

Memoirs of the Courts of Louis XV and XVI. Being secret memoirs of Madame Du Hausset, lady's maid to Madame de Pompadour, and of the Princess Lamballe — Volume 4 eBook

Memoirs of the Courts of Louis XV and XVI. Being secret memoirs of Madame Du Hausset, lady's maid to Madame de Pompadour, and of the Princess Lamballe — Volume 4

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Memoirs of the Courts of Louis XV and XVI. Being secret memoirs of Madame Du Hausset, lady's maid to Madame de Pompadour, and of the Princess Lamballe — Volume 4 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	7
Page 4.....	8
Page 5.....	9
Page 6.....	11
Page 7.....	12
Page 8.....	14
Page 9.....	16
Page 10.....	17
Page 11.....	18
Page 12.....	19
Page 13.....	21
Page 14.....	23
Page 15.....	24
Page 16.....	25
Page 17.....	26
Page 18.....	27
Page 19.....	28
Page 20.....	30
Page 21.....	32

Page 22.....	34
Page 23.....	35
Page 24.....	36
Page 25.....	37
Page 26.....	39
Page 27.....	40
Page 28.....	41
Page 29.....	43
Page 30.....	45
Page 31.....	47
Page 32.....	49
Page 33.....	50
Page 34.....	52
Page 35.....	54
Page 36.....	56

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
SECTION V.		1
SECTION VI.		6
SECTION VII.		14
SECTION VIII.		22
SECTION IX.		25
SECTION X.		30
ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:		36

Page 1

SECTION V.

“The accession of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette to the crown of France took place (May 10, 1774) under the most propitious auspices!

“After the long, corrupt reign of an old debauched Prince, whose vices were degrading to himself and to a nation groaning under the lash of prostitution and caprice, the most cheering changes were expected from the known exemplariness of his successor and the amiableness of his consort. Both were looked up to as models of goodness. The virtues of Louis XVI. were so generally known that all France hastened to acknowledge them, while the Queen's fascinations acted like a charm on all who had not been invincibly prejudiced against the many excellent qualities which entitled her to love and admiration. Indeed, I never heard an insinuation against either the King or Queen but from those depraved minds which never possessed virtue enough to imitate theirs, or were jealous of the wonderful powers of pleasing that so eminently distinguished Marie Antoinette from the rest of her sex.

“On the death of Louis XV. the entire Court removed from Versailles to the palace of La Muette, situate in the Bois de Boulogne, very near Paris. The confluence of Parisians, who came in crowds joyfully to hail the death of the old vitiated Sovereign, and the accession of his adored successors, became quite annoying to the whole Royal Family. The enthusiasm with which the Parisians hailed their young King, and in particular his amiable young partner, lasted for many days. These spontaneous evidences of attachment were regarded as prognostics of a long reign of happiness. If any inference can be drawn from public opinion, could there be a stronger assurance than this one of uninterrupted future tranquility to its objects?

“To the Queen herself it was a double triumph. The conspirators, whose depravity had been labouring to make her their victim, departed from the scene of power. The husband, who for four years had been callous to her attractions, became awakened to them. A complete change in the domestic system of the palace was wrought suddenly. The young King, during the interval which elapsed between the death and the interment of his grandfather, from Court etiquette was confined to his apartments. The youthful couple therefore saw each other with less restraint. The marriage was consummated. Marie Antoinette from this moment may date that influence over the heart (would I might add over the head and policy!) of the King, which never slackened during the remainder of their lives.

“Madame du Barry was much better dealt with by the young King, whom she had always treated with the greatest levity, than she, or her numerous courtiers, expected. She was allowed her pension, and the entire enjoyment of all her ill-gotten and accumulated wealth; but, of course, excluded from ever appearing at Court, and politically exiled from Paris to the Chateau aux Dames.

Page 2

“This implacable foe and her infamous coadjutors being removed from further interference in matters of State by the expulsion of all their own Ministers, their rivals, the Duc de Choiseul and his party, by whom Marie Antoinette had been brought to France, were now in high expectation of finding the direction of the Government, by the Queen’s influence, restored to that nobleman. But the King’s choice was already made. He had been ruled by his aunts, and appointed Ministers suggested by them and his late grandfather’s friends, who feared the preponderance of the Austrian influence. The three ladies, Madame la Marechale de Beauveau, the Duchesse de Choiseul, and the Duchesse de Grammont, who were all well-known to Louis XVI. and stood high in his opinion for many excellent qualities, and especially for their independent assertion of their own and the Dauphine’s dignity by retiring from Court in consequence of the supper at which Du Barry was introduced these ladies, though received on their return thither with peculiar welcome, in vain united their efforts with those of the Queen and the Abbe Vermond, to overcome the prejudice which opposed Choiseul’s reinstatement. It was all in vain. The royal aunts, Adelaide especially, hated Choiseul for the sake of Austria, and his agency in bringing Marie Antoinette to France; and so did the King’s tutor and governor, the Duc de Vauguyon, who had ever been hostile to any sort of friendship with Vienna; and these formed a host impenetrable even to the influence of the Queen, which was opposed by all the leaders of the prevailing party, who, though they were beginning externally to court, admire, and idolize her, secretly surrounded her by their noxious and viperous intrigues, and, while they lived in her bosom, fattened on the destruction of her fame!

“One of the earliest of the paltry insinuations against Marie Antoinette emanated from her not counterfeiting deep affliction at the decease of the old King. A few days after that event, the Court received the regular visits of condolence and congratulation of the nobility, whose duty prescribes their attendance upon such occasions; and some of them, among whom were the daughters of Louis XV., not finding a young Queen of nineteen hypocritically bathed in tears, on returning to their abodes declared her the most indecorous of Princesses, and diffused a strong impression of her want of feeling. At the head of these detractors were Mesdames de Guemenee and Marsan, rival pretenders to the favours of the Cardinal de Rohan, who, having by the death of Louis XV. lost their influence and their unlimited power to appoint and dismiss Ministers, themselves became ministers to their own evil geniuses, in calumniating her whose legitimate elevation annihilated their monstrous pretensions!

Page 3

“The Abbe Vermond, seeing the defeat of the party of the Duc de Choiseul, by whom he had been sent to the Court of Vienna on the recommendation of Brienne, began to tremble for his own security. As soon as the Court had arrived at Choisy, and he was assured of the marriage having been consummated, he obtained, with the Queen's consent, an audience of the King, for the purpose of soliciting his sanction to his continuing in his situation. On submitting his suit to the King, His Majesty merely gave a shrug of the shoulders, and turned to converse with the Duc d'Aiguillon, who at that moment entered the room. The Abbe stood stupefied, and the Queen, seeing the crestfallen humour of her tutor, laughed and cheered him by remarking, 'There is more meaning in the shrug of a King than in the embrace of a Minister. The one always promises, but is seldom sincere; the other is generally sincere, but never promises.' The Abbe, not knowing how to interpret the dumb answer, finding the King's back turned and his conversation with D'Aiguillon continuing, was retiring with a shrug of his own shoulders to the Queen, when she exclaimed, good-humouredly, to Louis, laughing and pointing to the Abbe, 'Look! look! see how readily a Church dignitary can imitate the good Christian King, who is at the head of the Church.' The King, seeing the Abbe still waiting, said, dryly, 'Monsieur, you are confirmed in your situation,' and then resumed his conversation with the Duke.

“This anecdote is a sufficient proof that *louis* XVI. had no prepossession in favour of the Abbe Vermond, and that it was merely not to wound the feelings of the Queen that he was tolerated. The Queen herself was conscious of this, and used frequently to say to me how much she was indebted to the King for such deference to her private choice, in allowing Vermond to be her secretary, as she did not remember the King's ever having held any communication with the Abbe during the whole time he was attached to the service, though the Abbe always expressed himself with the greatest respect towards the King.

“The decorum of Marie Antoinette would not allow her to endure those public exhibitions of the ceremony, of dressing herself which had been customary at Court. This reserve was highly approved by His Majesty; and one of the first reforms she introduced, after the accession, was in the internal discipline of her own apartment.

“It was during one of the visits, apart from Court etiquette, to the toilet of the Queen, that the Duchesse de Chartres, afterwards Duchesse d'Orleans, introduced the famous Mademoiselle Bertin, who afterwards became so celebrated as the Queen's milliner—the first that was ever allowed to approach a royal palace; and it was months before Marie Antoinette had courage to receive her milliner in any other than the private apartment which, by the alteration Her Majesty had made in the arrangements of the household, she set apart for the purpose of dressing in comfort by herself and free from all intruders.

Page 4

“Till then the Queen was not only very plain in her attire, but very, economical—a circumstance which, I have often heard her say, gave great umbrage to the other Princesses of the Court of Versailles, who never showed themselves, from the moment they rose till they returned to bed, except in full dress; while she herself made all her morning visits in a simple white cambric gown and straw hat. This simplicity, unfortunately, like many other trifles, whose consequences no foresight would have predicted, tended much to injure Marie Antoinette, not only with the Court dandies, but the nation; by whom, though she was always censured, she was as suddenly imitated in all she wore or did.

“From the private closet, which Marie Antoinette reserved to herself, and had now opened to her milliner, she would retire, after the great points of habiliment were accomplished, to those who were waiting with memorials at her public toilet, where the hairdresser would finish putting the ornaments in Her Majesty’s hair.

“The King made Marie Antoinette a present of Le Petit Trianon. Much has been said of the extravagant expense lavished by her upon this spot. I can only declare that the greater part of the articles of furniture which had not been worn out by time or were not worm or moth-eaten, and her own bed among them, were taken from the apartments of former Queens, and some of them had actually belonged to Anne of Austria, who, like Marie Antoinette, had purchased them out of her private savings. Hence it is clear that neither of the two Queens were chargeable to the State even for those little indulgences which every private lady of property is permitted from her husband, without coming under the lash of censure.

“Her allowance as Queen of France was no more than 300,000 francs. It is well known that she was generous, liberal, and very charitable; that she paid all her expenses regularly respecting her household, Trianon, her dresses, diamonds, millinery, and everything else; her Court establishment excepted, and some few articles, which were paid by the civil list. She was one of the first Queens in Europe, had the first establishment in Europe, and was obliged to keep up the most refined and luxurious Court in Europe; and all upon means no greater than had been assigned to many of the former bigoted Queens, who led a cloistered life, retired from the world without circulating their wealth among the nation which supplied them with so large a revenue; and yet who lived and died uncensured for hoarding from the nation what ought at least to have been in part expended for its advantage.

Page 5

“And yet of all the extra expenditure which the dignity and circumstances of Marie Antoinette exacted, not a franc came from the public Treasury; but everything out of Her Majesty’s private purse and savings from the above three hundred thousand francs, which was an infinitely less sum than Louis XIV. had lavished yearly on the Duchesse de Montespan, and less than half what Louis XV. had expended on the last two favourites, De Pompadour and Du Barry. These two women, as clearly appeared from the private registers, found among the papers of Louis XV. after his death, by Louis XVI. (but which, out of respect for the memory of his grandfather, he destroyed), these two women had amassed more property in diamonds and other valuables than all the Queens of France from the days of Catherine de Medicis up to those of Marie Antoinette.

“Such was the goodness of heart of the excellent Queen of Louis XVI., such the benevolence of her character, that not only did she pay all the pensions of the invalids left by her predecessors, but she distributed in public and private charities greater sums than any of the former Queens, thus increasing her expenses without any proportionate augmentation of her resources.”

[Indeed, could Louis XVI. have foreseen—when, in order not to expose the character of his predecessor and to honour the dignity of the throne and monarchy of France, he destroyed the papers of his grandfather—what an arm of strength he would have possessed in preserving them, against the accusers of his unfortunate Queen and himself, he never could have thrown away such means of establishing a most honourable contrast between his own and former reigns. His career exhibits no superfluous expenditure. Its economy was most rigid. No sovereign was ever more scrupulous with the public money. He never had any public or private predilection; no dilapidated Minister for a favourite: no courtesan intrigue. For gaming he had no fondness; and, if his abilities were not splendid, he certainly had no predominating vices.]

Note:

[I must once more quit the journal of the Princess. Her Highness here ceases to record particulars of the early part of the reign of Louis XVI., and everything essential upon those times is too well known to render it desirable to detain the reader by an attempt to supply the deficiency. It is enough to state that the secret unhappiness of the Queen at not yet having the assurance of an heir was by no means weakened by the impatience of the people, nor by the accouchement of the Comtesse d’Artois of the Duc d’Angouleme. While the Queen continued the intimacy, and even held her parties at the apartments of the Duchess that she might watch over her friend, even in this triumph over herself, the poissardes grossly insulted her in her misfortune, and coarsely called on her to give heirs to the throne!

A consolation, however, for the unkind feeling of the populace was about to arise in the delights of one of her strongest friendships. I am come to the epoch when Her Majesty first formed an acquaintance with the Princesse de Lamballe.

Page 6

After a few words of my own on the family of Her Highness, I shall leave her to pursue her beautiful and artless narrative of her parentage, early sorrows, and introduction to Her Majesty, unbroken.

The journal of the history of Marie Antoinette, after this slight interruption for the private history of her friend, will become blended with the journal of the Princesse de Lamballe, and both thenceforward will proceed in their course together, like their destinies, which from that moment never became disunited.]

SECTION VI.

[Maria Theresa Louisa Carignan, Princess of Savoy, was born at Turin on the 8th September, 1749. She had three sisters; two of them were married at Rome, one to the Prince Doria Pamfili, the other to the Prince Colonna; and the third at Vienna, to the Prince Lobkowitz, whose son was the great patron of the immortal Haydn, the celebrated composer.

The celebrated Haydn was, even at the age of 74, when I last saw him at Vienna, till the most good-humoured bon vivant of his age. He delighted in telling the origin of his good fortune, which he said he entirely owed to a bad wife.

When he was first married, he said, finding no remedy against domestic squabbles, he used to quit his bad half and go and enjoy himself with his good friends, who were Hungarians and Germans, for weeks together. Once, having returned home after a considerable absence, his wife, while he was in bed next morning, followed her husband's example: she did even more, for she took all his clothes, even to his shoes, stockings, and small clothes, nay, everything he had, along with her! Thus situated, he was under the necessity of doing something to cover his nakedness; and this, he himself acknowledged, was the first cause of his seriously applying himself to the profession which has since made his name immortal.

He used to laugh, saying, "I was from that time so habituated to study that my wife, often fearing it would injure me, would threaten me with the same operation if I did not go out and amuse myself; but then," added he, "I was grown old, and she was sick and no longer jealous." He spoke remarkably good Italian, though he had never been in Italy, and on my going to Vienna to hear his "Creation," he promised to accompany me back to Italy; but he unfortunately died before I returned to Vienna from Carlsbad.

She had a brother also, the Prince Carignan, who, marrying against the consent of his family, was no longer received by them; but the unremitting and affectionate attention which the Princesse de Lamballe paid to him and his new connexions was an ample compensation for the loss he sustained in the severity of his other sisters.

Page 7

With regard to the early life of the Princesse de Lamballe, the arranger of these pages must now leave her to pursue her own beautiful and artless narrative unbroken, up to the epoch of her appointment to the household of the Queen. It will be recollected that the papers of which the reception has been already described in the introduction formed the private journal of this most amiable Princess; and those passages relating to her own early life being the most connected part of them, it has been thought that to disturb them would be a kind of sacrilege. After the appointment of Her Highness to the superintendence of the Queen's household, her manuscripts again become confused, and fall into scraps and fragments, which will require to be once more rendered clear by the recollections of events and conversations by which the preceding chapters have been assisted.]

"I was the favourite child of a numerous family, and intended, almost at my birth—as is generally the case among Princes who are nearly allied to crowned heads—to be united to one of the Princes, my near relation, of the royal house of Sardinia.

"A few years after this, the Duc and Duchesse de Penthièvre arrived at Turin, on their way to Italy, for the purpose of visiting the different Courts, to make suitable marriage contracts for both their infant children.

"These two children were Mademoiselle de Penthièvre, afterwards the unhappy Duchesse d'Orleans, and their idolised son, the Prince de Lamballe.

[The father of Louis Alexander Joseph Stanislaus de Bourbon Penthièvre, Prince de Lamballe, was the son of Comte de Toulouse, himself a natural son of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan, who was considered as the most wealthy of all the natural children, in consequence of Madame de Montespan having artfully entrapped the famous Mademoiselle de Moutpensier to make over her immense fortune to him as her heir after her death, as the price of liberating her husband from imprisonment in the Bastille, and herself from a ruinous prosecution, for having contracted this marriage contrary to the express commands of her royal cousin, Louis XIV.—Vide Histoire de Louis XIV. par Voltaire.]

"Happy would it have been both for the Prince who was destined to the former and the Princess who was given to the latter, had these unfortunate alliances never taken place.

"The Duc and Duchesse de Penthièvre became so singularly attached to my beloved parents, and, in particular, to myself, that the very day they first dined at the Court of Turin, they mentioned the wish they had formed of uniting me to their young son, the Prince de Lamballe.

"The King of Sardinia, as the head of the house of Savoy and Carignan, said there had been some conversation as to my becoming a member of his royal family; but as I was so very young at the time, many political reasons might arise to create motives for a

change in the projected alliance. 'If, therefore, the Prince de Carignan,' said the King, 'be anxious to settle his daughter's marriage, by any immediate matrimonial alliance, I certainly shall not avail myself of any prior engagement, nor oppose any obstacle in the way of its solemnisation.'

Page 8

“The consent of the King being thus unexpectedly obtained by the Prince, so desirable did the arrangement seem to the Duke and Duchess that the next day the contract was concluded with my parents for my becoming the wife of their only son, the Prince de Lamballe.

“I was too young to be consulted. Perhaps had I been older the result would have been the same, for it generally happens in these great family alliances that the parties most interested, and whose happiness is most concerned, are the least thought of. The Prince was, I believe, at Paris, under the tuition of his governess, and I was in the nursery, heedless, and totally ignorant of my future good or evil destination!

“So truly happy and domestic a life as that led by the Duc and Duchesse de Penthièvre seemed to my family to offer an example too propitious not to secure to me a degree of felicity with a private Prince, very rarely the result of royal unions! Of course, their consent was given with alacrity. When I was called upon to do homage to my future parents, I had so little idea, from my extreme youthfulness, of what was going on that I set them all laughing, when, on being asked if I should like to become the consort of the Prince de Lamballe, I said, ‘Yes, I am very fond of music!’ No, my dear,’ resumed the good and tender-hearted Duc de Penthièvre, ‘I mean, would you have any objection to become his wife?’—‘No, nor any other person’s!’ was the innocent reply, which increased the mirth of all the guests at my expense.

“Happy, happy days of youthful, thoughtless innocence, luxuriously felt and appreciated under the thatched roof of the cottage, but unknown and unattainable beneath the massive pile of a royal palace and a gemmed crown! Scarcely had I entered my teens when my adopted parents strewed flowers of the sweetest fragrance to lead me to the sacred altar, that promised the bliss of busses, but which, too soon, from the foul machinations of envy, jealousy, avarice, and a still more criminal passion, proved to me the altar of my sacrifice!

“My misery and my uninterrupted grief may be dated from the day my beloved sister-in-law, Mademoiselle de Penthièvre, sullied her hand by its union with the Duc de Chartres.—[Afterwards Duc d’Orleans, and the celebrated revolutionary Philippe Egalite.]—From that moment all comfort, all prospect of connubial happiness, left my young and affectionate heart, plucked thence by the very roots, never more again to bloom there. Religion and philosophy were the only remedies remaining.

“I was a bride when an infant, a wife before I was a woman, a widow before I was a mother, or had the prospect of becoming one! Our union was, perhaps, an exception to the general rule. We became insensibly the more attached to each other the more we were acquainted, which rendered the more severe the separation, when we were torn asunder never to meet again in this world!

“After I left Turin, though everything for my reception at the palaces of Toulouse and Rambouillet had been prepared in the most sumptuous style of magnificence, yet such was my agitation that I remained convulsively speechless for many hours, and all the affectionate attention of the family of the Duc de Penthièvre could not calm my feelings.

Page 9

“Among those who came about me was the bridegroom himself, whom I had never yet seen. So anxious was he to have his first acquaintance incognito that he set off from Paris the moment he was apprised of my arrival in France and presented himself as the Prince’s page. As he had outgrown the figure of his portrait, I received him as such; but the Prince, being better pleased with me than he had apprehended he should be, could scarcely avoid discovering himself. During our journey to Paris I myself disclosed the interest with which the supposed page had inspired me. ‘I hope,’ exclaimed I, ‘my Prince will allow his page to attend me, for I like him much.’

“What was my surprise when the Duc de Penthièvre presented me to the Prince and I found in him the page for whom I had already felt such an interest! We both laughed and wanted words to express our mutual sentiments. This was really love at first sight.

[The young Prince was enraptured at finding his lovely bride so superior in personal charms to the description which had been given of her, and even to the portrait sent to him from Turin. Indeed, she must have been a most beautiful creature, for when I left her in the year 1792, though then five-and-forty years of age, from the freshness of her complexion, the elegance of her figure, and the dignity of her deportment, she certainly did not appear to be more than thirty. She had a fine head of hair, and she took great pleasure in showing it unornamented. I remember one day, on her coming hastily from the bath, as she was putting on her dress, her cap falling off, her hair completely covered her!

The circumstances of her death always make me shudder at the recollection of this incident! I have been assured by Mesdames Mackau, de Soucle, the Comtesse de Noailles (not Duchesse, as Mademoiselle Bertin has created her in her Memoirs of that name), and others, that the Princesse de Lamballe was considered the most beautiful and accomplished Princess at the Court of Louis XV., adorned with all the grace, virtue, and elegance of manner which so eminently distinguished her through life.]

“The Duc de Chartres, then possessing a very handsome person and most insinuating address, soon gained the affections of the amiable Mademoiselle Penthièvre. Becoming thus a member of the same family, he paid me the most assiduous attention. From my being his sister-in-law, and knowing he was aware of my great attachment to his young wife, I could have no idea that his views were criminally levelled at my honour, my happiness, and my future peace of mind. How, therefore, was I astonished and shocked when he discovered to me his desire to supplant the legitimate object of my affections, whose love for me equalled mine for him! I did not expose this baseness of the Duc de Chartres, out of filial affection for my adopted father, the Duc de Penthièvre; out of the love I bore his amiable daughter, she being pregnant;

Page 10

and, above all, in consequence of the fear I was under of compromising the life of the Prince, my husband, who I apprehended might be lost to me if I did not suffer in silence. But still, through my silence he was lost—and oh, how dreadfully! The Prince was totally in the dark as to the real character of his brother-in-law. He blindly became every day more and more attached to the man, who was then endeavouring by the foulest means to blast the fairest prospects of his future happiness in life! But my guardian angel protected me from becoming a victim to seduction, defeating every attack by that prudence which has hitherto been my invincible shield.

“Guilt, unpunished in its first crime, rushes onward, and hurrying from one misdeed to another, like the flood-tide, drives all before it! My silence, and his being defeated without reproach, armed him with courage for fresh daring, and he too well succeeded in embittering the future days of my life, as well as those of his own affectionate wife, and his illustrious father-in-law, the virtuous Duc de Penthievre, who was to all a father.

“To revenge himself upon me for the repulse he met with, this man inveigled my young, inexperienced husband from his bridal bed to those infected with the nauseous poison of every vice! Poor youth! he soon became the prey of every refinement upon dissipation and studied debauchery, till at length his sufferings made his life a burthen, and he died in the most excruciating agonies both of mind and body, in the arms of a disconsolate wife and a distracted father—and thus, in a few short months, at the age of eighteen, was I left a widow to lament my having become a wife!

“I was in this situation, retired from the world and absorbed in grief, with the ever beloved and revered illustrious father of my murdered lord, endeavouring to sooth his pangs for the loss of those comforts in a child with which my cruel disappointment forbade my ever being blest—though, in the endeavour to soothe, I often only aggravated both his and my own misery at our irretrievable loss—when a ray of unexpected light burst upon my dreariness. It was amid this gloom of human agony, these heartrending scenes of real mourning, that the brilliant star shone to disperse the clouds which hovered over our drooping heads,—to dry the hot briny tears which were parching up our miserable vegetating existence—it was in this crisis that Marie Antoinette came, like a messenger sent down from Heaven, graciously to offer the balm of comfort in the sweetest language of human compassion. The pure emotions of her generous soul made her unceasing, unremitting, in her visits to two mortals who must else have perished under the weight of their misfortunes. But for the consolation of her warm friendship we must have sunk into utter despair!

Page 11

“From that moment I became seriously attached to the Queen of France. She dedicated a great portion of her time to calm the anguish of my poor heart, though I had not yet accepted the honour of becoming a member of Her Majesty’s household. Indeed, I was a considerable time before I could think of undertaking a charge I felt myself so completely incapable of fulfilling. I endeavoured to check the tears that were pouring down my cheeks, to conceal in the Queen’s presence the real feelings of my heart, but the effort only served to increase my anguish when she had departed. Her attachment to me, and the cordiality with which she distinguished herself towards the Duc de Penthièvre, gave her a place in that heart, which had been chilled by the fatal vacuum left by its first inhabitant; and Marie Antoinette was the only rival through life that usurped his pretensions, though she could never wean me completely from his memory.

“My health, from the melancholy life I led, had so much declined that my affectionate father, the Duc de Penthièvre, with whom I continued to reside, was anxious that I should emerge from my retirement for the benefit of my health. Sensible of his affection, and having always honoured his counsels, I took his advice in this instance. It being in the hard winter, when so many persons were out of bread, the Queen, the Duchesse d’Orleans, the Duc de Penthièvre, and myself, introduced the German sledges, in which we were followed by most of the nobility and the rich citizens. This afforded considerable employment to different artificers. The first use I made of my own new vehicle was to visit, in company with the Duc de Penthièvre, the necessitous poor families and our pensioners. In the course of our rounds we met the Queen.

“‘I suppose,’ exclaimed Her Majesty, ‘you also are laying a good foundation for my work! Heavens! what must the poor feel! I am wrapped up like a diamond in a box, covered with furs, and yet I am chilled with cold!’

“‘That feeling sentiment,’ said the Duke, ‘will soon warm many a cold family’s heart with gratitude to bless Your Majesty!’

“‘Why, yes,’ replied Her Majesty, showing a long piece of paper containing the names of those to whom she intended to afford relief, ‘I have only collected two hundred yet on my list, but the cure will do the rest and help me to draw the strings of my privy purse! But I have not half done my rounds. I daresay before I return to Versailles I shall have as many more, and, since we are engaged in the same business, pray come into my sledge and do not take my work out of my hands! Let me have for once the merit of doing something good!’

Page 12

“On the coming up of a number of other vehicles belonging to the sledge party, the Queen added, ‘Do not say anything about what I have been telling you!’ for Her Majesty never wished what she did in the way of charity or donations should be publicly known, the old pensioners excepted, who, being on the list, could not be concealed; especially as she continued to pay all those she found of the late Queen of Louis XV. She was remarkably delicate and timid with respect to hurting the feelings of any one; and, fearing the Duc de Penthièvre might not be pleased at her pressing me to leave him in order to join her, she said, ‘Well, I will let you off, Princess, on your both promising to dine with me at Trianon; for the King is hunting, not deer, but wood for the poor, and he will see his game off to Paris before he comes back:

“The Duke begged to be excused, but wished me to accept the invitation, which I did, and we parted, each to pursue our different sledge excursions.

“At the hour appointed, I made my appearance at Trianon, and had the honour to dine tete-a-tete with Her Majesty, which was much more congenial to my feelings than if there had been a party, as I was still very low-spirited and unhappy.

“After dinner, ‘My dear Princess,’ said the Queen to me, ‘at your time of life you must not give yourself up entirely to the dead. You wrong the living. We have not been sent into the world for ourselves. I have felt much for your situation, and still do so, and therefore hope, as long as the weather permits, that you will favour me with your company to enlarge our sledge excursions. The King and my dear sister Elizabeth are also much interested about your coming on a visit to Versailles. What think you of our plan.

“I thanked Her Majesty, the King, and the Princess, for their kindness, but I observed that my state of health and mind could so little correspond in any way with the gratitude I should owe them for their royal favours that I trusted a refusal would be attributed to the fact of my consciousness how much rather my society must prove an annoyance and a burthen than a source of pleasure.

“My tears flowing down my cheeks rapidly while I was speaking, the Queen, with that kindness for which she was so eminently distinguished, took me by the hand, and with her handkerchief dried my face.

“‘I am,’ said the Queen, I about to renew a situation which has for some time past lain dormant; and I hope, my dear Princess, therewith to establish my own private views, in forming the happiness of a worthy individual.’

“I replied that such a plan must insure Her Majesty the desired object she had in view, as no individual could be otherwise than happy under the immediate auspices of so benevolent and generous a Sovereign.

“The Queen, with great affability, as if pleased with my observation, only said, ‘If you really think as you speak, my views are accomplished.’

Page 13

"My carriage was announced, and I then left Her Majesty, highly pleased at her gracious condescension, which evidently emanated from the kind wish to raise my drooping spirits from their melancholy.

"Gratitude would not permit me to continue long without demonstrating to Her Majesty the sentiments her kindness had awakened in my heart.

"I returned next day with my sister-in-law, the Duchesse d'Orleans, who was much esteemed by the Queen, and we joined the sledge parties with Her Majesty.

"On the third or fourth day of these excursions I again had the honour to dine with Her Majesty, when, in the presence of the Princesse Elizabeth, she asked me if I were still of the same opinion with respect to the person it was her intention to add to her household?

"I myself had totally forgotten the topic and entreated Her Majesty's pardon for my want of memory, and begged she would signify to what subject she alluded.

"The Princesse Elizabeth laughed. 'I thought,' cried she, 'that you had known it long ago! The Queen, with His Majesty's consent, has nominated you, my dear Princess (embracing me), superintendent of her household.'

"The Queen, also embracing me, said, 'Yes; it is very true. You said the individual destined to such a situation could not be otherwise than happy; and I am myself thoroughly happy in being able thus to contribute towards rendering you so.'

"I was perfectly at a loss for a moment or two, but, recovering myself from the effect of this unexpected and unlooked for preferment, I thanked Her Majesty with the best grace I was able for such an unmerited mark of distinction.

"The Queen, perceiving my embarrassment, observed, 'I knew I should surprise you; but I thought your being established at Versailles much more desirable for one of your rank and youth than to be, as you were, with the Duc de Penthièvre; who, much as I esteem his amiable character and numerous great virtues, is by no means the most cheering companion for my charming Princess. From this moment let our friendships be united in the common interest of each other's happiness.'

"The Queen took me by the hand. The Princesse Elizabeth, joining hers, exclaimed to the Queen, 'Oh, my dear sister! let me make the trio in this happy union of friends!'

"In the society of her adored Majesty and of her saint-like sister Elizabeth I have found my only balm of consolation! Their graciously condescending to sympathise in the grief with which I was overwhelmed from the cruel disappointment of my first love, filled up in some degree the vacuum left by his loss, who was so prematurely ravished from me in the flower of youth, leaving me a widow at eighteen; and though that loss is one I never



can replace or forget, the poignancy of its effect has been in a great degree softened by the kindnesses of my excellent father-in-law, the Duc de Penthièvre, and the relations resulting from my situation with, and the never-ceasing attachment of my beloved royal mistress.”

Page 14

SECTION VII.

[The connexion of the Princesse de Lamballe with the Queen, of which she has herself described the origin in the preceding chapter, proved so important in its influence upon the reputation and fate of both these illustrious victims, that I must once more withdraw the attention of the reader, to explain, from personal observation and confidential disclosures, the leading causes of the violent dislike which was kindled in the public against an intimacy that it would have been most fortunate had Her Majesty preferred through life to every other.

The selection of a friend by the Queen, and the sudden elevation of that friend to the highest station in the royal household, could not fail to alarm the selfishness of courtiers, who always feel themselves injured by the favour shown to others. An obsolete office was revived in favour of the Princesse de Lamballe. In the time of Maria Leckzinska, wife of Louis XV., the office of superintendent, then held by Mademoiselle de Clermont, was suppressed when its holder died. The office gave a control over the inclinations of Queens, by which Maria Leckzinska was sometimes inconvenienced; and it had lain dormant ever since. Its restoration by a Queen who it was believed could be guided by no motive but the desire to seek pretexts for showing undue favour, was of course eyed askance, and ere long openly calumniated.

The Comtesse de Noailles, who never could forget the title the Queen gave her of Madame Etiquette, nor forgive the frequent jokes which Her Majesty passed upon her antiquated formality, availed herself of the opportunity offered by her husband's being raised to the dignity of Marshal of France, to resign her situation on the appointment of the Princesse de Lamballe as superintendent. The Countess retired with feelings embittered against her royal mistress, and her annoyance in the sequel ripened into enmity. The Countess was attached to a very powerful party, not only at Court but scattered throughout the kingdom. Her discontent arose from the circumstance of no longer having to take her orders from the Queen direct, but from her superintendent. Ridiculous as this may seem to an impartial observer, it created one of the most powerful hostilities against which Her Majesty had afterwards to contend.

Though the Queen esteemed the Comtesse de Noailles for her many good qualities, yet she was so much put out of her way by the rigour with which the Countess enforced forms which to Her Majesty appeared puerile and absurd, that she felt relieved, and secretly gratified, by her retirement. It will be shown hereafter to what an excess the Countess was eventually carried by her malice.

Page 15

One of the popular objections to the revival of the office of superintendent in favour of the Princesse de Lamballe arose from its reputed extravagance. This was as groundless as the other charges against the Queen. The etiquettes of dress, and the requisite increase of every other expense, from the augmentation of every article of the necessaries as well as the luxuries of life, made a treble difference between the expenditure of the circumscribed Court of Maria Leckzinska and that of Louis XVI.; yet the Princesse de Lamballe received no more salary than had been allotted to Mademoiselle de Clermont in the selfsame situation half a century before.

(And even that salary she never appropriated to any private use of her own, being amply supplied through the generous bounty of her father-in-law, the Duc de Penthièvre; and latterly, to my knowledge, so far from receiving any pay, she often paid the Queen's and Princesse Elizabeth's bills out of her own purse.)

So far from possessing the slightest propensity either to extravagance in herself or to the encouragement of extravagance in others, the Princesse de Lamballe was a model of prudence, and upon those subjects, as indeed upon all others, the Queen could not have had a more discreet counsellor. She eminently contributed to the charities of the Queen, who was the mother of the fatherless, the support of the widow, and the general protectress and refuge of suffering humanity. Previously to the purchase of any article of luxury, the Princess would call for the list of the pensioners: if anything was due on that account, it was instantly paid, and the luxury dispensed with.

She never made her appearance in the Queen's apartments except at established hours. This was scrupulously observed till the Revolution. Circumstances then obliged her to break through forms. The Queen would only receive communications, either written or verbal, upon the subjects growing out of that wretched crisis, in the presence of the Princess; and hence her apartments were open to all who had occasion to see Her Majesty. This made their intercourse more constant and unceremonious. But before this, the Princess only went to the royal presence at fixed hours, unless she had memorials to present to the King, Queen, or Ministers, in favour of such as asked for justice or mercy. Hence, whenever the Princess entered before the stated times, the Queen would run and embrace her, and exclaim: "Well, my dear Princesse de Lamballe! what widow, what orphan, what suffering or oppressed petitioner am I to thank for this visit? for I know you never come to me empty-handed when you come unexpectedly!" The Princess, on these occasions, often had the petitioners waiting in an adjoining apartment, that they might instantly avail themselves of any inclination the Queen might show to see them.

Page 16

Once the Princess was deceived by a female painter of doubtful character, who supplicated her to present a work she had executed to the Queen. I myself afterwards returned that work to its owner. Thenceforward, the Princess became very rigid in her inquiries, previous to taking the least interest in any application, or consenting to present any one personally to the King or Queen. She required thoroughly to be informed of the nature of the request, and of the merit and character of the applicant, before she would attend to either. Owing to this caution Her Highness scarcely ever after met with a negative. In cases of great importance, though the Queen's compassionate and good heart needed no stimulus to impel her to forward the means of justice, the Princess would call the influence of the Princesse Elizabeth to her aid; and Elizabeth never sued in vain.

Marie Antoinette paid the greatest attention to all memorials. They were regularly collected every week by Her Majesty's private secretary, the Abbe Vermond. I have myself seen many of them, when returned from the Princesse de Lamballe, with the Queen's marginal notes in her own handwriting, and the answers dictated by Her Majesty to the different, officers of the departments relative to the nature of the respective demands. She always recommended the greatest attention to all public documents, and annexed notes to such as passed through her hands to prevent their being thrown aside or lost.

One of those who were least satisfied with the appointment of the Princesse de Lamballe to the office of superintendent was her brother-in-law, the Duc d'Orleans, who, having attempted her virtue on various occasions and been repulsed, became mortified and alarmed at her situation as a check to his future enterprise.

At one time the Duc and Duchesse d'Orleans were most constant and assiduous in their attendance on Marie Antoinette. They were at all her parties. The Queen was very fond of the Duchess. It is supposed that the interest Her Majesty took in that lady, and the steps to which some time afterwards that interest led, planted the first seeds of the unrelenting and misguided hostility which, in the deadliest times of the Revolution, animated the Orleanists against the throne.

The Duc d'Orleans, then Duc de Chartres, was never a favourite of the Queen. He was only tolerated at Court on account of his wife and of the great intimacy which subsisted between him and the Comte d'Artois. Louis XVI. had often expressed his disapprobation of the Duke's character, which his conduct daily justified.

Page 17

The Princesse de Lamballe could have no cause to think of her brother-in-law but with horror. He had insulted her, and, in revenge at his defeat, had, it was said, deprived her, by the most awful means, of her husband. The Princess was tenderly attached to her sister-in-law, the Duchess. Her attachment could not but make her look very unfavourably upon the circumstance of the Duke's subjecting his wife to the humiliation of residing in the palace with Madame de Genlis, and being forced to receive a person of morals so incorrect as the guardian of her children. The Duchess had complained to her father, the Duc de Penthièvre, in the presence of the Princesse de Lamballe, of the very great ascendancy Madame de Genlis exercised over her husband; and had even requested the Queen to use her influence in detaching the Duke from this connexion.

(It was generally understood that the Duke had a daughter by Madame de Genlis. This daughter, when grown up, was married to the late Irish Lord Robert Fitzgerald.)

But she had too much gentleness of nature not presently to forget her resentment. Being much devoted to her husband, rather than irritate him to further neglect by personal remonstrance, she determined to make the best of a bad business, and tolerated Madame de Genlis, although she made no secret among her friends and relations of the reason why she did so. Nay, so far did her wish not to disoblige her husband prevail over her own feelings as to induce her to yield at last to his importunities by frequently proposing to present Madame de Genlis to the Queen. But Madame de Genlis never could obtain either a public or a private audience. Though the Queen was a great admirer of merit and was fond of encouraging talents, of which Madame de Genlis was by no means deficient, yet even the account the Duchess herself had given, had Her Majesty possessed no other means of knowledge, would have sealed that lady's exclusion from the opportunities of display at Court which she sought so earnestly.

There was another source of exasperation against the Duc d'Orleans; and the great cause of a new and, though less obtrusive, yet perhaps an equally dangerous foe under all the circumstances, in Madame de Genlis. The anonymous slander of the one was circulated through all France by the other; and spleen and disappointment feathered the venomd arrows shot at the heart of power by malice and ambition. Be the charge true or false, these anonymous libels were generally considered as the offspring of this lady: they were industriously scattered by the Duc d'Orleans; and their frequent refutation by the Queen's friends only increased the malignant industry of their inventor.

An event which proved the most serious of all that ever happened to the Queen, and the consequences of which were distinctly foreseen by the Princesse de Lamballe and others of her true friends, was now growing to maturity.

The deposed Court oracle, the Comtesse de Noailles, had been succeeded as literary leader by the Comtesse Diane de Polignac. She was a favourite of the Comte d'Artois, and was the first lady in attendance upon the Countess, his wife.

Page 18

(The Comtesse Diane de Polignac had a much better education, and considerably more natural capacity, than her sister-in-law, the Duchess, and the Queen merely disliked her for her prudish affectation. The Comtesse d'Artois grew jealous of the Count's intimacy with the Comtesse Diane. While she considered herself as the only one of the Royal Family likely to be mother of a future sovereign, she was silent, or perhaps too much engrossed by her castles in the air to think of anything but diadems; but when she saw the Queen producing heirs, she grew out of humour at her lost popularity, and began to turn her attention to her husband's Endymionship to this now Diana! When she had made up her mind to get her rival out of her house, she consulted one of the family; but being told that the best means for a wife to keep her husband out of harm's way was to provide him with a domestic occupation for his leisure hours at home, than which nothing could be better than a handmaid under the same roof, she made a merit of necessity and submitted ever after to retain the Comtesse Diane, as she had been prudently advised. The Comtesse Diane, in consequence, remained in the family even up to the 17th October, 1789, when she left Versailles in company with the De Polignacs and the D'Artois, who all emigrated together from France to Italy and lived at Stria on the Brenta, near Venice, for some time, till the Comtesse d'Artois went to Turin.)

The Queen's conduct had always been very cool to her. She deemed her a self-sufficient coquette. However, the Comtesse Diane was a constant attendant at the gay parties which were then the fashion of the Court, though not greatly admired.

The reader will scarcely need to be informed that the event to which I have just alluded is the introduction by the Comtesse Diane of her sister-in-law, the Comtesse Julie de Polignac, to the Queen; and having brought the record up to this point I here once more dismiss my own pen for that of the Princesse de Lamballe.

It will be obvious to every one that I must have been indebted to the conversations of my beloved patroness for most of the sentiments and nearly all the facts I have just been stating; and had the period on which she has written so little as to drive me to the necessity of writing for her been less pregnant with circumstances almost entirely personal to herself, no doubt I should have found more upon that period in her manuscript. But the year of which Her Highness says so little was the year of happiness and exclusive favour; and the Princess was above the vanity of boasting, even privately in the self-confessional of her diary. She resumes her records with her apprehensions; and thus proceeds, describing the introduction of the Comtesse Julie de Polignac, regretting her ascendancy over the Queen, and foreseeing its fatal effects.]

"I had been only a twelvemonth in Her Majesty's service, which I believe was the happiest period of both our lives, when, at one of the Court assemblies, the Comtesse Julie de Polignac was first introduced by her sister-in-law, the Comtesse Diane de Polignac, to the Queen.

Page 19

“She had lived in the country, quite a retired life, and appeared to be more the motherly woman, and the domestic wife, than the ambitious Court lady, or royal sycophant. She was easy of access, and elegantly plain in her dress and deportment.

“Her appearance at Court was as fatal to the Queen as it was propitious to herself!

“She seemed formed by nature to become a royal favourite, unassuming, remarkably complaisant, possessing a refined taste, with a good-natured disposition, not handsome, but well formed, and untainted by haughtiness or pomposity.

“It would appear, from the effect her introduction had on the Queen, that her domestic virtues were written in her countenance; for she became a royal favourite before she had time to become a candidate for royal favour.

“The Queen’s sudden attachment to the Comtesse Julie produced no alteration in my conduct, while I saw nothing extraordinary to alarm me for the consequences of any particular marked partiality, by which the character and popularity of Her Majesty might be endangered.

“But, seeing the progress this lady made in the feelings of the Queen’s enemies, it became my duty, from the situation I held, to caution Her Majesty against the risks she ran in making her favourites friends; for it was very soon apparent how highly the Court disapproved of this intimacy and partiality: and the same feeling soon found its way to the many-headed monster, the people, who only saw the favourite without considering the charge she held. Scarcely had she felt the warm rays of royal favour, when the chilling blasts of envy and malice began to nip it in the bud of all its promised bliss. Even long before she touched the pinnacle of her grandeur as governess of the royal children the blackest calumny began to show itself in prints, caricatures, songs, and pamphlets of every description.

“A reciprocity of friendship between a Queen and a subject, by those who never felt the existence of such a feeling as friendship, could only be considered in a criminal point of view. But by what perversion could suspicion frown upon the ties between two married women, both living in the greatest harmony with their respective husbands, especially when both became mothers and were so devoted to their offspring? This boundless friendship did glow between this calumniated pair calumniated because the sacredness and peculiarity of the sentiment which united them was too pure to be understood by the grovelling minds who made themselves their sentencers. The friend is the friend’s shadow. The real sentiment of friendship, of which disinterested sympathy is the sign, cannot exist unless between two of the same sex, because a physical difference involuntarily modifies the complexion of the intimacy where the sexes are opposite, even though there be no physical relations. The Queen of France had love in her eyes and Heaven in her soul. The Duchesse de Polignac, whose person beamed with every

charm, could never have been condemned, like the Friars of La Trappe, to the mere memento mori.

Page 20

“When I had made the representations to Her Majesty which duty exacted from me on perceiving her ungovernable partiality for her new favourite, that I might not importune her by the awkwardness naturally arising from my constant exposure to the necessity of witnessing an intimacy she knew I did not sanction, I obtained permission from my royal mistress to visit my father-in-law, the Duc de Penthièvre, at Rambouillet, his country-seat.

“Soon after I arrived there, I was taken suddenly ill after dinner with the most excruciating pains in my stomach. I thought myself dying. Indeed, I should have been so but for the fortunate and timely discovery that I was poisoned certainly, not intentionally, by any one belonging to my dear father’s household; but by some execrable hand which had an interest in my death.

“The affair was hushed up with a vague report that some of the made dishes had been prepared in a stew-pan long out of use, which the clerk of the Duke’s kitchen had forgotten to get properly tinned.

“This was a doubtful story for many reasons. Indeed, I firmly believe that the poison given me had been prepared in the salt, for every one at table had eaten of the same dish without suffering the smallest inconvenience.

“The news of this accident had scarcely arrived at Versailles, when the Queen, astounded, and, in excessive anxiety, instantly sent off her physician, and her private secretary, the Abbe Vermond, to bring me back to my apartments at Versailles, with strict orders not to leave me a moment at the Duke’s, for fear of a second attempt of the same nature. Her Majesty had imputed the first to the earnestness I had always shown in support of her interests, and she seemed now more ardent in her kindness towards me from the idea of my being exposed through her means to the treachery of assassins in the dark. The Queen awaited our coming impatiently, and, not seeing the carriages return so quickly as she fancied they ought to arrive, she herself set off for Rambouillet, and did not leave me till she had prevailed on me to quit my father-in-law’s, and we both returned together the same night to Versailles, where the Queen in person dedicated all her attention to the restoration of my health.

“As yet, however, nothing in particular had discovered that splendour for which the De Polignacs were afterwards so conspicuous.

“Indeed, so little were their circumstances calculated for a Court life, that when the friends of Madame de Polignac perceived the growing attachment of the young Queen to the palladium of their hopes, in order to impel Her Majesty’s friendship to repair the deficiencies of fortune, they advised the magnet to quit the Court abruptly, assigning the want of means as the motive of her retreat. The story got wind, and proved propitious.

“The Queen, to secure the society of her friend, soon supplied the resources she required and took away the necessity for her retirement. But the die was cast. In gaining one friend she sacrificed a host. By this act of imprudent preference she lost forever the affections of the old nobility. This was the gale which drove her back among the breakers.

Page 21

"I saw the coming storm, and endeavoured to make my Sovereign feel its danger. Presuming that my example would be followed, I withdrew from the De Polignac society, and vainly flattered myself that prudence would impel others not to encourage Her Majesty's amiable infatuation till the consequences should be irretrievable. But Sovereigns are always surrounded by those who make it a point to reconcile them to their follies, however flagrant, and keep them on good terms with themselves, however severely they may be censured by the world.

"If I had read the book of fate I could not have seen more distinctly the fatal results which actually took place from this unfortunate connexion. The Duchess and myself always lived in the greatest harmony, and equally shared the confidence of the Queen; but it was my duty not to sanction Her Majesty's marked favouritism by my presence. The Queen often expressed her discontent to me upon the subject. She used to tell me how much it grieved her to be denied success in her darling desire of uniting her friends with each other, as they were already united in her own heart. Finding my resolution unalterable, she was mortified, but gave up her pursuit. When she became assured that all importunity was useless, she ever after avoided wounding my feelings by remonstrance, and allowed me to pursue the system I had adopted, rather than deprive herself of my society, which would have been the consequence had I not been left at liberty to follow the dictates of my own sense of propriety in a course from which I was resolved that even Her Majesty's displeasure should not make me swerve.

"Once in particular, at an entertainment given to the Emperor Joseph at Trianon, I remember the Queen took the opportunity to repeat how much she felt herself mortified at the course in which I persisted of never making my appearance at the Duchesse de Polignac's parties.

"I replied, 'I believe, Madame, we are both of us disappointed; but Your Majesty has your remedy, by replacing me by a lady less scrupulous.'

"'I was too sanguine,' said the Queen, 'in having flattered myself that I had chosen two friends who would form, from their sympathising and uniting their sentiments with each other, a society which would embellish my private life as much as they adorn their public stations.'

"I said it was by my unalterable friendship and my loyal and dutiful attachment to the sacred person of Her Majesty that I had been prompted to a line of conduct in which the motives whence it arose would impel me to persist while I had the honour to hold a situation under Her Majesty's roof.

"The Queen, embracing me, exclaimed, 'That will be for life, for death alone can separate us!'

“This is the last conversation I recollect to have had with the Queen upon this distressing subject.

Page 22

“The Abbe Vermond, who had been Her Majesty’s tutor, but who was now her private secretary, began to dread that his influence over her, from having been her confidential adviser from her youth upwards, would suffer from the rising authority of the all-predominant new favourite. Consequently, he thought proper to remonstrate, not with Her Majesty, but with those about her royal person. The Queen took no notice of these side-wind complaints, not wishing to enter into any explanation of her conduct. On this the Abbe withdrew from Court. But he only retired for a short time, and that to make better terms for the future. Here was a new spring for those who were supplying the army of calumniators with poison. Happy had it been, perhaps, for France and the Queen if Vermond had never returned. But the Abbe was something like a distant country cousin of an English Minister, a man of no talents, but who hoped for employment through the power of his kinsman. ‘There is nothing on hand now,’ answered the Minister, ‘but a Bishop’s mitre or a Field-marshal’s staff.’—‘Oh, very well,’ replied the countryman; ‘either will do for me till something better turns up.’ The Abbe, in his retirement finding leisure to reflect that there was no probability of anything ‘better turning up’ than his post of private secretary, tutor, confidant, and counsellor (and that not always the most correct) of a young and amiable Queen of France, soon made his reappearance and kept his jealousy of the De Polignacs ever after to himself.

“The Abbe Vermond enjoyed much influence with regard to ecclesiastical preferments. He was too fond of his situation ever to contradict or thwart Her Majesty in any of her plans; too much of a courtier to assail her ears with the language of truth; and by far too much a clergyman to interest himself but for Mother Church.

“In short, he was more culpable in not doing his duty than in the mischief he occasioned, for he certainly oftener misled the Queen by his silence than by his advice.”

SECTION VIII.

“I have already mentioned that Marie Antoinette had no decided taste for literature. Her mind rather sought its amusements in the ball-room, the promenade, the theatre, especially when she herself was a performer, and the concert-room, than in her library and among her books. Her coldness towards literary men may in, some degree be accounted for by the disgust which she took at the calumnies and caricatures resulting from her mother’s partiality for her own revered teacher, the great Metastasio. The resemblance of most of Maria Theresa’s children to that poet was coupled with the great patronage he received from the Empress; and much less than these circumstances would have been quite enough to furnish a tale for the slanderer, injurious to the reputation of any exalted personage.

“The taste of Marie Antoinette for private theatricals was kept up till the clouds of the Revolution darkened over all her enjoyments.

Page 23

“These innocent amusements were made subjects of censure against her by the many courtiers who were denied access to them; while some, who were permitted to be present, were too well pleased with the opportunity of sneering at her mediocrity in the art, which those, who could not see her, were ready to criticise with the utmost severity. It is believed that Madame de Genlis found this too favourable an opportunity to be slighted. Anonymous satires upon the Queen’s performances, which were attributed to the malice of that authoress, were frequently shown to Her Majesty by good-natured friends. The Duc de Fronsac also, from some situation he held at Court, though not included in the private household of Her Majesty at Trianon, conceiving himself highly injured by not being suffered to interfere, was much exasperated, and took no pains to prevent others from receiving the infection of his resentment.

“Of all the arts, music was the only one which Her Majesty ever warmly patronised. For music she was an enthusiast. Had her talents in this art been cultivated, it is certain from her judgment in it that she would have made very considerable progress. She sang little French airs with great taste and feeling. She improved much under the tuition of the great composer, her master, the celebrated Sacchini. After his death, Sapio was named his successor; but, between the death of one master and the appointment of another, the revolutionary horrors so increased that her mind was no longer in a state to listen to anything but the howlings of the tempest.

“In her happier days of power, the great Gluck was brought at her request from Germany to Paris. He cost nothing to the public Treasury, for Her Majesty paid all his expenses out of her own purse, leaving him the profits of his operas, which attracted immense sums to the theatre.

“Marie Antoinette paid for the musical education of the French singer, Garat, and pensioned him for her private concerts.

“Her Majesty was the great patroness of the celebrated Viotti, who was also attached to her private musical parties. Before Viotti began to perform his concertos, Her Majesty, with the most amiable condescension, would go round the music saloon, and say, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, I request you will be silent, and very attentive, and not enter into conversation, while Mr. Viotti is playing, for it interrupts him in the execution of his fine performance.

“Gluck composed his Armida in compliment to the personal charms of Marie Antoinette. I never saw Her Majesty more interested about anything than she was for its success. She became a perfect slave to it. She had the gracious condescension to hear all the pieces through, at Gluck’s request, before they were submitted to the stage for rehearsal. Gluck said he always improved his music after he saw the effect it had upon Her Majesty.

Page 24

“He was coming out of the Queen’s apartment one day, after he had been performing one of these pieces for Her Majesty’s approbation, when I followed and congratulated him on the increased success he had met with from the whole band of the opera at every rehearsal. ‘O my dear Princess!’ cried he, ‘it wants nothing to make it be applauded up to the seven skies but two such delightful heads as Her Majesty’s and your own.’—‘Oh, if that be all,’ answered I, ‘we’ll have them painted for you, Mr. Gluck!’—‘No, no, no! you do not understand me,’ replied Gluck, ‘I mean real, real heads. My actresses are very ugly, and Armida and her confidential lady ought to be very handsome:

“However great the success of the opera of Armida, and certainly it was one of the best productions ever exhibited on the French stage, no one had a better opinion of its composition than Gluck himself. He was quite mad about it. He told the Queen that the air of France had invigorated his musical genius, and that, after having had the honour of seeing Her Majesty, his ideas were so much inspired that his compositions resembled her, and became alike angelic and sublime!

“The first artist who undertook the part of Armida was Madame Saint Huberti. The Queen was very partial to her. She was principal female singer at the French opera, was a German by birth, and strongly recommended by Gluck for her good natural voice. At Her Majesty’s request, Gluck himself taught Madame Saint Huberti the part of Armida. Sacchini, also, at the command of Marie Antoinette, instructed her in the style and sublimity of the Italian school, and Mdlle. Benin, the Queen’s dressmaker and milliner, was ordered to furnish the complete dress for the character.

“The Queen, perhaps, was more liberal to this lady than to any other actress upon the stage. She had frequently paid her debts, which were very considerable, for she dressed like a Queen whenever she represented one.

“Gluck’s consciousness of the merit of his own works, and of their dignity, excited no small jealousy, during the getting up of Armida, in his rival with the public, the great Vestris, to whom he scarcely left space to exhibit the graces of his art; and many severe disputes took place between the two rival sharers of the Parisian enthusiasm. Indeed, it was at one time feared that the success of Armida would be endangered, unless an equal share of the performance were conceded to the dancers. But Gluck, whose German obstinacy would not give up a note, told Vestris he might compose a ballet in which he would leave him his own way entirely; but that an artist whose profession only taught him to reason with his heels should not kick about works like Armida at his pleasure. ‘My subject,’ added Gluck, ‘is taken from the immortal Tasso. My music has been logically composed, and with the ideas of my head; and, of course, there is very little room left for capering. If Tasso had thought proper to make Rinaldo a dancer he never would have designated him a warrior.’

Page 25

“Rinaldo was the part Vestris wished to be allotted to his son. However, through the interference of the Queen, Vestris prudently took the part as it had been originally finished by Gluck.

“The Queen was a great admirer and patroness of Augustus Vestris, the god of dance, as he was styled. Augustus Vestris never lost Her Majesty’s favour, though he very often lost his sense of the respect he owed to the public, and showed airs and refused to dance. Once he did so when Her Majesty was at the opera. Upon some frivolous pretext he refused to appear. He was, in consequence, immediately arrested. His father, alarmed at his son’s temerity, flew to me, and with the most earnest supplications implored I would condescend to endeavour to obtain the pardon of Her Majesty. ‘My son,’ cried he, ‘did not know that Her Majesty had honoured the theatre with her presence. Had he been aware of it, could he have refused to dance for his most bounteous benefactress? I, too, am grieved beyond the power of language to describe, by this mal apropos contretemps between the two houses of Vestris and Bourbon, as we have always lived in the greatest harmony ever since we came from Florence to Paris. My son is very sorry and will dance most bewitchingly if Her Majesty will graciously condescend to order his release!’

“I repeated the conversation verbatim, to Her Majesty, who enjoyed the arrogance of the Florentine, and sent her page to order young Vestris to be set immediately at liberty.

“Having exerted all the wonderful powers of his art, the Queen applauded him very much. When Her Majesty was about leaving her box, old Vestris appeared at the entrance, leading his son to thank the Queen.

“‘Ah, Monsieur Vestris,’ said the Queen to the father, you never danced as your son has done this evening.’

“‘That’s very natural, Madame,’ answered old Vestris, ‘I never had a Vestris, please Your Majesty, for a master.’

“‘Then you have the greater merit,’ replied the Queen, turning round to old Vestris—‘Ah, I shall never forget you and Mademoiselle Guimard dancing the minuet de la cour.’

“On this old Vestris held up his head with that peculiar grace for which he was so much distinguished. The old man, though ridiculously vain, was very much of a gentleman in his manners. The father of Vestris was a painter of some celebrity at Florence, and originally from Tuscany.”

SECTION IX.

“The visit of the favourite brother of Marie Antoinette, the Emperor Joseph the Second, to France, had been long and anxiously expected, and was welcomed by her with

delight. The pleasure Her Majesty discovered at having him with her is scarcely credible; and the affectionate tenderness with which the Emperor frequently expressed himself on seeing his favourite sister evinced that their joys were mutual.

“Like everything else, however, which gratified and obliged the Queen, her evil star converted even this into a misfortune. It was said that the French Treasury, which was not overflowing, was still more reduced by the Queen’s partiality for her brother. She was accused of having given him immense sums of money; which was utterly false.

Page 26

“The finances of Joseph were at that time in a situation too superior to those of France to admit of such extravagance, or even to render it desirable. The circumstance which gave a colour to the charge was this:

“The Emperor, in order to facilitate the trade of his Brabant subjects, had it in contemplation to open the navigation of the Scheldt. This measure would have been ruinous to many of the skippers, as well as to the internal commerce of France. It was considered equally dangerous to the trade and navigation of the North Hollanders. To prevent it, negotiations were carried on by the French Minister, though professedly for the mutual interest of both countries, yet entirely at the instigation and on account of the Dutch. The weighty argument of the Dutch to prevent the Emperor from accomplishing a purpose they so much dreaded was a sum of many millions, which passed by means of some monied speculation in the Exchange through France to its destination at Vienna. It was to see this affair settled that the Emperor declared in Vienna his intention of taking France in his way from Italy, before he should go back to Austria.

“The certainty of a transmission of money from France to Austria was quite enough to awaken the malevolent, who would have taken care, even had they inquired into the source whence the money came, never to have made it public. The opportunity was too favourable not to be made the pretext to raise a clamour against the Queen for robbing France to favour and enrich Austria.

“The Emperor, who had never seen me, though he had often heard me spoken of at the Court of Turin, expressed a wish, soon after his arrival, that I should be presented to him. The immediate cause of this let me explain.

“I was very much attached to the Princesse Clotilde, whom I had caused to be united to Prince Charles Emanuel of Piedmont. Our family had, indeed, been principally instrumental in the alliances of the two brothers of the King of France with the two Piedmontese Princesses, as I had been in the marriage of the Piedmontese Prince with the Princess of France. When the Emperor Joseph visited the Court of Turin he was requested when he saw me in Paris to signify the King of Sardinia’s satisfaction at my good offices. Consequently, the Emperor lost no time in delivering his message.

“When I was just entering the Queen’s apartment to be presented, ‘Here,’ said Her Majesty, leading me to the Emperor, ‘is the Princess,’ and, then turning to me, exclaimed, ‘Mercy, how cold you are!’ The Emperor answered Her Majesty in German, ‘What heat can you expect from the hand of one whose heart resides with the dead?’ and subjoined, in the same language, ‘What a pity that so charming a head should be fixed on a dead body.’

“I affected to understand the Emperor literally, and set him and the Queen laughing by thanking His Imperial Majesty for the compliment.

Page 27

“The Emperor was exceedingly affable and full of anecdote. Marie Antoinette resembled him in her general manners. The similitude in their easy openness of address towards persons of merit was very striking. Both always endeavoured to encourage persons of every class to speak their minds freely, with this difference, that Her Majesty in so doing never forgot her dignity or her rank at Court. Sometimes, however, I have seen her, though so perfect in her deportment with inferiors, much intimidated and sometimes embarrassed in the presence of the Princes and Princesses, her equals, who for the first time visited Versailles: indeed, so much as to give them a very incorrect idea of her capacity. It was by no means an easy matter to cause Her Majesty to unfold her real sentiments or character on a first acquaintance.

“I remember the Emperor one evening at supper when he was exceedingly good-humoured, talkative, and amusing. He had visited all his Italian relations, and had a word for each, man, woman, or child—not a soul was spared. The King scarcely once opened his mouth, except to laugh at some of the Emperor’s jokes upon his Italian relations.

“He began by asking the Queen if she punished her husband by making him keep as many Lents in the same year as her sister did the King of Naples. The Queen not knowing what the Emperor meant, he explained himself, and said, ‘When the King of Naples offends his Queen she keeps him on short commons and ‘soupe maigre’ till he has expiated the offence by the penance of humbling himself; and then, and not till then, permits him to return and share the nuptial rights of her bed.’

“‘This sister of mine,’ said the Emperor, ‘is a proficient Queen in the art of man training. My other sister, the Duchess of Parma, is equally scientific in breaking-in horses; for she is constantly in the stables with her grooms, by which she ‘grooms’ a pretty sum yearly in buying, selling, and breaking-in; while the simpleton, her husband, is ringing the bells with the Friars of Colorno to call his good subjects to Mass.

“‘My brother Leopold, Grand Duke of Tuscany, feeds his subjects with plans of economy, a dish that costs nothing, and not only saves him a multitude of troubles in public buildings and public institutions, but keeps the public money in his private coffers; which is one of the greatest and most classical discoveries a Sovereign can possibly accomplish, and I give Leopold much credit for his ingenuity.

“‘My dear brother Ferdinand, Archduke of Milan, considering he is only Governor of Lombardy, is not without industry; and I am told, when out of the glimpse of his dragon the holy Beatrice, his Archduchess, sells his corn in the time of war to my enemies, as he does to my friends in the time of peace. So he loses nothing by his speculations!’

“The Queen checked the Emperor repeatedly, though she could not help smiling at his caricatures.

Page 28

“As to you, my dear Marie Antoinette,” continued the Emperor, not heeding her, “I see you have made great progress in the art of painting. You have lavished more colour on one cheek than Rubens would have required for all the figures in his cartoons.” Observing one of the Ladies of Honour still more highly rouged than the Queen, he said, “I suppose I look like a death’s head upon a tombstone, among all these high-coloured furies.”

“The Queen again tried to interrupt the Emperor, but he was not to be put out of countenance.

“He said he had no doubt, when he arrived at Brussels, that he should hear of the progress of his sister, the Archduchess Maria Christina, in her money negotiations with the banker Valkeers, who made a good stock for her husband’s jobs.

“If Maria Christina’s gardens and palace at Lakin could speak,” observed he, “what a spectacle of events would they not produce! What a number of fine sights my own family would afford!

“When I get to Cologne,” pursued the Emperor, “there I shall see my great fat brother Maximilian, in his little electorate, spending his yearly revenue upon an ecclesiastical procession; for priests, like opposition, never bark but to get into the manger; never walk empty-handed; rosaries and good cheer always wind up their holy work; and my good Maximilian, as head of his Church, has scarcely feet to waddle into it. Feasting and fasting produce the same effect. In wind and food he is quite an adept—puffing, from one cause or the other, like a smith’s bellows!”

“Indeed, the Elector of Cologne was really grown so very fat, that, like his Imperial mother, he could scarcely walk. He would so over-eat himself at these ecclesiastical dinners, to make his guests welcome, that, from indigestion, he would be puffing and blowing, an hour afterwards, for breath.

“As I have begun the family visits,” continued the Emperor, “I must not pass by the Archduchess Mariana and the Lady Abbess at Clagenfurt; or, the Lord knows, I shall never hear the end of their klagens.—[A German word which signifies complaining.]—The first, I am told, is grown so ugly, and, of course, so neglected by mankind, that she is become an utter stranger to any attachment, excepting the fleshy embraces of the disgusting wen that encircles her neck and bosom, and makes her head appear like a black spot upon a large sheet of white paper. Therefore klagens is all I can expect from that quarter of female flesh, and I dare say it will be levelled against the whole race of mankind for their want of taste in not admiring her exuberance of human craw!

“As to the Lady Abbess, she is one of my best recruiting sergeants. She is so fond of training cadets for the benefit of the army that they learn more from her system in one month than at the military academy at Neustadt in a whole year. She is her mother’s

own daughter. She understands military tactics thoroughly. She and I never quarrel, except when I garrison her citadel with invalids. She and the canoress, Mariana, would rather see a few young ensigns than all the staffs of the oldest Field-marsals!’

Page 29

“The Queen often made signs to the Emperor to desist from thus exposing every member of his family, and seemed to feel mortified; but the more Her Majesty endeavoured to check his freedom, and make him silent, the more he enlarged upon the subject. He did not even omit Maria Theresa, who, he said, in consequence of some papers found on persons arrested as spies from the Prussian camp, during the seven years’ war, was reported to have been greatly surprised to have discovered that her husband, the Emperor Francis I., supplied the enemy’s army with all kinds of provision from her stores.

“The King scarcely ever answered excepting when the Emperor told the Queen that her staircase and antechamber at Versailles resembled more the Turkish bazars of Constantinople

[It was an old custom, in the passages and staircase of all the royal palaces, for tradespeople to sell their merchandise for the accommodation of the Court.]

than a royal palace. ‘But,’ added he, laughing, ‘I suppose you would not allow the nuisance of hawkers and pedlars almost under your nose, if the sweet perfumes of a handsome present did not compensate for the disagreeable effluvia exhaling from their filthy traffic.’

“On this, Louis XVI., in a tone of voice somewhat varying from his usual mildness, assured the Emperor that neither himself nor the Queen derived any advantage from the custom, beyond the convenience of purchasing articles inside the palace at any moment they were wanted, without being forced to send for them elsewhere.

“‘That is the very reason, my dear brother,’ replied Joseph, ‘why I would not allow these shops to be where they are. The temptation to lavish money to little purpose is too strong; and women have not philosophy enough to resist having things they like, when they can be obtained easily, though they may not be wanted.’

“‘Custom,’ answered the King—

“‘True,’ exclaimed the Queen, interrupting him; custom, my dear brother, obliges us to tolerate in France many things which you, in Austria, have long since abolished; but the French are not to be treated like the Germans. A Frenchman is a slave to habit. His very caprice in the change of fashion proceeds more from habit than genius or invention. His very restlessness of character is systematic; and old customs and national habits in a nation virtually spirituelle must not be trifled with. The tree torn up by the roots dies for want of nourishment; but, on the contrary, when lopped carefully only of its branches the pruning makes it more valuable to the cultivator and more pleasing to the beholder. So it is with national prejudices, which are often but the excrescences of national virtues. Root them out and you root out virtue and all. They must only be: pruned and turned to profit. A Frenchman is more easily killed than

subdued. Even his follies generally spring from a high sense of national dignity and honour, which foreigners cannot but respect.'

Page 30

“The Emperor Joseph while in France mixed in all sorts of society, to gain information with respect, to the popular feeling towards his sister, and instruction as to the manners and modes of life and thinking of the French. To this end he would often associate with the lowest of the common people, and generally gave them a louis for their loss of time in attending to him.

“One day, when he was walking with the young Princesse Elizabeth and myself in the public gardens at Versailles and in deep conversation with us, two or three of these louis ladies came up to my side and, not knowing who I was, whispered, ‘There’s no use in paying such attention to the stranger: after all, when he has got what he wants, he’ll only give you a louis apiece and then send you about your business.’”

SECTION X.

“I remember an old lady who could not bear to be told of deaths. ‘Psha! Pshaw!’ she would exclaim. ‘Bring me no tales of funerals! Talk of births and of those who are likely to be blest with them! These are the joys which gladden old hearts and fill youthful ones with ecstasy! It is our own reproduction in children which makes us quit the world happy and contented; because then we only retire to make room for another race, bringing with them all those faculties which are in us decayed; and capable, which we ourselves have ceased to be, of taking our parts and figuring on the stage of life so long as it may please the Supreme Manager to busy them in earthly scenes! Then talk no more to me of weeds and mourning, but show me christenings and all those who give employ to the baptismal font!’

“Such also was the exulting feeling of Marie Antoinette when she no longer doubted of her wished-for pregnancy. The idea of becoming a mother filled her soul with an exuberant delight, which made the very pavement on which she trod vibrate with the words, ‘I shall be a mother! I shall be a mother!’ She was so overjoyed that she not only made it public throughout France but despatches were sent off to all her royal relatives. And was not her rapture natural? so long as she had waited for the result of every youthful union, and so coarsely as she had been reproached with her misfortune! Now came her triumph. She could now prove to the world, like all the descendants of the house of Austria, that there was no defect with her. The satirists and the malevolent were silenced. Louis XVI., from the cold, insensible bridegroom, became the infatuated admirer of his long-neglected wife. The enthusiasm with which the event was hailed by all France atoned for the partial insults she had received before it. The splendid fetes, balls, and entertainments, indiscriminately lavished by all ranks throughout the kingdom on this occasion, augmented those of the Queen and the Court to a pitch of magnificence surpassing the most luxurious and voluptuous times of the great and brilliant Louis XIV. Entertainments were given even to the domestics of every description belonging to the royal establishments. Indeed, so general was the joy that, among those who could do no more, there could scarcely be found a father or mother in

France who, before they took their wine, did not first offer up a prayer for the prosperous pregnancy of their beloved Queen.

Page 31

“And yet, though the situation of Marie Antoinette was now become the theme of a whole nation’s exultation, she herself, the owner of the precious burthen, selected by Heaven as its special depositary, was the only one censured for expressing all her happiness!

“Those models of decorum, the virtuous Princesses, her aunts, deemed it highly indelicate in Her Majesty to have given public marks of her satisfaction to those deputed to compliment her on her prosperous situation. To avow the joy she felt was in their eyes indecent and unqueenly. Where was the shrinking bashfulness of that one of these Princesses who had herself been so clamorous to Louis XV. against her husband, the Duke of Modena, for not having consummated her own marriage?

“The party of the dismissed favourite Du Barry were still working underground. Their pestiferous vapours issued from the recesses of the earth, to obscure the brightness of the rising sun, which was now rapidly towering to its climax, to obliterate the little planets which had once endeavoured to eclipse its beautiful rays, but were now incapable of competition, and unable to endure its lustre. This malignant nest of serpents began to poison the minds of the courtiers, as soon as the pregnancy was obvious, by innuendoes on the partiality of the Comte d’Artois for the Queen; and at length, infamously, and openly, dared to point him out as the cause?

“Thus, in the heart of the Court itself, originated this most atrocious slander, long before it reached the nation, and so much assisted to destroy Her Majesty’s popularity with a people, who now adored her amiableness, her general kind-heartedness, and her unbounded charity.

“I have repeatedly seen the Queen and the Comte d’Artois together under circumstances in which there could have been no concealment of her real feelings; and I can firmly and boldly assert the falsehood of this allegation against my royal mistress. The only attentions Marie Antoinette received in the earlier part of her residence in France were from her grandfather and her brothers-in-law. Of these, the Comte d’Artois was the only one who, from youth and liveliness of character, thoroughly sympathised with his sister. But, beyond the little freedoms of two young and innocent playmates, nothing can be charged upon their intimacy,—no familiarity whatever farther than was warranted by their relationship. I can bear witness that Her Majesty’s attachment for the Comte d’Artois never differed in its nature from what she felt for her brother the Emperor Joseph.

[When the King thought proper to be reconciled to the Queen after the death of his grandfather, Louis XV., and when she became a mother, she really was very much attached to Louis XVI., as may be proved from her never quitting him, and suffering all the horrid sacrifices she endured, through the whole period of the Revolution, rather than leave her husband, her children, or her sister. Marie Antoinette might have saved

her life twenty times, had not the King's safety, united with her own and that of her family, impelled her to reject every proposition of self-preservation.]

Page 32

"It is very likely that the slander of which I speak derived some colour of probability afterwards with the million, from the Queen's thoughtlessness, relative to the challenge which passed between the Comte d'Artois and the Duc de Bourbon. In right of my station, I was one of Her Majesty's confidential counsellors, and it became my duty to put restraint upon her inclinations, whenever I conceived they led her wrong. In this instance, I exercised my prerogative decidedly, and even so much so as to create displeasure; but I anticipated the consequences, which actually ensued, and preferred to risk my royal mistress's displeasure rather than her reputation. The dispute, which led to the duel, was on some point of etiquette; and the Baron de Besenval was to attend as second to one of the parties. From the Queen's attachment for her royal brother, she wished the affair to be amicably arranged, without the knowledge either of the King, who was ignorant of what had taken place, or of the parties; which could only be effected by her seeing the Baron in the most private manner. I opposed Her Majesty's allowing any interview with the Baron upon any terms, unless sanctioned by the King. This unexpected and peremptory refusal obliged the Queen to transfer her confidence to the librarian, who introduced the Baron into one of the private apartments of Her Majesty's women, communicating with that of the Queen, where Her Majesty could see the Baron without the exposure of passing any of the other attendants. The Baron was quite gray, and upwards of sixty years of age! But the self-conceited dotard soon caused the Queen to repent her misplaced confidence, and from his unwarrantable impudence on that occasion, when he found himself alone with the Queen, Her Majesty, though he was a constant member of the societies of the De Polignacs, ever after treated him with sovereign contempt.

"The Queen herself afterwards described to me the Baron's presumptuous attack upon her credulity. From this circumstance I thenceforward totally excluded him from my parties, where Her Majesty was always a regular visitor.

"The coolness to which my determination not to allow the interview gave rise between Her Majesty and myself was but momentary. The Queen had too much discernment not to appreciate the basis upon which my denial was grounded, even before she was convinced by the result how correct had been my reflection. She felt her error, and, by the mediation of the Duke of Dorset, we were reunited more closely than ever, and so, I trust, we shall remain till death!

"There was much more attempted to be made of another instance, in which I exercised the duty of my office, than the truth justified—the nightly promenades on the terrace at Versailles, or at Trianon. Though no amusement could have been more harmless or innocent for a private individual, yet I certainly, disapproved it for a Queen, and therefore withheld the sanction of my attendance. My sole

Page 33

objection was on the score of dignity. I well knew that Du Barry and her infamous party were constant spies upon the Queen on every occasion of such a nature; and that they would not fail to exaggerate her every movement to her prejudice. Though Du Barry could not form one of the party, which was a great source of heartburning, it was easy for her, under the circumstances, to mingle with the throng. When I suggested these objections to the Queen, Her Majesty, feeling no inward cause of reproach, and being sanctioned in what she did by the King himself, laughed at the idea of these little excursions affording food for scandal. I assured Her Majesty that I had every reason to be convinced that Du Barry was often in disguise, not far from the seat where Her Majesty and the Princesse Elizabeth could be overheard in their most secret conversations with each other. 'Listeners,' replied the Queen, 'never hear any good of themselves.'

"My dear Lamballe," she continued, 'you have taken such a dislike to this woman that you cannot conceive she can be occupied but in mischief. This is uncharitable. She certainly has no reason to be dissatisfied with either the King or myself. We have both left her in the full enjoyment of all she possessed, except the right of appearing at Court or continuing in the society her conduct had too long disgraced.'

"I said it was very true, but that I should be happier to find Her Majesty so scrupulous as never to give an opportunity even for the falsehoods of her enemies.

"Her Majesty turned the matter off, as usual, by saying she had no idea of injuring others, and could not believe that any one would wantonly injure her, adding, 'The Duchess and the Princesse Elizabeth, my two sisters, and all the other ladies, are coming to hear the concert this evening, and you will be delighted.'

"I excused myself under the plea of the night air disagreeing with my health, and returned to Versailles without ever making myself one of the nocturnal members of Her Majesty's society, well knowing she could dispense with my presence, there being more than enough ever ready to hurry her by their own imprudence into the folly of despising criticisms, which I always endeavoured to avoid, though I did not fear them. Of these I cannot but consider her secretary as one. The following circumstance connected with the promenades is a proof:

"The Abbe Vermond was present one day when Marie Antoinette observed that she felt rather indisposed. I attributed it to Her Majesty's having lightened her dress and exposed herself too much to the night air. 'Heavens, madame!' cried the Abbe, 'would you always have Her Majesty cased up in steel armour, and not take the fresh air, without being surrounded by a troop of horse and foot, as a Field-marshal is when going to storm a fortress? Pray, Princess, now that Her Majesty, has freed herself from the annoying shackles of Madame Etiquette (the Comtesse de Noailles), let her enjoy the



pleasure of a simple robe and breathe freely the fresh morning dew, as has been her custom all her life (and as her mother before her, the Empress Maria Theresa, has done and continues to do, even to this day), unfettered by antiquated absurdities! Let me be anything rather than a Queen of France, if I must be doomed to the slavery of such tyrannical rules!

Page 34

“True; but, sir,’ replied I, ‘you should reflect that if you were a Queen of France, France, in making you mistress of her destinies, and placing you at the head of her nation, would in return look for respect from you to her customs and manners. I am born an Italian, but I renounced all national peculiarities of thinking and acting the moment I set my foot on French ground.’

“And so did I,’ said Marie Antoinette.

“I know you did, Madame,’ I answered; but I am replying to your preceptor; and I only wish he saw things in the same light I do. When we are at Rome, we should do as Rome does. You have never had a regicide Bertrand de Gurdon, a Ravillac or a Damiens in Germany; but they have been common in France, and the Sovereigns of France cannot be too circumspect in their maintenance of ancient etiquette to command the dignified respect of a frivolous and versatile people.’

“The Queen, though she did not strictly adhere to my counsels or the Abbe’s advice, had too much good sense to allow herself to be prejudiced against me by her preceptor; but the Abbe never entered on the propriety or impropriety of the Queen’s conduct before me, and from the moment I have mentioned studiously avoided, in my presence, anything which could lead to discussion on the change of dress and amusements introduced by Her Majesty.

“Although I disapproved of Her Majesty’s deviations from established forms in this, or, indeed, any respect, yet I never, before or after, expressed my opinion before a third person.

“Never should I have been so firmly and so long attached to Marie Antoinette, had I not known that her native thorough goodness of heart had been warped and misguided, though acting at the same time with the best intentions, by a false notion of her real innocence being a sufficient shield against the public censure of such innovations upon national prejudices, as she thought prayer to introduce,—the fatal error of conscious rectitude, encouraged in its regardlessness of appearances by those very persons who well knew that it is only by appearances a nation can judge of its rulers.

“I remember a ludicrous circumstance arising from the Queen’s innocent curiosity, in which, if there were anything to blame, I myself am to be censured for lending myself to it so heartily to satisfy Her Majesty.

“When the Chevalier d’Eon was allowed to return to France, Her Majesty expressed a particular inclination to see this extraordinary character. From prudential as well as political motives, she was at first easily persuaded to repress her desire. However, by a most ludicrous occurrence, it was revived, and nothing would do but she must have a sight of the being who had for some time been the talk of every society, and at the period to which I allude was become the mirth of all Paris.

“The Chevalier being one day in a very large party of both sexes, in which, though his appearance had more of the old soldier in it than of the character he was compelled ‘malgre lui’,

Page 35

[It may be necessary to observe here that the Chevalier, having for some particular motives been banished from France, was afterwards permitted to return only on condition of never appearing but in the disguised dress of a female, though he was always habited in the male costume underneath it.]

to adopt, many of the guests having no idea to what sex this nondescript animal really belonged, the conversation after dinner happened to turn on the manly exercise of fencing. Heated by a subject to him so interesting, the Chevalier, forgetful of the respect due to his assumed garb, started from his seat, and, pulling up his petticoats, threw himself on guard. Though dressed in male attire underneath, this sudden freak sent all the ladies—and many of the gentlemen out of the room in double—quick time. The Chevalier, however, instantly recovering from the first impulse, quietly pat down his, upper garment, and begged pardon in, a gentlemanly manner for having for a moment deviated from the form of his imposed situation. All, the gossips of Paris were presently amused with the story, which, of course, reached the Court, with every droll particular of the pulling up and clapping down the cumbrous paraphernalia of a hoop petticoat.

“The King and Queen, from the manner in which they enjoyed the tale when told them (and certainly it lost nothing in the report), would not have been the least amused of the party had they been present. His Majesty shook the room with laughing, and the Queen, the Princesse Elizabeth, and the other ladies were convulsed at the description.

“When we were alone, ‘How I should like,’ said the Queen, ‘to see this curious man-woman!’—‘Indeed,’ replied I, ‘I have not less curiosity than yourself, and I think we may contrive to let Your Majesty have a peep at him—her, I mean!—without compromising your dignity, or offending the Minister who interdicted the Chevalier from appearing in your presence. I know he has expressed the greatest mortification, and that his wish to see Your Majesty is almost irrepressible.’

“‘But how will you be able to contrive this without its being known to the King, or to the Comte de Vergennes, who would never forgive me?’ exclaimed Her Majesty.

“‘Why, on Sunday, when you go to chapel, I will cause him, by some means or other, to make his appearance, en grande costume, among the group of ladies who are generally waiting there to be presented to Your Majesty.’

“‘Oh, you charming creature!’ said the Queen. ‘But won’t the Minister banish or exile him for it?’

“‘No, no! He has only been forbidden an audience of Your Majesty at Court,’ I replied.

“In good earnest, on the Sunday following, the Chevalier was dressed en costume, with a large hoop, very long train, sack, five rows of ruffles, an immensely high powdered



female wig, very beautiful lappets, white gloves, an elegant fan in his hand, his beard closely shaved, his neck and ears adorned with diamond rings and necklaces, and assuming all the airs and graces of a fine lady!

Page 36

“But, unluckily, his anxiety was so great, the moment the Queen made her appearance, to get a sight of Her Majesty, that, on rushing before the other ladies, his wig and head-dress fell off his head; and, before they could be well replaced, he made so, ridiculous a figure, by clapping them, in his confusion, hind part before, that the King, the Queen, and the whole suite, could scarcely refrain from laughing; aloud in the church.

“Thus ended the long longed for sight of this famous man-woman!

“As to me, it was a great while before I could recover myself. Even now, I laugh whenever I think of this great lady deprived of her head ornaments, with her bald pate laid bare, to the derision of such a multitude of Parisians, always prompt to divert themselves at the expense of others. However, the affair passed off unheeded, and no one but the Queen and myself ever knew that we ourselves had been innocently the cause of this comical adventure. When we met after Mass, we were so overpowered, that neither of us could speak for laughing. The Bishop who officiated said it was lucky he had no sermon to preach that day, for it would have been difficult for him to have recollected himself, or to have maintained his gravity. The ridiculous appearance of the Chevalier, he added, was so continually presenting itself before him during the service that it was as much as he could do to restrain himself from laughing, by keeping his eyes constantly riveted on the book. Indeed, the oddity of the affair was greatly heightened when, in the middle of the Mass, some charitable hand having adjusted the wig of the Chevalier, he re-entered the chapel as if nothing had happened, and, placing himself exactly opposite the altar, with his train upon his arm, stood fanning himself, a la coquette, with an inflexible self-possession which only rendered it the more difficult for those around him to maintain their composure.

“Thus ended the Queen’s curiosity. The result only made the Chevalier’s company in greater request, for every one became more anxious than ever to know the masculine lady who had lost her wig!”

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS:

Fatal error of conscious rectitude
Feel themselves injured by the favour shown to others
Listeners never hear any good of themselves
Only retire to make room for another race
Regardlessness of appearances