The Memoirs of Madame de Montespan, V1

Madame La Marquise De Montespan

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HISTORIC COURT MEMOIRS.

MEMOIRS OF MADAME LA MARQUISE DE MONTESPAN.
Written by Herself

Being the Historic Memoirs of the Court of Louis XIV.

BOOK 1.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

Historians have, on the whole, dealt somewhat harshly with the fascinating Madame de Montespan, perhaps taking their impressions from the judgments, often narrow and malicious, of her contemporaries. To help us to get a fairer estimate, her own "Memoirs," written by herself, and now first given to readers in an English dress, should surely serve. Avowedly compiled in a vague, desultory way, with no particular regard to chronological sequence, these random recollections should interest us, in the first place, as a piece of unconscious self−portraiture. The cynical Court lady, whose beauty bewitched a great King, and whose ruthless sarcasm made Duchesses quail, is here drawn for us in vivid fashion by her own hand, and while concerned with depicting other figures she really portrays her own. Certainly, in these Memoirs she is generally content to keep herself in the background, while giving us a faithful picture of the brilliant Court at which she was for long the most lustrous ornament. It is only by stray touches, a casual remark, a chance phrase, that we, as it were, gauge her temperament in all its wiliness, its egoism, its love of supremacy, and its shallow worldly wisdom. Yet it could have been no ordinary woman that held the handsome Louis so long her captive. The fair Marquise was more than a mere leader of wit and fashion. If she set the mode in the shape of a petticoat, or devised the sumptuous splendours of a garden fete, her talent was not merely devoted to things frivolous and trivial. She had the proverbial 'esprit des Mortemart'. Armed with beauty and sarcasm, she won a leading place for herself at Court, and held it in the teeth of all detractors.

Her beauty was for the King, her sarcasm for his courtiers. Perhaps little of this latter quality appears in the pages bequeathed to us, written, as they are, in a somewhat cold, formal style, and we may assume that her much−dreaded irony resided in her tongue rather than in her pen. Yet we are glad to possess these pages, if only as a reliable record of Court life during the brightest period of the reign of Louis Quatorze.

As we have hinted, they are more, indeed, than this. For if we look closer we shall perceive, as in a glass, darkly, the contour of a subtle, even a perplexing, personality.

P. E. P.

CHAPTER I.

The Reason for Writing These Memoirs.—Gabrielle d'Estrees.

The reign of the King who now so happily and so gloriously rules over France will one day exercise the talent of the most skilful historians. But these men of genius, deprived of the advantage of seeing the great monarch whose portrait they fain would draw, will search everywhere among the souvenirs of contemporaries and base their judgments upon our testimony. It is this great consideration which has made me determined to devote some of my hours of leisure to narrating, in these accurate and truthful Memoirs, the events of which I myself am witness.

Naturally enough, the position which I fill at the great theatre of the Court has made me the object of much false admiration, and much real satire. Many men who owed to me their elevation or their success have defamed me; many women have belittled my position after vain efforts to secure the King's regard. In what I now write, scant notice will be taken of all such ingratitude. Before my establishment at Court I had met with hypocrisy of this sort in the world; and a man must, indeed, be reckless of expense who daily entertains at his board a score of insolent detractors.

I have too much wit to be blind to the fact that I am not precisely in my proper place. But, all things considered, I flatter myself that posterity will let certain weighty circumstances tell in my favour. An accomplished monarch, to greet whom the Queen of Sheba would have come from the uttermost ends of the earth, has deemed me worthy of his entertainment, and has found amusement in my society. He has told me of the esteem which the French have for Gabrielle d'Estrees, and, like that of Gabrielle, my heart has let itself be captured, not by a great king, but by the most honest man of his realm.

To France, Gabrielle gave the Vendome, to−day our support. The princes, my sons, give promise of virtues as excellent, and will be worthy to aspire to destinies as noble. It is my desire and my duty to give no thought to my private griefs begotten of an ill−assorted marriage. May the King ever be adored by his people; may my children ever be beloved and cherished by the King; I am happy, and I desire to be so.

CHAPTER II.

That Which Often It is Best to Ignore.—A Marriage Such as One Constantly Sees.—It is Too Late.

My sisters thought it of extreme importance to possess positive knowledge as to their future condition and the events which fate held in store for them. They managed to be secretly taken to a woman famed for her talent in casting the horoscope. But on seeing how overwhelmed by chagrin they both were after consulting the oracle, I felt fearful as regarded myself, and determined to let my star take its own course, heedless of its existence, and allowing it complete liberty.

My mother occasionally took me out into society after the marriage of my sister, De Thianges; and I was not slow to perceive that there was in my person something slightly superior to the average intelligence,—certain qualities of distinction which drew upon me the attention and the sympathy of men of taste. Had any liberty been granted to it, my heart would have made a choice worthy alike of my family and of myself. They were eager to impose the Marquis de Montespan upon me as a husband; and albeit he was far from possessing those mental perfections and that cultured charm which alone make an indefinite period of companionship endurable, I was not slow to reconcile myself to a temperament which, fortunately, was very variable, and which thus served to console me on the morrow for what had troubled me to−day.

Hardly had my marriage been arranged and celebrated than a score of the most brilliant suitors expressed, in prose and in verse, their regret at having lost beyond recall Mademoiselle de Tonnai−Charente. Such elegiac effusions seemed to me unspeakably ridiculous; they should have explained matters earlier, while the lists were still open. For persons of this sort I conceived aversion, who were actually so clumsy as to dare to tell me that they had forgotten to ask my hand in marriage!

CHAPTER III.

Madame de Montespan at the Palace.—M. de Montespan.—His Indiscreet Language.—His Absence.—Specimen of His Way of Writing.—A Refractory Cousin.—The King Interferes.—M. de Montespan a Widower.—Amusement of the King.—Clemency of Madame de Montespan.

The Duc and Duchesse de Navailles had long been friends of my father's and of my family. When the Queen−mother proceeded to form the new household of her niece and daughter−in−law, the Infanta, the Duchesse de Navailles, chief of the ladies−in−waiting, bethought herself of me, and soon the Court and Paris learnt that I was one of the six ladies in attendance on the young Queen.

This princess, who while yet at the Escurial had been made familiar with the notable names of the French monarchy, honoured me during the journey by alluding in terms of regard to the Mortemarts and Rochechouarts,— kinsmen of mine. She was even careful to quote matters of history concerning my ancestors. By such marks of good sense and good will I perceived that she would not be out of place at a Court where politeness of spirit and politeness of heart ever go side by side, or, to put it better, where these qualities are fused and united.

M. le Marquis de Montespan, scion of the old house of Pardaillan de Gondrin, had preferred what he styled "my grace and beauty " to the most wealthy partis of France. He was himself possessed of wealth, and his fortune gave him every facility for maintaining at Court a position of advantage and distinction.

At first the honour which both Queens were graciously pleased to confer upon me gave my husband intense satisfaction. He affectionately thanked the Duc and Duchesse de Navailles, and expressed his most humble gratitude to the two Queens and to the King. But it was not long before I perceived that he had altered his opinion.

The love−affair between Mademoiselle de la Valliere and the King having now become public, M. de Montespan condemned this attachment in terms of such vehemence that I perforce felt afraid of the consequences of such censure. He talked openly about the matter in society, airing his views thereanent. Impetuously and with positive hardihood, he expressed his disapproval in unstinted terms, criticising and condemning the prince's conduct. Once, at the ballet, when within two feet of the Queen, it was with the utmost difficulty that he could be prevented from discussing so obviously unfitting a question, or from sententiously moralising upon the subject.

All at once the news of an inheritance in the country served to occupy his attention. He did all that he could to make me accompany him on this journey. He pointed out to me that it behoved no young wife to be anywhere without her husband. I, for my part, represented to him all that in my official capacity I owed to the Queen. And as at that time I still loved him heartily (M. de Montespan, I mean), and was sincerely attached to him, I advised him to sell off the whole of the newly inherited estate to some worthy member of his own family, so that he might remain with us in the vast arena wherein I desired and hoped to achieve his rapid advance.

Never was there man more obstinate or more selfwilled than the Marquis. Despite all my friendly persuasion, he was determined to go. And when once settled at the other end of France, he launched out into all sorts of agricultural schemes and enterprises, without even knowing why he did so. He constructed roads, built windmills, bridged over a large torrent, completed the pavilions of his castle, replanted coppices and vineyards, and, besides all this, hunted the chamois, bears, and boars of the Nebouzan and the Pyrenees. Four or five months after his departure I received a letter from him of so singular a kind that I kept it in spite of myself, and in the Memoirs it will not prove out of place. Far better than any words of mine, it will depict the sort of mind, the logic, and the curious character of the man who was my husband.

MONTESPAN,—May 15, 1667.

I count more than ever, madame, upon your journey to the Pyrenees. If you love me, as all your letters assure me, you should promptly take a good coach and come. We are possessed of considerable property here, which of late years my family have much neglected. These domains require my presence, and my presence requires yours. Enough is yours of wit or of good sense to understand that.

The Court is, no doubt, a fine country,—finer than ever under the present reign. The more magnificent the Court is, the more uneasy

do I become. Wealth and opulence are needed there; and to your family I never figured as a Croesus. By dint of order and thrift, we shall ere long have satisfactorily settled our affairs; and I promise you that our stay in the Provinces shall last no longer than is necessary to achieve that desirable result. Three, four, five,—let us say, six years. Well, that is not an eternity! By the time we come back we shall both of us still be young. Come, then, my dearest Athenais, come, and make closer acquaintance with these imposing Pyrenees, every ravine of which is a landscape and every valley an Eden. To all these beauties, yours is missing; you shall be here, like Dian, the goddess of these noble forests. All our gentlefolk await you, admiring your picture on the sweetmeat−box. They are minded to hold many pleasant festivals in your honour; you may count upon having a veritable Court. Here it is that you will meet the old Warnais nobility that followed Henri IV. and placed the sceptre in his hand. Messieurs de Grammont and de Biron are our neighbours; their grim castles dominate the whole district, so that they seem like kings.

Our Chateau de Montespan will offer you something less severe; the additions made for my mother twenty years ago are infinitely better than anything that you will leave behind you in Paris. We have here the finest fruits that ever grew in any earthly paradise. Our huge, luscious peaches are composed of sugar, violets, carnations, amber, and jessamine; strawberries and raspberries grow everywhere; and naught may vie with the excellence of the water, the vegetables, and the milk.

You are fond of scenery and of sketching from nature; there are half a dozen landscapes here for you that leave Claude Lorrain far behind. I mean to take you to see a waterfall, twelve hundred and seventy feet in height, neither more nor less. What are your fountains at Saint Germain and Chambord compared with such marvellous things as these?

Now, madame, I am really tired of coaxing and flattering you, as I have done in this letter and in preceding ones. Do you want me, or do you not? Your position as Court lady, so you say, keeps you near the monarch; ask, then, or let me ask, for leave of absence. After having been for four consecutive years Lady of the Palace, consent to become Lady of the Castle, since your duties towards your spouse require it. The young King, favourite as he is with the ladies, will soon find ten others to replace you. And I, dearest Athenais, find it hard even to think of replacing you, in spite of your cruel absence, which at once annoys and grieves me. I am—no, I shall be —always and ever yours, when you are always and ever mine.

MONTESPAN.

I hastened to tell my husband in reply that his impatience and ill−humour made me most unhappy; that as, through sickness or leave of absence, five or six of the Court ladies were away, I could not possibly absent myself just then; that I believed that I sufficiently merited his confidence to let me count upon his attachment and esteem, whether far or near. And I gave him my word of honour that I would join him after the Court moved to Fontainebleau, that is to say, in the autumn.

My answer, far from soothing or calming him, produced quite a contrary effect. I received the following letter, which greatly alarmed and agitated me:

Your allegations are only vain pretexts, your pretexts mask your falsehoods, your falsehoods confirm all my suspicions; you are

deceiving me, madame, and it is your intention to dishonour me. My cousin, who saw through you better than I did before my wretched marriage,—my cousin, whom you dislike and who is no whit afraid of you,—informs me that, under the pretext of going to keep Madame de la Valliere company, you never stir from her apartments during the time allotted to her by the King, that is to say, three whole hours every evening. There you pose as sovereign arbiter; as oracle, uttering a thousand divers decisions; as supreme purveyor of news and gossip; the scourge of all who are absent; the complacent promoter of scandal; the soul and the leader of sparkling conversation.

One only of these ladies became ill, owing to an extremely favourable confinement, from which she recovered a week ago. At the outset, the King fought shy of your raillery, but in a thousand discreditable ways you set your cap at him and forced him to pay you attention. If all the letters written to me (all of them in the same strain) are not preconcerted, if your misconduct is such as I am told it is, if you have dishonoured and disgraced your husband, then, madame, expect all that your excessive imprudence deserves. At this distance of two hundred and fifty leagues I shall not trouble you with complaints and vain reproaches; I shall collect all necessary information and documentary evidence at headquarters; and, cost me what it may, I shall bring action against you, before your parents, before a court of law, in the face of public opinion, and before your protector, the King. I charge you instantly to deliver up to me my child. My unfortunate son comes of a race which never yet has had cause to blush for disgrace such as this. What would he gain, except bad example, by staying with a mother who has no virtue and no husband? Give him up to me, and at once let Dupre, my valet, have charge of him until my return. This latter will occur sooner than you think; and I shall shut you up in a convent, unless you shut me up in the Bastille.

Your unfortunate husband,

MONTESPAN.

The officious cousin to whom he alluded in this threatening letter had been so bold as to sue for my hand, although possessed of no property. Ever since that time he remained, as I knew, my enemy, though I did not know, nor ever suspected, that such a man would find pleasure in spying upon my actions and in effecting the irrevocable estrangement of a husband and a wife, who until then had been mutually attached to each other.

The King, whose glance, though very sweet, is very searching, said to me that evening, "Something troubles you; what is it?" He felt my pulse, and perceived my great agitation. I showed him the letter just transcribed, and his Majesty changed colour.

"It is a matter requiring caution and tact," added the prince after brief meditation. "At any rate we can prevent his showing you any disrespect. Give up the Marquis d'Antin to him," continued the King, after another pause. "He is useless, perhaps an inconvenience, to you; and if deprived of his child he might be driven to commit some desperate act."

"I would rather die!" I exclaimed, bursting into tears.

The King affectionately took hold of both my hands, and gently said:

"Very well, then, keep him yourself, and don't give him up."

As God is my witness, M. de Montespan had already neglected me for some time before he left for the Pyrenees; and to me this sudden access of fervour seemed singularly strange. But I am not easily hoodwinked; I understood him far better and far quicker than he expected. The Marquis is one of those vulgar−minded men who do not look upon a woman as a friend, a companion, a frank, free associate, but as a piece of property or of furniture, useful to his house, and which he has procured for that purpose only.

I am told that in England a man is the absolute proprietor of his wife, and that if he took her to the public market with a cord round her neck and exhibited her for sale, such sale is perfectly valid in the eyes of the law. Laws such as these inspire horror. Yet they should hardly surprise one among a semibarbarous nation, which does nothing like other peoples, and which deems itself authorised to place the censer in the hands of its monarch, and its monarch in the hands of the headsman.

M. de Montespan came to Paris and instituted proceedings against me before the Chatelet authorities. To the King he sent a letter full of provocations and insults. To the Pope he sent a formal complaint, accompanied by a most carefully prepared list of opinions which no lawyer was willing to sign. For three whole months he tormented the Pope, in order to induce him to annul our marriage. Of a truth, our Sovereign Pontiff could have done nothing better, but in Rome justice and religion always rank second to politics. The cardinals feared to offend a great prince, and so they suffered me to remain the wife of my husband. When he saw that on every side his voice was lost in the desert, and that the King, being calmer and more prudent than he, did not deign to pick up the glove, his folly reached its utmost limit. He went into the deepest mourning ever seen. He draped his horses and carriages with black. He gave orders for a funeral service to be held in his parish, which the whole town and its suburbs were invited to attend. He declared, verbally and in writing, that he no longer possessed a wife; that Madame de Montespan had died of an attack of coquetry and ambition; and he talked of marrying again when the year of mourning and of widowhood should be over.

His first outbursts of wrath were the source of much amusement to the King, who naturally was on the side of decorum and averse to hostile opinion. Pranks such as these seemed to him more a matter for mirth than fear, and, on hearing the story of the catafalque, he laughingly said to me, "Now that he has buried you, it is to be hoped that he will let you repose in peace." But hearing each day of fresh absurdities, his Majesty grew at last impatient. Luckily, M. de Montespan, perceiving that every house had closed its doors to him, decided to close his own altogether and travel abroad.

Not being of a vindictive disposition, I never would allow M. de Louvois to shut him up in the Bastille. On the contrary I privately paid more than fifty thousand crowns to defray his debts, being glad to render him some good service in exchange for all the evil that he spoke of me.

I reflected that he had been my husband, my confidant, my friend; that his only faults were bad temper, love of sport, and love of wine; that he belonged to one of the very first families of France; and that, despite all that was said, my son D'Antin certainly was nothing to the King, and that the Marquis was his father.

CHAPTER IV.

Mademoiselle de la Valliere Jealous.—The King Wishes All to Enjoy Themselves.—The Futility of Fighting against Fate.—What is Dead is Dead.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIERE was tall, shapely, and extremely pretty, with as sweet and even a temper as one could possibly imagine, which eminently fitted her for dreamy, contemplative love−making, such as one reads of in idyls and romances. She would willingly have spent her life in. contemplating the King,—in loving and adoring him without ever opening her mouth; and to her, the sweet silence of a tete−a−tete seemed preferable to any conversation enlivened by wit.

The King's character was totally different. His imagination was vivid, and mere love−making, however pleasant, bored him at last if the charm of ready speech and ready wit were wanting.

I do not profess to be a prodigy, but those who know me do me the justice to admit that where I am it is very difficult for boredom to find ever so small a footing.

Mademoiselle de la Valliere, after having begged me, and begged me often, to come and help her to entertain the King, grew suddenly suspicious and uneasy. She is candour itself, and one day, bursting into tears, she said to me, in that voice peculiar to her alone, "For Heaven's sake, my good friend, do not steal away the King's heart from me!" When mademoiselle said this to me, I vow and declare in all honesty that her fears were unfounded, and that (for my part at least) I had only just a natural desire to gain the good−will of a great prince. My friendship for La Valliere was so sincere, so thorough, that I often used to superintend little details of her toilet and give her various little hints as to attentive conduct of the sort which cements and revives attachments. I even furnished her with news and gossip, composing for her a little repertoire, of which, when needful, she made use.

But her star had set, and she had to show the world the touching spectacle of love as true, as tender, and as disinterested as any that has ever been in this world, followed by a repentance and an expiation far superior to the sin, if sin it was.

Moreover, Mademoiselle de la Valliere never broke with me. She shed tears in abundance, and wounded my heart a thousand times by the sight of her grief and her distress. For her sake I was often fain to bid farewell to her fickle lover, proud monarch though he was. But by breaking with him I should not have reestablished La Valliere. The prince's violent passion had changed to mere friendship, blended with esteem. To try and resuscitate attachments of this sort is as if one should try to open the grave and give life to the dead. God alone can work miracles such as these.

CHAPTER V.

The Marquis de Bragelonne, Officer of the Guards.—His Baleful Love.— His Journey.—His Death.

The Marquis de Bragelonne was born for Mademoiselle de la Valliere. It was this young officer, endowed with all perfections imaginable, whom Heaven had designed for her, to complete her happiness. Despite his sincere, incomparable attachment for her, she disdained him, preferring a king, who soon afterwards wearied of her.

The Marquis de Bragelonne conceived a passion for the little La Valliere as soon as he saw her at the Tuileries with Madame Henrietta of England, whose maid of honour at first she was. Having made proof and declaration of his tender love, Bragelonne was so bold as to ask her hand of the princess. Madame caused her relatives to be apprised of this, and the Marquise de Saint−Remy, her stepmother, after all necessary inquiries had been made, replied that the fortune of this young man was as yet too slender to permit him to think of having an establishment.

Grieved at this answer, but nothing daunted, Bragelonne conferred privately with his lady−love, and told her of his hazardous project. This project instantly to realise all property coming to him from his father, and furnished with this capital, to go out, and seek his fortune in India [West Indies. D.W.]

"You will wait for me, dearest one, will you not?" quoth he. "Heaven, that is witness how ardently I long to make you happy, will protect me on my journey and guard my ship. Promise me to keep off all suitors, the number of whom will increase with your beauty. This promise, for which I desire no other guarantee but your candour, shall sustain me in exile, and make me count as nought my privations and my hardships."

Mademoiselle de la Beaume−le−Blanc allowed the Marquis to hope all that he wished from her beautiful soul, and he departed, never imagining that one could forget or set at nought so tender a love which had prompted so hazardous an enterprise.

His journey proved thoroughly successful. He brought back with him treasures from the New World; but of all his treasures the most precious had disappeared. Restored once more to family and friends, he hastened to the capital. Madame d'Orleans no longer resided at the Tuileries, which was being enlarged by the King.

Bragelonne, in his impatience, asks everywhere for La Valliere. They tell him that she has a charming house between Saint Germain, Lucienne, and Versailles. He goes thither, laden with coral and pearls from the Indies. He asks to have sight of his love. A tall Swiss repulses him, saying that, in order to speak with Madame la Duchesse, it was absolutely necessary to make an appointment.

At the same moment one of his friends rides past the gateway. They greet each other, and in reply to his questioning, this friend informs him that Mademoiselle de la Valliere is a duchess, that she is a mother, that she is lapped in grandeur and luxury, and that she has as lover a king.

At this news, Bragelonne finds nothing further for him to do in this world. He grasps his friend's hand, retires to a neighbouring wood, and there, drawing his sword, plunges it into his heart, —a sad requital for love so noble!

CHAPTER VI.

M. Fouquet.—His Mistake.—A Woman's Indiscretion May Cause the Loss of a Great Minister.—The Castle of Vaux.—Fairy−land.—A Fearful Awakening.— Clemency of the King.

On going out into society, I heard everybody talking everywhere about M. Fouquet. They praised his good−nature, his affability, his talents, his magnificence, his wit. His post as Surintendant−General, envied by a thousand, provoked indeed a certain amount of spite; yet all such vain efforts on the part of mediocrity to slander him troubled him but little. My lord the Cardinal (Mazarin. D.W.) was his support, and so long as the main column stood firm, M. Fouquet, lavish of gifts to his protector, had really nothing to fear.

This minister also largely profited by the species of fame to be derived from men of letters. He knew their venality and their needs. His sumptuous, well−appointed table was placed in grandiose fashion at their disposal. Moreover, he made sure of their attachment and esteem by fees and enormous pensions. The worthy La Fontaine nibbled like others at the bait, and at any rate paid his share of the reckoning by the most profuse gratitude. M. Fouquet had one great defect: he took it into his head that every woman is devoid of will−power and of resistance if only one dazzle her eyes with gold. Another prejudice of his was to believe, as an article of faith, that, if possessed of gold and jewels, the most ordinary of men can inspire affection.

Making this twofold error his starting−point as a principle that was incontestable, he was wont to look upon every beautiful woman who happened to appear on the horizon as his property acquired in advance.

At Madame's, he saw Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and instantly sent her his vows of homage and his proposals.

To his extreme astonishment, this young beauty declined to understand such language. Couched in other terms, he renewed his suit, yet apparently was no whit less obscure than on the first occasion. Such a scandal as this well−nigh put him to the blush, and he was obliged to admit that this modest maiden either affected to be, or really was, utterly extraordinary.

Perhaps Mademoiselle de la Valliere ought to have had the generosity not to divulge the proposals made to her; but she spoke about them, so everybody said, and the King took a dislike to his minister.

Whatever the cause or the real motives for Fouquet's disgrace, it was never considered unjust, and this leads me to tell the tale of his mad folly at Vaux.

The two palaces built by Cardinal Mazarin and the castles built by Cardinal Richelieu served as fine examples for M. Fouquet. He knew that handsome edifices embellished the country, and that Maecenas has always been held in high renown, because Maecenas built a good deal in his day.

He had just built, at great expense, in the neighbourhood of Melun, a castle of such superb and elegant proportions that the fame of it had even reached foreign parts. All that Fouquet lived for was show and pomp. To have a fine edifice and not show it off was as if one only possessed a kennel.

He spoke of the Castle of Vaux in the Queen's large drawing−room, and begged their Majesties to honour by their presence a grand fete that he was preparing for them.

To invite the royal family was but a trifling matter,—he required spectators proportionate to the scale of decorations and on a par with the whole spectacle; so he took upon himself to invite the entire Court to Vaux.

On reaching Vaux−le−Vicomte, how great and general was our amazement! It was not the well−appointed residence of a minister, it was not a human habitation that presented itself to our view,—it was a veritable fairy palace. All in this brilliant dwelling was stamped with the mark of opulence and of exquisite taste in art. Marbles, balustrades, vast staircases, columns, statues, groups, bas−reliefs, vases, and pictures were scattered here and there in rich profusion, besides cascades and fountains innumerable. The large salon, octagonal in shape, had a high, vaulted ceiling, and its flooring of mosaic looked like a rich carpet embellished with birds, butterflies, arabesques, fruits, and flowers.

On either side of the main edifice, and somewhat in the rear, the architect had placed smaller buildings, yet all of them ornamented in the same sumptuous fashion; and these served to throw the chateau itself into relief. In these adjoining pavilions there were baths, a theatre, a 'paume' ground, swings, a chapel, billiard−rooms, and other salons.

One noticed magnificent gilt roulette tables and sedan−chairs of the very best make. There were elegant stalls at which trinkets were distributed to the guests,—note−books, pocket−mirrors, gloves, knives, scissors, purses, fans, sweetmeats, scents, pastilles, and perfumes of all kinds.

It was as if some evil fairy had prompted the imprudent minister to act in this way, who, eager and impatient for his own ruin, had summoned his King to witness his appalling system of plunder in its entirety, and had invited chastisement.

When the King went out on to the balcony of his apartment to make a general survey of the gardens and the perspective, he found everything well arranged and most alluring; but a certain vista seemed to him spoiled by whitish−looking clearings that gave too barren an aspect to the general coup d'oeil.

His host readily shared this opinion. He at once gave the requisite instructions, which that very night were executed by torchlight with the utmost secrecy by all the workmen of the locality whose services at such an hour it was possible to secure.

When next day the monarch stepped out on to his balcony, he saw a beautiful green wood in place of the clearings with which on the previous evening he had found fault.

Service more prompt or tasteful than this it was surely impossible to have; but kings only desire to be obeyed when they command.

Fouquet, with airy presumption, expected thanks and praise. This, however, was what he had to hear: "I am shocked at such expense!"

Soon afterwards the Court moved to Nantes; the ministers followed; M. Fouquet was arrested.

His trial at the Paris Arsenal lasted several months. Proofs of his defalcations were numberless. His family and proteges made frantic yet futile efforts to save so great a culprit. The Commission sentenced him to death, and ordered the confiscation of all his property.

The King, content to have made this memorable and salutary example, commuted the death penalty, and M. Fouquet learned with gratitude that he would have to end his days in prison.

Nor did the King insist upon the confiscation of his property, which went to the culprit's widow and children, all that was retained being the enormous sums which he had embezzled.

CHAPTER VII.

Close of the Queen−mother's Illness.—The Archbishop of Auch.— The Patient's Resignation.—The Sacrament.—Court Ceremony for its Reception.—Sage Distinction of Mademoiselle de Montpensier.—Her Prudence at the Funeral.

As the Queen−mother's malady grew worse, the Court left Saint Germain to be nearer the experts and the Val−de−Grace, where the princess frequently practised her devotions with members of the religious sisterhood that she had founded.

Suddenly the cancer dried up, and the head physician declared that the Queen was lost.

The Archbishop of Auch said to the King, "Sire, there is not an instant to be lost; the Queen may die at any moment; she should be informed of her condition, so that she may prepare herself to receive the Sacrament."

The King was troubled, for he dearly loved his mother. "Monsieur," he replied, with emotion, "it is impossible for me to sanction your request. My mother is resting calmly, and perhaps thinks that she is out of danger. We might give her her death−blow."

The prelate, a man of firm, religious character, insisted, albeit reverently, while the prince continued to object. Then the Archbishop retorted, "It is not with nature or the world that we have here to deal. We have to save a soul. I have done my duty, and filial tenderness will at any rate bear the blame."

The King thereupon acceded to the churchman's wishes, who lost no time in acquainting the patient with her doom.

Anne of Austria was grievously shocked at so terrible an announcement, but she soon recovered her resignation and her courage; and M. d' Auch made noble use of his eloquence when exhorting her to prepare for the change that she dreaded.

A portable altar was put up in the room, and the Archbishop, assisted by other clerics, went to fetch the Holy Sacrament from the church of Saint Germain de l'Auxerrois in the Louvre parish.

The princes and princesses hereupon began to argue in the little closet as to the proper ceremony to be observed on such occasions. Madame de Motteville, lady−in−waiting to the Queen, being asked to give an opinion, replied that, for the late King, the nobles had gone out to meet the Holy Sacrament as far as the outer gate of the palace, and that it would be wise to do this on the present occasion.

Mademoiselle de Montpensier interrupted the lady−in−waiting and those who shared her opinion. "I cannot bring myself to establish such a precedent," she said, in her usual haughty tone. "It is I who have to walk first, and I shall only go half−way across the courtyard of the Louvre. It's quite far enough for the Holy Wafer−box; what's the use of walking any further for the Holy Sacrament?"

The princes and princesses were of her way of thinking, and the procession advanced only to the limits aforesaid.

When the time came for taking the Sacred Heart to Val−de−Grace with the funeral procession, Mademoiselle, in a long mourning cloak, said to the Archbishop before everybody, "Pray, monsieur, put the Sacred Heart in the best place, and sit you close beside it. I yield my rank up to you on the present occasion." And, as the prelate protested, she added, "I shall be very willing to ride in front on account of the malady from which she died." And, without altering her resolution, she actually took her seat in front.

CHAPTER VIII.

Cardinal Mazarin.—Regency of Anne of Austria.—Her Perseverance in Retaining Her Minister.—Mazarin Gives His Nieces in Marriage.— M. de la Meilleraye.—The Cardinal's Festivities.—Madame de Montespan's Luck at a Lottery.

Before taking holy orders, Cardinal Mazarin had served as an officer in the Spanish army, where he had even won distinction.

Coming to France in the train of a Roman cardinal, he took service with Richelieu, who, remarking in him all the qualities of a supple, insinuating, artificial nature,—that is to say, the nature of a good politician,—appointed him his private secretary, and entrusted him with all his secrets, as if he had singled him out as his successor.

Upon the death of Richelieu, Mazarin did not scruple to avow that the great Armand's sceptre had been a tyrant's sceptre and of bronze. By such an admission he crept into the good graces of Louis XIII., who, himself almost moribund, had shown how pleased he was to see his chief minister go before him to the grave.

Louis XIII. being dead, his widow, Anne of Austria, in open Parliament cancelled the monarch's testamentary depositions and constituted herself Regent with absolute authority. Mazarin was her Richelieu.

In France, where men affect to be so gallant and so courteous, how is it that when women rule their reign is always stormy and troublous? Anne of Austria—comely, amiable, and gracious as she was—met with the same brutal discourtesy which her sister−in−law, Marie de Medici, had been obliged to bear. But gifted with greater force of intellect than that queen, she never yielded aught of her just rights; and it was her strong will which more than once astounded her enemies and saved the crown for the young King.

They lampooned her, hissed her, and burlesqued her publicly at the theatres, cruelly defaming her intentions and her private life. Strong in the knowledge of her own rectitude, she faced the tempest without flinching; yet inwardly her soul was torn to pieces. The barricading of Paris, the insolence of M. le Prince, the bravado and treachery of Cardinal de Retz, burnt up the very blood in her veins, and brought on her fatal malady, which took the form of a hideous cancer.

Our nobility (who are only too glad to go and reign in Naples, Portugal, or Poland) openly declared that no foreigner ought to hold the post of minister in Paris. Despite his Roman purple, Mazarin was condemned to be hanged.

The motive for this was some trifling tax which he had ordered to be collected before this had been ratified by the magistrates and registered in the usual way.

But the Queen knew how to win over the nobles. Her cardinal was recalled, and the apathy of the Parisians put an end to these dissensions, from which, one must admit, the people and the bourgeoisie got all the ills and the nobility all the profits.

As comptroller of the list of benefices, M. le Cardinal allotted the wealthiest abbeys of the realm to himself.

Having made himself an absolute master of finance, like M. Fouquet, he amassed great wealth. He built a magnificent palace in Rome, and an equally brilliant one in Paris, conferring upon himself the wealthy governorships of various towns or provinces. He had a guard of honour attached to his person, and a captain of the guard in attendance, just as Richelieu had.

He married one of his nieces to the Prince of Mantua, another to the Prince de Conti, a third to the Comte de Soissons, a fourth to the Constable Colonna (an Italian prince), a fifth to the Duc de Mercoeur (a blood relation of Henri IV.), and a sixth to the Duc de Bouillon. As to Hortense, the youngest, loveliest of them all,—Hortense, the beauteous−eyed, his charming favourite,—he appointed her his sole heiress, and having given her jewelry and innumerable other presents, he married her to the agreeable Duc de la Meilleraye, son of the marshal of that name.

Society was much astonished when it came out that M. le Cardinal had disinherited his own nephew,

[De Mancini, Duc de Nevers, a relative of the last Duc de Nivernois. He married, soon after, Madame de Montespan's niece.—Editor's Note]

a man of merit, handing over his name, his fortune, and his arms to a stranger. This was an error; in taking the name and arms of Mazarin, young De la Meilleraye was giving up those which he ought to have given up, and assuming those which it behove him to assume.

Nor did he retain the great possessions of the La Meilleraye family. Herein, certainly, he did not consult his devotion; since the secret and fatherly avowal of M. le Cardinal he had no right whatever to the estates of this family.

Beneath the waving folds of his large scarlet robe, the Cardinal showed such ease and certainty of address, that he never put one in mind of a cardinal and a bishop. To such manners, however, one was accustomed; in a leading statesman they were not unpleasant.

He often gave magnificent balls, at which he displayed all the accomplishments of his nieces and the sumptuous splendour of his furniture. At such entertainments, always followed by a grand banquet, he was wont to show a liberality worthy of crowned heads. One day, after the feast, he announced that a lottery would be held in his palace.

Accordingly, all the guests repaired to his superb gallery, which had just been brilliantly decorated with paintings by Romanelli, and here, spread out upon countless tables, we saw pieces of rare porcelain, scent− bottles of foreign make, watches of every size and shape, chains of pearls or of coral, diamond buckles and rings, gold boxes adorned by portraits set in pearls or in emeralds, fans of matchless elegance,— in a word, all the rarest and most costly things that luxury and fashion could invent.

The Queens distributed the tickets with every appearance of honesty and good faith. But I had reason to remark, by what happened to myself, that the tickets had been registered beforehand. The young Queen, who felt her garter slipping off, came to me in order to tighten it. She handed me her ticket to hold for a moment, and when she had fastened her garter, I gave her back my ticket instead of her own. When the Cardinal from his dais read out the numbers in succession, my number won a portrait of the King set in brilliants, much to the surprise of the Queen−mother and his Eminence; they could not get over it.

To me this lottery of the Rue Neuve−des−Petits−Changes

[The gallery to which the Marquise alludes is to−day called the Manuscript Gallery. It belongs to the Royal Library in the Rue de Richelieu. Mazarin's house is now the Treasury.]

I brought good luck, and we often talked about it afterwards with the King, regarding it as a sort of prediction or horoscope.

CHAPTER IX.

Marriage of Monsieur, the King's Brother.—His Hope of Mounting a Throne. —His High−heeled Shoes.—His Dead Child.—Saint Denis.

Monsieur would seem to have been created in order to set off his brother, the King, and to give him the advantage of such relief. He is small in stature and in character, being ceaselessly busied about trifles, details, nothings. To his toilet and his mirror, he devotes far more time than a pretty woman; he covers himself with scents, with laces, with diamonds.

He is passionately fond of fetes, large assemblies, and spectacular displays. It was in order to figure as the hero of some such entertainment that he suddenly resolved to get married.

Mademoiselle—the Grande Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle d'Eu, Mademoiselle de Dombes, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, Mademoiselle de Saint−Fargeau, Mademoiselle de la Roche−sur−Yon, Mademoiselle d'Orleans—had come into the world twelve or thirteen years before he had, and they could not abide each other. Despite such trifling differences, however, he proposed marriage to her. The princess, than whom no one more determined exists, answered, "You ought to have some respect for me; I refused two crowned husbands the very day you were born."

So the Prince begged the Queen of England to give him her charming daughter Henrietta, who, having come to France during her unfortunate father's captivity, had been educated in Paris.

The Princess possessed an admirable admixture of grace and beauty, wit being allied to great affability and good−nature; to all these natural gifts she added a capacity and intelligence such as one might desire sovereigns to possess. Her coquetry was mere amiability; of that I am convinced. Being naturally vain, the Prince, her husband, made great use at first of his consort's royal coat−of−arms. It was displayed on his equipages and stamped all over his furniture.

"Do you know, madame," quoth he gallantly, one day, "what made me absolutely desire to marry you? It was because you are a daughter and a sister of the Kings of England. In your country women succeed to the throne, and if Charles the Second and my cousin York were to die without children (which is very likely), you would be Queen and I should be King."

"Oh, Sire, how wrong of you to imagine such a thing!" replied his wife; "it brings tears to my eyes. I love my brothers more than I do myself. I trust that they may have issue, as they desire, and that I may not have to go back and live with those cruel English who slew my father−in−law."

The Prince sought to persuade her that a sceptre and a crown are always nice things to have. "Yes," replied Henrietta slyly, "but one must know how to wear them."

Soon after this, he again talked of his expectations, saying every minute, "If ever I am King, I shall do so; if ever I am King, I shall order this; if ever I am King," etc., etc.

"Let us hope, my good friend," replied the Princess, "that you won't be King in England, where your gewgaws would make people call out after you; nor yet in France, where they would think you too little, after the King."

At this last snub, Monsieur was much mortified. The very next day he summoned his old bootmaker, Lambertin, and ordered him to put extra heels two inches high to his shoes. Madame having told this piece of childish folly to the King, he was greatly amused, and with a view to perplex his brother, he had his own shoe−heels heightened, so that, beside his Majesty, Monsieur still looked quite a little man.

The Princess gave premature birth to a child that was scarcely recognisable; it had been dead in its mother's womb for at least ten days, so the doctors averred. Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans, however, insisted upon having this species of monstrosity baptised.

My sister, De Thianges, who is raillery personified, seeing how embarrassed was the cure of Saint Cloud by the Prince's repeated requests for baptism, gravely said to the cleric in an irresistibly comic fashion, "Do you know, sir, that your refusal is contrary to all good sense and good breeding, and that to infants of such quality baptism is never denied?"

When this species of miscarriage had to be buried, as there was urgent need to get rid of it, Monsieur uttered loud cries, and said that he had written to his brother so that there might be a grand funeral service at Saint Denis.

Of so absurd a proposal as this no notice was taken, which served to amaze Monsieur for one whole month.

CHAPTER X.

M. Colbert.—His Origin.—He Unveils and Displays Mazarin's Wealth.—The Monarch's Liberality.—Resentment of the Cardinal's Heirs.

A few moments before he died, Cardinal Mazarin, through strategy, not through repentance, besought the King to accept a deed of gift whereby he was appointed his universal legatee. Touched by so noble a resolve, the King gave back the deed to his Eminence, who shed tears of emotion.

"Sire, I owe all to you," said the dying man to the young prince, "but I believe that I shall pay off my debt by giving Colbert, my secretary, to your Majesty. Faithful as he has been to me, so will he be to you; and while he keeps watch, you may sleep. He comes from the noble family of Coodber, of Scottish origin, and his sentiments are worthy of his ancestors."

A few moments later the death−agony began, and M. Colbert begged the King to listen to him in an embrasure. There, taking a pencil, he made out a list of all the millions which the Cardinal had hidden away in various places. The monarch bewailed his minister, his tutor, his friend, but so astounding a revelation dried his tears. He affectionately thanked M. Colbert, and from that day forward gave him his entire consideration and esteem.

M. Colbert was diligent enough to seize upon the millions hidden at Vincennes, the millions secreted in the old Louvre, at Courbevoie and the other country seats. But the millions in gold, hidden in the bastions of La Fere, fell into the hands of heirs, who, a few moments after the commencement of the Cardinal's death−agony, sent off a valet post−haste.

The Cardinal's family pretended to know nothing of this affair; but they could never bear M. Colbert nor any of his kinsfolk. The King, being of a generous nature, distributed all this wealth in the best and most liberal manner possible. M. Colbert told him to what use Mazarin meant to put all these riches; he hoped to have prevailed upon the Conclave to elect him Pope, with the concurrence of Spain, France, and the Holy Ghost.

CHAPTER XI.

The Young Queen.—Her Portrait.—Her Whims.—Her Love for the King.—Her Chagrin.

MARIA THERESA, the King's new consort, was the daughter of the King of Spain and Elizabeth of France, daughter of Henri IV. At the time of her marriage she had lost her mother, and it was King Philip, Anne of Austria's brother, who himself presented her to us at Saint Jean de Luz, where he signed the peace−contract. The Spanish monarch admired his nephew, the King, whose stalwart figure, comely face, and polished manners, were, indeed, well calculated to excite surprise.

Anne of Austria had said to him, "My brother, my one fear during your journey was lest your ailments and the hardships of travel should hinder you from getting back here again."

"Was such your thought, sister?" replied the good man. "I would willingly have come on foot, so as to behold with my own eyes the superb cavalier that you and I are going to give to my daughter."

After the oath of peace had been sworn upon the Gospels, there was a general presentation before the two Kings. Cantocarrero, the Castilian secretary of state, presented the Spanish notabilities, while Cardinal Mazarin, in his pontifical robes, presented the French. As he announced M. de Turenne, the old King looked at him repeatedly. "There's one," quoth he, "who has given me many a sleepless night."

M. de Turenne bowed respectfully, and both courts could perceive in his simple bearing his unaffected modesty.

On leaving Spain and the King, young princess was moved to tears. Next day she thought nothing of it at all. She was wholly engrossed by the possession of such a King, nor was she at any pains to hide her glee from us.

Of all her Court ladies I was the most youthful and, perhaps, the most conspicuous. At the outset the Queen showed a wish to take me into her confidence but it was the lady−in−waiting who would never consent to this.

When, at that lottery of the Cardinal's, I won the King's portrait, the Queen−mother called me into her closet and desired to know how such a thing could possibly have happened. I replied that, during the garter− incident, the two tickets had got mixed. "Ah, in that case," said the princess, "the occurrence was quite a natural one. So keep this portrait, since it has fallen into your hands; but, for God's sake, don't try and make yourself pleasant to my son; for you're only too fascinating as it is. Look at that little La Valliere, what a mess she has got into, and what chagrin she has caused my poor Maria Theresa!"

I replied to her Majesty that I would rather let myself be buried alive than ever imitate La Valliere, and I said so then because that was really what I thought.

The Queen−mother softened, and gave me her hand to kiss, now addressing me as "madame," and anon as "my daughter." A few days afterwards she wished to walk in the gallery with me, and said to me, "If God suffers me to live, I will make you lady−in−waiting; be sure of that."

Anne of Austria was a tall, fine, dark woman, with brown eyes, like those of the King. The Infanta, her niece, is a very pretty blonde, blue−eyed, but short in stature.

To her slightest words the Queen−mother gives sense and wit; her daughter−in−law's speeches and actions are of the simplest, most commonplace kind. Were it not for the King, she would pass her life in a dressing−gown, night−cap, and slippers. At Court ceremonies and on gala− days, she never appears to be in a good humour; everything seems to weigh her down, notably her diamonds.

However, she has no remarkable defect, and one may say that she is devoid of goodness, just as she is devoid of badness. When coming among us, she contrived to bring with her Molina, the daughter of her nurse, a sort of comedy confidante, who soon gave herself Court airs, and who managed to form a regular little Court of her own. Without her sanction nothing can be obtained of the Queen. My lady Molina is the great, the small, and the unique counsellor of the princess, and the King, like the others, remains submissive to her decisions and her inspection.

French cookery, by common consent, is held to be well−nigh perfect in its excellence; yet the Infanta could never get used to our dishes. The Senora Molina, well furnished with silver kitchen utensils, has a sort of private kitchen or scullery reserved for her own use, and there it is that the manufacture takes place of clove−scented chocolate, brown soups and gravies, stews redolent with garlic, capsicums, and nutmeg, and all that nauseous pastry in which the young Infanta revels.

Ever since La Valliere's lasting triumph, the Queen seems to have got it into her head that she is despised; and at table I have often heard her say, "They will help themselves to everything, and won't leave me anything."

I am not unjust, and I admit that a husband's public attachments are not exactly calculated to fill his legitimate consort with joy. But, fortunately for the Infanta, the King abounds in rectitude and good− nature. This very good−nature it is which prompts him to use all the consideration of which a noble nature is capable, and the more his amours give the Queen just cause for anxiety, the more does he redouble his kindness and consideration towards her. Of this she is sensible. Thus she acquiesces, and, as much through tenderness as social tact, she never reproaches or upbraids him with anything. Nor does the King scruple to admit that, to secure so good−natured a partner, it is well worth the trouble of going to fetch her from the other end of the world.

CHAPTER XII.

Madame de la Valliere Becomes Duchess.—Her Family is Resigned.— Her Children Recognised by the King.—Madame Colbert Their Governess.— The King's Passion Grows More Serious.—Love and Friendship.

Out of affection and respect for the Queen−mother, the King had until then sought to conceal the ardour of his attachment for Mademoiselle de la Valliere. It was after the six months of mourning that he shook off all restraint, showing that, like any private person, he felt himself master of his actions and his inclinations.

He gave the Vaujours estate to his mistress, after formally constituting it a duchy, and, owing to the two children of his duchy, Mademoiselle de la Valliere assumed the title of Duchess. What a fuss she made at this time! All that was styled disinterestedness, modesty. Not a bit of it. It was pusillanimity and a sense of servile fear. La Valliere would have liked to enjoy her handsome lover in the shade and security of mystery, without exposing herself to the satire of courtiers and of the public, and, above all, to the reproaches of her family and relatives, who nearly all were very devout.

On this head, however, she soon saw that such fears were exaggerated. The Marquise de Saint−Remy was but slightly scandalised at what was going on. She and the Marquis de Saint−Remy, her second husband, strictly proper though they were, came to greet their daughter when proclaimed duchess. And when, a few days afterwards, the King declared the rank of the two children to the whole of assembled Parliament, the two families of Saint−Remy and La Valliere offered congratulations to the Duchess, and received those of all Paris.

M. Colbert, who owed everything to the King, entrusted Madame Colbert with the education of the new prince and princess; they were brought up under the eyes of this statesman, who for everything found time and obligingness. The girl, lovely as love itself, took the name of Mademoiselle de Blois, while to her little brother was given the title of Comte de Vermandois.

It was just about this time that I noticed the beginning of the monarch's serious attachment for me. Till then it had been only playful badinage, good−humoured teasing, a sort of society play, in which the King was rehearsing his part as a lover. I was at length bound to admit that chaff of this sort might end in something serious, and his Majesty begged me to let him have La Valliere for some time longer.

I have already said that, while becoming her rival, I still remained her friend. Of this she had countless proofs, and when, at long intervals, I saw her again in her dismal retreat, her good−nature, unchanging as this was, caused her to receive and welcome me as one welcomes those one loves.

CHAPTER XIII.

First Vocation of Mademoiselle de la Valliere.—The King Surprises His Mistress.—She is Forced to Retire to a Convent.—The King Hastens to Take Her Back.—She Was Not Made for Court Life.—Her Farewell to the King.—Sacrifice.—The Abbe de Bossuet.

What I am now about to relate, I have from her own lips, nor am I the only one to whom she made such recitals and avowals.

Her father died when she was quite young, and, when dying, foresaw that his widow, being without fortune or constancy, would ere long marry again. To little Louise he was devotedly attached. Ardently embracing her, he addressed her thus:

"In losing me, my poor little Louise, you lose all. What little there is of my inheritance ought, undoubtedly, to belong to you; but I know your mother; she will dispose of it. If my relatives do not show the interest in you which your fatherless state should inspire, renounce this world soon, where, separated from your father, there exists for you but danger and misfortune. Two of my ancestors left their property to the nuns of Saint Bernard at Gomer−Fontaines, as they are perfectly well aware. Go to them in all confidence; they will receive you without a dowry even; it is their duty to do so. If, disregarding my last counsel, you go astray in the world, from the eternal abodes on high I will watch over you; I will appear to you, if God empower me to do so; and, at any rate, from time to time I will knock at the door of your heart to rouse you from your baleful slumber and draw your attention to the sweet paths of light that lead to God."

This speech of a dying father was graven upon the heart of a young girl both timid and sensitive. She never forgot it; and it needed the fierce, inexplicable passion which took possession of her soul to captivate her and carry her away so far.

Before becoming attached to the King, she opened out her heart to me with natural candour; and whenever in the country she observed the turrets or the spire of a monastery, she sighed, and I saw her beautiful blue eyes fill with tears.

She was maid of honour to the Princess Henrietta of England, and I filled a like office. Our two companions, being the most quick−witted, durst not talk about their love−affairs before Louise, so convinced were we of her modesty, and almost of her piety.

In spite of that, as she was gentle, intelligent, and well−bred, the Princess plainly preferred her to the other three. In temperament they suited each other to perfection.

The King frequently came to the Palais Royal, where the bright, pleasant conversation of his sister−in−law made amends for the inevitable boredom which one suffered when with the Queen.

Being brought in such close contact with the King, who in private life is irresistibly attractive, Mademoiselle de la Valliere conceived a violent passion for him; yet, owing to modesty or natural timidity, it was plain that she carefully sought to hide her secret. One fine night she and two young persons of her own age were seated under a large oak−tree in the grounds of Saint Germain. The Marquis de Wringhen, seeing them in the moonlight, said to the King, who was walking with him, "Let us turn aside, Sire, in this direction; yonder there are three solitary nymphs, who seem waiting for fairies or lovers." Then they noiselessly approached the tree that I have mentioned, and lost not a word of all the talk in which the fair ladies were engaged.

They were discussing the last ball at the chateau. One extolled the charms of the Marquis d'Alincour, son of Villeroi; the second mentioned another young nobleman; while the third frankly expressed herself in these terms:

"The Marquis d'Alincour and the Prince de Marcillac are most charming, no doubt, but, in all conscience, who could be interested in their merits when once the King appeared in their midst?

"Oh, oh!" cried the two others, laughing, "it's strange to hear you talk like that; so, one has to be a king in order to merit your attention?"

"His rank as king," replied Mademoiselle de la Valliere, "is not the astonishing part about him; I should have recognised it even in the simple dress of a herdsman."

The three chatterers then rose and went back to the chateau. Next day, the King, wholly occupied with what he had overheard on the previous evening, sat musing on a sofa at his sister−in−law's, when all at once the voice

of Mademoiselle de la Beaume−le−Blanc smote his ear and brought trouble to his heart. He saw her, noticed her melancholy look, thought her lovelier than the loveliest, and at once fell passionately in love.

They soon got to understand one another, yet for a long while merely communicated by means of notes at fetes, or during the performance of allegorical ballets and operettas, the airs in which sufficiently expressed the nature of such missives.

In order to put the Queen−mother off the scent and screen La Valliere, the King pretended to be in love with Mademoiselle de la Mothe− Houdancour, one of the Queen's maids of honour. He used to talk across to her out of one of the top−story windows, and even wished her to accept a present of diamonds. But Madame de Navailles, who took charge of the maids of honour, had gratings put over the top−story windows, and La Mothe−Houdancour was so chagrined by the Queen's icy manner towards her that she withdrew to a convent. As to the Duchesse de Navailles and her husband, they got rid of their charges and retired to their estates, where great wealth and freedom were their recompense after such pompous Court slavery.

The Queen−mother was still living; unlike her niece, she was not blindfold. The adventure of Mademoiselle de la Mothe−Houdancour seemed to her just what it actually was,—a subterfuge; as she surmised, it could only be La Valliere. Having discovered the name of her confessor, the Queen herself went in disguise to the Theatin Church, flung herself into the confessional where this man officiated, and promised him the sum of thirty thousand francs for their new church if he would help her to save the King.

The Theatin promised to do what the Queen thus earnestly desired, and when his fair penitent came to confess, he ordered her at once to break off her connection with the Court as with the world, and to shut herself up in a convent.

Mademoiselle de la Valliere shed tears, and sought to make certain remarks, but the confessor, a man of inflexible character, threatened her with eternal damnation, and he was obeyed.

Beside herself with grief, La Valliere left by another door, so as to avoid her servants and her coach. She recollected seeing a little convent of hospitalieres at Saint Cloud; she went thither on foot, and was cordially welcomed by these dames.

Next day it was noised abroad in the chateau that she had been carried off by order of the Queen−mother. During vespers the King seemed greatly agitated, and no sooner had the preacher ascended the pulpit than he rose and disappeared.

The confusion of the two Queens was manifest; no one paid any heed to the preacher; he scarcely knew where he was.

Meanwhile the conquering King had started upon his quest. Followed by a page and a carriage and pair, he first went to Chaillot, and then to Saint Cloud, where he rang at the entrance of the modest abode which harboured his friend. The nun at the turnstile answered him harshly, and denied him an audience. It is true, he only told her he was a cousin or a relative.

Seeing that this nun was devoid of sense and of humanity, he bethought himself of endeavouring to persuade the gardener, who lived close to the monastery. He slipped several gold pieces into his hand, and most politely requested him to go and tell the Lady Superior that he had come thither on behalf of the King.

The Lady Superior came down into the parlour, and recognising the King from a superb miniature, besought him of his grandeur to interest himself in this young lady of quality, devoid of means and fatherless, and consented, moreover, to give her up to him, since as King he so commanded.

Louise de la Beaume−le−Blanc obeyed the King, or in other words, the dictates of her own heart, imprudently embarking upon a career of passion, for which a temperament wholly different from hers was needed. It is not simple−minded maidens that one wants at Court to share the confidence of princes. No doubt natures of that sort—simple, disinterested souls are pleasant and agreeable to them, as therein they find contentment such as they greedily prize; but for these unsullied, romantic natures, disillusion, trickery alone is in store. And if Mademoiselle de la Beaumele−Blanc had listened to me, she might have turned matters to far better account; nor, after yielding up her youth to a monarch, would she have been obliged to end, her days in a prison.

The King no longer visited her as his mistress, but trusted and esteemed her as a friend and as the mother of his two pretty children.

One day, in the month of April, 1674, his Majesty, while in the gardens, received the following letter, which one of La Valliere's pages proffered him on bended knee:

SIRE:—To-day I am leaving forever this palace, whither the cruellest of fatalities summoned my youth and inexperience. Had I not met you, my heart would have loved seclusion, a laborious life, and my kinsfolk. An imperious inclination, which I could not conquer, gave me to you, and, simple, docile as I was by nature, I believed that my passion would always prove to me delicious, and that your love would never die. In this world nothing endures. My fond attachment has ceased to have any charm for you, and my heart is filled with dismay. This trial has come from God; of this my reason and my faith are convinced. God has felt compassion for my unspeakable grief. That which for long past I have suffered is greater than human force can bear; He is going to receive me into His home of mercy. He promises me both healing and peace.

In this theatre of pomp and perfidy I have only stayed until such a moment as my daughter and her youthful brother might more easily do without me. You will cherish them both; of that I have no doubt. Guide them, I beseech you, for the sake of your own glory and their well-being. May your watchful care sustain them, while their mother, humbled and prostrate in a cloister, shall commend them to Him who pardons all.

After my departure, show some kindness to those who were my servants and faithful domestics, and deign to take back the estates and residences which served to support me in my frivolous grandeur, and maintain the celebrity that I deplore.

Adieu, Sire! Think no more about me, lest such a feeling, to which my imagination might but all too readily lend itself, only beget links of sympathy in my heart which conscience and repentance would fain destroy.

If God call me to himself, young though yet I am, He will have granted my prayers; if He ordain me to live for a while longer in this desert of penitence, it will never compensate for the duration of my error, nor for the scandal of which I have been the cause.

Your subject from this time forth,

LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE.

The King had not been expecting so desperate a resolve as this, nor did he feel inclined to hinder her from making it. He left the Portuguese ambassador, who witnessed his agitation, and hastened to Madame de la Valliere's, who had left her apartments in the castle at daybreak. He shed tears, being kind of heart and convinced that a body so graceful and so delicate would never be able to resist the rigours and hardships of so terrible a life.

The Carmelite nuns of the Rue Saint Jacques loudly proclaimed this conversion, and in their vanity gladly received into their midst so modest and distinguished a victim, driven thither through sheer despair.

The ceremony which these dames call "taking the dress" attracted the entire Court to their church. The Queen herself desired to be present at so harrowing a spectacle, and by a curious contradiction, of which her capricious nature is capable, she shed floods of tears. La Valliere seemed gentler, lovelier, more modest and more seductive than ever. In the midst of the grief and tears which her courageous sacrifice provoked, she never uttered a single sigh, nor did she change colour once. Hers was a nature made for extremes; like Caesar, she said to herself, "Either Rome or nothing!"

The Abbe de Bossuet, who had been charged to preach the sermon of investiture, showed a good deal of wit by exhibiting none at all. The King must have felt indebted to him for such reserve. Into his discourse he had put mere vague commonplaces, which neither touch nor wound any one; honeyed anathemas such as these may even pass for compliments.

This prelate has won for himself a great name and great wealth by words. A proof of his cleverness exists in

his having lived in grandeur, opulence, and worldly happiness, while making people believe that he condemned such things.

CHAPTER XIV.

Story of the Queen−mother's Marriage with Cardinal Mazarin Published in Holland.

Despite the endeavours made by the ministers concerning the pamphlet or volume about which I am going to speak, neither they nor the King succeeded in quashing a sinister rumour and an opinion which had taken deep root among the people. Ever since this calumny it believes—and will always believe—in the twin brother of Louis XIV., suppressed, one knows not why, by his mother, just as one believes in fairy−tales and novels. This false rumour, invented by far−seeing folk, is that which has most affected the King. I will recount the manner in which it reached him.

Since the disorder and insolence of the Fronde, this prince did not like to reside in the capital; he soon invented pretexts for getting away from it. The chateau of the Tuileries, built by Catherine de Medici at some distance from the Louvre, was, really speaking, only a little country− house and Trianon. The King conceived the plan of uniting this structure with his palace at the Louvre, extending it on the Saint Roch side and also on the side of the river, and this being settled, the Louvre gallery would be carried on as far as the southern angle of the new building, so as to form one whole edifice, as it now appears.

While these alterations were in progress, the Court quitted the Louvre and the capital, and took up its permanent residence at Saint Germain.

Though ceasing to make a royal residence and home of Paris, his Majesty did not omit to pay occasional visits to the centre of the capital. He came incognito, sometimes on horseback, sometimes in a coach, and usually went about the streets on foot. On these occasions he was dressed carelessly, like any ordinary young man, and the better to ensure a complete disguise, he kept continually changing either the colour of his moustache or the colour and cut of his clothes. One evening, on leaving the opera, just as he was about to open his carriage door, a man approached him with a great air of mystery, and tendering a pamphlet, begged him to buy it. To get rid of the importunate fellow, his Majesty purchased the book, and never glanced at its contents until the following day.

Imagine his surprise and indignation! The following was the title of his purchase:

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"Secret and Circumstantial Account of the Marriage of Anne of
Austria, Queen of France, with the Abbe Jules Simon Mazarin,
Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church.  A new edition, carefully
revised.  Amsterdam."
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Grave and phlegmatic by nature, the King was always master of his feelings, a sign, this, of the noble−minded. He shut himself up in his apartment, so as to be quite alone, and hastily perused the libellous pamphlet.

According to the author of it, King Louis XIII., being weak and languid, and sapped moreover by secret poison, had not been able to beget any heirs. The Queen, who secretly was Mazarin's mistress, had had twins by the Abbe, only the prettier of the two being declared legitimate. The other twin had been entrusted to obscure teachers, who, when it was time, would give him up.

The princess, so the writer added, stung by qualms of conscience, had insisted upon having her guilty intimacy purified by the sacrament of marriage, to which the prime minister agreed. Then, mentioning the names of such and such persons as witnesses, the book stated that "this marriage was solemnised on a night in February, 1643, by Cardinal de Sainte−Suzanne, a brother and servile creature of Mazarin's."

"This explains," added the vile print, "the zeal, perseverance, and foolish ardour of the Queen Regent in defending her Italian against the just opposition of the nobles, against the formal charges of the magistrates, against the clamorous outcry, not only of Parisians, but of all France. This explains the indifference, or rather the firm resolve, on Mazarin's part; never to take orders, but to remain simply 'tonsure' or 'minore', —he who controls at least forty abbeys, as well as a bishopric.

"Look at the young monarch," it continued, "and consider how closely he resembles his Eminence, the same haughty glance; the same uncontrolled passion for pompous buildings, luxurious dress and equipages; the same

deference and devotion to the Queen−mother; the same independent customs, precepts, and laws; the same aversion for the Parisians; the same resentment against the honest folk of the Fronde."

This final phrase easily disclosed its origin; nor upon this point had his Majesty the slightest shadow of a doubt.

The same evening he sent full instructions to the lieutenant−general of police, and two days afterwards the nocturnal vendor of pamphlets found himself caught in a trap.

The King wished him to be brought to Saint Germain, so that he might identify him personally; and, as he pretended to be half−witted or an idiot, he was thrown half naked into a dungeon. His allowance of dry bread diminished day by day, at which he complained, and it was decided to make him undergo this grim ordeal.

Under the pressure of hunger and thirst, the prisoner at length made a confession, and mentioned a bookseller of the Quartier Latin, who, under the Fronde, had made his shop a meeting−place for rebels.

The bookseller, having been put in the Bastille, and upon the same diet as his salesman, stated the name of the Dutch printer who had published the pamphlet. They sought to extract more from him, and reduced his diet with such severity that he disclosed the entire secret.

This bookseller, used to a good square meal at home, found it impossible to tolerate the Bastille fare much longer. Bound hand and foot, at his final cross−examination he confessed that the work had emanated from the Cardinal de Retz, or certain of his party.

He was condemned to three years' imprisonment, and was obliged to sell his shop and retire to the provinces.

I once heard M. de Louvois tell this tale, and use it as a means of silencing those who regretted the absence of the exiled Cardinal− archbishop.

As to the libellous pamphlet itself, the clumsy nature of it was only too plain, for the King is no more like Mazarin than he is like the King of Ethiopia. On the contrary, one can easily distinguish in the general effect of his features a very close resemblance to King Louis XIII.

The libellous pamphlet stated that, on the occasion of the Infanta's first confinement, twins were born, and that the prettier of the two had been adopted, another blunder, this, of the grossest kind. A book of this sort could deceive only the working class and the Parisian lower orders, for folk about the Court, and even the bourgeoisie, know that it is impossible for a queen to be brought to bed in secret. Unfortunately for her, she has to comply with the most embarrassing rules of etiquette. She has to bear her final birth−pangs under an open canopy, surrounded at no great distance by all the princes of the blood; they are summoned thither, and they have this right so as to prevent all frauds, subterfuges, or impositions.

When the King found the seditious book in question, the Queen, his mother, was ill and in pain; every possible precaution was taken to prevent her from hearing the news, and the lieutenant−general of police, having informed the King that two−thirds of the edition had been seized close to the Archbishop's palace, orders were given to burn all these horrible books by night, in the presence of the Marquis de Beringhen, appointed commissioner on this occasion.

CHAPTER XV.

Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans Wishes to be Governor of a Province.—The King's Reply.—He Requires a Fauteuil for His Wife.—Another Excellent Answer of the King's.

In marrying Monsieur, the King consulted only his well−known generosity, and the richly equipped household which he granted to this prince should assuredly have made him satisfied and content. The Chevalier de Lorraine and the Chevalier de Remecourt, two pleasant and baneful vampires whom Monsieur could refuse nothing, put it into his head that he should make himself feared, so as to lead his Majesty on to greater concessions, which they were perfectly able to turn to their own enjoyment and profit.

Monsieur began by asking for the governorship of a province; in reply he was told that this could not be, seeing that such appointments were never given to French princes, brothers of the King.

Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans hastened to point out that Gaston, son of Henri IV., had had such a post, and that the Duc de Verneuil, natural son of the same Henri, had one at the present time.

"That is true," replied the King, "but from my youth upward you have always heard me condemn such innovations, and you cannot expect me to do the very thing that I have blamed others for doing. If ever you were minded, brother, to rebel against my authority, your first care would, undoubtedly, be to withdraw to your province, where, like Gaston, your uncle, you would have to raise troops and money. Pray do not weary me with indiscretions of this sort; and tell those people who influence you to give you better advice for the future."

Somewhat abashed, the Duc d'Orleans affirmed that what he had said and done was entirely of his own accord.

"Did you speak of your own accord," said the King, "when insisting upon being admitted to the privy council? Such a thing can no longer be allowed. You inconsiderately expressed two different opinions, and since you cannot control your tongue, which is most undoubtedly your own, I have no power over it,—I, to whom it does not want to belong."

Then Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans added that these two refusals would seem less harsh, less painful to him, if the King would grant a seat in his own apartments, and in those of the Queen, to the Princess, his wife, who was a king's daughter.

"No, that cannot be," replied his Majesty, "and pray do not insist upon it. It is not I who have established the present customs; they existed long before you or me. It is in your interest, brother, that the majesty of the throne should not be weakened or altered; and if, from Duc d'Orleans, you one day become King of France, I know you well enough to believe that you would never be lax in this matter. Before God, you and I are exactly the same as other creatures that live and breathe; before men we are seemingly extraordinary beings, greater, more refined, more perfect. The day that people, abandoning this respect and veneration which is the support and mainstay of monarchies,—the day that they regard us as their equals,—all the prestige of our position will be destroyed. Bereft of beings superior to the mass, who act as their leaders and supports, the laws will only be as so many black lines on white paper, and your armless chair and my fauteuil will be two pieces of furniture of the selfsame importance. Personally, I should like to gratify you in every respect, for the same blood flows in our veins, and we have loved each other from the cradle upwards. Ask of me things that are practicable, and you shall see that I will forestall your wishes. Personally, I daresay I care less about honorary distinctions than you do, and in Cabinet matters I am always considered to be simpler and more easy to deal with than such and such a one. One word more, and I have done. I will nominate you to the governorship of any province you choose, if you will now consent in writing to let proceedings be taken against you, just as against any ordinary gentleman, in case there should be sedition in your province, or any kind of disorder during your administration."

Hereupon young Philippe began to smile, and he begged the King to embrace him.

CHAPTER XVI.

Arms and Livery of Madame de Montespan.—Duchess or Princess.—Fresh Scandal Caused by the Marquis.—The Rue Saint Honore Affair.—M. de Ronancour.—Separation of Body and Estate.

When leaving, despite himself, for the provinces, M. de Montespan wrote me a letter full of bitter insults, in which he ordered me to give up his coat−of−arms, his livery, and even his name.

This letter I showed to the King. For a while he was lost in thought, as usual on such occasions, and then he said to me:

"There's nothing extraordinary about the fellow's livery. Put your servants into pale orange with silver lace. Assume your old crest of Mortemart, and as regards name, I will buy you an estate with a pretty title."

"But I don't like pale orange," I instantly replied; "if I may, I should like to choose dark blue, and gold lace, and as regards crest, I cannot adopt my father's crest, except in lozenge form, which could not seriously be done. As it is your gracious intention to give me the name of an estate, give me (for to you everything is easy) a duchy like La Valliere, or, better still, a principality."

The King smiled, and answered, "It shall be done, madame, as you wish."

The very, next day I went into Paris to acquaint my, lawyer with my intentions. Several magnificent estates were just then in the market, but only marquisates, counties, or baronies! Nothing illustrious, nothing remarkable! Duhamel assured me that the estate of Chabrillant, belonging to a spendthrift, was up for sale.

"That," said he, "is a sonorous name, the brilliant renown of which would only be enhanced by the title of princess."

Duhamel promised to see all his colleagues in this matter, and to find me what I wanted without delay.

I quitted Paris without having met or recognised anybody, when, about twenty paces at the most beyond the Porte Saint Honor, certain sergeants or officials of some sort roughly stopped my carriage and seized my horses' bridles "in the King's name."

"In the King's name?" I cried, showing myself at the coach door.

"Insolent fellows! How dare you thus take the King's name in vain?" At the same time I told my coachman to whip up his horses with the reins and to drive over these vagabonds. At a word from me the three footmen jumped down and did their duty by dealing out lusty thwacks to the sergeants. A crowd collected, and townsfolk and passers−by joined in the fray.

A tall, fine−looking man, wrapped in a dressing−gown, surveyed the tumult like a philosopher from his balcony overhead. I bowed graciously to him and besought him to come down. He came, and in sonorous accents exclaimed:

"Ho, there! serving−men of my lady, stop fighting, will you? And pray, sergeants, what is your business?"

"It is a disgrace," cried they all, as with one breath. "Madame lets her scoundrelly footmen murder us, despite the name of his Majesty, which we were careful to utter at the outset of things. Madame is a person (as everybody in France now knows) who is in open revolt against her husband; she has deserted him in order to cohabit publicly with some one else. Her husband claims his coach, with his own crest and armorial bearings thereon, and we are here for the purpose of carrying out the order of one of the judges of the High Court."

"If that be so," replied the man in the dressing−gown, "I have no objection to offer, and though madame is loveliness itself, she must suffer me to pity her, and I have the honour of saluting her."

So saying, he made me a bow and left me, without help of any sort, in the midst of this crazy rabble.

I was inconsolable. My coachman, the best fellow in the world, called out to him from the top of his bog, "Monsieur, pray procure help for my mistress,—for Madame la Marquise de Montespan."

No sooner had he uttered these words than the gentleman came back again, while, among the lookers−on, some hissing was heard. He raised both hands with an air of authority, and speaking with quite incredible vehemence and fire, he successfully harangued the crowd.

"Madame does not refuse to comply with the requirements of justice," he added firmly; "but madame, a member of the Queen's household, is returning to Versailles, and cannot go thither on foot, or in some tumbledown vehicle. So I must beg these constables or sergeants (no matter which) to defer their arrest until

to−morrow, and to accept me as surety. The French people is the friend of fair ladies; and true Parisians are incapable of harming or of persecuting aught that is gracious and beautiful."

All those present, who at first had hissed, replied to this speech by cries of "Bravo!" One of my men, who had been wounded in the scuffle, had his hand all bloody. A young woman brought some lavender−water, and bound up the wound with her white handkerchief, amid loud applause from the crowd, while I bowed my acknowledgments and thanks.

The King listened with interest to the account of the adventure that I have just described, and wished to know the name of the worthy man who had acted as my support and protector. His name was De Tarcy−Ronancour. The King granted him a pension of six thousand francs, and gave the Abbey of Bauvoir to his daughter.

As for me, I kept insisting with might and main for a separation of body and estate, which alone could put an end to all my anxiety. When a decree for such separation was pronounced at the Chatelet, and registered according to the rules, I set about arranging an appanage which, from the very first day, had seemed to me absolutely necessary for my position.

As ill−luck would have it, the judges left me the name of Montespan, which to my husband was so irksome, and to myself also; and the King, despite repeated promises, never relieved me of a name that it was very difficult to bear.