberating to obtain his Majesty's consent, the College of Clermont, in the Rue Saint Jacques, brought out its annual thesis, and dedicated it to the King,—Louis the Great (Ludovico Magno).

On the following day the masons raised scaffolding before the great door of the college, erased the original inscription—which consisted of the words: “College of Clermont”—to substitute for it, in letters of gold: “Royal College of Louis the Great.” These items of news reached Versailles one after the other. The King received them with visible satisfaction, and if only Pere de la Chaise had known how to profit at the time by the emotion and sentiment of the prince, he would have carried off the tall pyramid as an eagle does a sparrow. The confessor, a man of great circumspection, dared not force his penitent's hand; he was tactful with him in all things, and the society had the trouble of its famous cajolery without gaining anything more at the game than compliments and gold pieces in sufficient plenty.

Some days afterwards the monarch, of his own accord and without any incentive, remembered the offensive and mortifying pyramid; but Madame de Maintenon reminded him that it was desirable to wait, for scoffers would not be wanting to say that this demolition was one of the essential conditions of the bargain.

The King relished this advice. At the Court one must make haste to obtain anything; but to be forgotten, a few minutes' delay is sufficient.

[This pyramid was taken down two or three years before the Revolution by the wish of Louis XVI., after having stood for two hundred years.—*Editor's Note.*]

CHAPTER XLIII.

Little Opportune.—M. and Madame Bontems.—The Young Moor Weaned.—The Good Cure.—The Blessed Virgin.—Opportune at the Augustinians of Meaux.—Bossuet Director.—Mademoiselle Albanier and Leontine.—Flight of Opportune.—Her Threats of Suicide.—Visit of the Marquise.—Prudence of the Court.



The poor Queen had had several daughters, all divinely well made and pretty as little Cupids. They kept in good health up to their third or fourth year; they went no further. It was as though a fate was over these charming creatures; so that the King and Queen trembled whenever the accoucheurs announced a daughter instead of a son.

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My readers remember the little negress who was born to the Queen in the early days, —she whom no one wanted, who was dismissed, relegated, disinherited, unacknowledged, deprived of her rank and name the very day of her birth; and who, by a freak of destiny, enjoyed the finest health in the world, and surmounted, without any precautions or care, all the difficulties, perils, and ailments of infancy.

M. Bontems, first valet de chambre of the cabinets, served as her guardian, or curator; even he acted only through the efforts and movements of an intermediary. It was wished that this young Princess should be ignorant of her birth, and in this I agree that, in the midst of crying injustice, the King kept his natural humanity. This poor child not being meant, and not being able, to appear at Court, it was better, indeed, to keep her from all knowledge of her rights, in order to deprive her, at one stroke, of the distress of her conformation, the hardship of her repudiation, and the despair of captivity. The King destined her for a convent when he saw her born, and M. Bontems promised that it should be so.

At the age of three, she was withdrawn from the hands of her nurse, and Madame Bontems put her to be weaned in her own part of the world. Opportune,—[She was born on Sainte Opportune's Day.]—clothed and nourished like the other children of the farmer, who was her new patron, played with them in the barns or amongst the snow; she followed them into the orchards and fields; she filled, like them, her little basket with acorns that had been left after the crop was over, or ears of corn that the gleaners had neglected, or withered branches and twigs left by the wood-cutters for the poor. Her nude, or semi-nude, arms grew rough in the burning sun, and more so still in the frosts. Her pretty feet, so long as the fine season lasted, did not worry about being shod, and when November arrived with its terrors, Opportune took her little heeled sabots like the other country children. M. and Madame Bontems wrote every six months to inquire if she were dead, and each time the answer came that the little Moor was in wonderful health.

The pastor of the neighbouring hamlet felt pity for this poor child, who was sometimes tormented by her companions on account of her colour. The good cure even went so far as to declare, one day when there was a sermon, that the Virgin Mary, if one was to believe respectable books, was black from head to foot, which did not prevent her from being most beautiful in the sight of God and of men.

This good cure taught the gentle little orphan to read and pray. He often came to her farm to visit her, and probably he knew her birth; he was in advanced age, and he died. Then Opportune was placed with the Augustinian ladies of Meaux, where Bossuet charged himself with the task of instructing her well in religion and of making her take the veil.

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The lot of this young victim of pride and vain prejudices touched me in spite of myself, and often I made a firm resolution to take her away from her oppressors and adopt her in spite of everybody. The poor Queen, forgetting our rivalry, had taken all my children into her affections. Why should not I have shown a just recognition by protecting an innocent little creature animated with her breath, life, and blood,—a child whom she would have loved, I do not doubt, if she had been permitted to see and recognise her? This idea grew so fixed in my mind, that I resolved to see Opportune and do her some good, if I were able.

The interest of my position had led me once to assure myself of the neighbourhood of the King by certain little measures, not of curiosity but of surveillance. I had put with M. Bontems a young man of intelligence and devotion, who, without passing due limits, kept me informed of many things which it is as well to know.

When I knew, without any doubt, the new abiding-place of Opportune, I secretly sent to the Augustinians of Meaux the young and intelligent sister of my woman of the bedchamber, who presented herself as an aspirant for the novitiate. They were ignorant in the house of the relations of Mademoiselle Albanier with her sister Leontine Osselin, so that they wrote to each other, but by means of a cipher, and under seal, addressing their missives to a relative.

Albanier lost no time in informing us that the little Opportune had begun to give her her confidence, and that the nuns took it in very good part, believing them both equally called to take the veil in their convent. Opportune knew, though in a somewhat vague way, to what great personage she owed her life, and it appeared that the good cure had informed her, out of compassion, before he left this world. Albanier wrote to Leontine:

“Tell Madame la Marquise that Opportune is full of wit; she resembles M. le Duc du Maine as though she were his twin; her carriage is exactly that of the King; her body is built to perfection, and were it not for her colour, the black of which diminishes day by day, she would be one of the loveliest persons in France; she is sad and melancholy by temperament, but as I have succeeded in attracting her confidence, and diverting her as much as one can do in a purgatory like this, we dance sometimes in secret, and then you would think you saw Mademoiselle de Nantes dance and pirouette.

“When any one pronounces the name of the King, she trembles. She asked me to-day whether I had seen the King, if he were handsome, if he were courteous and affable. It seemed to me as though she was already revolving some great project in her brain, and if I am not mistaken, she has quite decided to scale the fruit-trees against our garden wall and escape across country.

“M. Bossuet, in his quality of Bishop of Meaux, has the right of entry into this house; he has come here three times since my arrival; he has given me each time a little tap on my check in token of goodwill, and such as one gets at confirmation; he told me that he

longs to see me take the veil of the Ursulines, as well as my little scholar; it is by that name he likes to call her.



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“Opportune answers him with a stately air which would astound you; she only calls him monsieur, and when told that she has made an error, and that she should say monseigneur, she replies with great seriousness, ‘I had forgotten it.’”

Mademoiselle Albanier, out of kindness to me, passed nearly two years in this house, which she always called her purgatory, but the endeavours of the superior and of M. Bossuet becoming daily more pressing, and her health, which had suffered, being unable to support the seclusion longer, she made up her mind to retire.

Her departure was a terrible blow to the daughter of the Queen. This young person, who was by nature affectionate, almost died of grief at the separation. We learnt that, after having been ill and then ailing for several weeks, she found the means of escaping from the convent, and of taking refuge with some lordly chatelaine. M. de Meaux had her pursued, but as she threatened to kill herself if she were taken back to the Abbey of Notre Dame, the prelate wrote to M. Bontems, that is to say, to the real father, and poor Opportune was taken to Moret, a convent of Benedictines, in the forest of Fontainebleau. There they took the course of lavishing care, and kindness, and attentions on her. But as her destiny, written in her cradle, was an irrevocable sentence, she was finally made to take the veil, which suited her admirably, and which she wears with an infinite despair.

I disguised myself one day as a lady suitor who sought a lodging in the house. I established myself there for a week, under the name of the Comtesse de Clagny, and I saw, with my own eyes, a King’s daughter reduced to singing matins. Her air of nobility and dignity struck me with admiration and moved me to tears. I thought of her four sisters, dead at such an early age, and deplored the cruelty of Fate, which had spared her in her childhood to kill her slowly and by degrees.

I would have accosted her in the gardens, and insinuated myself into her confidence, but the danger of these interviews, both for her and me, restrained what had been an ill-judged kindness. We should both have gone too far, and the monarch would have been able to think that I was opposing him out of revenge, and to give him pain.

This consideration came and crushed all my projects of compassion and kindness. There are situations in life where we are condemned to see evil done in all liberty, without being able to call for succour or complain.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The Aristocratic Republic of Genoa Offends the King.—Its Punishment.—Reception of the Doge at Paris and Versailles.

M. de Louvois—by nature, as I have said, hard and despotic—was quite satisfied to gain the same reputation for the King, in order to cover his own violence and rigour beneath the authority of the monarch.

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The King, I admit, did not like to be contradicted or opposed. He became irritated if one was unfortunate enough to do so; but I know from long experience that he readily accepted a good excuse, and by inclination liked neither to punish nor blame. The Marquis de Louvois was unceasingly occupied in exciting him against one Power and then another, and his policy was to keep the prince in constant alarm of distrust in order to perpetuate wars and dissensions. This order of things pleased that minister, who dreaded intervals of calm and peace, when the King came to examine expenses and to take account of the good or bad employment of millions.

The Republic of Genoa, accustomed to build vessels for all nations, built some of them, unfortunately, for the King's enemies. These constructions were paid for in advance. M. de Louvois, well-informed of what passed in Genoa, waited till the last moment to oppose the departure of the four or five new ships. The Genoese, promising to respect the King's will in the future, sent these vessels to their destination.

On the report and conclusions of M. de Louvois, his Majesty commanded the senators of Genoa to hand over to his Minister of War the sums arising from the sale of these, and to send their Doge and four of the most distinguished senators to beg the King's pardon in his palace at Versailles.

The senate having replied that, by a fundamental law, a Doge could not leave the city without instantly losing his power and dignity, the King answered this message to the effect that the Doge would obey as an extraordinary circumstance, that in this solitary case he would derogate from the laws of the Genoese Republic, and that, the King's will being explicit and unalterable, the Doge would none the less maintain his authority.

Whilst waiting, his Majesty sent a fleet into Italian waters, and the city of Genoa immediately sustained the most terrible bombardment.

The flag of distress and submission having been flown from all the towers, our admirals ceased, and the Doge set out for Versailles, accompanied by the four oldest senators.

At the news of their approach, all Paris echoed the songs of triumph that M. de Louvois had had composed. A spacious hotel was prepared to receive these representatives of a noble, aristocratic republic; and, to withdraw them from the insults of the populace, they were given guards and archers.

Although the chateau of Versailles was in all the lustre of its novelty, since it had been inhabited for only two years, I perceived that they had even been adding to its magnificence, and that everywhere were new curtains, new candelabra, new carpets. The throne on which the monarch was to sit surpassed all that we had ever seen.

On the eve of the solemn presentation the astonished ambassadors appeared incognito before the minister, who dictated to them their costumes, their reverences, and all the

substance of their address. The influx of strangers and Parisians to Versailles, to be witnesses of such a spectacle, was so extraordinary and prodigious that the hostels and other public inns were insufficient, and they were obliged to light fires of yew in all the gardens.

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In the great apartments there were persons of the highest rank who sought permission to pass the night on benches, so that they might be all there and prepared on the following day. On the two sides of the great gallery they had raised tribunes in steps, draped in 'Cramoisi' velvet. It was on these steps, which were entirely new, that all the ladies were placed. The lords stood upright below them, and formed a double hedge on each side.

When his Majesty appeared on his throne, the fire of the diamonds with which he was covered for a moment dazzled all eyes. The King seemed to me less animated than was his wont; but his fine appearance, which never quits him, rendered him sufficiently fit for such a representation and his part in it.

The Doge of the humiliated Republic exhibited neither obsequiousness nor pride. We found his demeanour that of a philosopher prepared for all human events. His colleagues walked after him, but at a little distance. When the Doge Lescaro had asked for pardon, as he had submitted to do, two of his senators fell to weeping. The King, who noticed the general emotion, descended from his throne and spoke for some minutes with the five personages, and, smiling on them with his most seductive grace, he once more drew all hearts to him.

I was placed at two paces from Madame de Maintenon. The Doge,—who was never left by a master of ceremonies, who named the ladies to him,—in passing before me, made a profound reverence. He then drew near Madame de Maintenon, who heard all his compliments, said to him, in Italian, all that could be said, and did him the honour to lean on his hand when descending from her tribune to return to the King's.

On the next day the Doge and senators came to present their homage to my children, and did not forget me in their visits of ceremony.

CHAPTER XLV.

The Comte de Vermandois.—His Entrance into the World.—Quarrels with the Dauphin.—Duel.—Siege of Courtrai.—The Cathedral of Arras.

When Madame de la Valliere (led by suggestions coming from the Most High) left the Court and the world to shut herself up in a cloister, she committed a great imprudence; I should not know how to repeat it: The Carmelites in the Rue Saint Jacques could easily do without her; her two poor little children could not. The King confided them, I am well aware, to governors and governesses who were prudent, attentive, and capable; but all the governors and preceptors in the world will never replace a mother,—above all, in a place of dissipation, tumult, and carelessness like the Court.



M. le Comte de Vermandois was only seven years old when exaggerated scruples and bad advice deprived him of his mother. This amiable child, who loved her, at first suffered much from her absence and departure. He had to be taken to the Carmelites, where the sad metamorphosis of his mother, whom he had seen so brilliant and alluring, made him start back in fright.

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He loved her always as much as he was loved by her, and in virtue of the permission formally given by the Pope, he went every week to pass an hour or two with her in the parlour. He regularly took there his singing and flute lessons; these were two amiable talents in which he excelled.

About his twelfth year he was taken with the measles, and passed through them fairly well. The smallpox came afterwards, but respected his charming brown face. A severe shower of rain, which caught him in some forest, made him take rheumatism; the waters of Vichy cured him; he returned beaming with health and grace.

The King loved him tenderly, and everybody at Court shared this predilection of the monarch. M. de Vermandois, of a stature less than his father, was none the less one of the handsomest cavaliers at the Court. To all the graces of his amiable mother he joined an ease of manner, a mixture of nobility and modesty, which made him noticeable in the midst of the most handsome and well made. I loved him with a mother's fondness, and, from all his ingenuous and gallant caresses, it was easy to see that he made me a sincere return.

This poor Comte de Vermandois, about a year before the death of the Queen, had a great and famous dispute with Monsieur le Dauphin, a jealous prince, which brought him his first troubles, and deprived him suddenly of the protecting favour of the Infanta-queen.

At a ball, at the Duchesse de Villeroy's, all the Princes of the Blood appeared. Monseigneur, who from childhood had had a fancy for Mademoiselle de Blois, his legitimised sister, loved her far more definitely since her marriage with M. le Prince de Conti. Monseigneur is lacking in tact. At this ball he thought he could parade his sentiments, which were visibly unpleasant, both to the young husband and to the Princess herself. He danced, nevertheless, for some minutes with her; but, suddenly, she feigned to be seized with a sharp pain in the spleen, and was conducted to a sofa. The young Comte de Vermandois came and sat there near her. They were both exhibiting signs of gaiety; their chatter amused them, and they were seen to laugh with great freedom. Although Monsieur le Dauphin was assuredly not in their thoughts, he thought they were making merry at his expense. He came and sat at the right of the Princess and said to her:

"Your brother is very ill-bred!"

"Do you think so?" the Princess answered immediately. "My brother is the most amiable boy in the world. He is laughing at my talking to myself. He assures me that my pain is in my knee instead of being in the spleen, and that is what we were amusing ourselves at, quite innocently."

“Your brother thinks himself my equal,” added the Prince; “in which he certainly makes a mistake. All his diamonds prove nothing; I shall have, when I like, those of the crown.”

“So much the worse, monsieur,” replied the Comte de Vermandois, quickly. “Those diamonds should never change hands,—at least, for a very long time.”

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These words degenerating into an actual provocation, Monseigneur dared to say to his young brother that, were it not for his affection for the Princess, he would make him feel that he was——

“My elder brother,” resumed the Comte de Vermandois, “and nothing more, I assure you.”

Before the ball was over, they met in an alcove and gave each other a rendezvous not far from Marly. Both of them were punctual; but Monsieur le Dauphin had given his orders, so that they were followed in order to be separated.

The King was informed of this adventure; he immediately gave expression to his extreme dissatisfaction, and said:

“What! is there hatred and discord already amongst my children?”

I spoke next to elucidate the facts, for I had learnt everything, and I represented M. de Vermandois as unjustly provoked by his brother. His Majesty replied that Monsieur le Dauphin was the second personage in the Empire, and that all his brothers owed him respect up to a certain point.

“It was out of deference and respect that the Count accepted the challenge,” said I to the King; “and here the offending party made the double attack.”

“What a misfortune!” resumed the King. “I thought them as united amongst themselves as they are in my heart. Vermandois is quick, and as explosive as saltpetre; but he has the best nature in the world. I will reconcile them; they will obey me.”

The scene took place in my apartment, owing to my Duc du Maine. “My son,” said his Majesty to the child of the Carmelite, “I have learned with pain what has passed at Madame de Villeroi’s and then in the Bois de Marly. You will be pardoned for this imprudence because of your age; but never forget that Monsieur le Dauphin is your superior in every respect, and must succeed me some day.”

“Sire,” replied the Count, “I have never offended nor wished to offend Monseigneur. Unhappily for me, he detests me, as though you had not the right to love me.”

At these words Monsieur le Dauphin blushed, and the King hastened to declare that he loved all his children with a kindness perfectly alike; that rank and distinctions of honour had been regulated, many centuries ago, by the supreme law of the State; that he desired union and concord in the heart of the royal family; and he commanded the two brothers to sacrifice for him all their petty grievances, and to embrace in his presence.

Hearing these words, the Comte de Vermandois, with a bow to his father, ran in front of Monseigneur, and, spreading out his arms, would have embraced him. Monsieur le

Dauphin remained cold and dumb; he received this mark of good-will without returning it, and very obviously displeased his father thereby.

These little family events were hushed up, and Monseigneur was almost explicitly forbidden to entertain any other sentiments for Madame de Conti than those of due friendship and esteem.

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Some time after that, Messieurs de Conti, great lovers of festivity, pleasure, and costly delights, which are suited only for people of their kind, dragged the Comte de Vermandois, as a young debutant, into one of those licentious parties where a young man is compelled to see things which excite horror.

His first scruples overcome, M. de Vermandois, naturally disposed to what is out of the common, wished to give guarantees of his loyalty and courage; from a simple spectator he became, it is said, an accomplice.

There is always some false friend in these forbidden assemblies. The King heard the details of an orgy so unpardonable, and the precocious misconduct of his cherished son gave him so much pain, that I saw his tears fall. The assistant governor of the young criminal was dismissed; his valet de chambre was sent to prison; only three of his servants were retained, and he himself was subjected to a state of penitence which included general confessions and the most severe discipline. He resigned himself sincerely to all these heavy punishments. He promised to associate only with his mother, his new governor, his English horses, and his books; and this manner of life, carried out with a grandeur of soul, made of him in a few months a perfect gentleman, in the honourable and assured position to which his great heart destined him.

The King, satisfied with this trial, allowed him to go and prove his valour at the sieges of Digmude and Courtrai. All the staff officers recognised soon in his conversation, his zeal, his methods, a worthy rival of the Vendomes. They wrote charming things of him to the Court. A few days afterwards we learned at Versailles that M. de Vermandois was dead, in consequence of an indisposition caught whilst bivouacking, which at first had not seemed dangerous.

The King deplored this loss, as a statesman and a good father. I was a witness of his affliction; it seemed to me extreme. One knew not whom to approach to break the news to the poor Carmelite. The Bishop of Meaux, sturdy personage, voluntarily undertook the mission, and went to it with a tranquil brow, for he loved such tasks.

To his hoarse and funereal voice Soeur Louise only replied with groans and tears. She fell upon the floor without consciousness, and M. Bossuet went on obstinately preaching Christian resignation and stoicism to a senseless mother who heard him not.

About a fortnight after the obsequies of the Prince (which I, too, had celebrated in my church of Saint Joseph), the underprioress of that little community begged me to come to Paris for a brief time and consecrate half an hour to her. I responded to her invitation. This is the important secret which the good nun had to confide to me: Before expiring; the young Prince had found time to interview his faithful valet de chambre behind his curtains. "After my death," said he, "you will repair, not to the King, my father, but to Madame la Marquise de Montespan, who has given me a thousand proofs of kindness in my behalf. You will remit to her my casket, in which all my private papers

are kept. She will be kind enough to destroy all which ought not to survive me, and to hand over the remainder, not to my good mother, who will have only too much sorrow, but to Madame la Princesse de Conti, whose indulgence and kindness are known to me."

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Sydney, this valet de chambre, informed me that the Count was dead, not through excessive brandy, as the Dauphin's people spread abroad, but from a cerebral fever, which a copious bleeding would have dissipated at once. All the soldiers wept for this young Prince, whose generous affability had charmed them. Sydney had just accompanied his body to Arras, where, by royal command, it had been laid in a vault of the cathedral. I opened his pretty casket of citron wood, with locks of steel and silver. The first object which met my eyes was a fine and charming portrait of Madame de la Valliere. The face was smiling in the midst of this great tragedy, and that upset me entirely, and made my tears flow again. Five or six tales of M. la Fontaine had been imitated most elegantly by the young Prince himself, and to these rather frivolous verses he had joined some songs and madrigals. All these little relics of a youth so eager to live betokened a mind that was agreeable, and not libertine. In any case the sacrifice was accomplished; reflections were in vain. I burned these papers, and all those which seemed to me without direct importance or striking interest. That was not the case with a correspondence, full of wit, tenderness, and fire, of whose origin the good Sydney pretended ignorance, but which two or three anecdotes that were related sufficiently revealed to me. The handsome Comte de Vermandois, barely seventeen years old, had won the heart of a fair lady, of about his own age, who expressed her passion for him with an energy, a delicacy, and a talent far beyond all that we admire in books.

I knew her; the King loved her. Her husband, a most distinguished field-officer, cherished her and believed her to be faithful. I burned this dangerous correspondence, for M. de Vermandois, barely adolescent, was already a father, and his mistress gloried in it.

On receiving this casket, in which she saw once more the portraits of her mother, her brother, and her husband, Madame la Princesse de Conti felt the most sorrowful emotion. I told her that I had acquitted myself, out of kindness and respect, of a commission almost beyond my strength, and I begged her never to mention it to the King, who, perhaps, would have liked to see and judge himself all that I had destroyed.

M. le Comte de Vermandois left by his death the post of High Admiral vacant. The King begged me to bring him my little Comte de Toulouse; and passing round his neck a fine chain of coral mixed with pearls, to which a diamond anchor was attached, he invested him with the dignity of High Admiral of France. "Be ever prudent and good, my amiable child," he said to him, raising his voice, which had grown weak; "be happier than your predecessor, and never give me the grief of mourning your loss."

I thanked the King for my son, who looked at his decoration of brilliants and did not feel its importance. I hope that he will feel that later, and prove himself worthy of it.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

The House of Saint Cyr.—Petition of the Monks of Saint Denis to the King, against the Plan of Madame de Maintenon.—Madame de Maintenon Summons Them and Sends Them Away with Small Consolation.

At the time when I founded my little community of Saint Joseph, Madame de Maintenon had already collected near her chateau at Rueil a certain number of well-born but poor young persons, to whom she was giving a good education, proportioned to their present condition and their birth. She had charged herself with the maintenance of two former nuns, noble and well educated, who, at the fall of their community, had been recommended, or had procured a recommendation, to her. Mesdames de Brinon and du Basque were these two vagrant nuns. Madame de Maintenon, instinctively attracted to this sort of persons, welcomed and protected them.

The little pension or community of Rueil, having soon become known, several families who had fallen into distress or difficulty solicited the kindness of the directress towards their daughters, and Madame de Maintenon admitted more inmates than the space allowed. A more roomy habitation was bought nearer Versailles, which was still only temporary and the King, having been taken into confidence with regard to these little girls, who mostly belonged to his own impoverished officers, judged that the moment had come to found a fine and large educational establishment for the young ladies of his nobility.

He bought, at the entrance to the village of Saint Cyr, in close proximity to Versailles, a large old chateau, belonging to M. Segulier; and on the site of this chateau, which he pulled down, the royal house of Saint Cyr was speedily erected. I will not go into the nature and aim of a foundation which is known nowadays through the whole of Europe. I will content myself with observing that if Madame de Maintenon conceived the first idea of it, it is the great benefactions of the monarch and the profound recognition of the nobility which have given stability and renown to this house.

Madame de Maintenon received much praise and incense as the foundress of this community. It has been quite easy for her to found so vast an establishment with the treasures of France, since she herself had remained poor, by her own confession, and had neither to sell nor encumber Maintenon, her sole property.

In founding my community of Saint Joseph, I was neither seconded nor aided by anybody. Saint Joseph springs entirely from myself, from good intentions, without noise or display. Saint Joseph is one of my good actions, and although it makes no great noise in the world, I would rather have founded it than Saint Cyr, where the most exalted houses procure admission for their children with false certificates of poverty.

The buildings of Saint Cyr, in spite of all the sums they have absorbed, have no external nobility or grandeur. The foundress put upon it the seal of her parsimony, or, rather, of her general timidity. She is like Moliere's Harpagon, who would like to do great things for little money.

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[Here Madame de Montespan forgets what she has just said, that Saint-Cyr cost “immense sums,”—an ordinary effect of passion.—*Ed. Note*]

The only beauty about the house is in the laundry and gardens. All the rest reminds you of a convent of Capuchins. The chapel has not even necessary and indispensable dignity; it is a long, narrow barn, without arches, pillars, or decorations. The King, having wished to know beforehand what revenue would be needed for a community of four hundred persons, consulted M. de Louvois. That minister, accustomed to calculate open-handedly, put in an estimate of five hundred thousand livres a year. The foundress presented hers, which came to no more than twenty-five thousand crowns. His Majesty adopted a middle course, and assigned a revenue of three hundred thousand livres to his Royal House of Saint Cyr.

The foundress, foreseeing the financial embarrassments which have supervened later, conceived the idea of making the clergy (who are childless) support the education of these three hundred and fifty young ladies. In consequence, she cast her eyes upon the rich abbey of Saint Denis, then vacant, and suggested it to the King, as being almost sufficient to provide for the new establishment.

This idea astonished the prince. He found it, at first, audacious, not to say perilous; but, on further reflection, considering that the monks of Saint Denis live under the rule of a prior, and never see their abbot, who is almost always a great noble and a man of the world, his Majesty consented to suppress the said abbey in order to provide for the children.

The monks of Saint Denis, alarmed at such an innovation (which did not, however, affect their own goods and revenues), composed a petition in the form of the factum that our advocates draw up in a suit. They exclaimed in this document “on the disrepute which this innovation would bring upon their ancient, respectable, and illustrious community. In suppressing the title of Abbot of Saint Denis,” they said further, “your Majesty, in reality, suppresses our abbey; and if our abbey is reduced to nothing, our basilica, where the Kings, your ancestors, lie, will be no more than a royal church, and will cease to be abbatial.”

Further on, this petition said: “Sire, may it please your Majesty, whose eyes can see so far, to appreciate this innovation in all its terrible consequences. By striking to-day dissolution and death into the first abbey of your kingdom, do you not fear to leave behind you a great and sinister precedent? . . . What Louis the Great has looked upon as possible will seem righteous and necessary to your successors; and it will happen, maybe, before long, that the thirst for conquests and the needs of the State (those constant and familiar pretexts of ministers) will authorise some political Attila to extend your work, and wreak destruction upon the tabernacle by depriving it of the splendour which is its due, and which sustains it.”

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Madame de Maintenon, to whom this affair was entrusted, summoned the administrative monks of Saint Denis to Versailles. She received them with her agreeable and seductive courtesy, and, putting on her dulcet and fluted voice, said to them that their alarm was without foundation; that his Majesty did not suppress their abbey; that he simply took it from the male sex to give it to the female, seeing that the Salic law never included the dignities of the Church nor her revenues.

"The King leaves you," she added, "those immense and prodigious treasures of Saint Denis, more ancient, perhaps, than the Oriflamme. That is your finest property, your true and illustrious glory. In general, your abbots have been, to this very day, unknown to you. Do you find, gentlemen, that religion was more honoured and respected when men of battle, covered with murders and other crimes, were called Abbots of Saint Denis? Beneath the government of the King such nominations would never have affected the Church; and after the present M. le Chevalier de Lorraine, we shall hear no more of nominating an abbot-commandant on the steps of the Opera.

"Our little girls are cherubim and seraphim, occupied unceasingly with the praise of the Lord. I recommend them to your holy prayers, and you can count on theirs."

With this compliment she dismissed the monks, and what she had resolved on was carried out.

The King, who all his life had loved children greatly, did not take long to contract an affection for this budding colony. He liked to assist sometimes at their recreations and exercises, and, as though Versailles had been at the other end of the world, he had a magnificent apartment built at Saint Cyr. This fine armorial pavilion decorates the first long court in the centre. The mere buildings announce a king; the royal crown surmounts them.

At first the education of Saint Cyr had been entrusted to canonesses; but a canoness only takes annual vows; that term expired, she is at liberty to retire and marry. Several of these ladies having proved thus irresolute as to their estate, and the house being afraid that a greater number would follow, the Abbe de Fenelon, who cannot endure limited or temporary devotion, thought fit to introduce fixed and perpetual vows into Saint Cyr, and that willynilly.

This elegant abbe says all that he means, and resolutely means all that he can say. By means of his lectures, a mixed and facile form of eloquence, which is his glory, he easily proved to these poor canonesses that streams and rivers flow ever since the world began, and never think of suspending their current or abandoning their direction. He reminded them that the sun, which is always in its place and always active, never dreams of abandoning its functions, either from inconstancy or caprice. He told them that wise kings are never seized with the idea or temptation of abdicating their crown, and that God, who serves them as a model and example, is ceaselessly occupied, with

relation to the world, in preserving, reanimating, and maintaining it. Starting from there, the ingenious man made them confess that they ought to remain at their post and bind themselves to it by a perpetual vow.

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The first effect of this fine oration having been a little dissipated, objections broke out. One young and lovely canoness dared to maintain the rights of her freedom, even in the face of her most amiable enemy. Madame de Maintenon rushed to the succour of the Abbe of Saint Sulpice, and half by wheedling, half by tyranny, obtained the cloister and perpetual vows.

I must render this justice to the King; he never would pronounce or intervene in this pathetic struggle. His royal hand profited, no doubt, by a submission which the Abbe de Fenelon imposed upon timidity, credulity, and obedience. The House of Saint Cyr profited thereby; but the King only regretted a new religious convent, for, as a rule, he liked them not. How many times has he unburdened himself before me on the subject.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Final Rupture.—Terrible Scene.—Madame de Maintenon in the Brocaded Chair.

To-day, when time and reflection, and, perhaps, that fund of contempt which is so useful, have finally revealed to me the insurmountable necessities of life, I can look with a certain amount of composure at the injury which the King did me. I had at first resolved to conclude, with the chapter which you have just read, my narrative of the more or less important things which have passed or been unfolded before my eyes. For long I did not feel myself strong enough to approach a narrative which might open up all my old wounds and make my blood boil again; but I finished by considering that our monarch's reign will be necessarily the subject of a multitude of commentaries, journals, and memoirs. All these confidential writings will speak of me to the generations to be; some will paint me as one paints an object whom one loves; others, as the object one detests. The latter, to render me more odious, will probably revile my character, and, perhaps, represent me as a cowardly and despairing mistress, who has descended even to supplications!! It is my part, therefore, to retrace with a firm and vigorous hand this important epoch of my life, where my destiny, at once kind and cruel, reduced me to treat the greatest of all Kings both as my equal and as an inconstant friend, as a treacherous enemy, and as my inferior or subject. He had, at first, the intention of putting me to death,—of that I am persuaded,—but soon his natural gentleness got the better of his pride. He grasped the wounds in my heart from the deplorable commotion of my face. If his former friend was guilty in her speech, he was far more guilty by his actions. Like an equitable judge he pardoned neither of us; he did not forgive himself and he dared not condemn me.

Since this sad time of desertion and sorrow, into which the new state of things had brought me, *mm.* de Mortemart, de Nevers, and de Vivonne had been glad to avoid me. They found my humour altered, and I admit that a woman who sulks, scolds, or complains is not very attractive company.

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One day the poor Marechal de Vivonne came to see me; he opened my shutters to call my attention to the beauty of the sky, and, my health seeming to him a trifle poor, he suggested to me to embark at once in his carriage and to go and dine at Clagny. I had no will left that day, so I accompanied my brother.

Being come to Clagny, the Marshal, having shut himself up with me in his closet, said to me the words which follow:

“You know, my, sister, how all along you have been dear to me; the grief which is wearing you out does me almost as much harm as you. To-day I wish to hurt you for your own good; and get you away from this locality in spite of yourself. Kings are not to be opposed as we oppose our equals; our King, whom you know by heart, has never suffered contradiction. He has had you asked, two or three times already, to leave his palace and to go and live on your estates. Why do you delay to satisfy him, and to withdraw from so many eyes which watch you with pity?”

“The King, I am very sure, would like to see me away,” I replied to the Marshal, “but he has never formally expressed himself, and it is untrue that any such wish has been intimated or insinuated to me.”

“What! you did not receive two letters last year, which invited you to make up your mind and retire!”

“I received two anonymous letters; nothing is more true. Could those two letters have been sent to me by the King himself?”

“The Marquis de Chamarante wrote them to you, but beneath the eyes, and at the dictation, of his Majesty.”

“All, God! What is it you tell me? What! the Marquis de Chamarante, whom I thought one of my friends, has lent himself to such an embassy!”

“The Marquis is a good man, a man of honour; and his essential duty is to please his sovereign, his master. Moreover, at the time when the letters were sent you, time remained to you for deliberation. To-day, all time for delay has expired; you must go away of your own free will, or receive the affront of a command, and a ‘lettre de cachet’ in form.”

“A ‘lettre de cachet’ for me! for the mother of the Duc du Maine and the Comte de Toulouse! We shall see that, my brother! We shall see!”

“There is nothing to see or do but to summon here all your people, and leave to-morrow, either for my chateau of Roissy, or for your palace at Petit-Bourg; things are pressing, and the day after to-morrow I will explain all without any secrecy.”



“Explain it to me at once, my brother, and I promise to satisfy you.”

“Do you give me your word?”

“I give it you, my good and dear friend, with pleasure. Inform me of what is in progress.”

“Madame de Maintenon, whom, having loved once greatly, you no longer love, had the kindness to have me summoned to her this morning.”

“The kindness!”

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“Do not interrupt me—yes, the kindness. From the moment that she is in favour, all that comes from her requires consideration. She had me taken into her small salon, and there she charged me to tell you that she has always loved you, that she always will; that your rupture with her has displeased the King; that for a long time, and on a thousand occasions, she has excused you to his Majesty, but that things are now hopeless; that your retreat is required at all costs, and that it will be joined with an annual pension of six hundred thousand livres.”

“And you advise me—?” I said to my brother.

“I advise you, I implore you, I conjure you, to accept these propositions which save everything.”

My course was clear to me on the instant. Wishing to be relieved of the importunities of the Marshal (a courtier, if ever there was one), I embraced him with tears in my eyes. I assured him that, for the honour of the family and out of complacency, I accepted his propositions. I begged him to take me back to Versailles, where I had to gather together my money, jewels, and papers.

The Duc de Vivonne, well as he knew me, did not suspect my trickery; he applied a score of kisses to my “pretty little white hands,” and his postilions, giving free play to their reins, speedily brought us back to the chateau.

All beaming with joy and satisfaction, he went to convey his reply to Madame de Maintenon, who was probably expecting him. Twenty minutes hardly elapsed. The King himself entered my apartment.

He came towards me with a friendly air, and, hardly remarking my agitation, which I was suppressing, he dared to address the following words to me:

“The shortest follies are the best, dear Marquise; you see things at last as they should be seen. Your determination, which the Marechal de Vivonne has just informed me of, gives me inexpressible pleasure; you are going to take the step of a clever woman, and everybody will applaud you for it. It will be eighteen years to-morrow since we took a fancy for each other. We were then in that period of life when one sees only that which flatters, and the satisfaction of the heart surpasses everything. Our attachment, if it had been right and legitimate, might have begun with the same ardour, but it could not have endured so long; that is the property of all contested affections.

“From our union amiable children have been born, for whom I have done, and will do, all that a father with good intentions can do. The Act which acknowledged them in full Parliament has not named you as their mother, because your bonds prevented it, but these respectful children know that they owe you their existence, and not one of them shall forget it while I live.

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"You have charmed by your wit and the liveliness of your character the busiest years of my life and reign. That pleasant memory will never leave me, and separated though we be, as good sense and propriety of every kind demands, we shall still belong to each other in thought. Athenais will always be to me the mother of my, dear children. I have been mindful up to this day, to increase at different moments the amount of your fortune: I believe it to be considerable, and wish, nevertheless, to add to it even more. If the pension that Vivonne had just suggested to you appear insufficient, two lines from your pen will notify me that I must increase it.

"Your children being proclaimed Princes of France, the Court will be their customary residence, but you will see them frequently, and can count on my commands. Here they are coming,—not to say good-bye to you, but, as of old, to embrace you on the eve of a journey.

"If you are prudent, you will write first to the Marquis de Montespan, not to annul and revoke the judicial and legal separation which exists, but to inform him of your return to reasonable ideas, and of your resolve to be reconciled with the public."

With these words the King ceased speaking. I looked at him with a fixed gaze; a long sigh escaped from my heaving breast, and I had with him, as nearly as I can remember, the following conversation:

"I admire the sang-froid with which a prince who believes himself, and is believed by the whole universe, to be magnanimous, gives the word of dismissal to the tender friend of his youth,—to that friend who, by a misfortune which is too well known, knew how to leave all and love him alone.

"From the day when the friendship which had united us cooled and was dissipated, you have resumed with regard to me that distance which your rank authorises you, and on my side, I have submitted to see in you only my King. This revolution has taken effect without any shock, or noise, or scandal. It has continued for two years already; why should it not continue in the same manner until the moment when my last two children no longer require my eyes, and presence, and care? What sudden cause, what urgent motive, can determine you to exclude me? Does not, then, the humiliation which I have suffered for two years any longer satisfy your aversion?"

"What!" cried the prince, in consternation, "is your resolution no longer the same? Do you go back upon what you promised to your brother?"

"I do not change my resolution," I resumed at once; "the places which you inhabit have neither charm nor attraction for my heart, which has always detested treachery and falseness. I consent to withdraw myself from your person, but on condition that the odious intriguer who has supplanted me shall follow the unhappy benefactress who

once opened to her the doors of this palace. I took her from a state of misery, and she plunges daggers into my breast.”

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"The Kings of Europe," said the prince, white with agitation and anger, "have not yet laid down the law to me in my palace; you shall not make me submit to yours, madame. The person whom, for far too long, you have been offending and humiliating before my eyes, has ancestors who yield in nothing to your forefathers, and if you have introduced her to this palace, you have introduced here goodness, sweetness, talent, and virtue itself. This enemy, whom you defame in every quarter, and who every day excuses and justifies you, will abide near this throne, which her fathers have defended and which her good counsel now defends. In sending you today from a Court where your presence is without motive and pretext, I wished to keep from your knowledge, and in kindness withdraw from your eyes an event likely to irritate you, since everything irritates you. Stay, madame, stay, since great catastrophes appeal to and amuse you; after to-morrow you will be more than ever a supernumerary in this chateau."

At these words I realised that it was a question of the public triumph of my rival. All my firmness vanished; my heart was, as it were, distorted with the most rapid palpitations. I felt an icy coldness run through my veins, and I fell unconscious upon my carpet.

My woman came to bring me help, and when my senses returned, I heard the King saying to my intendant: "All this wearies me beyond endurance; she must go this very day."

"Yes, I will go," I cried, seizing a dessert-knife which was on my bureau. I rushed forward with a mechanical movement upon my little Comte de Toulouse, whom I snatched from the hands of his father, and I was on the verge of sacrificing this child.

I shudder every time I think of that terrible and desperate scene. But reason had left me; sorrow filled my soul; I was no longer myself. My reader must be penetrated by my misfortune and have compassion on me.

Madame de Maintenon, informed probably of this storm, arrived and suddenly showed herself. To rush forward, snatch away the dagger and my child was but one movement for her. Her tears coursed in abundance; and the King, leaning on the marble of my chimney-piece, shed tears and seemed to feel a sort of suffocation.

My women had removed my children. My intendant alone had remained in the deep embrasure of a shutter; the poor man had affliction and terror painted on his face. Madame de Maintenon had slightly wounded herself in seizing my knife. I saw her tearing her handkerchief, putting on lavender water in order to moisten the bandage. As she left me she took my hand with an air of kindness, and her tears began again.

The King, seeing her go out, retired without addressing me a word. I might call as much as I would; he did not return.



Until nightfall I seemed to be in a state of paralysis. My arms were like lead; my will could no longer stir them. I was distressed at first, and then I thanked God, who was delivering me from the torments of existence. All night my body and soul moved in the torrent and waves of a fever handed over to phantoms; I saw in turn the smiling plains of Paradise and the dire domain of Hell. My children, covered with wounds, asked me for pardon, kneeling before me; and Madame de Maintenon, one mass of blood, reproached me for having killed her.

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On the following day a copious blood-letting, prescribed by my doctor, relieved my head and heart.

The following week Madame de Maintenon, entirely cured of her scratch, consented to the King's will, which she had opposed in order to excite it, and in the presence of the Marquis and Marquise de Montchevreuil, the Duc de Noailles, the Marquis de Chamarante, M. Bontems, and Mademoiselle Ninon, her permanent chambermaid, was married to the King of France and Navarre in the chapel of the chateau.

The Abbe de Harlay, Archbishop of Paris, assisted by the Bishop of Chartres and Pere de la Chaise, had the honour of blessing this marriage and presenting the rings of gold. After the ceremony, which took place at an early hour, and even by torchlight, there was a slight repast in the small apartments. The same persons, taking carriages, then repaired to Maintenon, where the great ceremony, the mass, and all that is customary in such cases were celebrated.

At her return, Madame de Maintenon took possession of an extremely sumptuous apartment that had been carefully arranged and furnished for her. Her people continued to wear her livery, but she scarcely ever rode any more except in the great carriage of the King, where we saw her in the place which had been occupied by the Queen. In her interior the title of Majesty was given her; and the King, when he had to speak of her, only used the word Madame, without adding Maintenon, that having become too familiar and trivial.

He was desirous of proclaiming her; she consistently opposed it, and this prudent and wise conduct regained for her, little by little, the opinions which had been shocked.

A few days after the marriage, my health being somewhat reestablished, I went to Petit-Bourg; but the Marechal de Vivonne, his son Louis de Vivonne, all the Mortemarts, all the Rochehouarts, Thianges, Damas, Seignelays, Blainvilles, and Colberts,—in a word, counts, marquises, barons, prelates, and duchesses, came to find me and attack me in my desert, in order to represent to me that, since Madame de Maintenon was the wife of the monarch, I owed her my homage and respectful compliments. The whole family has done so, said these cruel relations; you only have not yet fulfilled this duty. You must do it, in God's name. She has neither airs nor hauteur; you will be marvellously well received. Your resistance would compromise us all.

Not desiring to harm or displease my family, and wishing, above all, to reinstate myself somewhat in the King's mind, I resolutely prepared for this distressing journey, and God gave me the necessary strength to execute it.

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I appeared in a long robe of gold and silver before the new spouse of the monarch. The King, who was sitting at a table, rose for a moment and encouraged me by his greeting. I made the three pauses and three reverences as I gradually approached Madame de Maintenon, who occupied a large and rich armchair of brocade. She did not rise; etiquette forbade it, and principally the presence of the all-powerful King of kings. Her complexion, ordinarily pale, and with a very slight tone of pink, was animated suddenly, and took all the colours of the rose. She made me a sign to seat myself on a stool, and it seemed to me that her amiable gaze apologised to me. She spoke to me of Petit-Bourg, of the waters of Bourbon, of her country-place, of my children, and said to me, smiling kindly: "I am going to confide in you. Monsieur le Prince has already asked Mademoiselle de Names for his grandson, M. le Duc de Bourbon, and his Highness promises us his granddaughter for our Duc du Maine. Two or three years more, and we shall see all that."

After half an hour spent thus, I rose from this uncomfortable stool and made my farewell reverences. Madame de Maintenon, profiting by the King having leaned over to write, rose five or six inches in her chair, and said to me these words: "Do not let us cease to love one another, I implore you."

I went to rest myself in the poor apartment which was still mine, since the keys had not yet been returned, and I sent for M. le Duc du Maine, who said to me coldly: "I have much pleasure in seeing you again; we were going to write to you."

I had come out from Madame de Maintenon by the door of mirrors, which leads to the great gallery. There was much company there at the moment; M. le Prince de Salm came to me and said: "Go and put on your peignoir; you are flushed, and I can perfectly well understand why." He pressed my hand affectionately. In all the salons they were eager to see me pass. Some courageous persons came even within touch of my fan; and all were more or less pleased with my mishap and downfall. I had seen all these figures at my feet, and almost all were under obligations to me. I left Versailles again very early. When I was seated in my carriage I noticed the King, who, from the height of his balcony in the court of marble, watched me set off and disappear.

I settled at Paris, where my personal interest and my great fortune gave me an existence which many might have envied. I never returned to Versailles, except for the weddings of my eldest daughter, and of my son, the Serious;—[Louis Augusts de Bourbon, Duc du Maine, a good man, somewhat devout and melancholy. (See the *Memoirs of Dubois and Richelieu.*)—*Editor's Note.*]—I always loved him better than he did me.

Pere de Latour, my director, obtained from me then, what I had refused hitherto to everybody, a letter of reconciliation to M. le Marquis de Montespan: I had foreseen the reply, which was that of an obstinate, ill-bred, and evil man.

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Pere de Latour, going further, wished to impose hard, not to say murderous, penances on me; I begged him to keep within bounds, and not to make me impatient. This Oratorian and his admirers have stated that I wore a hair shirt and shroud. Pious slanders, every word of them! I give many pensions and alms, that is to say, I do good to several families; the good that I bestow about me will be more agreeable to God than any harm I could do myself, and that I maintain.

The Marquis d'Antin, my son, since my disgrace.....

Here end the memoirs of madame de Montespan.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Ambition puts a thick bandage over the eyes
Says all that he means, and resolutely means all that he can say Situations in life where
we are condemned to see evil done Women who misconduct themselves are pitiless
and severe