

A BEAU SABREUR

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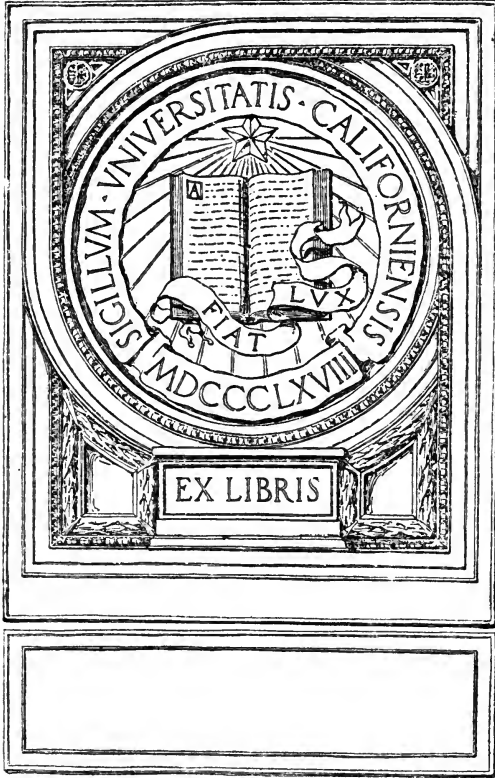
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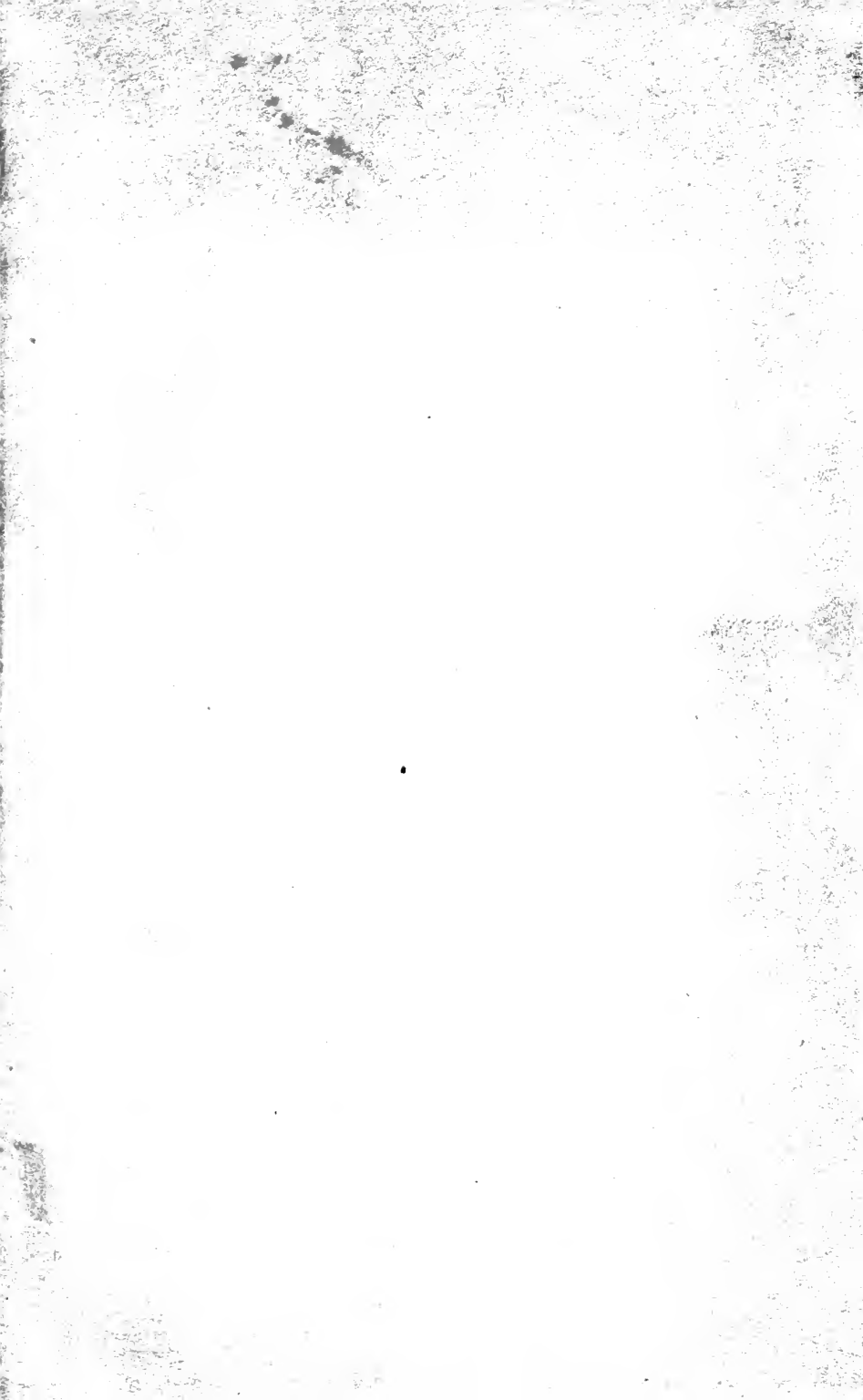
MAURICE DE SAXE, MARSHAL OF FRANCE



W · R · H · TROWBRIDGE



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A BEAU SABREUR

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TO VINO
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*Maurice, Comte de Saxe, Marshal of France.
(After the portrait by La Tour in the Dresden Gallery).*

A BEAU SABREUR

MAURICE DE SAXE, MARSHAL
OF FRANCE: HIS LOVES, HIS
LAURELS, AND HIS TIMES

1696—1750

BY

W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE

||
AUTHOR OF

“SEVEN SPLENDID SINNERS,” “MIRABEAU, THE DEMIGOD,”

ETC., ETC.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

T. FISHER UNWIN

LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE

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“How kind was the Devil to his Saxe ; and flew away with him in rose-pink, while it was still time ! . . . The Devil (I am afraid it was he, though clad in roseate effulgence, and melodious exceedingly) carried him home on those kind terms, as from a Universe all in Opera.”

CARLYLE : *Frederick the Great.*



TO

LUCIEN MOREL BEY

PREFACE

A TASTE for literary exhumations is one of the distinctive features of the literature of the period. Nothing, to judge from the number of biographies and memoirs that are constantly being published, seems to afford the reading public more entertainment than to shake the dust from old parchments and the private correspondence of the famous dead, to sit down, so to speak, on the threshold of a vanished age and peer at the passions, morals, and customs of times that are no more. Thanks to the indefatigable efforts to satisfy the craving for historical and psychological revelations, many new and interesting facts have been unearthed, and not a few personalities, formerly misunderstood or despised, have been placed on pedestals that ignorance or malice had hitherto denied them; while others have, in their turn, been removed from the niches they had long and undeservingly occupied. How many kings and statesmen, cardinals and soldiers, philosophers and adventurers have been resurrected from the vast cemetery of History in which their memory is buried, and paraded for our edification! And what swarms of women are likewise continually flitting past us! Women of all

ranks and descriptions: serious and chaste, frivolous and erring; saintly paragons in royal mantles, and adorable sinners *en déshabillé*.

To swell the lists of this procession—for such, needless to say, is the *raison d'être* of this book—I have selected the once glorious Maurice de Saxe. I say once glorious, for to how many is he more than a name to-day?

Nevertheless, in these latter days, when men are so busy blowing the bubble—Reputation—it may, perhaps, be worth our while to glance at a man who, in the not very remote past, was engaged in the same occupation to a notable degree, and without meditating on the fickleness of that old flirt, the World, realise somewhat more fully than we are wont how extremely fragile is Fame, and how susceptible to blight is the laurel. For posterity seldom fails to discount its legacy of great names, and not a few of the demigods of to-day resemble the Potsdam giants.

It is not, however, with the career of Saxe, deemed once an immortal captain of the eighteenth century, that we need concern ourselves any more. The echo of the campaigns in which he played so shining a part has long since been stilled. With all their loud-sounding fame the wars of the old *régime* always ended in a general “as you were,” and the mere *personal* glory of a Marlborough, a Eugene, or a Saxe, is all that appears in the credit columns of national accounts. A King of Prussia alone *did* anything that we can see and appreciate to-day, and him men call The Great.

But though oblivion has overtaken the glory of the Maréchal de Saxe, Maurice de Saxe, adventurer, soldier of fortune, *bâtard de roi*, he is still a figure to claim attention and excite interest.

The romance of his extraordinary life, the fascination of his personality, which from first to last was paramount over men and things, was due entirely to the irregularity of his birth. It has been observed with reason that men who have been brought into the world with a total disregard of the laws of etiquette pertaining to the ceremony of marriage, usually continue to go through life in a similar audacious and provocative fashion. If this observation be true of the humblest of their class what will its force not be when it is a question of the love-child of a king? Separated by an abyss from the throne they can almost touch; related by the tie of blood to the sovereign on whose arms, which they wear, the bar sinister is stamped like the brand of Cain; and fully conscious of the superior courage, pride, and abilities with which they are usually endowed, what wonder that they should be the embodiment of the ambition and disorder in which they were begotten?

In the early Iron Ages of Europe, when the race was really won by the strongest, when the "men who could" were really Kings or Canning-men, these illegitimate scions of royalty played very conspicuous *rolés*. Not a nation but has been compelled to bend heart or knee, or both, to these magnificent pariahs. Not a nation but has been forced to niche in the Valhalla of its history the

monuments which this race of rebels carved out of their careers and inscribed with their deeds. Sometimes they bridged the abyss and seized the throne, like William the Conqueror or Henry of Trastamara, from whom descended Isabella of Castille. Often, like Manfred and Monmouth, sword in hand and distracted with ambition, they plunged headlong into the abyss they had ventured to leap. Again, knight-errants, like Don John of Austria, or brigands, like Cæsar Borgia, they roamed restlessly in quest of glory, love, and loot, till stung to death by the Nessus'-poison of their royal livery.

It was with Maurice de Saxe that the race of these Cupidons of the sceptre, of these Ishmaels of the throne, came to an end. In the sense in which Fleury is termed the Last of the Cardinals, and Richelieu the Last of the Dukes, so the Comte de Saxe may be described as the Last of the Bastards.

Never since he died in the heyday of the *ancien régime* has the bar sinister cut any figure in the world. But even in Saxe's time, though the condition of Europe still offered heroic opportunities to the ambitious *bâtard de roi*, the character of the tribe had changed. In the march of civilisation the discontent and defiance of the formidable rebels of ruder ages had gradually assumed a milder form of expression. By the eighteenth century the *condottiere* had dwindled into a *beau sabreur*. It was the age of the grand adventurer, an heroic being compared to the creatures to whom this term is applied to-day. For before the French Revolution arrived to throw open every profession

to everybody, and so overcrowd and cheapen all, the career of adventurer was closed to all but a few reckless darlings of the devil, to whom fortune was an adventure to be sought at a court, on a battlefield, or in a boudoir. For money they had a fine aristocratic contempt; it represented to them merely a banquet, a *fête*, or a gambling-party. They had no *bourgeois* greed of gain, no knave's instinct to trick or to cheat. There was, in fine, nothing sordid, commonplace, or low in the old adventurers. Absolutely without morals they were ready to protect innocence in distress, like Casanova, or to bid you keep both your money and your life, like the brigand Cartouche. At once vicious and generous, they might be described as the wayward paladins of a vanished chivalry.

Saxe, as I have said, was not only the last, but the most picturesque of this line of *âmes damnées*. Born in a fold of the royal mantle, he had, like all his sinister caste, the *flair* of the purple. Throughout his life he sought a kingdom—in Courland, where he found it only to lose it again, in Corsica, in Madagascar, in the West Indies, in the virgin forests of America. Whether in the ranks of the armies in which he first learnt the science of war, or at Prague and Fontenoy in the height of his fame, it was not only the love of glory that inspired his astonishing audacity and courage, but the dream of a throne that was reserved for him in some corner of the world. It haunted him, too, amid the debaucheries of the Regency, and in the boudoirs of his mistresses. Everything connected

with him bore the stamp of this feverish dream, even the title of his highly technical book on warfare, justly regarded as the "breviary of a commander-in-chief" and written in thirteen nights, is significant. He called it "Mes Rêveries." In fine, ever dreaming, Maurice de Saxe, with his hairbreadth escapes, his tireless energy, his boundless daring, his exaggerated courage, and his indefatigable eroticism, was himself, so to speak, a dream. The dream of all the rebellious royal bastards that had gone before him, to whom—like the mirage of Glory so often seen by painted armies on painted battlefields—there had come as they slept in their graves on the eve of the total extinction of the world to which they belonged, a vision of the genius of their race.

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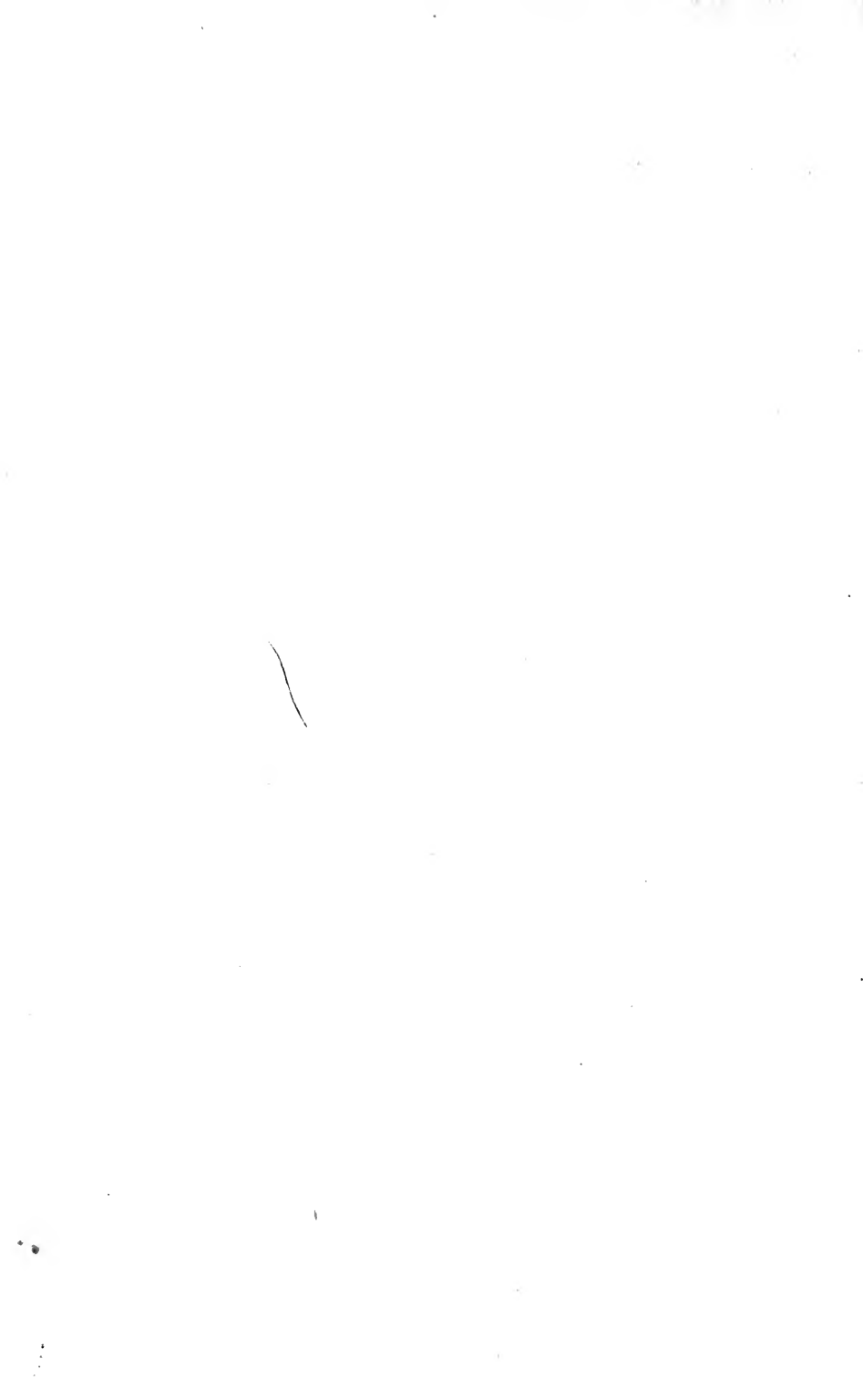
As it has been my principal object in relating the romantic history of this extraordinary man to attempt to re-create his personality and the atmosphere of his times, I have naturally adopted the method which seems to me best suited to my purpose. I have, accordingly, cast the material I have carefully collected from an extensive bibliography into an autobiographical form. In other words, instead of telling the story in the third person, I have made Saxe, so to speak, relate his own story. This method of treating the subject, though it may appear novel, has many precedents to justify it. In the case of certain minor characters in history like Maurice de Saxe, whose claim to attention rests

entirely on their personality and their adventures, it is, perhaps, the only way to pourtray them. Its success, of course, depends upon the skill of the writer. The lives of Cardinal Dubois and the Maréchal de Richelieu, written in the form of memoirs, are masterpieces of this particular style of biography. Needless to say, the art displayed by the authors of these works is so superior to my feeble attempt to imitate it as to make any comparison ridiculous. The present book makes no claim to be regarded as anything but a veracious and popular record of Saxe's career.

In regard to the illustrations, I had hoped to include in the list pictures of Saxe's wife and the Duchesse de Bouillon. But though both these ladies were painted, probably more than once, and the latter very likely by Nattier or Coypel, I regret to state that all my efforts to trace their portraits—if, indeed, they still exist, which is extremely doubtful—have proved ineffectual.

W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE.

LONDON, *June*, 1909.



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A BEAU SABREUR

CHAPTER I

THE KÖNIGSMARCKS

I

“CRITICS,” observed the Chevalier de Gramont once, “are those *canaille* who only open a book to find fault with it.”

Accordingly, when he desired to record in a printed form the experiences of his checkered career, being for one who possessed so graceful a wit, very clumsy with a pen, he confided the task to his celebrated brother-in-law. But I, whose life has been far more checkered and worthy of record than M. de Gramont’s, have not the good fortune to possess a Hamilton to prevent the critics from finding in the printed memoir of my life anything but amusement. Nor, I confess, if I had, would I entrust to another a pen which I am only too conscious I use like a tyro. For difficulties have

always had a peculiar fascination for me, and my whole life has chiefly been employed in surmounting them. From a child danger had but to present itself for me to rush blindly into it. And, perhaps, not the least formidable of the risks I have taken is when now I metaphorically beat my sword into a pen, an implement which soldiers in times of peace so often handle like a ploughshare.

The risk to which I allude is, of course, ridicule. It is a risk from which the most dauntless spirit may be excused from recoiling, like the great Condé, who, when it was suggested that he should follow the example of the Cardinal de Retz and plant a memoir of the Fronde in the flower-beds of literature, replied, "Chacun à son métier, je ne suis pas le jardinier des muses."

But I have faced ridicule too often, as will be seen, to fear it now. Besides, how should I, of whose audacity at least there has never been any question, dread the bite of the critic? Europe is, for the moment, at peace, and France has no employment for my sword. I am idle, and idleness has ever been irksome to me. So while waiting for the cannon to roar again, which is to me, as it was to Charles XII., the sort of music I like the best, I intend to amuse myself by twining the myrtle amid my laurels. Let the critics find fault if they wish with the result, I defy them not to find entertainment in the record of my life—a record in which I shall neither seek to enhance virtues that have won me the esteem of my friends, nor to palliate the vices that have inspired the reproaches and

calumnies of my enemies. I shall merely tell the truth.

So much by way of preface.

I am, as everybody knows, the son of the Countess Aurora von Königsmarck and Augustus the Strong. The likeness I bear to the latter is so striking that there has not been the least doubt as to my paternity—an advantage that a *bâtard de roi* does not always possess over his more fortunately born brothers and sisters. But though a true son of my father, my character so closely resembles that of my mother's wild and wayward kindred, whose most conspicuous traits I have inherited, that some account of my maternal antecedents will afford the most fitting introduction to myself.

The Königsmarcks were heroes of whom the possession is equally disputed by history and romance. They were typical adventurers of the seventeenth century, such as the pencil of Callot has immortalised, men of the race of the Buckinghams and Lauzuns, presumptuous and passionate, light-hearted and cynical, brave and daring to the last degree. From Stockholm to Madrid, from London to Athens, memories of their romantic careers are scattered broadcast along all the high-ways of the history of their times. Indeed, so far afield did they wander in the course of their tempestuous lives, it is impossible having met them once to avoid coming across them again. Then suddenly, after raising such a dust and smoke, this

proud and valorous race disappeared without leaving a trace!

Old Marshal Königsmarck may be regarded as the real founder of the family. It was he who, in the time of the Thirty Years' War, first raised the Königsmarcks out of the respectable insignificance in which they had been sunk for I know not how many centuries in Brandenburg, and, having, when still young, forsaken the service of the House of Hapsburg for that of Gustavus Adolphus, converted them from a German into a Swedish family.

I doubt if any tribune of morality before which this hero might be arraigned would acquit him. In war he was an abominable pillager, a bravo in quest of loot, who combined the cunning and knavery of a card-sharper with the brutality of a *soudard*. Of that bold and romantic dash, scented with the perfume of chivalry, which was the distinctive mark of the later Königsmarcks, you will find not a trace in him. Sword and torch in hand he sabred and sacked through all the brawl and tumult of the Thirty Years' War. You would have said that the scene and the actor were specially created for one another. Yet without knowing anything of the art of war or possessing the least military capacity he managed to conquer by his sheer audacity and soldier's courage a place beside the Wrangels, the Banners, the Horns, those generals whom Sweden honoured most.

As a reward for his services Queen Christina, that strange daughter and successor of the great



MARSHAL KÖNIGSMARCK.

(From an old German print.)

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ANNOUNCED

Gustavus Adolphus, made him Governor of the Principality of Werden and the Duchy of Bremen—German territories then in the possession of Sweden. At Stade he built a splendid marble palace, which he called Agathenburg, after his wife ; and, incredible as it may seem, this vandal who had razed the churches and demolished the monuments of Prague became a patron of literature and art !

The favour of the Court of Stockholm, however, was not so easily won. The Swedes could not forgive a foreigner such an excess of fortune. Jealousy caballed against him. But the old Marshal was not to be caught in the meshes of intrigue, and by bribes and threats continued to preserve his place at Court. Little by little the slander and hatred that pursued him slackened their pace as his hastened to the tomb, till finally his cruelties and crimes were forgotten, and when he died a marble mausoleum raised itself above his grave in the usual way, recording for the edification of posterity the list of his honours, his virtues, and his glories.

This superb bandit left three sons, of whom the youngest, Otho, is the most memorable. Being a younger son he was obliged—though in his case the obligation by no means went against the grain—to carry his sword abroad for a livelihood. He found plenty of employment for it, which, like a true Königsmarck, he coloured with romance wherever he went. After many adventures he finally joined the Venetian service, and received from the Doge Cornaro the command of the

Venetian army in one of the Republic's everlasting wars with the Turks. Having taken Corinth and made himself master of a part of the Morea, the intrepid Conismarco, as the Venetians called him, proposed to lay siege to Athens, which no other Venetian general had dared to do. His army, accordingly, took up their position in a wood of olives near the city, while the Turks from the height of their impregnable citadel contemplated them with contempt.

Now this citadel of the Ottomans was no other than the world-famous Parthenon, still in those days, in spite of many vicissitudes, preserving all the primitive splendour of its classical beauty. But Otho cared nothing for the arts. In this monument, respected by the ages, he merely saw, like the true son of the *soudard* of the Thirty Years' War, a powder magazine which it was necessary to blow up, and it was this Swedish iconoclast who directed the sacriligious bombardment that destroyed the divine temple. The old Marshal had sacked Prague; Otho laid the Parthenon in ruins!

But Art had her revenge. Otho shortly afterwards contracted a fever at the siege of Negrepont, of which he died. His wife, who accompanied him wherever he went, carried his body back to Stade and interred it in the family vault there.

Of Otho's two elder brothers, the younger was killed in boyhood by a fall from a horse. The other, Conrad, the head of the family, was one of the distinguished mediocrities of his time, and

fell into the oblivion of a respectable grave at the siege of Bonn, after a life spent chiefly in increasing the wealth and honours he had inherited from his father. The lives of his four children, however—Charles, Philip, Wilhelmina, and Aurora—more than made amends for the insignificance of his, and very successfully kept alive the family traditions.

At eighteen Charles, finding Sweden too small a cage for the lion in him, broke the bars and escaped into the world. Charles von Königsmarck is the real hero of the family. Proceeding to Paris, the Mecca of every ambitious vagabond, he joined his uncle Otho, who was vigorously pursuing his pleasure there while waiting for something to turn up. There were many old ladies, once beauties of the Court of Louis Quatorze, in whose withered hearts memories of the dashing Charles were still green, when I in my turn alighted on Paris and Versailles many years later.

When his restless spirit had wearied, as it soon did, of the delights of the French Court, Charles found occupation of the sort he liked best under the Knights of Malta. Fiery and reckless, dashing, daring, and brave, Königsmarck, in a word, the worthy Chevaliers of the Cross, whose task of policing the Mediterranean the abominable piracy of the Turks made difficult, found in him a valuable recruit.

A volume of romance could be made out of the anecdotes of his exploits. Let me cite a couple.

One day a Saracen ship, after having sunk a

*bad
sentence*

Christian sail, was proceeding slowly towards Tangiers with the booty it had captured. The captives, laden in chains, had been thrown pell-mell into the hold ; those for whom no more room could be found lay beside the women on deck exposed to the terrible heat of the sun and the insults of the conquerors. The sea was dead calm ; the poor captives exhausted by hunger and thirst died like flies, and to throw overboard the bodies of those who had given up the ghost seemed to be the sole occupation of the crew. All at once in the far distance a white speck is visible. The cross of Malta appears on the horizon. Gradually this emblem, inspiring at once hope and terror, grows larger, is multiplied, approaches ; and Christians and Turks alike recognise—with what different emotions !—the galleys of the Order.

One having arrived alongside, a knight with drawn sword hastens to board the pirate ship. The Turks shove off his galley with their iron poles, and try to drive him into the sea, while he, seizing a rope in his left hand, fences with his right against a troop of brigands. In the midst of this tumult one of the latter, more cunning than the rest, cuts the rope with the end of his yatagan, and behold our hero in the sea. As he is encased in heavy armour all believe he must drown. Bah ! In the twinkling of an eye he reappears at the other end of the pirate brig, and falls upon the Turks lock, stock, and barrel. Attacked from behind by what in the surprise of the moment they believe to be a numerous enemy, the courage of the Mussulmans

falters, and before they can recover from their panic they are surrounded on all sides by the Christian galleys.

But the pirates, seeing themselves lost, prefer to perish by their own hands. The powder is fired, and the Saracen vessel leaps into the air with a frightful roar. How the intrepid knight, thus launched into space by this terrific projectile, fell from the sky into the sea and was picked up living, God only knows !

On another occasion Charles von Königsmarck happened to arrive at Tangiers, which was besieged and almost reduced by the Moors, at the very moment the Christian garrison he had come to relieve was making a desperate sortie.

To seize the first horse that came to hand and plunge into the *melée* is for him a matter of a moment. Between the furious glare of the sun and whirlwinds of blinding dust it is almost impossible to distinguish friends from foes, and in the excitement of the battle young Königsmarck finds himself carried into the midst of the Moors. Surrounded and overwhelmed by numbers he defends himself like a lion. His horse having been killed under him, his only means of rejoining his friends, who are but twenty yards away, was his sword. With it he begins to hew a passage through the human wall. Whereupon his friends, perceiving him as he advances with difficulty along this corpse-paved road, shout :

“ Courage, a minute more and we are with you ! ”

At these words his exhausted strength revives,

the wall of flesh shivers asunder, and through the breach Königsmarck passes triumphant.

To such prodigies of valour this hero added no less remarkable feats of gallantry. Having tired of Turk-baiting, he left Malta and went in quest of fresh adventures—to Rome, to Florence, to Venice, then the home of every pleasure. In this classic land of carnivals and stilettoes, in this city of palaces and lagoons, where Melpomene and Harlequin arm-in-arm dance an eternal masquerade, the brilliant young Swede could not fail to pay his tribute to youth, beauty, and love. It was here that he met the Countess of Southampton, that courageous *amoureuse* who forsook fortune and family to follow him about the world disguised as a page.

This incident afforded the French Court an opportunity to ridicule the puritanical hypocrisy of the English, who are wont to pride themselves on their morals, which they claim to be superior to those of other nations.

Madame, the curious German mother of the Regent d'Orléans, so famous for her *sauer-kraut* and her letters, for both of which her passion was gluttonous, was ever afterwards convinced that it was in the nature of English ladies to follow their lovers.

“It was,” she said to me once, when talking on this subject, “an English lady who followed your uncle, Count Königsmarck, disguised as a page. She was with him at Chambord, and since for lack of room she could not be lodged in the palace he



CHARLES VON KÖNIGSMARCK.

To face page 26.]

NO. 1111
ANGONIA

erected a tent for her in the park. He related his adventure to me one day while we were hunting. It made me curious to see the *soi-disant* page. I have never seen a more beautiful face. Picture the loveliest eyes, a charming mouth, and immense quantities of very fine black hair which fell in great curls on her shoulders. She smiled on seeing me, doubtless guessing that I knew her secret. Later Count Königsmarck went to Italy, and with him, of course, the page. One morning as he was leaving some village inn, where he had passed the night, for a stroll, the inn-keeper ran after him, crying:

“Come quickly, Monsieur, *votre page accouche!*”

“In fact, the page had presented him with a daughter. He placed the mother and child in a convent in Paris, and as long as he lived took the greatest care of them. But he died in the Morea, and the faithful page did not long survive him.”

Charles von Königsmarck's devotion to his “page,” however, did not prevent him from indulging in other amorous adventures. One of them very nearly cost him his life.

Having refused a commission which Louis XIV., who knew the value of a brave man, had offered him, solely because France happened to be at peace at the time—he was not the fellow to dangle his sword in a messroom—and having nothing better to do, he went to London to sample the pleasures of the Court of Whitehall. Here he found Lady Southampton's brothers, cousins, and a numerous collateral kindred waiting to welcome

him. Their reception was of a sort that could not fail to appeal to him. Duels rained upon him, and as his sword liked nothing so much as to flash in the sun he drew it willingly.

But though his enemies were unable to kill him by steel or poison—both of which they tried—they would have succeeded, but for Charles II., in slipping a hangman's halter round his neck. For discovering that the richest heiress in Great Britain, the Lady Elizabeth Percy, was anxious for him to carry her off, he could devise no other means than to hire three bravos to murder her husband, the celebrated Tom Thynne of Ten Thousand. Owing, however, to some misadventure, though Tom got killed, and buried in Westminster Abbey, the capture of the lady was not effected; and Königs-marck only escaped the gallows through the timely intervention, as I have said, of King Charles. Having made England too hot to hold him, he resolved to join his uncle Otho, who was now in command of the Venetian army in the Morea, where shortly afterwards he died. The fever in which his adventurous existence ended tamely, like Otho's, deprived the theatre of Europe of one of its most brilliant actors, the palaces of kings of one of their most fascinating figures, and filled I know not how many boudoirs and alcoves with regrets. He was at the time of his death only twenty-six.

II

The career of his brother Philip, which began on the close of his, was still more memorable.

Philip von Königsmarck was one of the handsomest men of his time. It is impossible to imagine any one more fascinating, more *débonnaire*, more intelligent, than this young Swedish noble with his black, brilliant eyes, his thick dark hair curling and waving off a straight white bow, his voluptuous mouth, and a suggestion of mockery and tenderness stamped on every line of his face. The beauty of his person, the elegance of his manners, had something almost feminine in them. His grandfather, the Marshal, Otho, and even Charles, would have smiled with pity at the sight of the rapier of the courtier replacing in his white hands the torch and the sabre theirs were wont to hold. But Philip was none the less a true Königsmarck for all his refinement. Though his adventures were restricted to affairs of the heart, they, too, were stamped with the audacity and reckless courage, the passion and fire of his race.

Young, rich by the deaths of his father and brother, polished by travel and the experience of many Courts, he arrived one day at that of Hanover. The gaiety of the Electoral Court was at this time well-nigh extinguished by the bitter rivalry that reigned between the mistress of the Elector and the wife of his son and heir, the unfortunate Sophia Dorothea. The former was the daughter of a certain Count von Meisenberg, a ruined vagabond, who, in the hope of mending his broken fortune, had offered her respectively to the Kings of France and England. But Madame de Montespan and the Duchess of Portsmouth had beset the

pair with so many perils that they were glad enough to return to Germany, where the charms of the fair Elizabeth von Meisenberg finally managed to captivate the Elector Ernest Augustus of Hanover. This prince had travelled extensively, and as he particularly plumed himself on imitating Louis XIV., whose manners and morals were alike regulated by etiquette, he found without any difficulty among his courtiers a Count von Platen, who readily consented to marry the favourite in order that she might become his master's mistress as decorously as possible.

The Countess von Platen had been supreme at the Electoral Court for some years when the Electoral Prince, who afterwards became George I. of Great Britain, made his ill-starred marriage with his cousin Sophia Dorothea of Zell. From the very start each of these women recognised her mortal enemy in the other, and a war waged between them, incessant, revengeful, and secret. You would have said it was the struggle of Fredegonde and Brunehault in the Niebelungen over again. It required but a spark to set this smouldering conflagration ablaze, and destiny blew it to Hanover in the person of Philip von Königsmarck.

From his arrival this *beau sabreur* drew all hearts after him, the Platen's and the Princess's alike. The youth, beauty, and unhappiness of Sophia Dorothea were well calculated to excite the sympathy of Königsmarck. Neglected and ill-treated by her husband, who was now, to her great relief absent, snubbed, and despised by the haughty



SOPHIA DOROTHEA.

(From an old print.)

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TO THE
ASSEMBLY

old Electress Sophia, who could never forgive her for being the daughter of the former French mistress of the Duke of Zell, ignored by the whole of the Electoral Court, and insulted daily by the Countess von Platen, the high-spirited Princess gave herself freely and gladly to the happiness of loving and being loved.

But Madame von Platen, whose proffered favours had been rebuffed by the gallant Swede, was quick to suspect the reason. With this woman to suspect was to detect. She was a Montespan, with the heart of a Medea and the temperament of a Phèdre. Had her lot fallen at Versailles or Whitehall her name would have made a great noise in the world; but her fame is alone saved from being buried amid the forgotten crimes and intrigues of a petty Court by the undying memory of the drama of the fourteenth-century Florentine type, in which, so to speak, she played the part of a Malatesta to another Paolo and Francesca.

To save his mistress from the insults and indignities to which their secret and suspected understanding exposed her, Königsmarck decided to leave Hanover. He went to Dresden, but his infatuation was so great that after a short absence he returned to Hanover with the object, it is believed, of eloping with the Princess. This plan, however, if indeed it was his plan, for everything connected with him after his return is shrouded in mystery, was frustrated by his sudden and complete disappearance. The last time he was seen alive was on the night of July 1, 1694.

Romance, of course, did not delay to weave itself around Philip von Königsmarck's last moments on earth, for whatever be the truth concerning his mysterious disappearance, there can be no doubt that he was murdered, and foully murdered. The various rumours in circulation at the time, while differing in a few unimportant details, such as to what was done with the body of the murdered man, all agreed in the main, and were substantiated by a document pertaining to be the deathbed confession of one of the assassins, a certain Bussmann, which some years later was discovered, or was said to have been discovered, among the papers of the late Hanoverian Court Chaplain Kramer. This reputed confession shaped itself in some such fashion as the following:—

“The Countess von Platen,” said Bussmann, “discovered that the Princess was in the habit of receiving her lover after his return from Dresden every night in secret. A letter from the Princess arranging one of these meetings having fallen into her hands, she showed it to the Elector, whereby she excited his anger against the Swede to the pitch of obtaining from him an order authorising her to seize M. de Königsmarck, and, if necessary, to take his life sooner than let him escape. The Elector made only one stipulation: that everything that was done should be done with the utmost secrecy.

“The Countess, accordingly, chose the hour when M. de Königsmarck left the Princess's apartment, which would be in the depths of the night, to

execute her vengeance and the Elector's order. She confided her plan to the colonel of the palace guards, a young man who owed his position to her influence, and he, having selected myself and three others, brought us to her presence.

“ ‘A villain,’ she said, ‘has seduced the wife of the Electoral Prince and has the audacity to boast of it. To-night she will admit him again to her chamber, and when he leaves you will arrest him and cut him down if he offers resistance. See, here is the order of the Elector. If you obey it you will be well rewarded, but if you let this wretch escape or mention what transpires your own lives will be the forfeit.’

“ We swore to obey as we were commanded, and at the appointed hour concealed ourselves in a corridor that led to the Princess's chamber. Presently the door of this chamber was opened, and Mademoiselle de Knesebeck, her lady-in-waiting, holding a lighted candle in her hand, passed down the corridor and unlocked a door which opened into the gardens of the palace. As she did so, M. de Königsmarck entered. He was very richly dressed as if he were going to some great Court *fête*, and as he passed us he left a scent of perfume behind him. We let him pass undisturbed, as the Countess von Platen had strictly commanded us to wait till he returned.

“ It was after midnight when Mademoiselle de Knesebeck opened the door of the Princess's apartment again and let him out. He came down the corridor, alone this time, softly humming an air

to himself, and little recking of the death that was waiting him. Suddenly, at a signal from our commander, who lit a torch he carried, we rushed from our hiding-place and attacked him.

“ ‘Treason !’ he called, and began to defend himself with great courage.

“ Our orders were to take him alive if possible, and this we should have attempted to do, but seeing that he was in no mood to surrender tamely, the Countess von Platen came from behind the arras and cried :

“ ‘Do not suffer him to escape ; cut him down quickly.’

“ We were obliged to obey.

“ ‘Good !’ she exclaimed, as he fell pierced by our four swords ; ‘now bind him and tie his hands.’

“ While we did this, he moaned out :

“ ‘Spare the Princess, she is innocent !’

“ This exasperated the Countess beyond endurance.

“ ‘Do not heed him,’ she shouted. ‘He is a criminal ; gag him !’

“ I forced a handkerchief into his mouth, as she commanded.

“ ‘So !’ she exclaimed ; ‘now let us take him away.’

“ We lifted him up, bound and gagged, but it was in vain that we tried to make him stand. He fainted from loss of blood.

“ ‘Place him on the ground,’ commanded the Countess. As we obeyed her, she took the handkerchief from his mouth to staunch a wound in his

head, and looking at him closely, said, 'Now, wretch, confess your crime and that of the Princess!'

"He raised himself on his elbow, and opening his eyes, exclaimed, as he beheld her, 'Do your worst, viper; the Princess is innocent!' Then he fell back unconscious.

"The Countess lifted up his head and commanded some vinegar to be brought. When M. de Königsmarck had breathed it, he opened his eyes again and groaned curses on her. She let his head fall and rose from her knees beside him. As she did so the candle she carried fell from her hand, and, seeming to slip in his blood, she uttered a shriek of rage and put her heel upon his mouth.

"'Now,' she said, 'take care of him while I find the Elector and learn what is to be done.'

"'This is a pretty business,' I murmured to my companions, as she drew the Elector from a curtain behind which he had been a silent witness of all that had passed. 'M. de Königsmarck is dead.'

"'Well,' was the reply, 'we have only done what we were told to do.'

"The Elector, having assured himself that the man who had dishonoured his house was dead, ordered us to wall up the body behind a fireplace which was never used. He then bound us to secrecy and rewarded us generously."

It is said that Countess von Platen before she died also made a confession similar in substance to Bussmann's. Her deathbed, at all events, was of a nature to establish her participation in the murder

of Königsmarck. For having in the course of her last illness become totally blind, she fancied that she saw the ghost of her victim ever at her side. Nothing would rid her tortured conscience of this horrible delusion, and she died raving mad.

To complete the "pity and terror" of this truly Greek tragedy, the fate of the Princess Sophia Dorothea was scarcely less appalling. Concerning it there is at least no mystery. Divorced from her husband and separated from her children, she was, as everybody knows, sealed up in the flower of her youth for the rest of her life—thirty-two years—in the lonely Castle of Ahlden.

III

With the disappearance of Philip von Königsmarck, his two sisters, Wilhelmina and Aurora, alone remained to perpetuate the name and traditions of this notorious race; but since the former had married a Swedish nobleman, Count Löwenhaupt, it was really the latter on whom this duty devolved. It was a duty that Aurora von Königsmarck was admirably fitted to perform in a manner worthy of the romantic family which was destined to expire characteristically with her.

Gifted with a mind of no mean order, she had been very carefully educated by her mother, a daughter of Wrangel, one of the ablest of the generals of Gustavus Adolphus. At the age of fifteen, when she first emerged from the seclusion of the Castle of



PHILIP VON KÖNIGSMARCK.

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TO THE
APPROVED

Agathenburg, the seat of the Königs-marcks at Stade, to make her *début* at the Swedish Court, she was a perfect mistress of German, French, English, and Italian. To these accomplishments, which would have attracted attention in any of the Northern Courts, where at this period the barbarous manners of the Thirty Years' War still prevailed, she added a natural talent for music. At Stockholm her charming voice caused her to be called the "Swedish nightingale," and she was compared to Margaretti, then the most celebrated *cantatrice* in Europe. In the rendering of simple and popular melodies she was inimitable. She drew, too, exquisitely, and was extremely fond of pageantry, grandeur, and pleasure.

Nor did she lack the physical charms which make the empire of a clever woman absolute. Nature, by one of those contrasts she often affects, had clothed her brilliant and almost masculine faculties in the fairest, tenderest, most feminine form.

She was moderately tall and possessed a fine figure. Her neck, breast, arms, and hands were of a whiteness whose parallel was never seen. The regularity of her features heightened their unrivalled delicacy. Her teeth were so nicely placed and of so beautiful a colour that they could scarcely be distinguished from a row of pearls. Her sparkling almond-shaped eyes were like two bright, brown stars in whose soft reflection a tender and sensitive soul blended with the lively flash of wit and humour. Her hair, of the same colour as her eyes, set off most exquisitely her beautiful com-

plexion, where blushed an exceeding fine carnation. In a word, Nature seemed to have exhausted all her charms in her favour. With so much to make her conceited, she was, however, in no way prepossessed in favour of her extraordinary merits.

That so charming and accomplished a woman should have received numerous offers of marriage from many distinguished men goes without saying. But she was too much a Königsmarck to subject her proud and independent spirit to the marriage yoke. Like her brothers, it was the excitement and movement of the great world she craved, not the quiet of the domestic hearth. When the news of Philip's "disappearance" reached her, she was deeply stirred; similar temperaments and a close personal resemblance had given to their mutual *esprit de famille*, a quite particular vigour, the vigour of a devoted friendship.

"A Königsmarck," she declared passionately, "cannot be blotted out like this without disturbing the peace of Europe. I swear to find my brother if he is still living, or to avenge him if dead!"

Persuaded by too many indications that the possibility of the former was reduced to zero by the probability of the latter, she and the Countess Lowenhaupt, as the natural and sole heirs of Philip von Königsmarck, proceeded to take possession of his estate. Having frequently heard their brother say that he had deposited considerable sums with Lastrop, a banker of Hamburg, they demanded that the money should be paid to them. But Lastrop replied that their brother had only entrusted to

his care a few diamonds, valued at 40,000 thalers, which he agreed to deliver to them provided they could produce evidence of his client's death.

This appeared not only impossible but so reasonable that the two sisters were about to let the matter drop, when one of Lastrop's clerks secretly informed them that his master was swindling them.

"M. de Königsmarck," he declared, "just prior to the date of his mysterious disappearance, deposited at the bank the sum of 400,000 thalers. He stated at the time that he should require it again within a few days in bills of exchange on Paris."

From this it has been conjectured, as I have said, that her brother was no doubt intending to elope with the Princess Sophia Dorothea when he fell a victim to the jealousy of the Countess von Platen. But be this as it may, the sisters now, perceiving that Lastrop was endeavouring to defraud them of this money, at once brought the matter before the courts at Hamburg. Finding, however, that against the influence of this rogue they were powerless to obtain justice, they set out in quest of it, and having visited in turn and in vain nearly all the principal cities of the Empire, arrived at last at Dresden with letters of recommendation from the Queen of Denmark to the mother of the Elector—Augustus the Strong.

Augustus, then in his twenty-fifth year, had but recently succeeded his brother on the Electoral throne. This event had occurred shortly after his return from a long and extended tour of almost

all the Courts and capitals of Europe, where he had been admired for his extraordinary strength and handsome person, but much more for the liberality of his views, the shrewdness of his intellect, and the tact he manifested on every occasion. It was during these travels that he acquired the noble manners which throughout his life caused him to be regarded as the most polished, gracious, and generous prince of his time.

Endowed with so many shining qualities and an excessive love of magnificence, it was but natural that his Court should be the most brilliant in Germany—I had almost said in Europe. As regards gaiety and cheerfulness, at all events, no capital could boast so many and varied amusements and pleasures as Dresden. Every day was a different *fête*, every night—ye gods!

At such a Court, where beauty was worshipped with fervour, the young Countess von Königs-marck was sure of a favourable reception. Augustus, to whom no woman ever knelt in vain, no sooner beheld the fair suppliant than in all the *éclat* of her youth and beauty than he gallantly espoused her cause. *Enversaille*, like all German princes of the period, he regarded her as another Vallière or Fontanges, and giving orders to unravel, if possible, the mystery of the disappearance of her brother, for news of whom the lovely Swede had vainly implored so many chancelleries, he proceeded to honour her arrival at his Court with a *fête* at the Castle of Moritzburg, which deserves to rank among the *fastes d'amour* as one of the

most remarkable that the annals of gallantry record.

Surnamed the Strong, because he could break horseshoes and men as easily as he dispelled care and triumphed over misfortune, Augustus was equally remarkable for the victories he gained over the fair sex, which seldom fails to recognise a master in a prince. But as an excuse for the weakness of all the ladies who found a temporary paradise in his favour, it must be admitted that even without the captivating glamour of his crown he possessed a personal charm which was of itself sufficient to conquer the most rebellious heart. On this occasion he surpassed himself to please his fascinating guest, and so well did he succeed that the fair Aurora, permitting ambition if not love to triumph over her virtue, brought me into the world nine months later. This event occurred on October 19, 1696, at Goslar, an old Saxon city full of monuments and memories of the early days of the Empire.

Nine days later the news of the great honour the Countess had paid him having reached Augustus, he desired that the infant should be baptized Maurice, or Moritz—as it is written in German, which was, by the way, never spoken in the German Courts—“in memory,” he said, “of the victory I gained over his mother at Moritzburg.”

This and other marks of his love which the Countess received, might not unreasonably, had they been displayed by any one else, have been deemed a presage of its indefinite continuation.

But with this fickle sultan, who regarded the gratification of the senses as the chief business of his life, one woman was as good as another, provided she was handsome *bien entendu*. For with all his splendour and grandiose generosity he was never anything but commonplace and selfish in love. I will not go so far as to say that he was incapable of appreciating the merit of a woman outside a boudoir, but where his model the French king treated a mistress as a friend and adviser, this good-natured debauchee demanded only kisses. He had been captivated entirely by the beauty of the Countess, and during her illness his anxiety was so great that, figuratively speaking, he passed whole days at the bolster of her bed. But an offensive perspiration, with which she was afflicted during her *accouchement*, and which, to her inexpressible grief, in spite of all the pains of the doctors, she ever after retained, completely robbed her of the attraction she had possessed for him.

In a word, I began the romance of my life by putting an end to my mother's.

IV

The birth of the child of a royal favourite is usually a cause of offence, exciting indignation in the public and jealousy at Court. Aurora von Königsmarck, however, had used the favour she had enjoyed with such tact that she was not only liked by all classes when her star was in the ascendant,

but greatly commiserated and regretted when it had set. Indeed, both in and out of power her popularity was greater than any mistress before her had ever experienced. Even the Electress, to whom she had always been most considerate, had seen her favour without jealousy.

“Since I am to have a rival,” she was heard to say, “I am pleased it should be a person of such merit.”

The Countess’s “disgrace” troubled her extremely, and considering the insolence with which she was treated by the Esterles, Lubomirskis, Cosels, and others who reigned in turn as the *sultana validé* of her husband’s seraglio, the Electress must often have had cause to regret the Countess von Königsmarck.

“Hélas, ma chérie,” she exclaimed to the latter once, “in *your* time how much happier I was !”

Nor was Augustus himself wanting in consideration for the woman who had ceased to fascinate him. Though she had lost the empire of his heart she long continued to preserve his esteem. Recognising the abilities, which her physical charms had hitherto prevented him from appreciating as they deserved, he sought and followed her advice on more than one important occasion. No king’s mistress, perhaps, ever had so easy a fall. Aurora von Königsmarck was, moreover, far too clever to resent the cooling of the Elector’s love. Intended by nature for the intrigues of the cabinet rather than those of the alcove, she endeavoured to acquire in the former the power she had lost in the latter.

Obliged to abandon her investigations in regard to her brother, which had brought the Courts of Saxony and Hanover almost to the point of war, her son became the object of her solicitude, the focus of her ambition, the inspiration of her intrigues. To my advancement she consecrated the rest of her life, for me she was ever ready to make any sacrifice. Where my career was concerned there was no question with her of the morality or immorality of an action. Had I required of her a crime she would not have shrunk from it, and would even have consented to pave the road to the throne from which I was debarred with the corpses of my father and his lawfully begotten son.

Mais autres temps, autres mœurs. Thrones are no longer carved out of crimes for *bâtards de rois*. I demanded money—not blood—of my mother. It was all that I ever demanded of her, but I never ceased demanding it. To satisfy me she had recourse to all sorts of expedients. Her zeal often defeated its object. To increase the influence she possessed over Augustus, whom she regarded as the arbiter of my destiny, she dared to attack ministers and mistresses alike in the hope of plundering them of the power they possessed.

But they thus threatened caballed in their turn against her. Between Flemming, Augustus's chief minister, whose corruption she had denounced in vain, and herself there was a perpetual and vindictive war. Flemming attacked both her and me; and exploiting the jealousy of an Esterle or a Cosel, succeeded more than once in injuring my prospects

and exiling my mother from the Court, at which, however, the urgency of her private affairs seldom permitted her to remain long.

The complications in which these were involved began while she was still the *maitresse déclarée* of Augustus. Aware that all royal *liaisons* terminate sooner or later, Aurora von Königsmarck, being a shrewd woman, had from the very commencement of her period of favour sought to prepare for herself an honourable retreat in case of need. The one she chose was the Lutheran Abbey of Quedlinburg. Hitherto the abbesses of this ancient cloister had always been royal princesses, but the Countess Aurora, like all the Königsmarcks, was not the person to respect a custom to which she objected to conform. She desired to be the first lady of quality to preside over this serene assembly of canonesses, who enjoyed the revenues and prestige of the rich chapter to which they belonged without being obliged to make any vows or to restrict their liberty in any way.

The matter, however, was not easy to adjust. The reverend canonesses raised a storm of protest on learning that a mistress of the Elector of Saxony had the presumption to seek admission to their ranks, much less to demand the highest honour in their congregation. The Abbess at the time was the Princess Anne Dorothea of Saxe-Weimar. This illustrious lady had opposed the candidature of the Countess Aurora tooth and nail, but the cleverness and tact of the seductive sinner gradually softened this heart of stone and she was not only admitted

to the Abbey, but admitted with a sort of tacit understanding that she should become Abbess on the death of the Princess.

The question, however, of the reversion of the chief authority of the Abbey in favour of Aurora von Königsmarck was by no means definitely settled. The shock canonical conventions had received had shattered the wonted peace of the chapter. Jealousy smouldered in the cloister. In the commotion that was caused at the Abbey when Augustus, pressed for money, sold Quedlinburg to Prussia, disaffection found its voice. Two Countesses of Schwarzburg openly declared that they would never bend the knee to a Countess of Königsmarck. The latter taking up the challenge thus thrown down rushed off to Berlin to find friends to support her cause. But in spite of all her charms, intrigues, and the money she spent, she could not establish her claim, or appease the furious opposition of the hostile canonesses.

Disheartened, but not discouraged, she embarked on the hazardous and costly expedient of having recourse to the law. At the same time she was obliged to defend herself against an action which sought to compel her to pay the debts of her brother whose fortune she had taken possession of. Now began for her a life of vagabondage. Seldom six months in the same place she was ever on the wing, flitting between Quedlinburg and Berlin, Hamburg and Dresden, Stockholm and Warsaw, or wherever her interests were compromised and mine might be furthered. In this way, in the long run, between



THE ABBEY OF QUEDLINBURG.

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the expense of endless litigation, the defalcations of her agents, the robberies of her servants, and my incessant demands for money, the whole of the Königsmarck fortune was finally dissipated.

Menant grand train wherever she went, her own extravagance would of itself have been sufficient to ruin her. Never did her intrigues and lawsuits, her ambitions and anxieties, interfere with her luxurious pursuit of pleasure. She could always find time for a *fête*. Amusement was often the sole object of her restless coming and going. Now she is seen at Wolfenbittel acting with Antoine Ulric, most singular of reigning oddities, in her own opera *Les Trois Filles de Cécrops*. Again at Stockholm, that the Queen, who never wearied of them, might hear the trills and roulades of her "Swedish nightingale;" and even at Hanover she did not scorn to receive the flattery of Ernest Augustus, to whom her best-loved brother Philip owed his death.

Nor was the pious seclusion of her fiercely contested asylum stranger to the gaiety that followed in her train. To the scandal of the hostile canonesses and the Schwarzburg countesses in particular, the Abbey, when she visited it, either as an exile or from inclination, became transformed into a sort of court of love. Quedlinburg, it is said, still echoes with the fame of an opera and a ballet that Aurora von Königsmarck had performed there in honour of the son of Peter the Great. On this occasion, poetically draped *à l'antique*, the Countess took the part of a Muse, and recited some verses of her own composition with which the

Czarewitch was charmed, and which provoked even the applause of the reverend ladies themselves, notably of the Lady Abbess, who, being very old, deaf, and almost blind, mistook the antique Muse for St. Theresa, and her amorous melodies for the psalms of St. Ambrose!—an illusion that one took care not to dispel and—the reverend dame having retired early—caused the entertainment to be prolonged far into the night.

Had the ladies of Quedlinburg been young, it is probable that such proceedings, indicative of the laxity to be expected from the rule of an Abbess responsible for them, might have secured for Aurora von Königsmarck the post of authority she coveted in the chapter. But the canonesses had reached an age when the frailty of human nature is no longer capable of responding to the appeal of such frivolities. The penitence of a week followed the licence of a night; and the *fête* of the Countess, far from winning her any votes, proved a fresh weapon with which to attack her. In spite of all her efforts she could never overcome opposition to her candidature for the post of Abbess, and so indefatigable was the enmity of the two Countesses of Schwarzburg, who, dreading her influence at the Court of Berlin, kept an agent there well supplied with money to defeat it, that to the end of her life she remained a simple canoness.

It was perhaps just as well for Quedlinburg that she never succeeded in becoming the Abbess, for if at the beginning she craved the position for sake of its prestige, in the end she craved it for the sake

of the control it would give of the revenues of the Abbey. These she must undoubtedly have devoted to the advancement of my career, and I, in my inordinate and continual demands for money, would have consumed the wealth of the chapter with as light a heart as I devoured the fortune of the Königsmarcks.

With all her ability it was the fate of Aurora von Königsmarck to see all her plans for me fail. It was not till the end of her life, when she was ruined by the enormous expense into which her maternal ambition led her that mine was awakened. Perhaps none but a mother who has spent her life in dreaming of a brilliant career for a passionately loved son, who alone has been the obstacle to the realisation of all her dreams and schemes, can understand what the Countess of Königsmarck felt when he at last on fire with ambition came to demand of her—became old, ill, broken-hearted, and impoverished—proofs of her devotion, of which she has exhausted the resources. To such a mother, however, it is impossible to be alive at such a moment—the moment she has dreamt of all her life—and be useless.

When I set out from Paris to win the crown of Courland, with a handful of young rakes as reckless as myself, and the jewels of actresses and court ladies, I was followed by the “Ha-has!” of the world. But ridicule, like morals, restrains only the base herd. To men of my type the greater the odds the more is the game worth winning. Arrived in Courland the laugh was on my side. I was unanimously elected Duke!

The world, like the imbecile it is, stopped laughing at me now just when its jeers should have been the loudest. For to win the throne was but the A B C of the adventure. My real difficulty was to keep it. This I had suspected from the start. Of what use to have all Courland at my back and be obliged to face a Poland, a Russia? What I needed was not an army corps, but a brain. I remembered my mother. She was living at Quedlinburg, faded in beauty, shattered in health and fortune, broken in spirit by many and continual disappointments, burnt out before her time. Nevertheless, I did not hesitate to appeal to her. Was I not accustomed to appeal to her, was she not wont to respond? Galvanised to life and hope by my project, of which she took the splendour for that of the career she had dreamed for me so long, the conduct of Aurora von Königsmarck became sublime. Melting down her plate to provide me with money, she swore to consecrate her feeble strength to the Herculean labour of rendering my throne secure.

Regardless of her infirmities, she emerged from her cloistered seclusion and rushed as of old restlessly up and down a restless world intriguing on my behalf with the same indefatigable energy she had formerly displayed in checkmating a Flemming or Schwarzburg, in composing a letter or staging an opera, in dancing a quadrille or administering an embassy. At last, principally owing to her wiles and crafts, it really seemed as if a House of Königsmarck was to be added to the reigning

dynasties of Europe, when lo! once again the castle of her dreams is destroyed, and that, too, by my own hands. This time her pride and mother's love were smitten to the heart, and comprehending that the hour had come for her to leave a world that had quite ceased to have any attractions for her, she crawled back to Quedlinburg to die.

Aware that she was dying and utterly unable to go to her, I sent a messenger to bid her farewell on my behalf. Alas! the Abbey bells were still tolling for her when this man arrived. Having come too late, he might have stayed away altogether. On his return he handed me the sum of *fifty-two crowns* which he had received from the Abbess after the funeral. It was all that the once-adored favourite of the most generous and magnificent sovereign of his time had left to bequeath!

NOTE.

In the Napoleonic days, when so much went by the board in Europe, the Abbey of Quedlinburg, after an existence of nearly one thousand years, was suppressed. But one may still visit the old Castle of the canonesses of the once famous chapter. Perhaps the most interesting of all the relics and treasures it contains is to be found in the burial vaults in the crypt of the Abbey Church. These vaults, hollowed in the sandstone out of and on which the Abbey is built, possess the property of preserving the bodies buried in them from decay—an unfortunate property judging from the shrivelled and hideous mummies that are to be seen when the sacristan raises the cloths that

cover them. Here in a long robe of blue damask, swathed in priceless *point d'Angleterre* and decked in jewels, may be seen Aurora von Königsmarck, exposed—oh ! irony of fate—between her two deadliest enemies—the old Schwarzburg countesses—whose vindictive influence had caused her so much bitterness in life.

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CHAPTER II

AUGUSTUS THE STRONG

I

OF the host of dukes and prince-bishops, margraves and landgraves, rhingraves and waldgraves—those petty potentates who while vassals of the Holy Roman Emperor at Vienna were absolute and independent in their tiny territories, which a stag could take at a leap and which made of Germany, as Oxenstiern expressed it, “a confusion by the grace of divine providence”—Frederick Augustus was by far the most important.

In the first place, thanks to time, accident, and exceptional ability of an ancestor here and there, Saxony, of which he was the Elector, had become, and remained till his successor fell foul of Frederick the Great, the chief State in the German Confederation—excepting always the dominions of the Imperial Hapsburgs.

Secondly, Frederick Augustus was personally by far the most conspicuous of the sovereign *valetaille*, of whom the Emperor was the liege-lord, surpassing

all in craft and the extent of his ambition as he outrivalled all in splendour.

The echo of the loud noise he made in his passage through life may still be heard at Dresden. He found it brick and left it marble, as was said of the Rome of Augustus ; but in the process of the transformation it was by the King of France rather than the Cæsar, whose name he bore, that he was inspired. Of all who tried to *singer* Louis Quatorze none succeeded so well as he. His mock-Versailles at Dresden and Warsaw might almost have taken in the Grand Monarque himself.

None knew how to play the king better than Augustus II., as he was styled on mounting the Polish throne, which he procured by cunning and bribery, and on which he sat so unsteadily. The charm of his person, his majestic air, his heroic strength, his good-nature, his politeness, and his well-known valour were the least of his qualities. Never was any prince more magnificent, nor did any ever give more or with better grace. As a general he was never too much elated by prosperity or abased by adversity, so that he was observed in the depth of his misfortunes to behave even towards his enemies with an air of equanimity, which was habitual to him, and which only men accustomed to great affairs know how to assume in the midst of the cruellest mortification.

But to play the king much more is required of a sovereign than a royal air. Augustus had the misfortune to reign at a time when artists of the first order paraded the stage of Europe clad in



AUGUSTUS THE STRONG.

(From an old print.)

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the purple of the throne. Nevertheless, though a mediocrity as a king, he was at least a splendid one. His portrait is not one of those which History refuses to hang in its gallery. Its frame alone would be sufficient to preserve it from dishonour.

Perhaps no portrait ever had a stranger frame, no king a more anomalous kingdom. There are many, no doubt, who will regard the latter as worthy of more attention than the former ; and as I can find no argument sufficiently valid to maintain the contrary, let us inspect the frame before the canvas—Poland before its king.

Voltaire has called Poland the “first of anarchies.” I would, however, describe it as the *pays au delà du miroir*.

Everything there was the reverse of everything elsewhere. For instance, though the Romans never conquered or penetrated to their country, Latin was the common language of the Poles, even the servants spoke it.* Again, Poland was a republic governed by a king. But never was republic less democratic or king less royal. To behold the Polish king in all the pomp of his majesty you would have believed him to be the most absolute monarch in Europe. In reality he was nothing more than the tool of the nobles, with whom the clergy, who were likewise noble, united to defend the liberties which they denied the common people. For the boasted

* Latin continued to be spoken in Poland as late as the early decades of the nineteenth century.

liberties of Poland were but the liberties of the nobles, who alone possessed the right to elect their king. But this fine privilege was debased by the greatest abuses. Owing to the jealousy of the most powerful families, such as the Sapiehas, the Oginskis, the Czartoriskis, and the Lubomirskis, the throne was always for sale, and since a Pole was seldom rich enough to buy it a foreigner was often chosen as king.

In a country where the throne is elective the objections to a foreign king are numerous. Particularly was this the case in Poland, which owed its independence to the jealousy of its neighbours rather than to the virtues of its inhabitants. For a foreign king was likely to resent the humiliating restrictions imposed upon him by the Polish Constitution, and to endeavour to escape from them by obtaining foreign aid, or even by stirring the embers of civil war, which could easily be fanned into a blaze. Foreign intervention, however, is a double-edged sword, which only a very skilful king can use without wounding himself.

But the danger of a foreign king might have been reduced to a minimum had the Poles only been consistent in their corruption, and in selling their votes sold also their affections. This, however, they never did. Consequently, with their pride, their spirit of independence, and their utter lack of discipline—qualities which they have inherited from their Sarmatian ancestors—intensified by jealousy, corruption, and anarchic laws that permitted the protest of a single noble to upset the

unanimous resolutions of the Diet, some idea may be formed of what a Polish election was like.

On the death of King John Sobieski, which occurred in 1696, the year I was born, the situation, though extremely serious to the Poles and the candidates for their vacant throne, was full of Aristophanic humour. Out of less comic elements Molière would have made a most excellent farce. Poland made out of them a tragi-comedy.

According to the Constitution, the sons of Sobieski were prevented from offering themselves as candidates for the throne. This restriction, however, they had no intention of observing, and their mother, who was more able than they, and was equally desirous of keeping the throne in the family, easily induced them to lend themselves to her intrigues.

Queen Marie Sobieska was the daughter of the Marquis d'Arquien, a poor officer in the Mousquetaires of Monsieur, uncle of Louis XIV. Maria Gonzaga had brought her to Poland when Mazarin sent her there to marry Ladislas IV. Having captivated Sobieski, she had in her turn become Queen of the Sarmatian Republic. As crafty as the Princesse des Ursins, she was as arrogant and domineering as Sarah Jennings, and, like the latter, completely governed her husband, who was as devoted, as victorious, and as unscrupulous as the Duke of Marlborough. During his life, having as little respect for the Treasury as she had for the Constitution, she had bled it of several millions in order that at his death she might have the funds

necessary to secure the succession for one of her sons.

With so great a fortune it is probable that, had she also possessed the goodwill of the Cardinal Primate, she might have raised a Titus to the throne of the late Polish Vespasian. For the Cardinal Primate during an interregnum was the repository of such authority as existed in Poland. According to the Constitution, no king could be elected who was not proclaimed by him. But instead of making a friend of this important individual, the Queen made him an enemy. Nevertheless, though heavily handicapped, the ambitious widow of Sobieski entered the contest, relying on her cunning, which was great, for victory.

The most formidable of the numerous candidates for the vacant throne was the Prince de Conti, the candidate offered by France.

Ever since the sixteenth century, when the Poles had elected the Duc d'Anjou as their king, who afterwards on the death of his brother Charles IX., of St. Bartholomew Massacre fame, had returned to France to be the last of the Valois, the French had taken a sort of family interest in the Poles. Cardinal Richelieu had courted Poland in the hope of using her as a weapon against Austria, and it was with the same object that his successor, Mazarin, had married Maria Gonzaga, who though of Italian origin was French by education, sympathy, and her rich duchies of Nevers and Rethel, to Ladislas IV. On his death she had married his brother Casimir V., who had obtained

the throne, thanks to her wealth and capacity. During her life, or rather reign, for she ruled both her husbands, she had used her influence entirely in favour of France.

When Sobieski became king on Casimir's abdication, the fact that he, too, had a French wife, and one quite as clever as Maria Gonzaga, was distinctly favourable to the binding of Poland still closer to France. But Louis XIV.'s most subtle schemes were often damaged by his prejudices. In the day of her prosperity the Queen of Poland had remembered her parents and asked how she might serve them. They had never left France, where with the flight of years the affairs of the needy officer in Gaston d'Orleans' Mousquetaires had reached the point at which poverty and dishonesty so often form their discreditable partnership. The Marquis d'Arquien had asked for money in abundance; the Marquise, womanlike, for a *tabouret* at Versailles. To obtain this it was necessary that the Marquis should be made a duke and peer of France, but this neither the intrigues nor the influence of the Queen of Poland could procure.*

Marie Sobieska was not the woman to put up with a slight, even from so glorious a monarch as the King of France. Thus affronted by Louis XIV., she had devoted her life to undoing all that French influence had accomplished in Poland. Her

* On the death of his wife, the Marquis d'Arquien entered the Church, went to Poland, and became, through his daughter's influence, a cardinal.

husband's victory over the Moslems at Vienna was her answer to Louis XIV. It was Marie Sobieska who made Poland save Austria from the Turks, in order to spite the French king.

With such feelings in regard to France it was to be expected that her opposition to the election of Conti would be formidable. But though Louis had preferred to make an enemy of the Queen sooner than accommodate his pride to the point of permitting her mother "to sit uncomfortably in his presence," as Sobieski said, he never for a moment ceased to court Poland. Throughout his long reign his pet object was to see a French prince on the Polish throne. It was the secret of the mystery which was known in diplomacy as *la grande affaire*.

To further this object he had sent the ablest diplomatist in his service, the Abbé Melchoir de Polignac, to Warsaw before Sobieski's death. So craftily did Polignac intrigue that when this great event occurred he had not only assured his master of the invaluable support of the Cardinal Primate for the Prince de Conti, but with a cunning, of which the immorality was excused by its success, he had induced the Queen, who was at the time unaware of his designs, to invest two millions of the money she had robbed from the Treasury in French Government securities, with the secret object of making her furnish him with the weapons of attack that she had intended for her own defence. For when she wished to withdraw this money in order to purchase the support she re-



QUEEN MARIE SOBIESKA.

(From an old print.)

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quired, Louis XIV. not only refused to let her have it, but employed it to buy support for Conti.

But though in this game Polignac had the best cards, and played them with consummate skill, he did not hold the winning hand.

The protest of a single noble, I have said, was, according to the Constitution, sufficient to invalidate any election. The remedy for the disorder caused by this law served to increase it still further. For unanimity being impossible in the Polish Diet, factions were formed and decisions arrived at by a plurality of votes. But these decisions, though authorised by custom, were in reality illegal, and, decreed as they were in the name of a king whose election was disputed, without his consent and often against his interests, tended to create either anarchy or despotism, as the king was weak or strong. It was such a decision that Polignac hoped to obtain—and did, indeed, obtain—by dint of his trump card, the Cardinal Primate.

But though in the fierce toils of this election Polignac succeeded in completely ruining the cause of Sobieski's sons, who helped him by quarrelling amongst themselves and with their mother, the Queen continued her intrigues. She belonged to the race of women-sphinxes who regard themselves as the axis of the world, and to attain their ends will see with a light heart and without the least remorse everything tumble to pieces around them. To prevent Polignac from seizing the prize within his grasp she instigated the great family of Sapieha, who were desirous of creating an independent prin-

cipality for themselves out of the province of Lithuania, to choose this moment to make the attempt. This was to rend Poland with civil war and expose her to the intervention of her powerful neighbours who were hostile, especially Austria, to the election of the French candidate.

Realising the magnitude of the peril with which the State was now confronted, the more patriotic Poles determined to avoid it by a *coup d'état*. The Cardinal Primate declared Conti elected; the Queen was banished, two of her sons were arrested and imprisoned in a fortress, while the third was compelled to flee the country to escape a similar fate. But the benefits that should have resulted from this rigorous action were now nullified by Conti himself!

To ensure the success of Louis XIV.'s secret design on Poland it was essential that a member of his House should sit on the Polish throne. In selecting Conti for his purpose he had shown great cunning. For Conti was not only a man of marked ability, but the last of the ten princes of the blood in the order of succession in France—a fact calculated to induce the Poles to regard his candidature more favourably than if he were in measurable distance of the French throne.

But the Prince de Conti had no desire to leave the delights of Paris and Versailles for the thorn-pit of Warsaw, and though compelled by his august sovereign to offer himself as a candidate for the Polish crown he made no haste to leave France. This delay was the cause of Polignac's failure to

secure the throne for him. It was only when the news reached the French Court that he had been proclaimed by the Cardinal Primate that Louis insisted on his departing. The hostile state of Europe prevented him from going overland, so Louis sent him by sea to Dantzic, with a fleet under the command of the famous Jean Bart, who from a Dutch fisher-boy had risen to be an admiral in the French Navy.

While Conti was on his way the illegality of his election, combined with the revolt of the Sapiéhas, created such disorder in Poland that his late arrival only served to increase the anarchy. The temptation to intervene was too great to resist, and while Austria, Russia, and Sweden were considering the ways and means, Aurora von Königsmarck suggested to Augustus that he should seize the Polish throne before Conti reached Warsaw.

The cooling of his passion for the beautiful Swede, as I have previously stated, had not robbed her of his respect for her abilities. To display these in a manner to dazzle Augustus, and thereby secure the power that her ambition and her needs alike urged her to seek, the Countess von Königsmarck required a vast stage. This the situation in Poland supplied her with.

“You have but to move,” she said, “and a powerful party will rally round you. To escape partition the Poles will welcome you to a man, for Saxony is too small to inspire them with the dread of being

absorbed in the Electorate. Austria and Prussia, too, are your friends; they will support you. Being on the spot, so to speak, you have but to act at once. The Sapiéhas, in their own interests, will never let Conti land, and while he and they are fighting you may march into Lithuania with Poland behind you and restore order."

Thus Aurora baited the hook with which Augustus began to fish in these troubled waters.

Captivated by this argument, Augustus lost no time in acting upon it. To procure the money he needed he sold Quedlinburg to Prussia, and, declaring that the election of the Prince of Conti was illegal, entered Poland and offered himself as king.

As Aurora von Königsmarck had predicted, on his appearance a party gathered round him, and he proceeded to Cracow, paving the road to the throne as he went with gold and fine promises. But in spite of his personal popularity he failed to inspire confidence. The antiquated Sarmatian laws and the stubborn pride and jealousy of the nobles raised innumerable obstacles. These, however, did not discourage Augustus. He faced them with the careless gaiety of a *beau sabreur* whom nothing daunts.

It was an inviolable condition of the Polish Constitution that none but a Catholic could hold the throne. The Electoral family of Saxony were Protestants, but this fact by no means deterred Augustus. He was not one of those narrow-minded bigots like James II. of England, who are to be found in every religion, in every sect, whose

narrow-mindedness passes with them for the rock on which faith is built. Thoroughly agreeing with Henri IV. that a crown is well worth a mass, he was quite ready to accommodate his conscience to his convenience. He had done so before most successfully. Lutheran by birth, was he not Mussulman by morals? After such a feat, to become Catholic by conviction was a mere bagatelle for Augustus the Strong.

But this verbal scalade of the throne, in which he was reinforced by ten thousand Saxon troops, was but the beginning of his difficulties. In the state things had come to in Poland, it was one thing to win the crown, to keep it quite another. As the first step in this direction, it was, of course, essential that King Augustus should get rid of King Conti.

This had been very nearly effected for him during the voyage of the latter to Dantzic. Attacked by the English, the French ships were in such danger of capture that after the action Conti could not refrain from expressing his joy at the manner, in which Bart had saved him from being taken prisoner.

“Oh,” replied Bart in his blunt way, “there was no danger of that, your Highness. My son was in the gun-room ready to blow us all into the air if necessary.”

But what Bart and the English between them had failed to do for Augustus in the Baltic, the Lithuanians effected at Dantzic. Being Protestants, the inhabitants of this province, whose revolt under

the Sapiehas had been suppressed by their rivals, the Oginskis, preferred a king whose Catholicism was open to suspicion to one whose devotion to Rome was taken as a matter of course. They therefore gave Conti so hostile a reception on his arrival that he who had not wished to leave France was delighted at the necessity of returning to Paris, where the people with whom he was immensely popular did their best to compensate him for the spiteful treatment he received from Louis XIV., whose schemes to render Poland an appanage of France were thus once more and finally frustrated.

The departure of the Prince de Conti, however, did not appreciably diminish the difficulties of his rival. The party that had supported the French prince, led by the Cardinal Primate, resolutely refused to recognise Augustus as King of Poland. It was the hostility of this formidable subject to which Augustus owed the misfortunes that, after dogging him for nine years, were to drive him from Poland and very nearly from Saxony.

That Augustus, who broke horseshoes as easily as he broke hearts, should refuse to acknowledge himself beaten by the Cardinal Primate goes without saying. To turn this enemy into a friend he employed every artifice that his cunning could invent or his imagination suggest. But the Cardinal Primate was not to be cajoled. It was the struggle of a limpet and a leech. The Cardinal Primate demanded as the preliminary to a truce, as the first step to the summoning of the Diet in which he would endeavour to persuade his party to cast their

votes in favour of the Elector of Saxony, that the Saxon troops should be sent out of the country.

This was the one concession Augustus could not make. It would be to turn him into a puppet, and that was not what had brought him into Poland. Had he been content to play a waiting game and to devote himself entirely to the task of winning the goodwill of the recalcitrant Poles, it is quite possible that he might gradually have tamed their fury. Possession is nine points of the law; he had been crowned at Cracow; Warsaw and other important towns had thrown open their gates to him; his claim to be regarded as the elected sovereign was supported by a powerful party, and he was personally the man to win popularity. But misunderstanding the character of the Poles, Augustus adopted a course which is always desperate, dangerous, and seldom successful. In a word, he sought a foreign war.

It was not his own idea. It is a significant feature of the character of Augustus that he rarely if ever acted on his own initiative in the momentous crises of his career. When he resolved to procure the throne of Poland, it was Aurora von Königs-marck who first baited the hook of his ambition. Now having caught the fish for which he had angled, so to speak, it was Flemming who endeavoured to land it for him.

Flemming was one of the remarkable men of his time. He was a Swedish soldier of fortune who

had entered the Saxon service before the succession of Augustus. After the "disgrace" of Aurora von Königsmarck, when Augustus was summoned by the Emperor to assist him in his war against the Turks, he had taken Flemming with him as an aide-de-camp. The opportunity of ingratiating himself was one that Flemming did not let slip. So well did he succeed that when Augustus offered himself as a candidate for the Polish throne he sent Flemming to Poland as his agent, and it was chiefly due to his intrigues that he had been crowned at Cracow. For this service Augustus appointed him chief minister. He knew well how to increase the favour he had acquired. His power lasted unbroken for thirty years. Whether Richelieu or Mazarin accumulated a greater wealth I cannot say, but in Germany there is not an instance of fortune sooner acquired, more resplendent, and better maintained than his.

Repeated experience of his abilities, both in the camp and in the council chamber, confirmed Augustus's faith in him. But the faith Flemming inspired in his master was not the only secret of his success. He was a demon for work, and relieved Augustus of all the tiresome details of State business for which he had no liking; and so cleverly did he encourage the king in his dissipations, in which he joined, that he became necessary to him.

Nor did the royal debaucheries, which would have impaired the strength of a giant, occasion him the least inconvenience. Whenever Flemming

indulged in a debauch, a nap of two hours set him right again. It was no more for him to go from a debauch to business than from business to a debauch. He despatched great affairs with as much ease as if they were only a diversion. No wonder he was invaluable to such a man as Augustus. What did it matter if he took care to do his own business first, or if all ways were alike fair to him provided he could gain his ends? To the lazy, good-natured king, such a servant was worth his price. Augustus's ears were deaf to all accusations. When Aurora von Königsmarck, who saw in his growing influence a menace to her own, and in the hope of destroying it exposed his enormous peculations, she was banished to Quedlinburg. When the haughty Countess Cosel, who bullied Augustus for nine years, as the Duchess of Cleveland did Charles II., dared pit her strength against the all-powerful minister, he was not content with causing her fall, but got her imprisoned for the rest of the reign.

He was, indeed, an implacable enemy, as I have had cause to know, but I must in justice admit that he was also a man of superior talent. Ambition, perhaps, would be a more fitting term. A soldier by profession, Flemming was really a politician by instinct—an Alberoni in miniature. In the rise of Russia and Prussia he foresaw the eventual extinction of Poland, unless internecine jealousy and the antiquated Constitution were alike suppressed. Being full of schemes, in the development of which he was as interested much as a chess-player in

working out a problem, he conceived a project of reconstructing and strengthening Poland. To put a check to the encroachment of her powerful neighbours, Poland was to be enlarged by robbing Sweden of the Baltic province of Livonia—a theft which the apparent decay of Sweden and Livonian sympathy seemed likely to render easy. Then, having dazzled the Poles by such an aggrandisement, he counted on tricking or bribing them into accepting Augustus as their king, after which it would be a comparatively simple matter for Augustus to render the throne hereditary in his family.

To realise this dream of empire, Flemming believed he had but to persuade his master to give the Poles a war, “to amuse them,” he said, “since so restless a nation could only be kept united by keeping it occupied with external affairs.” Augustus needed no urging, the mere ability to conceive so grandiose a scheme raised his minister, if possible, still higher in his estimation than he already was.

Thus began the Great Northern War, which lasted nearly twenty years, exhausted the treasure of the nations engaged in it, counted its victims by myriads, and changed the map of Europe. Nevertheless, great though it was, it deserves to be remembered solely for sake of the part two men played in it—Charles XII. of Sweden and Peter the Great. Its history is entirely subservient to their fame. This is true in a greater or less degree of all events. For in the long run individuals are always more important and more interesting than events.

To follow the fortunes, or rather misfortunes, of Augustus through this war is quite unnecessary, and I shall therefore merely indicate the milestones of his journey through the valley of humiliation.

As the idea of partitioning Sweden had occurred to the King of Denmark and Peter the Great as well as to Augustus, the three monarchs agreed to divide the spoils, the more willingly since their unity seemed to assure beyond a doubt the success of their designs. The Swedes, in whom the spirit of the veterans of Gustavus Adolphus seemed dead, believed their country lost. But the peril of this formidable conspiracy acted like magic on the slothful, effeminate boy of eighteen who had recently succeeded to the throne of the Vasas. Issuing from Sweden with incredible rapidity and energy, he attacked and defeated Denmark before the astonished Danes had time to defend themselves. Then with courage worthy of the Greeks who dared to face Xerxes, Charles flung himself upon the Bear.

At Narva, with only 8,000 men, he met and utterly vanquished 80,000 men under Peter the Great. It is one of the memorable battles in history.

After Narva it was the turn of Augustus to bite the dust. The humiliation was all the more bitter for the complete failure of Flemming's great project to unite the Poles. Instead of rallying to the defence of their country, the party of the Cardinal Primate hailed the hour of danger to give the *coup de grâce* to Augustus. The irreconcilable

prelate himself rushed off to welcome the invader.

Humbled by the mere fact of the approach of the invincible Swede, the King of Poland determined to sue for peace. Conscious that the influence of the Cardinal Primate would leave no stone unturned to make the conditions of a nature he could not accept, Augustus wanted an intermediary capable of outmanœuvring the intrigues of his remorseless enemy. His choice fell upon the Countess Aurora von Königsmarck.

In selecting her, Augustus fancied he displayed consummate craft, for he not only had perfect confidence in her capacity to transact so great an affair, but he thought her nationality would be taken as a delicate compliment by the Swedish king, who, judging from his own weakness for the fair sex, he doubted not, he said, would "know a beautiful woman when he saw her."

But Charles XII. was not the man to be flattered by compliments however delicate, or to be fascinated by beauty however great. The mere fact that Augustus's ambassador was a woman was sufficient for him to refuse to receive her. Aurora, after one or two bold but fruitless attempts to get access to him, was obliged to return without obtaining any other satisfaction than the right to boast that "the Swedish lion feared no one but herself."

Charles, as crafty as he was brave, fully comprehended the situation in Poland and resolved to turn it to his advantage. He not only refused to make peace with Augustus, but declared him to be

a usurper whom he had come to chase from the kingdom, which, with a marvellous tact for soothing the tender Polish susceptibilities that concealed the nature of his designs, he proceeded to give to Stanislas Leczinski. Augustus, refusing to abdicate and continuing to struggle, was not only driven from Poland, but pursued into Saxony, where at Altranstadt Charles finally consented to give him the peace he implored. To save himself from being stripped of Saxony, which Charles held in the hollow of his hand, he was compelled to accept without protest the terrible conditions of the Swede. These included giving up certain Swedish subjects in his service who had fought or conspired against Charles, particularly John Patkul.

The ferocity with which Charles's vengeance pursued this unfortunate man is the one indelible stain on his fame. Patkul was descended from a very rich and ancient family of Livonia. This province had originally belonged to the Knights of the Teutonic Order, who having conquered and cultivated it many centuries before, had made it the finest and most fertile in North-Eastern Europe. On the decline of the power of the Knights, its possession had been alternately disputed by the Russians, the Poles, and the Swedes. The latter had finally won it and held it some hundred years. Under the Swedish yoke the Livonians had been stripped of all their privileges and their estates confiscated. Against this oppression Patkul had vehemently protested in person to the predecessor of Charles XII., who had condemned him to death for high treason.

This fate, however, Patkul had avoided by fleeing the country. He carried with him not unnaturally his resentment. It was he who had first suggested to Flemming the idea of plundering Sweden of Livonia. It was also by his means that the alliance of Denmark, Russia, and Poland was effected, of which the object was the partition of Sweden.

The position of Augustus may be imagined. Patkul, who had entered the Russian service, was the ambassador of Peter the Great at Dresden. To betray him into the hands of Charles was to expose himself to the resentment of the Czar, whose friend and ally he was. It was, moreover, a mean and cruel act, highly repugnant to his generous nature. But Flemming, who had purchased *his* exemption from a similar fate by undertaking to deliver Patkul to Charles, induced Augustus to yield.

The latter, however, to his honour it should be recorded, did not do so without an attempt to save the victim of his misfortunes from the fate that awaited him. Notifying Charles that Patkul was arrested, he gave the unfortunate man every means of making good his escape before the arrival of the Swedes sent to seize him. But this Patkul refused to do, relying for safety on his belief in the inviolability of his position as the ambassador of the Czar. Augustus accordingly abandoned him to his fate, and it was not *his* hands that were stained with the blood of Patkul when the Livonian patriot was brutally executed under the old sentence which had condemned him to death years before.

In this connection, another and more striking

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FLEMMING.

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instance of Augustus's generosity is worthy of note.

On the departure of the Swedes from Saxony, Charles indulged in one of those mad and dangerous caprices so characteristic of him. On passing near Dresden he determined to pay a visit to Augustus. He arrived at the palace of the man he had so terribly humiliated, attended only by three or four officers. To have seized him then and there as he could have done, and as Flemming was anxious to do, was an opportunity which few men in Augustus's position would have let slip. He, however, nobly refused to obtain his revenge in such a way and suffered his enemy to depart with all the courtesy of an Arab sheik. There was, indeed, much of the Arab in Augustus, if he had the vices of a Mussulman he had also the virtues of one.

Three years later Peter the Great more than redeemed his disgrace at Narva by a crushing victory at Pultawa. From this graveyard of the might of Sweden, from this mausoleum in which the destinies of the nation and its hero-king were alike interred, the spirits of many dead ambitions emerged. Tempted by the flight of the wounded Charles, who had fled into Turkey where he was detained a prisoner for five years—a fate that had likewise befallen his puppet Stanislas Leczinski—Augustus once more attempted to recover Poland, in which, thanks to Peter the Great, he was eventually successful.

So much for the frame. Now for the portrait within it.

II

It may be said of Augustus the Strong, as the intolerant—I had almost said intolerable—Hebrew moralists have recorded of Ahab, King of Israel, that he “did evil in the sight of the Lord above all those who went before him.” Indeed, with his Baal-worship, his Cosel-Jezebel, and his magnificence, the Polish king recalls the Israelitish monarch with *his* devotion to Baal, his Jezebel, and his “ivory house.” Like Ahab, too—who, as I very much suspect was not so black as his enemies the prophets painted him—Augustus possessed some very amiable qualities.

His subjects adored rather than loved him.

But it is not necessary to cry so far back as Ahab for a comparison to Augustus.

He belongs to the race of Charles II. and the Regent d’Orleans. Without the cynical humour of the former or the wit of the latter he had the same good-natured, easy-going, live-and-let-live temperament of both. The ease with which it was possible to excite his sympathy, and the extent to which it was possible to exploit it, earned him a reputation possessed by no other prince in Christendom. He could never bring himself to refuse to admit the claim of the offspring of the many ladies he had honoured with his regard to be considered also as his own. In the course of time these claims, advanced often by those who had deliberately invented them, became so numerous that Augustus was

in a fair way to be regarded literally as the father of his people.

Since, however, such a physical *tour de force* was manifestly impossible even to him, who could lift a trumpeter in full armour in the palm of his hand, bend coins with his fingers, and perform similar Herculean feats of strength, scandal was obliged to limit the number of these illegitimate scions of the royal stock. Accordingly, desiring to satisfy as many claimants as possible, and out of consideration for the prowess of the king, it agreed to draw the line at three hundred and fifty-four. I do not know whether Augustus sanctioned this nice calculation, but I am of the opinion that scandal exaggerated as usual, and that not above fifty of the three hundred and fifty-four were entitled to the distinction they coveted.

Of legitimate children he had but one—a son—who afterwards succeeded him.

It was during an extended European tour, which he made before the death of his elder brother John George IV.* unexpectedly raised him to the Electoral throne at the early age of twenty-four, that he first acquired the reputation of a knight of romantic debauchery who joined to the strength of Hercules the fascination of Don Juan. Of the many charming ladies he had met during his travels he had brought back to Dresden, as his wife, the one round whom his capricious fancy had hovered the longest. This was the Princess Christine Eberhardine of Brandenburg-Baireuth. But

* 1694.

though this princess was charming enough to have "fixed" any heart, Augustus's was not made for constancy.

A Mademoiselle Kessel was the first reef on which his marital fidelity was wrecked. But the arrogance she displayed to the young Electress, for whose feelings Augustus had not yet lost all respect, had, after a brief reign, brought about the disgrace of this favourite. It was at this moment when the jealousy of a wife whom he had ceased to love had deprived him of the illicit companionship he preferred to matrimony that the Countess Aurora von Königsmarck arrived at his court and sought his protection.

After nine months of favour she was in her turn succeeded by the Countess Esterle. This lady, who had been one of the beauties of the Court of Vienna, thinking that the conditions she had obtained as the price of her infidelity to a very tiresome husband rendered her charms more attractive than they were, looked upon the favour of Augustus as an inheritance of which she had acquired an everlasting possession. Encouraged by the humility with which her unbridled arrogance was received, from insulting the unfortunate Queen she took finally to betraying the King. But he, though willing to stretch the habitual generosity of his nature to the extent of allowing his mistresses the liberty he took himself, having grown weary of her, seized so favourable an opportunity of dismissing her.

Accordingly, he desired her to leave the palace

within two hours, Warsaw within twenty-four, and the kingdom without delay. Fear lest her innumerable enemies should exact from his rage a greater punishment before she could quit the country gave her wings. Nor was she mistaken, for she had no sooner gone than they insinuated to the King that he should have obliged her to return some of the diamonds he had given her, as the bitterness of having to part with them would trouble her even more than her disgrace. Augustus consequently was induced to send a messenger after her.

But a dread of this very reprisal had caused her, before leaving Warsaw to entrust her jewels to an Italian musician, on whose devotion she knew she could count. This man, in obedience to her orders, had likewise left Warsaw, and was travelling by a different road and at a speed similar to hers when the King's messenger overtook Madame Esterlé and demanded her box of jewels in His Majesty's name.

"Certainly," she replied with cleverly feigned dismay, producing the box from which the jewels had been abstracted, "since the King commands I am prepared to obey, but as I would not be subject to His Majesty's suspicions in case he should miss any of the diamonds he has given me I merely desire the liberty of locking the box and enclosing the key in a letter I beseech you to permit me to write to the King."

The messenger, believing he had got the right box because she gave him the one that had been described to him, made no objection to this pro-

posal, and permitted the Countess to continue her journey, which she did with such expedition that she reached Breslau at the same time the messenger returned to Warsaw.

He duly delivered the box to the King, who on opening it found that it contained only a heap of cut paper. This imposture, however, far from exasperating Augustus—and herein lies the point of this anecdote—cooled his anger. Possessing a sense of humour, he could not help laughing at the cleverness with which he had been duped.

But though he forgave the Countess he did not reinstate her in her former position, which for some little time remained vacant. Not that His Polish Majesty repented him of his evil practices, *bien entendu*. On the contrary, he was only too willing to find a *maîtresse en titre* for his mock-Versailles and, while looking about for one worthy to fill so greatly coveted a post, as idleness was hateful to him he diverted himself with those trifling and accidental *amours* which might more properly be called by the astronomical term of *ignis fatuus*.

Indeed, so great was the pleasure he took in these *petites aventures* he would have been glad, if the truth be told, to have devoted his life entirely to an amatory vagabondage. But haunted as he was by the “thought of what Louis Quatorze would say,” Augustus, after having indulged in a seduction or two, once more returned to the proper kingly way of sinning.

The Princess Lubomirska was the next lady of rank on whom the dizzy honour of *sultana validé*

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THE PRINCESS LUBOMIRSKA.

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of the royal seraglio was conferred. To uncommon personal attractions the Lubomirska had the additional advantage of being the niece of the Cardinal Primate, with whom she had great influence. The fact that her elevation occurred at the time when Augustus was endeavouring to win the goodwill of the powerful prelate, who had refused to acknowledge him as king, caused it to be generally believed in Poland that he had only pretended a passion for the princess in order to avail himself of her influence over her uncle. Augustus, however, was the last man in the world to select a mistress for political reasons, and the princess was too charming to owe the passion she inspired to anything but her own fascinating self.

Like a wise woman, she took care to cut her hay while the sun shone, as the saying is. For she studied less to preserve her influence than to amass a fortune sufficient to maintain her on her fall in her usual grandeur.

The manner in which this was effected is too characteristic of Augustus and his court to be omitted.

Though Aurora von Königsmarck failed to procure the peace Augustus had sent her to seek from Charles XII., that monarch did not crush the King of Poland without further resistance. Augustus was harder to crush than the King of Denmark or Peter the Great. To crush him took the Swede five years. During this time Augustus was frequently obliged to go to Saxony for fresh recruits. At first the Lubomirska always accompanied him—

to the dismay of the unhappy Queen, who lived in Dresden and was forced to endure the arrogant impudence with which the princess, like her predecessor the Countess Esterle, treated her. By degrees, however, the frail Pole suffered her lover to make these journeys without her, atoning for her unwillingness to inconvenience herself by shedding floods of tears on his departure. The Princess Lubomirska, it should be stated, had a head like a main, which she could turn on at a minute's notice. At last she grew so accustomed to remaining behind in Warsaw, that she never gave a thought to the risk she ran.

At length on one of these recruiting expeditions to Saxony, Augustus, whose troubles for once, wonderful to relate, had affected his spirits, on arriving in Dresden resolved to drive all melancholy from his heart by frequenting a place where debauchery was practised to a great degree. Here the conversation of the royal entourage, consisting only of men, turned on mistresses.

Every one boasted of his and related wonders of her. Hoym, a Privy Councillor, who was present, said he had no mistress, but that his happiness consisted in a wife whom he loved as one, and who was much more charming than any that had yet been described. As wine had deprived him of the free use of his senses, he described his wife so exactly that the most able painter could not have portrayed her better. Hereupon the King, aware that jealousy caused Hoym to confine her to the country, said :

“I cannot believe your assertion. You talk like a man who has only been married three months. If Madame Hoym’s beauty responded in the least to your description she would be much more noted than she is.”

“Yes,” added Prince Furstenburg, “and I will wager a thousand ducats that if Madame Hoym comes to court she will not be found so beautiful as you would persuade us to believe.”

Hoym accepted the wager, and the King offered to decide it. Too drunk to suspect he was being made a fool, he was instantly obliged to write to his wife and order her to come directly to Dresden. And that he might not be capable of altering his mind they forced him to drink so much that he could scarce speak, act, or think. Great, then, was his surprise when his wife arrived the next morning in Dresden. He would have sent her back but for fear of being ridiculed for his great jealousy.

At sight of her the King found himself obliged to acknowledge that Hoym had even been sparing of the praises of his wife’s beauty ; and as she was of a lively disposition, which he liked in a mistress, nothing more was required to make him forget the Princess Lubomirska.

To sharpen the point of this gothic humour it should be added that Augustus, having decided that Hoym had won his wager, obliged Furstenburg to pay the thousand ducats, much to that nobleman’s dismay, who, not unnaturally, thought that instead of paying for the service he had rendered the King he should be paid. But if Augustus was too

magnanimous to take Hoym's wife without compensating him for the honour he paid him, he was also much too royal to permit the invaluable service of Furstenburg to pass unrewarded.

"Pay Hoym," he said, "the sum you have lost to him, and then go and receive ten thousand ducats from my treasurer."

Could the honour and magnanimity of a great king be better illustrated?

It is needless to say that Madame Hoym was only too ready to exchange her jealous husband and confinement in the country for Augustus the Strong and the freedom and power of a *maîtresse en titre*. She was, however, very careful to obtain the most advantageous terms before accepting a position which Augustus's notorious fickleness rendered so precarious. She demanded that he should acknowledge and provide for her children, if she had any; give her an income of "one hundred thousand rix-dollars a year, and build her a palace similar to one in the 'Arabian Nights.'" He consented without the least demur, and of his own accord obtained for her into the bargain the title of Countess Cosel from the Emperor.*

The Princess Lubomirska almost drowned herself in tears when she heard she had been supplanted, and on Augustus's return to Warsaw she did her utmost to recover his affection. On one occasion

* Imperial patents of nobility were highly prized, on account of the difficulty of obtaining them not only in Germany but throughout Europe.



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THE COUNTESS COSEL.

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she appeared at a court ball clad in the deepest mourning.

"Whom have you lost, princess?" he asked ironically, approaching her.

"Your Majesty," was the quick reply.

But Augustus instead of being touched was visibly annoyed. He would have banished her, but as that would have still further infuriated the Cardinal Primate, whom he ever sought to placate, he got the Emperor to create her Princess of Teschen, a title she had long desired, whereupon she consented to dry her eyes and leave him in peace. He had previously accepted the paternity of her son, the Chevalier de Saxe.

Thus began the reign of Madame Hoym, *née* Anna von Brocksdorf, or Countess Cosel, as she was henceforth known.

Her power over Augustus lasted nine years—longer than that of any other of his mistresses. She was one of those women who seem to grow more beautiful every day. Foreigners who saw her at her zenith spoke of her with enthusiasm. Knowing the man she had to deal with, she seldom let him out of her sight. She was ever ready alike to accompany him on his interminable journeys or to a battle. No danger could terrify her.

Medea and Jezebel in one, she acquired an ascendancy over Augustus similar to that of the termagant Duchess of Cleveland over Charles II. The violence of her jealousy often frightened lesser rivals out of

her path. On one occasion a French milliner, who had borne a child to Augustus, wrote to ask what she should do with it. Happening to be present when he received the letter, the Countess Cosel, whose suspicions were aroused, snatched it from his hands.

“Do with it?” she screamed; “let her drown it!”

The laughter with which Augustus replied to this outburst only served to inflame her the more, and, in a towering passion, she threatened to kill both the mother and her *gage d'amour*. The wretched milliner took the hint and disappeared with her child, and thus it chanced that the identity of the latter, afterwards famous as the Countess Orzelska, was not discovered till years after by Count Rutowski—another of Augustus's offspring—who had fallen in love with her.

A fury like the Duchess of Cleveland, the Countess Cosel was every whit as extravagant as her grace. She forced the King to supply her with money when he was at his wits' ends to procure funds to recruit his shattered army. Her influence alarmed everybody, and as she never studied to please any one but herself, the whole court longed for her downfall.

Her declared enemy was Flemming. But try as she might she could not effect his disgrace. On this point Augustus was firm.

“I have my Charles XII.,” he would say to her, “you your Flemming.”

Her fall when it came was swift and terrible. As the Lubomirska had been supplanted at Warsaw

by the intrigues of the Court of Dresden, so the Countess Cosel was supplanted at the latter court by the intrigues of the former. Being at Warsaw, without his favourite, of whom he had at last begun to weary without knowing how to get rid of her, Augustus fell under the spell of the Countess Denhof, a scatter-brain who had the strange whim of always appearing in public masked. Having a wholesome fear of the vengeance of the Countess Cosel, she sought the advice of her mother, a crafty and dauntless old woman who would have bearded the devil himself.

“You must,” said she, “refuse to follow the King when he returns to Dresden. When he asks the reason, tell him that as he has two courts he ought to have a mistress in each, for by thus avoiding the appearance of favouring one more than the other he will satisfy both. His approval of such an arrangement is a foregone conclusion. Knowing Cosel, we may be certain that she will at once come here. To prevent this you must at once inform the King with many tears and endearments that great as it grieves you to force yourself to part from him your terror of Cosel leaves you no other course. To calm you he will send to forbid Cosel to come to Warsaw, an order which she, we may be sure, will not obey. To take advantage of the King’s anger should then be easy. He will perceive that your fears are thoroughly justified, and to allay them will readily consent to banish Cosel altogether from his dominions.”

The foresight of the wily old woman was proved

in every particular, and as the Countess Denhof obeyed her mother to the letter her arrogant rival was obliged to make room for her.

But Flemming was not satisfied with the mere disgrace of the favourite. Fallen, he proceeded to trample on her. Reviving at once the fears of the Countess Denhof and the anger of Augustus, he caused the unhappy woman to be driven from Berlin, where she had sought refuge, and after frightening her with the menace of imprisonment till she knew not where she was safe, he had her seized in the name of the King of Poland and sealed up in the fortress-castle of Stolpen.

The rest of the career of the Countess Cosel is too singular to pass over without brief notice. In spite of the strictness with which she was guarded at Stolpen for the remaining seventeen years of Augustus's reign, she more than once nearly succeeded in escaping. In these attempts she was assisted not only from without by devoted servants, but from within her prison itself by officers and even soldiers whom she had fascinated. These abortive plots proved fatal to all who endeavoured to free her ; but being always provided with a pistol, she generally managed to take a life for a life. Once, indeed, she attempted that of Augustus himself, who, while hunting in the neighbourhood many years after her incarceration, chanced to ride by Stolpen with the Countess Orzelska and a glittering retinue.

In the course of time a great change came over her ; a sort of exalted love took the place of her hatred of the King. On learning of his death she



THE COUNTESS ORZELSKA.

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burst into tears. His son, Augustus III., offered her her freedom and even paid her—while he was able—a pension. But bereft by their deaths of all who had been devoted to her, and estranged from her children, she begged to be allowed to remain at Stolpen, where, after an imprisonment of forty-five years, she died at a very advanced age, having out-lived all her contemporaries.

After the death of Augustus she passed her time in gardening and reading. It was said that her knowledge of French literature surpassed even that of the Countess von Königsmarck—an accomplishment most unusual for a German of the period. Strange to relate, however, the Bible was the favourite book of the Countess Cosel. She knew it, as the saying is, by heart.

But enough of these mistresses of Augustus the Strong! Suffice it to state that the Denhof who, like the Lubomirska, made haste to gather hay while the sun shone—her harvest it is said was the most profitable of all—was by no means the last. This *honour*, as it was termed and considered, was reserved for the incomparable Orzelska. Like the Denhof, who always went about in a mask, she had a fondness for men's clothes, especially preferring the uniform of the grenadiers of the Life Guards. It was in this attire Rutowski presented her to the King.

To be noted for the magnificence of his court was ever the pet ambition of Augustus. Mussul-

man in his morals, it was perhaps but natural that his oriental proclivities should have displayed themselves in the manner in which he staged a pageant.

The festivities in honour of the marriage of his heir to the daughter of the Emperor afford some idea of his custom in this respect.

At this *fête*, which was held in what was known as the Turkish Palace from the manner in which it was furnished, the whole court appeared in the habits of Turks. The King came in the dress of a sultan, while Her Imperial Highness found on her arrival a body of Janizaries drawn up in the courtyard. The King and Princess being seated at table, were served by twenty-four sumptuously attired negroes with sherbert, coffee, and sweetmeats. Nor were scented waters and perfumed handkerchiefs forgotten. After this collation they drew to the windows to see the Pillau (which is the rice of Turkey) distributed to the Janizaries. This was followed by an entertainment of Turkish dances. Then came supper, the guests being seated cross-legged on cushions and the courses served after the fashion of Turkey by negroes and Turkish boys. At the same time the leaps and postures of some tumblers and rope-dancers diverted the assembly. Then began the ball, which concluded at five in the morning with a sumptuous breakfast served after the manner of our own country, for which, with the leave of the Mussulmans, I confess a preference.

But the fame of this *fête*, which was much talked of, as well as the one that Augustus gave at Moritz-

burg in honour of the arrival of Aurora von Königs-marck at his court, was quite overshadowed by the colossal scale of the revelries of the Camp of Mühlberg. The splendour of the hospitality Augustus dispensed on this occasion deserves to rank with that of the Field of the Cloth of Gold and the Tournament at Mainz in Frederick Barbarossa's time.

History must admit that Augustus attained the maximum in several things. Maximum of physical strength: he could break horseshoes, nay half-crowns with finger and thumb. Maximum of sumptuosity: no man of his time was so regardless of expense. Maximum of bastards: three hundred and fifty-four of them according to scandal, a number that probably no mortal ever exceeded. Lastly he baked the biggest cake on record! In the making of it five thousand eggs, a ton of butter, a ton of milk, and a ton of yeast were consumed.

To draw this triumph of culinary skill on the scene required eight horses, and to cut it a carpenter with a gigantic knife, acting under the orders of the Head of the Board of Works. Not only was there cut-and-come-again for all, but Augustus, with the good-natured generosity for which he was noted, having dined with his grand guests, gave the still groaning table with all its dishes to be scrambled for by the Janizaries. Souvenirs of the "Great Cake," I may add, are still to be found to this day in many a Saxon household of high and low degree in the shape of priceless Dresden china, which, by a miracle, escaped being broken in the scramble.

On this occasion I saw the young Crown Prince of Prussia, afterwards Frederick the Great, beaten before the entire assembly by his old tyrant of a father—a humiliation which caused poor Fritz to run away, as all the world knows, with the most tragic result !

But though Augustus succeeded in astounding Europe by the magnitude of his sumptuosities, which he fondly imagined were worthy of the approved of Versailles, his court was really as gothic as that of any of his neighbours. There was the same ignorance and coarseness, the same gross debauchery and rough buffoonery at Dresden and Warsaw, as at Berlin or Hanover, Stuttgart or Munich.

The manners of Augustus himself off parade, so to speak, were typical of the gross brutality that was characteristic of the courts beyond the Rhine. Most German princes had their *Tabagies*, or Tobacco Parliaments, where they drank, smoked, played practical jokes, and discussed more or less important matters. But at Dresden the carousing was rather more prominent and the business rather less so than elsewhere. Considering, however, the trouble the Diet gave him in Poland, it was perhaps but natural that Augustus should only seek amusement in Saxony, where his adoring subjects gave him a free hand.

At Dresden he frequently had a couple of bears brought into the *Tabagie*, and nothing gave him so

much pleasure as to make two enemies drunk and then induce them to fight. When his drunken Flemmings and Hoymys began to quarrel he used to split his sides with laughter. As it was not always an easy matter to get his ministers to oblige him in this respect, his principal court fool Frölich was ever on hand to keep him amused. Frölich was so accustomed to laugh as a matter of duty that he was always laughing, and made others laugh from morning to night. Small, round, and pink, the comicality of his appearance was enhanced by a tall, pointed hat with a feather, and a swallow-tail coat, of which, thanks to his master's generosity, he had ninety-nine. At other German courts it was customary for the fool to wear a gold chain round the neck, from which was suspended an enormous key. Instead of a key, however, Frölich carried a large silver vase on his back shaped like a key, from which he was obliged to drink when the King commanded. To make him drunk was very easy, and Augustus kept another fool of a melancholy temperament to quarrel with the gay one. There were also secondary fools to replace these when exhausted. Augustus also had a giant, and a number of negroes and albinos to add to the horseplay he delighted in.

The fun of the *Tabagie* often ended in some fatality. Augustus was himself a heavy drinker, and after dashing off a few bumpers became dangerous. For if his strength was the strength of Hercules, his anger was the anger of Jove. True he was not often angry, but his rage was as terrible

as a thunderbolt. On these occasions he was known to throw many a man through the window, who fell on the pavement to rise no more !

His generosity, too, sometimes proved very inconvenient for those who experienced it. A bit of an alchemist in his way, having heard that one Böttger, an apothecary, professed to be able to make gold, he sent for him, and shutting him up in a castle kept him busy day and night experimenting. He flattered the man, gave him every luxury, but kept him securely guarded. Böttger used to give balls and dinners in his gilded cell and cost the King thousands, but though he never made gold he made porcelain. It is to him that the famous Dresden or Meissen china owes its invention. In this sense at least he may certainly be said to have made gold.

The poor man went mad in the end, and died in confinement.

As Augustus went down the vale of life he became more and more addicted to drink. In this respect, too, he attained the maximum. The amount he could consume passed into a sort of proverb. Among "the dirty linen which he sent me to wash," as Voltaire after his quarrel with Frederick the Great scornfully termed the doggerel, which that monarch begged him to polish, was the famous line :

"Quand Auguste buvait la Pologne était ivre."

Drink, indeed, was the direct cause of his death. Ill-health, caused by his excesses, occasioned inflammation in one of his toes, which necessitated amputation. The operation was successful, but a

terrible drinking-bout in which he indulged caused the wound to open, mortification ensued and carried him off.

He was much lamented by his Saxons, who long cherished the memory of what they termed "the good old times of Augustus the Strong." Even the joy of the Poles on being rid of him was turned to regret. For the throne of that unhappy country, whose treasury he had emptied to fill that of Saxony, became at once a source of strife, which led it at a faster pace than ever to ruin.

And now for my own adventures.

CHAPTER III

THE BOYHOOD OF MAURICE

I

FIFTEEN days after my birth at Goslar, the Countess Aurora von Königsmarck, who in her journeys from court to court to obtain news of her vanished brother had contracted the habit of vagrancy, once more resumed her peregrinations which the favour of Augustus had for a brief period interrupted. After a year, during which I had been carried up and down Germany, she sent me to Warsaw with my nurse in order that I might claim in person from my father, who had just mounted the throne of Poland, the protection essential to my future well-being. The distracted state of the country, in which the factions of Augustus, Conti, and Sapieha were warring against one another at the same time, rendered travelling very dangerous ; but the Countess, who had only been deterred from making the journey from fear lest its object should be defeated by the ill-will her presence at the Polish Court would excite in the Countess Esterle, was

fully compensated for her anxiety as to my safety by the welcome I received from my father.

“Why,” exclaimed the good-natured Augustus, who never failed to discover a likeness to himself in every fine, chubby infant in whose behalf his protection was solicited, “the fellow resembles me just as a little sixpence does a big crown !”

On the present occasion the delight which this resemblance afforded the King was intensified by the emphatic manner in which Nature supported, and continued to support, his opinion. For the image of the sovereign was too indelibly stamped on sixpence and crown for any one ever to doubt that both coins had been struck in the same mint.

Being the soul of generosity, Augustus was ever ready to express his satisfaction in a practical manner. To acknowledge the compliment that Nature paid him in the present instance, he immediately assigned a pension of 3,000 thalers to be devoted to my maintenance. But since the dilapidated state of his finances frequently caused his *will* to be generous to be traitor to his *wish*, this act of magnanimity was left to the Countess von Königsmarck to perform.

This she undertook with no small satisfaction, for she was aware that those whom he induced to invest in his munificence, so to speak, obtained a much higher rate of interest for their capital than they would otherwise receive. In other words, though the King of Poland found it more convenient to draw upon the Countess Aurora than upon his own treasury for the money he assigned to my

upbringing, he kept me near him and watched my growth with considerable pride.

This was so precocious that when I arrived at the age of four the King decided it was time I should be taken out of the hands of women and placed in those of men. The post of governor to a child who was regarded with such favour was eagerly coveted, and Augustus, anxious as usual to please everybody, was placed in such a dilemma that he could find no other means of extricating himself from it than by ignoring the claims of all and conferring the honour on a certain Baron Delorme, whose previous obscurity rendered his elevation the more humiliating to those over whose heads he had been preferred.

The Countess, in particular, objected to the appointment of Delorme, though her objection was quite free from the jealousy that had inspired the opposition of the others. Having very strong ideas on the subject of my education, she not unnaturally felt that the money she contributed towards it gave her a right to be considered in the matter. A special predilection for the French, whose language she spoke *sans accent*, though she had never set foot in their country, made her desire to cultivate in me a similar taste, which was a sort of heritage of the Königsmarcks. Knowing that it would be useless to try to remove Delorme, whose integrity was his sole qualification, and determined to have her way, the Countess artfully proposed that he should have an "assistant."

"The Baron Delorme," she said to Augustus, "is



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a man of undoubted personal merit, but he is after all only a Saxon in spite of his name, and from the manner in which he speaks the language of Molière and Racine, I feel sure he lapses into boorish Platt-Deutsch whenever he gets the chance."

On a king who prided himself on the manners he imported from Versailles, such an imputation could not fail to have the effect designed. Accordingly, Augustus was not only persuaded to give Delorme a French assistant, but to leave the choice to the Countess, who selected the Chevalier d'Alençon, a captain in Bonneval's regiment of Huguenots at Dresden and specially noted for his *bel air*, his literary accomplishments, and his skill in riding and fencing.

My martial spirit, which began to assert itself, so they say, while I was still in my cradle, induced me to bestow a sort of non-committal approval on the riding and fencing d'Alençon, which I had utterly refused to extend to the sedentary and pedantic Delorme. But though I was eager to learn to manage a horse and handle a sword, I fumed and fretted like a leashed animal at the compulsion of learning my lessons. The drums which I heard beaten around me from morning till night, the flash of the swords which I saw constantly unsheathed, the glitter of uniforms, the neighing and prancing of war-horses, the even tramp of the soldiers at drill on the esplanade in front of my father's palace, the everlasting talk of battles and sieges—in fine the incessant excitement of my environment—had

deeply impressed my imagination and stirred the Königsmarck that was latent in me. I refused to apply my mind to anything that was not of a militant nature, and resented the bare idea of restraint.

To teach me to read and write was like breaking a horse to harness. On the principle that a bird which can sing and won't must be made to sing, Delorme and d'Alençon tried to frighten me once by letting me overhear them, as if by accident, seriously discussing the making of an iron machine for tightening the skull, in which they said there was a large crack that was the cause of my lack of intelligence. Discovering, however, that fear was powerless to move me, they resorted to bribery.

"I will," wrote my mother in the hope of inducing me to learn to write, "give you a fine horse and a pistol the day you prove worthy of them."

For sake of so tempting a reward rather than with any idea of pleasing her, I at once set myself to the task of earning it. After some days I succeeded, with infinite labour and pains, in inditing a reply, in which I reminded my mother of her promise, and begged her to keep it as soon as possible in order that I might show her how brave I was.

But even to bribery I yielded grudgingly the homage I refused to fear. In order to obtain my consent to study for a couple of hours in the morning it was necessary to promise me I should be allowed to devote the whole afternoon to riding, shooting, and fencing. In this way, from a natural

facility to grasp a subject quickly rather than from application, by the time I had reached my seventh year I was quite well up in geography, and could, if called upon, state correctly the names of the capitals and princes of the various countries in Europe. I had also read the "Fables" of La Fontaine, and was able to recite passages from Racine. As for languages, I had picked up a knowledge of Latin which, when in Poland, I heard constantly spoken around me; while French, to the delight of my mother and thanks to d'Alençon, had become as familiar to me as if I had been born a Frenchman.

To spell correctly, however, was a feat that neither now nor at any time in my life could I achieve; perhaps no man was ever a worse "speller." But this deficiency, as Voltaire says, is no drawback to a man of wit, a statement of which I, at all events, have never had occasion to doubt the truth. For my lifelong quarrel with orthography by no means deterred the Académie Française from offering me one of its forty arm-chairs—a sublime honour, which I had the common-sense to decline—or innumerable ladies, from duchesses to demi-reps, from understanding my *billets doux*.

The feverish Königsmarck blood in my veins, which made application so abhorrent to me, was still further inflamed by the unsettled life I was forced to lead. Owing to the agitated lives of my parents and the confusion of the times, I seldom remained long anywhere. No sooner would I and my tutors arrive in a town than they would re-

ceive orders to move to another. I lived perpetually *en route*.

To counteract the evils of this nomadic existence my tutors attempted to make my mode of life as regular and simple as possible. My daily fare consisted of bread and beer soup, a Spartan regimen as monotonous as it was nourishing, and on which it was customary in those days to bring up German children. As I possessed a very vigorous appetite, constantly sharpened by plenty of exercise in the open air, I thrived remarkably on this diet, which was far from being as unappetising as it sounds. Indeed, so greatly did I relish my beer soup that even the Regency suppers have not cloyed my taste for it.

My parents were kept frequently informed of my progress. The Countess, in particular, required that the reports despatched to her should contain the fullest information concerning her "*cher petit mystérieux*." No detail, she declared, could be too trivial to interest her. Thus Delorme and d'Alençon would report to her that I had lost a tooth at Leipsic, at Utrecht been measured for a new suit of clothes, or that at Breslau I had amused myself by chasing the Burgomaster's ducks, with as much gravity as that I had a fine ear for music, or was observant, frank, spirited, and promised to be as strong as King Augustus.

But the Countess's motherly solicitude was far from being satisfied by the frequency of the detailed reports she received. She demanded them as well from servants, who, unknown to Delorme

and d'Alençon, furnished her with confidential accounts of my doings. As these often contradicted the reports of the tutors, she was in the habit of arriving in person when least expected to inspect my progress. Such excessive solicitude, however, made up as it was of espionage and interference, only served to inflame the mutual antipathy of the tutors, whose recriminations impaired their authority. At length the situation became so intolerable that both Delorme and d'Alençon resigned.

As Charles XII. and the Poles left Augustus no time to occupy himself with an affair of such minor importance, the Countess now took upon herself the entire direction of my education. She appointed as my governor a M. de Stotrogen, who, though Dutch by birth, possessed in every other respect the qualifications she deemed essential for the post. Stotrogen, however, I am inclined to suspect, owed his appointment less to his personal merit and abilities than to a romantic, platonic attachment to the Countess, a portion of which he extended to me.

Being very tactful, and not handicapped by an assistant to dispute his authority, Stotrogen engaged to work wonders, provided I was suffered to remain permanently in one place. To this the Countess was readily induced to consent, and as the continual advance of the Swedish king had not only made a residence in Poland impossible for any one connected with Augustus, but threatened to render Saxony unsafe, she settled on the Hague. Convinced that my tastes and nature would defeat any

attempt to turn me into a sort of Admiral Crichton, as was the fond dream of the Countess, Stotrogen, not unwisely, confined his labours to the cultivation of such parts as I possessed. Instead of bribing me with amusements as the means of inducing me to fix an unwilling attention on tasks I detested, the easy-going governor made these amusements the chief part of his curriculum. Thus, so well did I learn to sit a horse that I might be said to have been born in the saddle. In fencing, in spite of my youth, I could hold my own against the most skilled masters of the art. Nor was I less expert in dancing and singing. As the son of the King of Poland I would naturally have attracted attention anywhere. Several of the principal officials of the Dutch Republic called on me in person. This, coupled with my precocious physical development, which made me appear twice my age, obtained for me many invitations to social functions, where I enjoyed the attentions that were paid me so much that I applied myself with ardour to the study of the art of pleasing.

Such aptitude did I display in this respect, I was constantly in request. Stotrogen, who attached the highest importance to deportment, was so delighted at my popularity that he actually wrote to Augustus to suggest he should honour me with the new order of knighthood he had instituted as a reward for my perfect manners and progress in all I was taught.

Stotrogen, however, was either too conscientious, or too afraid of the wrath of the Countess, not to

endeavour to burden the mind of the little *petit maître* he was creating with some knowledge that might be of use to him in after life. Accordingly, following as usual the line of least resistance, he craftily insinuated that since in the preparation for the profession of arms, which I continually stated it was my fixed intention to follow, rather more was required than a knowledge of the use of pistols and swords, it would be as well for me to obtain some information in regard to the art of warfare generally.

The effect of this hint was immediate, and as I had conceived a taste for mathematical problems, I devoted a considerable part of my time to the study of geometry, drawing, and fortifications.

But my residence at the Hague where I lived—O presage of the future!—at an inn called the “Maréchal de Turenne,” was far from having the calming effect upon me that both my mother and Stotrogen had hoped.

Over my pleasures and pursuits alike hung the cloud of my father’s misfortunes. Passionately devoted to Augustus, I had from my earliest years taken the liveliest interest in the King’s struggle with Charles XII. My letters to my father were full of an exalted affection, which expressed the great anxiety I felt concerning the perils that confronted him. I never rose from my beer soup and bread without proposing a toast to the success of the arms of the King of Poland. The news of a

defeat would throw me into a violent passion, which neither Delorme nor d'Alençon attempted to check. For on reporting these fits to my mother she had recommended them to be careful how they reproved me as she considered such vivacity a distinctive sign of high birth.

The humiliating Treaty of Altranstadt, which Charles wrung out of Augustus the year after my arrival at the Hague, and which the dethroned King of Poland bore with characteristic light-heartedness, overwhelmed me.

On receiving the news I covered the portraits of the King and the Countess with kisses, and vowed an irreconcilable hatred of the Swedes.

At a reception to which I was invited at this time two persons attracted my attention by the singularity of their appearance. Asking who they were, I was told they were Swedes.

"Swedes!" I exclaimed, pale with rage, and immediately drawing my sword I rushed upon them.

In reply to the remonstrances of those who with difficulty restrained me, I said:

"I hate them; they are the enemies of the King, my father!"

I even declared war against Sweden in my household itself. Discovering that one of the servants had originally come from Sweden I compelled him to leave the Hague.

But the cup of my bitterness remained to be filled. The King of Prussia, the crooked-backed grandfather of the great Frederick, whose extravagance

surpassed even that of Augustus, arrived in the Hague. Aware that it was largely due to my father's influence with the Emperor that this sovereign had been able to realise the ambition of his life and convert his electorate of Brandenburg into the kingdom of Prussia, I hastened to call on him as a mark of respect. But the Prussian monarch not only refused to receive me, but turned his back on me one day in a public thoroughfare.

The shame of this rebuff was intolerable. My vanity, however, was wounded less on my own account than on account of my father. It gave a poignancy to the disgrace of the latter. Hitherto the attention I had received, the compliments paid me on my resemblance to my father, had flattered me immensely. But now when I heard people as I passed in the street exclaim, "Look, that is the son of Augustus!" it seemed to me like a reproach. To the despair of Stotrogen, who was obliged to report them to the Countess, I had frequent fits of melancholy from which it was difficult to rouse me.

The misfortunes of Augustus, however, were not without their beneficial effect on my emotional nature. Stotrogen no longer had any trouble in persuading me to learn the tasks he set me. I applied myself more diligently than ever to master the art of conquering, for the military career I dreamt of had suddenly acquired a new meaning for me. I resolved to consecrate it to wiping out the stain on my father's honour!

II

To a mind so agitated, to a nature so restless, the Hague, within echoing distance as it was of the victories of Marlborough and Eugene, was, it scarcely needs saying, anything but settling. The magnitude of the War of the Spanish Succession, the importance of the powers engaged in it, the genius of the generals, were like so much fuel to feed the fire that blazed in me. The admiration Charles XII. would have stirred in me, had any one but the King of Poland been his victim, was elicited by the marvellous Englishman who trailed the glory of Louis XIV. in the dust at Blenheim, Ramillies, and Oudenarde.

My imagination, constantly inflamed by tales of heroism, hair-breadth escapes, and glorious deaths, was beside itself with excitement when I learnt that Augustus, as the vassal of the Emperor, had been called upon to furnish troops for the next campaign. I pleaded hard to be allowed to join this contingent, resolving, if my prayer was not heard, to run away and enlist. My mother, dismayed at the idea of exposing her darling—barely thirteen—to the danger and hardship of active service, endeavoured in vain to pacify me. But her attempts only served to exasperate me, and she was finally forced from fear of losing my affection to use her influence to obtain from Augustus the permission I craved.

The King—Charles had suffered him to retain the

title—would, like the Countess, have preferred to wait till I was somewhat older before granting my prayer. My spirit, however, appealed to him, and shortly before the departure of the Saxon contingent he ordered Stotrogen to bring me to Dresden. As he gave no reason for this, and suffered me, moreover, to remain for some days after my arrival in ignorance of his intentions, I had begun to doubt if they boded me good, when General Schulenburg appeared one morning with the tidings I craved.

“The King,” he said, “has sent me to inform you that he intends to make a soldier of you, and you must be ready to start to-morrow.”

I was drunk with joy. Having donned the uniform that Schulenburg had brought me, and buckled round my waist a belt to which a long sword was attached, I went to the King to kiss his hand. He invited me to dine at his table and made me drink his health more than was good for me. The conversation turned on my studies, especially as to my knowledge of geometry and drawing.

“I understand,” said the King to Schulenburg, “that all the plans you will send me are to be drawn by him. See,” he added, “that you get plenty of work out of him, for it will harden him. To commence with, make him march on foot all the way to Flanders.”

This latter project was not at all to my taste, but I dared offer no objection. Schulenburg replied for me suitably no doubt, but in a manner that certainly did not express my thoughts. At last I dared to suggest that I should much prefer to serve

in the cavalry to the infantry, but I was roughly silenced. The King further went on to tell Schulenburg that he did not wish any one to carry my arms for me during the march as my shoulders were quite broad enough for me to carry them myself.

“Above all,” he said, “see that he does not hire a substitute when he has to mount guard unless he should be seriously ill.”

I pricked up my ears at this, and considered that the King, who was usually so kind in his manner to me, spoke like a Turk. But reflecting that I had at last become a man, I forgot my vexation and considered myself the happiest of mortals.

The next day Schulenburg carried me off to Leipsic, where the force he commanded was assembled. A week later the preparations for the campaign being complete, the Saxon troops left for the front. I was placed in the first battalion, given a gun, and saluted as ensign. On arriving at Lützen, Schulenburg took advantage of its glorious associations to review his men.

At the close of the inspection he sent for me, and having embraced me, addressed me thus, leaning the while against the monument which marks the spot where Gustavus Adolphus fell:

“May this place be of good omen to you. May the spirit of the great man who died here protect you. May all your actions be regulated by its gentleness, its sense of discipline and justice. Be as obedient to your superiors as you are firm in exacting the obedience of those you yourself com-



*Matthäo Gio. Conte del S.
Feld Marschal, e
della Ser. Rep. di
dell' Aquila nera di
All' Imperatore, &c.*



*R. J. di Schulenburg
Generale in Capite
Venezia, Cavalier
S. M. Prussiana &c.
e la sua fedeltà e umiltà e coraggio
di Marco Pavesi scult. Franc.*

GENERAL SCHULENBURG.

(From an old print.)

70 VIII
ANNO 1900

mand. Never be weak, either from friendship or an excess of caution, then there will be no question of insubordination. To rule men you must be irreproachable.”

I replied that I joyfully accepted the favourable omen he mentioned, and would profit by his advice. He embraced me a second time and I returned to the ranks.

The same evening Schulenburg presented me to the officers, and I gave a supper of a hundred covers. The next morning the army proceeded on the road to Flanders, I marching on foot. My colonel, M. de Preuss, although quite an old man, kept me company with some other officers. To amuse me he placed a player on the bag-pipes at the head of the battalion and some soldiers who excelled in singing comic songs. Their *répertoire* was soon learnt by the others, who joined in the chorus at the end of each verse. Never since that day have I seen troops march so gaily. Also there was not a single deserter. In the end, however, I could not support the fatigue of the march; my feet had sores in twenty places, and my shoulder was black and blue from the weight of my gun. For some days I was obliged to ride, but the soldiers made fun of me, and just as soon as I possibly could I resumed my place among them.

Nor was the hospitality the Saxons received in the various friendly little states through which they marched without its memorable incidents.

At Hanover I was very well received in spite of

the affair of my uncle, Philip von Königsmarck, Indeed, on the very day of my arrival I was invited to supper by the Elector.

I could not help wondering what the Elector, afterwards George I. of England, thought of the Saxon ensign whose birth was so closely connected with the famous "mystery" of the tragic scandal in his own life. It was not a subject, it goes without saying, that any one would dare to refer to ; but that night when the son of Aurora von Königsmarck, whose efforts to clear up the mystery of her brother's disappearance some fourteen years before had only served to add to the notoriety of that sensation, was so very well received by George, the thoughts of two at least among the distinguished company gathered round the Electoral board, dwelt on the past.

One was George's mother, the Electress Sophia—strangest and craftiest of old women who lived in a world of dreams and intrigues, a German spider spinning a web around the British throne. The other was George's mistress, Ehrengard Melusina von der Schulenburg, General Schulenburg's sister, also very strange and crafty, very lean and hideous and old, who went to England five years later with George and got made Duchess of Kendal, a harpy queen with an inordinate appetite for gold !

As I stood warming myself at the logs that blazed in a huge fireplace, I caught the words "Königsmarck's bastard," and looking up I observed the two regarding me slyly. Were they thinking that it was behind that very chimney, the corpse of Philip

was buried after the Platen's bravos had hacked him to pieces as he left the bedroom of her rival on that terrible night years ago? So slyly were their eyes fixed upon me, that I moved away from the fire with a little instinctive shudder, as if I expected my uncle's ghost to rise out of it. Needless to say I was not sorry on the morrow to leave that haunted palace, to get away from the strained politeness of George and those prim suspicious old women, in whose withered bosoms many a strange secret was locked.

But all the halting-places were not so gloomy as Hanover. At Wolfenbüttel, for instance, which was the capital of one of those principalities a stag could leap at a bound, there were no ghosts of Königsmarcks, or if there were they were very merry ones. Here I was welcomed with the greatest cordiality. For Duke Anton Ulric, a cheery, amusing old man, who spent most of his time writing novels in imitation of those of Mademoiselle de Scudéry into which he put the various members of his court, was a particular friend of my mother, having once staged and acted in her play "Les Trois Filles de Cécrops."

Thus, marching by easy stages, the Saxons at length reached Brussels, where Schulenburg duly presented me as "the son of King Augustus" to the generals of the Allies, who at once invited the ensign of twelve to dine with them. Perhaps only a schoolboy, who has been noticed by some hero of the playground for whom he has an enthusiastic admiration, will be capable of understanding my

feelings on finding myself in the presence of Marlborough and Eugene. In all my letters to my mother I dilated on the honour of being permitted to assist at their receptions.

The Countess, who had seen me depart from Dresden with the greatest misgiving, had implored Schulenburg to keep me out of danger. But it was one thing for the General to promise and another to keep his promise. Danger was the very thing I craved. Throughout the campaign, which ended in the immortal victory of Malplaquet, I contrived to be in the thick of danger in every engagement.

At the siege of Tournay seven men were killed and twelve wounded beside me. The horse I rode was killed under me, and my hat was pierced by a ball. This was my baptism of fire.

At Mons I only escaped death or capture by suddenly turning and blowing out the brains of my pursuer. My rashness on this occasion attracted the notice of Marlborough himself—which was exactly what I had designed. Instead, however, of complimenting me as I expected, he administered a stern reproof.

“Young man,” said the Duke to me severely, “only one ignorant of danger would attempt what you have so wantonly done. You mistake rashness for bravery.”

But the words only went in one ear and out the other, and I swallowed my mortification with the

consoling thought that it was something after all to be *blamed* by Marlborough.

At Malplaquet, where blood flowed like water, my incorrigible recklessness must have cost me my life but for the watchful care of Schulenburg, who placed me among the reserves, and managed to keep me there to my intense disgust. For my corps was not under fire through the battle. But though I failed to distinguish myself on this occasion, I was not above pretending I had, for I was perfectly convinced that it was not *my* fault that I hadn't. Knowing that I would be exposed to the banter of the officers—who, aware of my annoyance when I heard of an engagement in which I had not taken part, were in the habit of twitting me—I entered the mess at the end of the day wiping my brow and saying with a theatrical air that I was satisfied with my day. Indeed, as the fame of this battle in the flight of time quite extinguished that of all the other engagements of this memorable campaign, I formed the habit of transferring the scenes that had witnessed my valour to that of the deathless carnage itself.

“Ah,” I would say in later years, when in reminiscent mood, “at Malplaquet I, &c., &c.”

It was one of those amiable fictions that one permits the vanity of the soldier to indulge in. I dare say many recalled Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, who never *saw* either in the battle!

No. both ran away!!

III

But delightful as I found the soldier's life, it was, nevertheless, not without its drawbacks. These arose out of the liberal and prodigal tendencies which I had inherited from my father, and which in an atmosphere conducive to extravagance were rapidly developed. For one did not follow a Marlborough and a Eugene to the wars on a few paltry ducats, and in an army where dukes and princes were as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa the son of a king was naturally expected to cut a figure. Invited to the banquets and gambling parties of the officers, who, admiring the fearlessness I displayed, treated me with a *camaraderie* that ignored my extreme youth, I felt compelled to return their hospitality and keep pace with their extravagance. I accordingly appealed to my mother for the money necessary to maintain my dignity.

"Without money," I complained, "I might as well be in the ranks like a *fantassin*."

Finding that she responded to my appeals, spoilt by the *luxe* of maternal affection with which I had been surrounded from my cradle, I did not hesitate to make them more and more urgent and excessive. They became, in fact, the sum and substance of all my letters to her.

But the strain of meeting these constant demands for money caused the Countess many misgivings. If I found time to waste money like water in the midst of the fatigues of the campaign, to what

lengths of extravagance would I not go in winter-quarters, where the temptations to dissipation would be irresistible? Disappointed by my failure to acquire the elegant intellectual accomplishments she deemed indispensable to my education, it occurred to her that the evil effects of the coming winter's idleness at Brussels might be counteracted by obliging me to resume the studies my military service had interrupted.

"I would," she wrote to Schulenburg, whom she consulted, "willingly go in rags to see my son well educated."

But this method of checking my tendency to wildness, which proves how little she understood me, was suggested not only by misgivings on my account but on her own. The world had not gone well with the Countess von Königsmarck of late years. Since the complete failure of her mission to Charles XII., Augustus had rather lost faith in her abilities. The jealousy of the Countess Cosel, who had *her* children to provide for, and the enmity of Flemming, whose disgrace she in vain intrigued to bring about, had driven her from the court. All her schemes to become Abbess of Quedlinburg had failed, and last, but by no means least, her fortune which she had crippled by her own extravagant mode of life was inextricably entangled in a costly lawsuit.

Depressed by the weight of such a multiplicity of cares, it is, perhaps, scarcely to be wondered that so devoted a mother, finding the road of political influence which she had built expressly for me to travel to greatness on impeded by so many

obstacles, should in her anxious quest for a surer avenue to success have lost her way, so to speak.

For having, as I have said, consulted Schulenburg—who was one of the few men, and possibly the only soldier, of a corrupt and irreligious age to be held in high esteem while preserving his honour and a devout belief in God—the Countess actually proposed to send me to the Jesuit College at Brussels. This idea—suggested by Schulenburg—had at first horrified the Countess, who prided herself, like all the Königsmarcks, on being Lutheran, a persuasion in which I had also been born and bred. But Aurora von Königsmarck never suffered her religious scruples to interfere with her ambition; and just as she had found it easy to urge Augustus to abjure Protestantism in order to become King of Poland, so now she resigned herself to the task of making me a Catholic in order to save me from the debaucheries of winter-quarters. Perhaps, too, she thought the Jesuits might induce me to exchange my uniform for a cassock? And giving the rein to her imagination, I have no doubt my ambitious mother pictured “her darling” clad in the *soutane* running as swiftly as Atalanta along a road on which mitres and even the crimson robes of a Cardinal Primate of Poland were to be picked up!

But this little conspiracy of Schulenburg and the Countess never got beyond its conception. No sooner did I get wind of it than my indignation nipped it in the bud. The bare thought of becoming a priest gave me an unconquerable aversion to the Catholic religion, which, in later years, caused the Church to join with the Court in the discreditable

attempts of my enemies to disgrace me. Not that I was really a Lutheran, though I have always called myself one. The fact is, I have never had any religious convictions at all. Madame de Pompadour was so disturbed by my scepticism, as she termed it, that she spoke of it to the Abbé Marigny, to whose care she had entrusted her soul, and who had as little belief as myself. But scepticism implies a state of mental unrest, and my mind preserved a perfectly tranquil indifference as to my fate in the next world.

However, though I made the idea of the Jesuit College impossible, I did not escape tutelage altogether. When the army of the Allies returned to winter-quarters at Brussels at the close of the campaign, I found Stotrogen with two under-governors waiting to instruct me in the "intellectual sciences." The mortification I experienced may be imagined.

"What," I said to myself, "if I am not yet fourteen have I not borne the fatigue of an exhausting campaign like a man, have I not been treated as a man by all my seniors and superiors? To expect me, accustomed to obey the command of generals, to take orders from tutors is too much. I to apply myself to the study of the 'intellectual sciences,' after mounting guard and copying the plans of Schulenburg? Never!"

In such a mood application of any sort was out of the question, and as the pleasures from which it was desired to restrain me became the more alluring, in order to obtain them I had resource to subterfuge.

CHAPTER IV

MONSIEUR AND MADAME SATAN

I

I DID not, however, long enjoy the fruit I stole ; for Augustus being greatly pleased with my conduct in the campaign suddenly recalled me to Dresden and gave me the colonelcy of a cavalry regiment. This high favour revived the drooping ambition of my mother, who did not fail to take advantage of so propitious an occasion to increase my prestige. But though the Countess was ever ready to busy herself with all sorts of schemes for my advancement, she never knew just what sort of a career it was she desired for me, save that it was to be a dazzling one.

This was due to my total indifference in regard to the future. Between fighting and flirting, between campaigns crowded with action, danger, and adventure, and winters equally crowded with gallantry, gambling, and dissipation generally, I never thought of my future at all. Colonel of a cavalry regiment, with an untiring passion for war, son of a king, from whom I had inherited an inordinate love of pleasure, popular in the army and petted at court, I asked nothing better than to spend my summers in fighting and my winters at Dresden or Warsaw. Life, as I found it, was a *fête* with which I was very well satisfied.

But to enjoy this *fête* required money. The pride

I took in my regiment of itself demanded a small Golconda. For I would only have the best horses and the best men, and to maintain both in the state of efficiency that prevented them from collapsing under the strain I put upon them, it was necessary to give them the best food, the best uniforms, and the best of care generally. A colonel, too, could not live like a subaltern, so I deemed it incumbent upon my dignity to keep several servants, to give costly parties, and to gamble for high stakes.

Augustus on giving me my colonelcy had added an income of 10,000 crowns a year. But this bagatelle was not only inadequate to supply my needs, but even increased their embarrassment. For the estate from which this revenue was derived had been ruined by the war, and the rents were paid irregularly, if at all.

Perhaps no fixed income however large would have sufficed to cover my extravagant expenditure. But though I plunged into debt and dissipation with the same *insouciant* recklessness and energy characteristic of my conduct in the field, I was forced to consider ways and means. So I continued to appeal to the Countess for money, compelling her—for I was merciless in this matter—to provide me with funds without the least care of *her* difficulties. Not that I meant to be cruel ; I merely treated her with the thoughtless tyranny of all children whose mothers spoil them from infancy less from any real love than from a selfish desire to be indispensable to them, which is only to be realised by their own complete subjection. So complete was the

Countess's she rebelled at no humiliation to satisfy my exorbitant demands.

Any mother placed in such a position would, no doubt, desire to see her son married as the likeliest means of "settling" him. In the case of the Countess von Königsmarck the idea of my making a rich marriage had at an early date entered into her calculations. It was, in fact, the one definite factor in the grand career of which she dreamed, and I was scarcely out of my cradle before she had begun to look for my wife.

She had not looked far before she discovered the necessary heiress. But it was one thing to find and another to secure Victoria von Löben, whose immense fortune had excited the cupidity of others at the Court of Augustus quite as distinguished as the Countess von Königsmarck. Her proposals, indeed, had been politely rejected by the father of the little heiress, who at the age of eight had been promised to a Count von Friesen, on the condition that he won her affection by the time she was old enough to marry him. To this condition Friesen had willingly consented, and as a guarantee of good faith on both sides a contract was drawn up to the above effect, to which the suitor and his prospective father-in-law put their signatures.

Shortly after this event, however, Löben died, and his widow married the following year a Baron von Gersdorff, who induced her to destroy the contract her former husband had made with Friesen and betroth the little Victoria to his nephew. The latter, delighted at the prospect of obtaining so rich

a prize, resolved to protect himself from the fate of the previous aspirant, into whose shoes he had stepped, by marrying the child at once. Accordingly, to render ineffectual any opposition to such a scheme on the score of Victoria's age, young Gersdorff eloped with her to Silesia. Having found a priest willing to perform the marriage ceremony, he once more restored his nine-year-old wife to her mother, who seems to have encouraged, if not to have proposed, the adventure.

But fortunes are not to be filched like this with impunity, and Friesen at once raised such an outcry and took such steps to recover the "priceless jewel" he had lost that he set the whole of Saxony and Poland ablaze with the scandal of Gersdorff's abduction of the heiress.

This was the stage when the interest that the Countess von Königsmarck had formerly taken in the Löben gold-mine once more became active. For though her proposal of marriage in behalf of myself had been rejected, she had by no means abandoned all hope of securing the prize she sought. Recognising that our extreme youth—Victoria was a year younger than I—of itself was an insurmountable barrier to an immediate marriage, she had merely postponed the intrigues by which she meant to cheat Friesen of his bride. She had, however, not counted on the entry of Gersdorff on the scene.

But even now the Countess did not for a moment admit herself beaten. She intended to *remove* Gersdorff. The immorality of such a proceeding did not trouble her in the least. If this question

had arisen in her mind, like all women and most men with a definite purpose and a fixed determination to attain it, she would have found some plausible answer to satisfy her conscience. Had Friesen's complaints and denunciations not given her the opportunity she desired of *removing* Gersdorff without appearing to do so, she would not have hesitated to have had recourse to bolder and more violent methods.

The stratagem by which she took advantage of the situation created by Friesen's appeal to Augustus for justice made up in cleverness for what it lacked in principle. Her plan was to persuade the King to make Friesen's appeal to him serve as a pretext for arbitrarily interfering in the affairs of the Löbens, and thus assuming control of the heiress. This Augustus was only too glad to do, and, guided by the Countess, he summoned Victoria von Löben and her mother to Dresden. The latter was then separated from her daughter and questioned as if there was a crime to be punished. Intimidated by the harshness with which she was treated, the Baroness von Gersdorff was induced to confess that she had not only consented to her daughter's abduction, but in doing so had been actuated by the most self-interested motives. The marriage was hereupon declared null and void, a decision to which the extreme youth of the abducted Victoria gave under the circumstances every appearance of justice. The Baroness von Gersdorff, moreover, having on her own showing proved herself unfit to have the care of her child, was deprived,

in spite of her tears and protestations, of all further control of the little heiress, who was confided to a lady of the Saxon court, specially charged with her education. At the same time Augustus effectually extinguished any hopes that Gersdorff and Friesen might still continue to cherish by sternly ordering the former to renounce all further thought of recovering the wife he had lost, and by marrying the latter to one of his daughters by the Countess Cosel.

The ground having been prepared for me in this way, I had no difficulty in supplanting future rivals.

But a wife had no attraction for me, and, in spite of the Countess's arguments and entreaties, I refused for a long time even to meet her heiress. I was too wedded to the free life I was leading to impose the slightest restraint on it. By degrees, however, as the difficulty of obtaining the money I needed increased, I began to reflect seriously on the advantage of possessing a rich wife. The more I reflected the less irksome appeared the sacrifice; even the name of Victoria von Löben came to possess an auspicious significance.

"Soit," I exclaimed at last to my mother, "épousons la victoire!"

I now became as eager to co-operate with the Countess as I had previously been reluctant. I made love as I made war. The heiress, whose education had been such as to predispose her in my favour, succumbed at the first assault. The Countess was for a speedy wedding. To this, however, Augustus would not consent on the ground

that we were too young—Victoria was at the time but fifteen, I a year older. The decision of the King by indefinitely deferring the marriage I had come to desire only made me the more impatient for it. Victoria was ever in my thoughts, and my letters to my mother contained as many demands for news of my *fiancée* as for money. I constantly extolled her charms, which but for her great wealth no one would ever have allowed she possessed, and boasted of my good fortune as if I hoped by advertising my happiness to make certain of it. With this object, indeed, I even attempted to anticipate the realisation of my wishes by suggesting that the Countess should raise 60,000 thalers for me on the security of the fortune I was to marry.

Victoria, in her turn, having as great a desire to be the wife of a king's son as I had for her money, manifested an equal devotion to me. This found expression in ardent love-letters, in which she swore to be "très fidèle jusqu' à la mort." Her passion also vented itself in poetry, and in moments of frenzy she assured me of her fidelity in verse of which the cadence was even more melancholy than the sentiment.

To render our mutual agreement complete this charming idyl of the Court of Augustus was assailed by one of those proverbial storms which by disturbing the smoothness of its course give to true love the *cachet* of romance. The Countess Cosel was at this time the declared favourite of the King of Poland. Jealous of the esteem in which he continued to hold the Countess von Königsmarck, she

regarded me as an obstacle to the advancement of her own children. She accordingly left no stone unturned to disgrace me in the eyes of Augustus.

Having succeeded for a time in estranging Augustus from the Countess, she attempted to deprive me of Victoria by persuading the King to marry the heiress to one of her sons. But this malicious intrigue only served to hasten the very end it endeavoured to defeat. For the fear, on my part, of losing a fortune I had all but touched, and on Victoria's of never marrying any one through this chopping and changing, caused us to approach the King together and implore him to permit us to be married without further delay, though we could only count thirty-five years between us. Touched by the ardour of our prayers the good-natured Augustus consented to hear them, and the marriage was finally solemnised at the Castle of Moritzburg with all the pomp for which the Saxon court was noted.

Among the clauses of the marriage contract, which we both signed, was one in which we "engaged ourselves by a solemn and irrevocable vow, to love one another as husband and wife in all honour and affection till the end of our days."

II

Having obtained what we had both set our hearts upon, it did not take either of us long to make the discovery that the pleasure of realisation falls far short of anticipation. Scarcely had we left the altar than each of us perceived the motive that had in-

spired the love of the other, and mutually despised one another for the deception that in ourselves we ignored. But while we neither had the least intention of keeping the vows we had made, our pride delayed the inevitable rupture.

Particularly did the Comtesse de Saxe, who became *enceinte* immediately after the marriage, dread the humiliation of being deserted before her child was born. To compel me to remain, if not at her side, at least at court till after this event, she went to the length of secretly entreating the King to refuse me permission to rejoin my regiment as usual at the opening of the campaign.

An intense pride in my approaching paternity, which in some curious way caused me to regard the legitimacy of my son—I was *sure* it would be a son—as a sort of atonement for the illegitimacy of my own birth, induced me to respect the wishes of the Comtesse de Saxe. For the first time since I had commenced my military career I passed a whole campaign in idleness at Dresden. My wife, however, would have done better to have compelled me to leave her, for, having no resources in myself, I could not escape the pitfalls with which such a court was honeycombed. For I am one of those who to keep out of mischief require to be constantly employed. It is only with the harness on my back that such virtues as I possess become apparent.

The novelty of the Golconda my wife had brought me was in itself an invitation to debauchery. I accepted it eagerly, and astonished everybody by my reckless extravagance. The restlessness of my

nature impelled me to excesses of every kind. Prevented from seeking glory on the battle-field, I sought to keep my audacity and temerity in training, so to speak, by any mad escapade to which danger was attached.

The day my son was born was almost fatal to me.* Hearing some one observe that the Elbe which had been frozen all winter was, in spite of a heavy thaw, still covered with ice, it suddenly occurred to me to test the strength of the ice by sleighing on the river. The derision with which this suggestion was received only made me the more determined to make the dangerous experiment. Two friends, as reckless as myself, volunteered to accompany me. A sledge was ordered, and seizing the reins as we jumped into it I made it fly over the ice. Suddenly there was a crash, and horse and sledge disappeared. A moment later, my head having risen above the icy flood, I clutched a block of ice and succeeded in reaching the shore, as did one of my companions. But the life of the other was only saved with the greatest difficulty. The stupid folly of this escapade, one of many similar instances of the exaggerated bravado with which I sought to astonish the Saxon court, will prove the state to which my intelligence was reduced by idleness.

Ten days later the news reached Dresden that Charles XII. had escaped from his Turkish prison and arrived at Stralsund after the most thrilling adventures. The sudden reappearance of this re-

* January 21, 1715.

markable hero, for whom I had, since his misfortune at Pultawa, conceived an unbounded admiration, and after whose reckless and dauntless conduct in war I modelled my own, stirred me profoundly. It was like a tocsin summoning me to the dangers and adventures I craved. I longed to be in the trenches at Stralsund—the last Swedish possession in Germany—where in the depth of winter Charles was offering an heroic resistance to the besiegers. I yearned to be in the thick of those furious assaults and sallies, to hear the patter of the bullet-rain and the rumbling thunder of the cannon, to match the death-contemptuous heroism of the redoubtable Charles, to meet him, perhaps, in person in some Homeric encounter !

To remain idle in Dresden at such a time was impossible, and having tugged for months at the chain to which I had consented to bind myself out of consideration for the fine present my wife promised me—a promise she had finally kept—I snapped my bonds and escaped, without bidding my wife, my mother, or the King farewell.

III

It was not, however, to Stralsund that I went at first, but to the Saxon army at Sandomir, which was then engaged in quelling one of the many risings of the ever turbulent Polish nobles, who had taken the opportunity afforded them by Charles's return



CHARLES XII.

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NO. 1110
ALBANY, N. Y.

to the theatre of war to trouble once more the repose of Augustus.

The campaign did not lack adventures of the sort I craved, and as my appetite for activity was whetted by my long fast of idleness, I may be said to have fairly gorged myself with danger. One day, returning from Red Russia whither I had gone on some military brigandage, a term which may be fitly applied to the insurrection in general, I arrived at the village of Crachnitz, where I halted the twenty men who accompanied me for refreshment. But scarcely had we alighted at the village inn when a troop of eight hundred Polish horse entered Crachnitz at a gallop. The strength of the enemy rendered escape impossible, and as the idea of surrender, had it occurred to me, was not one I would have entertained for a moment, I adopted the only other alternative, which was ridiculous or heroic as one chooses to regard it. I was, at all events, of the latter opinion. With twenty men to defy eight hundred ! Could the most daring and reckless lover of danger ask more ?

Overjoyed at the opportunity of imitating Charles XII., who with forty men at Bender had dared to resist six thousand Turks and a battery of artillery, I at once prepared to defend myself with the utmost *sang-froid* and energy. Having too few men to defend the courtyard of the inn as well as the inn itself, I entrenched myself in the latter and resolved to bury myself in its ruins sooner than surrender. Dividing my men into two parties, I set one to guard the ground floor and mounted

the other on the first floor, from the windows of which it could fire upon the enemy as they approached. While I, at once upstairs and down at the same time, reserved for myself the extreme pleasure of taking up my position in the weakest, and consequently the most dangerous, point of defence as soon as I had discovered it.

Scarcely had I made my arrangements to receive the Poles when they arrived at the door of the inn which they immediately burst open. Realising the danger of being overwhelmed by numbers I hereupon called the party on the ground floor upstairs and destroyed the staircase. A furious struggle now ensued, with which all the advantage was with the besieged. I had no difficulty in communicating my ardour to my men. They fully understood that every shot they fired must hit its mark, and while some converting the windows into loop-holes riddled the ranks of their assailants without, others boring holes in the floor shot or bayoneted the enemy crowded in the low-ceiled rooms below. These advantages were, however, seriously handicapped by the small supply of ammunition possessed by the besieged. But I easily surmounted this difficulty by making my men, when the bullets began to run short, load their guns with nails and even with the silver they had in their pockets.

At length the Poles after fighting five hours, during which they had lost their captain and many men, decided to abandon the attack for that day. Leaving some sentinels to invest the village, they

withdrew, "promising as they rode off to return on the morrow and set fire to the inn." I saw them go with relief. Nearly all my brave Saxons were wounded, and I myself had been grazed by a ball in the thigh. It was a mere scratch, from the effects of which, notwithstanding, I have since suffered in later life. A glance at my comrades assured me that to continue the struggle on the morrow was out of the question. Their heroic resistance, however, I was resolved should not meet a fate similar to that of Charles at Bender. Calling them around me I told them gaily that, desperate as our situation seemed, a blow dealt at once and like a flash of lightning was all that was needed to save us.

They, aware that no quarter was to be expected from the exasperated Poles, readily consented to be guided by me. Accordingly, as soon as night had come, when the weary guard without believed those whom they watched were likewise dropping with fatigue, I and my handful of mutilated heroes crept out of the inn. To massacre the unsuspecting sentinels was the work of a moment, and having seized as many of their horses as we required, we rapidly gained the shelter of the neighbouring forest, and reached the army in safety the next day.

Such was the affair of the Crachnitz inn. It was really only one of the mad, preposterous adventures *à la* Charles von Königsmarck with which my youth was crowded. Nevertheless, it gave me a notoriety in Polish mess-rooms and barrack-rooms of the sort I craved.

On the fall of Stralsund, which its spirited commander surrendered after a desperate resistance because "he did not wish to be so discourteous to his king"—who had previously effected his escape in a remarkable manner—"as to hold a city he had abandoned," I returned to Dresden. The death of my little son, which had occurred during my absence, had severed the sole bond that could now ensure the fidelity of either my wife or myself. Respecting the vows I had made at the altar in so far as they afforded me the right to treat the fortune of the Comtesse de Saxe as my own, on returning to Dresden I resumed my former wild and loose life.

In this—I do not offer it as an excuse—I received every encouragement. Enjoying the favour of Augustus to a greater degree than ever, gifted with youth, good looks, prodigious strength—like my father, I could break horseshoes in my fingers like biscuits—and with the *réclame* of innumerable instances of my reckless daring, which it flattered me to hear dignified with the name of courage, I soon found myself the hero of the court. To shine, to dazzle, to startle was the height of my ambition, and in order that no one should surpass me in this respect I established a reputation by losing it. Each of my companions kept his mistress. It was *de rigueur*. Two houris, for sake of either of whom I would have foregone all the pleasures of Paradise, shared my heart between them—the Baroness von Metzrath, a dazzling, opulent blonde, cold as the polar snows; and the actress Fulke, a delicious

odalisque, hot as a volcano, with an ivory body and ebony hair, and carnal to the core.

But the tireless demon of activity that possessed me did not permit me to immure myself in the boudoirs of these charmers. I plunged deep into every kind of debauchery, got drunk with sharpers and thieves, lost enormous sums at play, and even went to a court ball disguised as a cook. Every where I pursued pleasure recklessly and wantonly, never losing an opportunity to advertise myself. On one occasion at a royal hunt I cut off the head of a stag with a single stroke of my sword.

To increase the noise of so disordered a life was added that of the perpetual quarrels with my wife. These were of daily occurrence, and as the Comtesse de Saxe had a shrill voice, which in her fits of passion rose to a shriek, and a vocabulary in Platt-Deutsch a grenadier would have envied, the passers-by in the street were provided with an entertainment which, to judge from the crowd that assembled under the windows, they evidently found to their taste.

But vituperation was not the only weapon the Comtesse de Saxe employed. She could turn a lie with the facility with which a *petit-maitre* makes a *riposte*. With dishevelled hair and breast bleeding from a self-inflicted wound she appeared before the King and complained of my brutality.

“He is not content,” she wailed, turning on the fountains in her eyes, “to treat me like a little child and confine me on bread and water. His violence makes me live in constant fear of my life.”

Having brought this accusation, she at once attempted to prevent the investigation, which she knew it would not bear, by adding with hypocrisy that would have done credit to a Puritan :

“ But do not think, sire, that I bear him any grudge or ill-will. Being united to him by so strong a bond, I ardently desire to live on a good understanding with him. All I ask is that he will have a little respect for my feelings. I shall be quite content if he will but give me some slight mark of esteem and not humiliate me as he does in public.”

As the result of this complaint I received a royal reproof, which so exasperated me that I refused to live any longer under the same roof with my wife.

Enemies were not lacking to take advantage of the scandals attaching to my name to injure me. The most powerful and vindictive of these was Flemming. Heretofore the Countess von Königs-marck was the target at which his hate had aimed. More than once for having attempted to denounce his peculations to the King had he obliged her to leave the court, to which, however, after a short exile she always managed to return. As her son he could not but resent the favour I enjoyed, in which he had but too good a reason to suspect a danger to his own. He, therefore, extended to me the hatred he cherished for my mother.

Taking advantage of the peace which followed the fall of Stralsund, he had recommended Augustus to relieve Saxony, crippled by a long and exhausting war, of the burden of maintaining an army he no longer needed. Augustus was easily induced to

follow this advice, because he perceived that the economy thus effected would serve to provide him with fresh funds to indulge his taste for magnificence. As he disliked nothing so much as the details of state business, he left the reduction of the Saxon army to Flemming, who maliciously included among the regiments to be disbanded that of which I was the proud commander.

My rage may be imagined. Rushing at once to the King I passionately protested against the treatment I had received, which was exactly what Flemming, knowing my nature, had designed. For had I observed the least discretion I have no doubt I should have saved my regiment from the fate to which his malevolence condemned it. But *tout enfant gaté* that I was, resenting the frigidity with which Augustus listened to my complaints, I completely lost my head.

“If,” I threatened, forgetting that I was addressing my sovereign, “you do not order adequate satisfaction to be made me, I shall take the proper means to procure it myself!”

Exasperated in his turn, Augustus replied in a manner calculated to still further inflame me. I dared to insist on redress.

“Insistance,” returned the King in the same aggravating voice, “once led your mother to Quedlinburg.”

Blinded by passion I mistook the threat for a taunt. It seemed to me as if my father meant, “Your mother is merely my cast-off mistress, and you are nothing but a bastard.”

“Sire,” I rejoined haughtily, raising my voice, “my mother is a woman, she could not punish scoundrels; and there is no abbey to which you can exile a colonel of cavalry.”

“No, Monsieur le Comte,” retorted Augustus, “for such I have the dungeons in my Castle of Konigstein.”

And he abruptly terminated the interview.

The manner in which this parting thrust was delivered warned me that I had gone too far. To be shut up in this Saxon Bastille was the last thing I desired. With the impetuosity that characterised all my actions I rushed to the royal mews, and, ordering a horse to be saddled, fled from Dresden then and there.

To escape capture and the imprisonment I feared, it was necessary to go into hiding. But what place of concealment, I asked myself, could I find that would elude the vigilance of my pursuers? Quedlinburg? I might as well give myself up at once, I thought, as to go there. Then it occurred to me that the very reasons which would direct the suspicion to my mother hiding me would divert it from my wife. Considering how notorious were the relations between us, who would ever suspect me of seeking refuge with her, or her of giving it to me? I never stopped to reflect whether she might not refuse to shelter me, but putting spurs to my horse covered the twenty leagues that separated Dresden from the castle to which the Comtesse de Saxe had retired without stopping.

The audacity of appealing for protection to a

wife to whom I had refused it produced the contemplated effect. But the Comtesse de Saxe was mistaken if she fancied that by concealing me she was likely to recover the position for which she had married me, and which alone would reconcile her to a man she despised. Instead of being reconciled by the romantic circumstances that had brought us together we could not meet without wrangling and reproaching one another. After a week's concealment I decided that I would rather be shut up in the Castle of Konigstein for the rest of my life than remain another week where I was. So, as usual when in any trouble, I wrote my mother and implored her to obtain my pardon from the King.

To the Countess who had begun to despair of that "grand career" of which she had dreamed for me, it must have seemed as if my destiny was to get into scrapes and hers to get me out of them. In this practice had made her expert. Not only did she make a piteous appeal to the King, but persuaded several ladies of the court, including the *maitresse en titre* of the moment, Countess Denhof, to plead for "her darling's" forgiveness. This was granted for the asking; for Augustus, good-natured man, had already forgotten the offence he was implored to forgive. He had not really been so incensed as he appeared by the disrespect I had shown him, perhaps he had even secretly admired my courage.

But to be recalled to Dresden merely to hang about the court by no means accorded with my

views. The Countess, therefore, only too eager to see me occupied, swallowed her pride, if she still had any left, and begged Flemming to give me the command of another regiment. This Flemming refused to do, even though the Denhof herself appealed to him in her turn.

“To provide him with a regiment,” he told the favourite, “would necessitate depriving some other officer of his command. This I will certainly not recommend to His Majesty, and to create a regiment merely to gratify the Comte de Saxe is out of the question. The King cannot afford it.”

To appeal to Augustus was equally useless ; in this matter he was entirely guided by the all-powerful minister. Fortunately, however, for me, war, which was always smouldering in the Balkans, suddenly burst into flame. The Turks once more crossed the Danube and invaded Hungary. It was no sooner known in Europe that Prince Eugene, with an army of one hundred and fifty thousand men, was preparing to hurl them back, than the professional soldiers, whom the treaties, that had recently given peace to the exhausted nations left without occupation, flocked to Vienna. Fired by the cult of war and the glory of serving under Eugene, I implored the King to permit me to join the volunteers who recruited from all ranks and all countries, gave the *cachet* of a crusade against the crescent to what was in reality only a grand expedition of *condottieri* in quest of loot.

The consent of Augustus was easily obtained, and I at once hastened to the scene of action.



THE COUNTESS DENHOF.

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IV

The financial difficulties in which I had become entangled increased my eagerness to get away. I had eaten my wife's fortune to the bone. Scarcely had I left Dresden when my creditors attached all the revenues of the Comtesse de Saxe's estates. Finding herself without a ducat she appealed to my mother, who, pitying her condition, offered her an asylum at Quedlinburg, which she accepted.

It was not long, however, before the harmony of their relations was broken by their natural incompatibility. The Countess von Königsmarck was exacting, unsympathetic, and secretly prejudiced from the start against her daughter-in-law, whom, in her blind devotion to me, she regarded as chiefly responsible for the failure of my marriage. The Comtesse de Saxe, on the other hand, was giddy, discontented, and resentful of the least semblance of authority or criticism. The life she had led could not have failed to demoralise any character. Hers was naturally weak. Abducted, married, and divorced at the age of nine; accustomed to be petted, pampered, flattered, and allowed to do as she pleased, she had grown up utterly unrestrained in a court where life was regarded as a perpetual Saturnalia, in the revel of which debauchery discarded the gossamer veil it wore as a concession to decency. That such a woman should conform to the rules and restrictions of a cloister and placidly adopt the monotonous life of the canonesses of

Quedlinburg was impossible. Opportunities, too, were not lacking to entice her to yield to the temptations that tormented her undisciplined nature.

In the scandal caused by the tribulations of her marriage the gossips had not spared her reputation. People had begun by saying that there were other admirers besides Gersdorff and Friesen to whose attentions she had not been indifferent, and ended in wagering that "like her husband she took lovers one after the other, or rather at the same time, at the bottom of society as well as at the top."

Whether these rumours were true or not it is impossible to say, but it is certain they contributed their poison to the baneful influences which were to complete the moral ruin of the Comtesse de Saxe. Marrying for his position a man who had married her for her fortune, and losing both with her reputation into the bargain, in her desire for revenge she was utterly indifferent as to the means by which she obtained it. In such a state of mind then, and in such an environment, very little was necessary to make the two Countesses mortal enemies.

How the war between them began they themselves perhaps could not have said. Did the Countess von Königsmarck really detect her daughter-in-law "in the arms of one of the servants at the Abbey"? Or did she mistake one of the canonesses for the Comtesse de Saxe, and "insult the latter with her suspicions"? From remonstrance to recrimination and thence to denuncia-

tion is but a step. There were angry scenes, daily duels of vituperation, battle-royals of Fredegonde and Crimhilda. Such quarrels are infectious, and soon the whole abbey was in an uproar. The intriguing Schwarzburg sisters made capital out of the scandal.

“What an abness this scolding Countess von Königsmarck would make!” sneered the paid emissary they kept at the Court of Berlin to prevent this contingency.

Having sown dissension in every furrow of the fertile soil of Quedlinburg, the Comtesse de Saxe betook herself once more to one of her castles which my creditors allowed her to inhabit, leaving her mother-in-law and the implacable Schwarzburgs to reap the crop. Hereupon my mother invoked the vengeance of the King. Her complaints, however, were far from producing the effect she had hoped. Augustus, remembering the fortune the Comtesse de Saxe had brought me, and the condition to which she had been reduced by my extravagance and desertion, was inclined to sympathise with her. He merely contented himself, therefore, with gently recommending her for the sake of appearances to behave with more circumspection; whereupon the Comtesse de Saxe passionately implored him to protect her from the persecutions of her mother-in-law.

“Your Majesty knows,” she wrote, “the nature of the Countess von Königsmarck, and how capable she is of meddling in other people’s affairs. But for her I should have lived on the best of terms

with my husband. It is she who is the sole cause of all my troubles. She wishes to force me to fashion my mode of life to her liking, regardless of my inclinations, but sooner than submit to be her slave, sire, I will live on bread and water for the rest of my days !”

Augustus, quite as indifferent at heart to the dissensions of the two women, as he was bored by their mutual complaints, conceived what he good-naturedly deemed the happy idea of reconciling them. Accordingly he summoned the two Countesses to Dresden for this purpose, and in the hope of killing two birds with one stone chose the moment when he knew that I would return from the Turkish War.

But I was not to be induced to make it up with my wife. Service in a foreign army had completely altered my views of life. The soldiers of fortune and princes from all over Europe I had met had given a fresh impetus to my restless temperament. I was obsessed with a craving for adventure, a longing to see the world. My ambition, in a word, had finally been awakened ; I was not at all sure what I wanted, but I knew that it was not to be found in Saxony or Poland, and I was resolved to go abroad again as soon as possible. Indeed, after having served on the staff of Prince Eugene, the idea of returning to an inglorious and idle life at the Court of Augustus had been so obnoxious to me that I had wasted several months on the road. In such a mood the bare fact of my wife was hateful to me, and now that I had squandered the fortune



PRINCE EUGENE.

(From an old print.)

TO THE
LEGISLATIVE

I had married her for I was more than ever anxious for our union to be dissolved.

“There can be no question of a reconciliation,” I told my mother, to whom I confided my feelings, “that is not based on a divorce.”

Nor was the Countess any more disposed than I to patch up her quarrel with the Comtesse de Saxe. She hailed the signs of my incipient ambition with delight, and though she no more than I had any idea as to what my future career was to be, she, too, had come to the conclusion that the King of Poland had not the power if he had the inclination to provide me with one. Realising that the marriage she had regarded as the haven of my fortunes was in reality the reef on which they were being wrecked, she was as anxious to see me divorced as I was myself.

The Comtesse de Saxe, on the contrary, had come to Dresden fully prepared for reconciliation. She had lost too much in the marriage lottery not to welcome a reasonable chance of recovering her position. It was bad enough to be beggared, but to be the deserted wife of a king's son was intolerable. When, therefore, she discovered our intentions, she was beside herself with rage. But instead of paralysing her shallow wits, fury seemed to give them powers of invention they had never before possessed. Dreading lest Augustus, on perceiving that his attempts at reconciliation were doomed to failure, should insist on a nullification of her marriage, she besought the aid Flemming, who was only too ready to serve her in such a

matter. In the meantime, while he was engaged in influencing the King to refuse to consent to my proposal, she employed lacqueys, servants, and even witches to inform her of the doings of her mother-in-law in order to be in a position to checkmate any fresh move on the part of the Countess.

At first the sole purpose of the infuriated Comtesse de Saxe was to cheat us of what she considered a triumph at her expense. When, thanks to the efforts of Flemming, this was accomplished, she set herself to obtain revenge.

Among the spies she had chosen so promiscuously to watch her mother-in-law was the Countess's companion, Madame Rosenacker. A similarity of temperament had in the first instance drawn the latter and the Comtesse de Saxe together. From a mutual attraction to intimacy is but a step. Having tricked Madame Rosenacker into a friendship by a thousand advances, the Comtesse de Saxe proceeded to cement it by rendering her dupe a service as questionable and as imaginary as it was flattering.

"Do you know," she said very confidentially to her one day, "a very great personage has fallen in love with you and desires me to arrange a meeting between you."

Madame Rosenacker, who was as vain as she was pretty, was easily persuaded that the "great personage" was the King. Intoxicated with the prospect of becoming a *maîtresse en titre*, the silly creature put herself unreservedly in the hands of my wife, who by cleverly keeping her dangling

between hope and despair turned her into a spy as she had designed. Encouraged by success, she believed it would be as easy to convert her into an accomplice. But this time the Comtesse de Saxe overreached herself ; for in her impatience for vengeance she unmasked her project before Madame Rosenacker was wholly perverted.

One day when the two women were in turn discussing the difficulties that seemed to beset the "great personage" every time he arranged to meet Madame Rosenacker, and bewailing the misfortunes of the Comtesse de Saxe, the latter suddenly showed Madame Rosenacker two boxes containing two packets of a white powder prepared by an Italian who lived in Vienna.

"This," she said, "is the sole means that will restore me my liberty and happiness."

At the same time she begged Madame Rosenacker to drop one of the powders in a cup of coffee destined for me.

"The effect," she added, "will be slow but sure, and incapable of rousing the least suspicion. The Comte will be ill for some time and die in four months. Then, his mother having fallen ill from despair—as of course she would—you can make her swallow the other powder, and people will declare that her death was due to grief."

Terrified at the tone of command in which this monstrous suggestion was uttered, Madame Rosenacker attempted to expostulate.

"The Comte de Saxe," she stammered, "has never done me any harm. Besides, to commit

such a crime would be to expose my own life——”

“What, you dare to refuse?” interrupted the Comtesse de Saxe, and bursting with rage, she added, “Take care not to betray my confidence, for if you do, as there is a God above us, I swear to make you swallow the powders yourself!”

But in spite of this threat Madame Rosenacker hastened to inform the Countess von Königsmarck of her danger, whereupon the latter at once informed the King. The mere horror of the accusation was sufficient to exonerate the Comtesse de Saxe in the eyes of Augustus. Her infamy recoiled on her dupe whom she boldly denounced as a “vile intriguer and liar.”

Madame Rosenacker, however, escaped the disgrace she had merited. For though at the instigation of the King the Countess von Königsmarck coldly consented to accept the explanation of her daughter-in-law, she let it be understood that she did not believe her by retaining Madame Rosenacker as her companion. She even found a sort of consolation for my failure to obtain a divorce in the fresh light this incident threw on the Comtesse de Saxe’s character.

“Give her free rein,” she said to me jubilantly, “for she will surely come to grief without any assistance from us.”

V.

The Countess von Königsmarck, however, as may be imagined, was anything but content to fold her hands and patiently await the arrival of the catastrophe she desired. To assist time the more speedily to verify her prediction, she in her turn employed detectives to shadow her daughter-in-law. Thus between my mother's espionage and the free rein I gave my wife, the *dénouement* I longed for was brought about.

Shortly after the failure of my attempt to procure the nullification of my marriage, I paid my first visit to Paris. At the same time the Comtesse de Saxe took advantage of my absence to go to Leipsic *incognita* for the Fair which was held there at Easter. Here she found a page named Iago who had left my service the previous year without any definite reason. He arrived in Leipsic in princely fashion with several horses, one finer than the other, and a retinue of servants in splendid liveries. The Comtesse, who lived as if she expected I would never return, allowed him to pay her visits and even to accompany her on her return to her estate at Schönbrunn in the Lausitz, where she treated him with every mark of distinction, an honour to which neither as a page nor a soldier in the Hammerstein regiment of Prussia was he entitled.

These favours, which shocked even the servants, continued for nearly six weeks, when the report of

my return gave the couple a great fright. Iago hereupon made his escape as soon as possible, and the Comtesse departed a few days later, on the pretext of visiting some of her relations in Silesia. But as the page waited for her at Leignitz, where he had engaged apartments for her, I had not a doubt that she continued her journey in his company, especially as Iago travelled in a coach and six with twenty attendants armed to the teeth, an evident sign that he feared being overtaken.

My rage was so great on learning these particulars from my mother that both would have paid dear for their frolic had not the Countess, dreading lest my vengeance should have vexatious consequences for myself, taken the precaution to inform the King before my return. He had at once demanded of the Comtesse de Saxe an explanation of conduct so *scabreux* to my honour. She, of course, replied that the charges brought against her had been invented or falsified by her enemies.

“It is true,” she said, “I spent part of the winter at Schönbrunn, where I amused myself as best I could because the place at that season was like a wilderness. At last *ennui* drove me away, and I went to Silesia to visit an uncle who will substantiate me in every respect. As for Iago, he only came to see me in order that I might intercede in his behalf as he wished Maurice to take him back into his service. To put it briefly, sire, my conscience acquits me entirely of all accusations.”

Augustus, influenced by Flemming, had been content to accept this explanation, and on my return from Paris commanded me to accept it too. But though I was obliged to obey, I seized the opportunity to press my wife once more to consent to break the bond which united us.

"If you will consent with good grace to a divorce," I said, "I promise on my part to conceal your irregularities from the public and take all the blame on myself. I will even arrange to be taken in the act of adultery with your maid so that you may bring a suit against me yourself."

As the Gorgon would have passed for a beauty compared with the maid in question, I playfully added that to refuse so heroic a sacrifice would be to convict her of a heart of stone.

"Never!" she replied in a tone which left me to infer that her resolution at least was granite; "we married for better or worse. I have had too much the worst of the bargain to permit you to cheat me even of my resentment."

Had I been less anxious to obtain my freedom her obduracy, proof alike against persuasion, protestation, and reproach, would have commanded my admiration. Instead, it exasperated me, and piqued by a resistance that defied every attempt to break it, I called into action the guns of an artillery that I held in reserve, and opened fire in the hope of bombarding into subjection a citadel that was not to be taken by stratagem.

"Well, then, madame," I stormed, "if you insist on keeping my name, I warn you that you will be

obliged to govern your actions by my wishes. Your mode of life does not please me in the least, but I shall know how to change it. Remember in marrying you I wedded victory as your name implies. You have till to-morrow to decide."

Having delivered this parting shot, I was withdrawing like the Poles from the inn at Crachnitz, when she, either terrified by my threats or tempted to recover her freedom on terms so favourable to herself, signified her willingness to surrender.

Both of us being now of the same mind, Augustus was easily induced to give his consent to our divorce. Accordingly the Comtesse de Saxe appealed to the ecclesiastical court to annul her marriage, pleading, as agreed between us, adultery, desertion, and dissipation in which her fortune had been absorbed.

"What have you to say in your defence?" asked the judge of me.

"Absolutely nothing," I replied, without the least embarrassment. "The Comtesse has not exaggerated in the least; what she has stated is perfectly true."

After this the judge had no other alternative than to grant a divorce. But no sooner had he pronounced with the utmost politeness a decision which usually is not at all polite, than he proceeded to regale me with one of the platitudes of his trade. As this was a fare for which I had no appetite, I declined to partake of it with a politeness that equalled his own.

"Monsieur," I said, interrupting him, "I know

what you wish to say. We are all great sinners, a truth that requires no proof. Some one has said that there are only two fine days in our lives, the entrance and the exit, of the two I infinitely prefer the latter." And making a bow, I left him and his court to meditate on the great truth I had just told them.

The same day I received a letter from the lawyer of the lady who had been my wife in which he informed me that the decision of the court was completely to the taste of the Comtesse and that, as I no longer had a claim to her property, my creditors would leave me in peace.

"The Comtesse," he added, "desires you will return her portrait."

Thus, after seven years, ended an episode which only a miracle had prevented from terminating tragically.

Three years later the Comtesse de Saxe married a Baron von Runkel, who consoled her in her second experiment in matrimony for the failure of her first. The marriage was happy in every particular. Runkel was a most estimable man; he won the affection of his wife, influenced her impressionable character for good, and by management, in which he displayed abilities worthy to have earned him the portfolio of a minister of finance, he succeeded in repairing and refloating the fortune I had wrecked. As a mark of her gratitude his wife presented him with several chil-

dren who lived to call down blessings on the former Comtesse de Saxe.*

Strange as it may appear, we were no sooner free than we became the best of friends—at least while I remained in Saxony. On settling in France, however, having no object in talking of a woman who had divorced me, I so completely avoided all mention of her that at Versailles the story of my marriage was absolutely unknown. Or those who knew had no reason, like myself, to speak of an event that even in Saxony was well-nigh forgotten.

“Why,” said Madame de Pompadour to me one day, “have you never married?”

“Madame,” I replied, “as the world goes at present there are few men of whom I would wish to be the father, and few women of whom I would wish to be the husband.”

It was not a very gallant reply to make to so charming a woman. But after Fontenoy my German bluntness passed for wit, and as many an amorous abbé and pretty carpet-knight paid me the compliment of trying to copy it, rudeness became fashionable for a time at Versailles.

I have, however, more than once seriously contemplated resuming the conjugal joke, but the accidents by which I failed to lose my hardly won liberty have never occasioned me much regret.

A wife is not the sort of baggage a soldier needs. The Maréchal de Lowendal, however, is not at all of my opinion. He has two, like the Turks, and has never found them a burden to his career.

* The Comtesse de Saxe died in 1747, three years before Maurice.

CHAPTER V
PARADISE—LOST

I

I HAVE always regarded the Turkish War, in which for the first time I fought in the service of a foreign prince, as one of the memorable milestones in my career. For if it did not actually awaken my ambition, it gave me definite desires.

The troubles in which my marriage had entangled me, together with the intrigues of Flemming, who, by depriving me of my regiment, had deprived me of all hope of obtaining active employment at the Court of Augustus, had disgusted me with my native country. On leaving it I felt that I had exhausted all its resources, and my subsequent experiences on the Danube only served to confirm me in this opinion. From associating with soldiers of fortune from every part of Europe, who, like myself, served as volunteers under Prince Eugene, I had imbibed a veritable passion for their adventurous existence, of which the freedom, excitement, and possibilities of obtaining fortune and renown were

eminently calculated to appeal to my imagination.

After the Peace of Passarowitz the idea of returning to either Saxony or Poland was so distasteful to me that I lingered on the way as long as possible. Nor did the welcome I received from Augustus on my arrival in Dresden, cordial though it was, tend to decrease my disgust. As a reward for my conduct at the battle of Belgrade, where I saw two battalions literally cut to pieces in the twinkling of an eye, so furious was the engagement, he decorated me with the Order of the White Eagle—a very ancient Saxon order given formerly only to princes, but which, as it was highly prized and cost him nothing, he conferred on all whom he wished to favour. Had I required any proof of the little the future had to offer me in his dominions this mark of his esteem would have convinced me. It seemed to me that his power and importance, which I had once regarded as boundless, had contracted to the extent to which my horizon had expanded. I even lost my respect for him; his pretensions compared with the insignificance of his states afforded me a contemptuous amusement, which I took care, however, to conceal. In a word, His Polish Majesty with his Court *à la Versailles* and his White Eagle was ridiculous, and I determined as soon as possible to leave a country in which I felt suffocated, dwarfed.

My desire to get away was so great that it alone would have defeated Augustus's attempt to reconcile me to the Comtesse de Saxe. Accordingly, after

Madame Rosenacker's disclosures convinced the King of the futility of trying to make peace between my wife and myself, I asked and obtained his permission to visit Paris. Brief though this first visit was, the glimpse it afforded me of the vaunted Mecca of pleasure only served to confirm me in my intention to seek fortune abroad. To this, however, Augustus was much opposed, and had it not been for Flemming I doubt if he would ever have allowed me to return to Paris at all.

Not that Flemming had the least wish to do me a favour. Far enough from it. His object was to get rid of me, for, powerful though he was, he paid me the compliment of regarding my presence at the Polish court as a perpetual menace to himself. He would infinitely have preferred to remove me by foul means, and it was only because these appeared to be impossible that he resorted to fair. Disguising his motives, he feigned an interest in my welfare that should have made the King suspect its sincerity, and pleaded for me to be permitted to return to France as I wished with a subtlety that a *maitresse en titre* might have envied.

As Flemming's ascendancy over his master was paramount his efforts were successful—rather more so, in the end, than pleased him. For Augustus, having finally consented to allow me to return to Paris, entered into the matter with a heartiness that Flemming, as my enemy, could not but object to.

“I consent to your departure,” said the King, when I bade him farewell, “because I believe

France is a better school in which to study the art of war than here, where as there is none, and no wish for one, you are not likely to study anything."

As I took this to be tantamount to permission to enter the French service, in which on my first visit to Paris I had been given an honorary appointment as *maréchal de camp*, I determined to buy a colonelcy. Accordingly, as soon as I returned to Paris I took the necessary steps in this direction. Of several of which I had the choice I settled on the colonelcy of one of the German regiments in the French army, which had distinguished itself on more than one occasion. The price of a regiment, whether infantry or cavalry, was not dear as a rule. I should naturally have preferred the latter. But having frequently heard it said that foreigners are always made to pay through the nose for a thing, I was induced, less from prudence than from a desire not to be made a fool of, not only to content myself with a colonelcy of foot, but to make my purchase from one who, like myself, was a foreigner. Sparre, however, had no scruples about taking advantage of my ignorance, and fleeced me by means of the very precaution I adopted to escape this fate. For I could have bought the best cavalry regiment in France for the 35,000 thalers I paid this scoundrel of a Swede. The worst of it was that the price was so excessive as to be talked of, thus at the same time publishing my folly and making me appear a bigger fool than I was.

Flemming, in particular, was scandalised, for it was he who had to find the money. He tried to

make it a means of injuring me in the esteem of Augustus.

“The Comte de Saxe,” he said, “buys like a *grand seigneur*. As it is apparently from your Majesty’s purse he expects to obtain the money for his regiment, it would have been better to have kept him at home, made him a general, and given him two regiments.”

Augustus, however, instead of being incensed against me, as he might have been with reason, paid the money out of his own privy purse, which by some lucky chance happened then to be full. Moreover, either because he considered he had gone too far to draw back, or because he wished to give me the chance of making the most of my new career, he allowed me to sell the estate he had settled on me some years before, and which would have reverted to the Saxon crown on my death; whereby I derived a pecuniary benefit from what had hitherto been a constant source of embarrassment.

Augustus, in a word, behaved in this matter with his characteristic kindness of heart, merely contenting himself with forbidding me to play.

“I warn you,” he wrote, “that I shall not only refuse to pay your gambling debts, but if you incur them I shall wash my hands of you entirely. You have the opportunity you desired, it now rests with you to make the most of it.”

As he had refused to ruin me at the instigation of my enemies, gratitude impulsively compelled me to give him a promise that I would observe his

wishes. Honour alone prevented me from breaking my word, which I frequently regretted having pledged. For next to war and women I have loved nothing so much as the dice, and the sacrifices I would fain have offered on the altars of the God of Chance would in no way have fallen short of the tribute I have ever loyally paid to Mars and Venus.

At the same time, as it had ever been—and has ever continued to be—a point of honour with me to live in a manner befitting my rank, I took advantage of the fair wind which blew from Poland to instal myself in a fine house on the Quai des Théatins.* I furnished it sumptuously, had a portrait of myself, painted in Polish uniform, hung in the principal *salon* so as to attract the attention of all who entered, and affected in general great ostentation; for I perceived that the French only respected those who impressed them.

So behold me the year after my divorce—twenty-five, free, in Paris, and a colonel. Needless to say, it gave me the greatest pleasure to possess a regiment once more. The ridicule that was showered on my bargain piqued me to make it worth the price I had paid. It had at least a fine record, and flaunted twenty-four flags at a review. The *drapeau-colonel* was particularly handsome. It was of white silk covered with golden *fleur-de-lys*; on one side was a golden sun, surmounted by the device of the regiment, “Nec pluribus impar,” on the other a sky-blue globe of the world.

* To-day No. 3, Quai Malaquais.

Under Sparre's command the *morale* of the regiment had greatly deteriorated. It was necessary to introduce many changes and to maintain a severe discipline. I drilled my men in person after the German fashion, and, above all, applied myself to teach them precision in evolution and firing, for which the soldiers of the North were noted. In Saxony and Poland I had trained excellent hussars, in Paris I turned out as excellent infantrymen. In a short time the Saxe Regiment * was cited as a model in the French army. The Chevalier de Folard, the chief military authority of his time on tactics, was so enthusiastic over my success that he did not hesitate to predict a great destiny for me.

At the same time, while I was engaged in re-organising my regiment I conceived the project of breeding Cossack horses in France. The idea was suggested by rather curious means. The alliance that the Regent and Cardinal Dubois had formed with England had made English customs fashionable in Paris. The English, with the object of breeding horses for war, had instituted racing competitions as a means of testing their strength. Introduced to France, these equestrian contests were converted into a sport, which became so popular that it was nothing to see the whole Court in a stable. For it did not take long to discover that betting made this pleasure more piquant; and in spite of Monsieur Law, his Mississippi and his

* It was the custom for a regiment to be known by the name of its colonel.

système, or perhaps it would be truer to say on account of them, I have known *grands seigneurs* of the best families risk their whole fortune on the speed of a horse.

I was as eager to play with this fire as anybody, and as my promise to Augustus not to gamble prevented me from burning my fingers, I raced my horses with the object of testing their strength, as was the original intention of the English. This led to the testing of the strength of different breeds, and so to the conception of my project of breeding Cossack horses, which I found superior to any others, for the French Army.

In the meanwhile, as I am one of those who can squeeze an hour like an orange, I also found plenty of time to join in the Cyprian revels of the carnival to which France was abandoning herself after the long Lenten fast of Louis XIV.'s last years. The variety of my occupations, the zest with which I pursued them, and the ostentatious magnificence in which I lived enabled me to achieve the difficult feat of astonishing Paris; whilst the jealousy of a prince of the blood, whose wife did me the honour of distinguishing me with a passing caprice, helped me to acquire a very pretty reputation as a man of pleasure and a rake.

The manner in which this was effected was extremely piquant. It was a little conjugal comedy in the true style of the Regency, in which I played the part of hero or villain, as you will, without appearing on the scene; an intrigue without a rendezvous, an amour without a kiss.

II

The beginning of this *petite aventure* was worthy of such a *dénouement*. Some men have fallen in love with a portrait of which they have never seen the original, others have formed an attachment by letter for a writer they have never met; it has been reserved for me, alone of all mortals, to be thrilled by a despatch!

This was, however, not altogether so strange as it seems, for the despatches of ambassadors, in which a gallantry, a scandal, or a *fête* was reported as faithfully as a treaty, a policy, or a plot, were not always the prosaic documents they are generally supposed to be.

Very often, especially in times of peace, the weekly report of an ambassador was nothing more than a *chronique scandaleuse*, a secret memoir, a lacquey's diary, made up of all the tittle-tattle of the Court to which he was accredited. Those of Watzdorf, the representative of Augustus at Paris, were as full of information as a gazette and as racy as a letter of Madame, the mother of the Regent—everything went down in them. He knew that his master liked nothing so much as some fresh impurity to laugh over, some *risqué* story of Versailles with which to regale his mistresses, his ministers, and his Tobacco Parliament.

The dissensions in the royal family were naturally a favourite topic. The French royal family consisted of four branches—the Houses

of Orléans, Condé, Conti, and the legitimatised *bâtards* of the King—each jealous and suspicious of the other. Louis XIV.'s attempts to extinguish their feuds, which threatened to extirpate the dynasty, were as unwise as they were unfortunate. He had a mania for intermarrying one branch with another, regardless of their wishes, or of the suitability of those he selected for the partnerships into which they were forced. But though he married Condé to Conti, and Conti to Orléans, and *bâtardisé* each in turn by transfusing into their royal veins the blood that flowed from his own, diluted with that of his mistresses, he could no more stamp out the domestic guerilla than he could remove the Pyrenees. A marriage in the royal family was, indeed, merely a renewal of hostilities.

Of these treaties of peace converted into declarations of war by the signatories, of these alliances formed under compulsion and broken by mutual agreement, the most notorious was that of the Prince de Conti and Mademoiselle de Condé. A more ill-mated couple it would be impossible to conceive. The former, whose father had been the unsuccessful rival of mine for the throne of Poland—a fact which inspired him with a revengeful aversion for me and which he imparted to his son—was a hunchback, so weakened by debauchery that his legs constantly refused to support him. The frequency with which this occurred had passed into a sort of proverb, so that whenever people were startled by a sudden noise to which no consequence was attached one would exclaim re-



THE PRINCESSE DE CONTI.

(After *Nattier*.)

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assuringly, "Oh, it is nothing, it is only the Prince de Conti falling again."

To this Bourbon Caliban, Louis XIV. had mated a princess more beautiful than day. With her *chevelure* of chestnut tinted with gold, her violet-black eyes, and her dazzling skin; with her nymph's throat, Hebe-like hands, and the foot of Diana, the Princesse de Conti was the personification of a kiss, the incarnation of an embrace, the ideal of a dream of love. With the matchless beauty of the princesses of the family of Bourbon-Condé she possessed the tenderness of Mademoiselle de Clermont, the vivacity of Mademoiselle de Sens, the pride of Mademoiselle de Vermandois, and the temperament of Mademoiselle de Charolais, who, like a salamander, lived on fire. Nature had endowed her, too, like her sisters, very generously with the Condé spirit of independence, which manifested itself in a fearless contempt for the laws of morality, respect for which the race to which she belonged regarded as the special and inviolable prerogative of the *bourgeois*.

To such a woman love was a necessity; married to a man she despised, it became a consolation. Her repugnance, however, inspired her degenerate husband with a passion that rendered him still more obnoxious. Faithless himself, he manifested what to the refined and corrupt world, of which the Princesse de Conti was so charming an ornament, seemed a very gothic prejudice in favour of wifely fidelity. Tormented with jealousy, he sought to convince himself of the inconstancy of which he

suspected he was the victim. At first it afforded his wife a scornful amusement to deny him the proof he desired, and as she had much wit this was not difficult. But, finally wearying of his complaints, she informed him that if she wished to betray him she had seven different ways of doing so. The first six she frankly confided to him.

“The seventh,” she said, like a true daughter of the Regency, “I will not tell you, for it is the one I make use of.”

The espionage, the insults, and even brutalities to which this confession had subjected her rendered her life unbearable. She made up her mind to leave him ; but for a princess of the blood, of whom children were required in order to fortify the royal line and preserve it from the possibility of extinction, this was no easy matter. But the Princesse de Conti possessed the art of succeeding cleverly in all she undertook and turned to advantage things that appeared the greatest obstacles to her designs.

To obtain the release she desired, to be able to leave the Hôtel de Conti without being compelled to return, it was necessary to prove her husband in the wrong and herself in the right in such a manner as to win her universal sympathy. Her scheme was to appear guilty when she was really innocent, to inflame her husband's jealousy to the point of inviting a brutal, dangerous, and wholly unjustifiable outrage. For this purpose she required an accomplice, by whose devotion she had not been sufficiently compromised to rob her of

the public sympathy she sought. She wanted, in a word, a new lover.

It was at this moment that destiny blew me to Paris, where I arrived with the secret determination of tasting this morsel for a god with whom, thrilled by the stories I had heard of her unhappiness, beauty, and gallantry, I had already formed in imagination a *liaison*. In love and war alike the strategy I have ever found to be the most successful is that which is boldly conceived and promptly executed. I, accordingly, lost no time in making the acquaintance of Madame la Princesse de Conti ; and to fire her curiosity as well as to startle Paris by beginning my career with the conquest of a princess of the blood, I made a boast of my admiration and insinuated my intentions.

But while this attracted to me the attention I craved, it also provided the Princesse de Conti with the opportunity she sought. One night she made her dog, which slept on her bed, bark, in order that her husband, who occupied the next apartment, and was aware that the animal had been trained to warn her of the least noise in her room, believe there was some one with her. The Prince de Conti fell into the trap and his wife's room at the same time, a sword in one hand and a pistol in the other. The Princesse, secure in the consciousness of her innocence, thereupon awoke from a feigned sleep and asked him what he wished. Instead of replying he proceeded to search the room, whereupon his wife proceeded to call her servants as witnesses to the outrage of which she was the victim, who,

arriving as the dog, egged on by its mistress fastened its teeth in the intruder's leg, believed or pretended to believe that their master was a thief and likewise fell upon him.

The next day the husband and wife separated, and scandal recalling my boast and the Princesse de Conti's reputation, took advantage of an accident, which had befallen me by a singular coincidence that very night and confined me for some days to my bed, to connect me with the affair. Some said that the Prince de Conti had killed me, others that I was only wounded, though grievously. At once I found myself possessed of all the notoriety I craved ; while the Princesse completed my happiness not long after by expressing her gratitude for the service I had unconsciously rendered her in such a manner as to leave me her debtor.

II

Flemming tried to make capital out of this affair. If it had been galling to him to know that he had gratified the wish of my life, when in order to get rid of me he obtained permission for me to come to Paris, it was still more so when he found that Augustus refused to humiliate me on his advice in the matter of the purchase of my regiment. To get even with me he had set Watzdorf to paint me in the blackest colours in his despatches. This Watzdorf, anxious to obey a man he feared, did, or rather overdid ; for instead of discrediting me with

Augustus, the part I was supposed to have played in the Conti *ménage*, only raised me the higher in his estimation. The rage of Flemming may be imagined.

I was, however, too elated by his failure, which only served to sweeten my own success, to pay him the compliment of even wondering when or how he would next attempt to obtain revenge. He *was* to have it, as will be seen later, and with interest added. But now the world was all *couleur de rose* to me, and the episode by which Flemming had again sought in vain to ruin me proved to be the best of passports to the favour of the Regent, the golden key to the forbidden paradise of the Palais Royal.

Had I possessed no other recommendation than the lucky accident of being born in a bed in which a king had slept, I should have received scant consideration from Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans and his titled *valetaille*, whom the grandeur of the long reign of Louis XIV. had so convinced of the immeasurable superiority of France to the rest of the world as to cause them to regard foreigners as barbarians and their language as jargon.

Indeed, the tradition of the Grande Mademoiselle, who fifty years before had preferred the disgrace of a *mésalliance* with the Duc de Lauzun to the honour of sharing the throne of the Emperor, had formed a sort of precedent for the princesses of the blood. The Regent had the greatest difficulty to get Mademoiselle de Valois to leave Paris to marry the Duke of Modena. The daughters of Louis XV.

refused to leave France, as did the princesses of the Houses of Condé and Conti. Thus if foreign thrones were held in such contempt it was not likely that a *bâtard* of a foreign king would count for much merely on the score of his rank.

Thanks, however, to my appearance, my manners, and to the ease with which I spoke French, I had from the start favourably impressed the Regent. I was, therefore, admitted to the reception of the Palais Royal, whence to a man of my reputation it was but a step to the *petits soupers*, where familiarity of the most free kind replaced the etiquette of the Court of Versailles.

If the world, according to an epigram of Rousseau, is only a comedy where some pay the actors on the stage and others the violins in the orchestra, and where for their money they could hiss both when they pleased, I do not know an epoch that better deserves the title than the Regency. Having acquired the privilege of assisting at this comedy, I was not one to hold it lightly, and from the day I joined the ranks of the *roués*, true son of Augustus, I proved myself worthy of my father.

From the fame the *roués* of the Regency have acquired, many are of the opinion that this particular type of human frailty was created by the royal sun round whom they revolved. As a matter of fact the species has been so long in existence that I am inclined to believe it was a *roué* who whiled away a May morning in the apple-orchard of Eden in giving Madame Eve her first lesson in

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THE REGENT.

(After Rigaud.)

To face page 171.]

love. In those days, however, he was known by another name than *roué*, which originated in a *bon mot* of M. le Duc d'Orléans. For the Regent once having called his favourites *roués* meant them to understand that they were *bon rompu*, as that old cynic Louis XI. used to term his boon companions. Following his example in boasting of their impiety and glorifying their vices, they laughingly accepted the *sobriquet*; or, according to a lampoon of the day, decorated themselves with the title to distinguish themselves from their lacqueys, who were only *bon pendu*.

To describe the members of this fraternity of aristocratic vice in detail would require a volume to itself, and I shall therefore merely content myself with naming those whom the special favour of the Regent rendered most conspicuous. There were two kinds of *roués*—the young and the old, of both sexes; though only young women were admitted to the Palais Royal. Of the Regent, who played Bacchus in his company of satyrs, spoilt child of the monarchy, darling of Destiny, what can I say that has not already been said, that is not already known?

He was one of those fine promises that Nature sometimes makes in a moment of enthusiasm, but never fulfils. The bravest in danger, but never a hero; possessing great ability, but no energy; a statesman devoid of application who behaved like a buffoon at the council table; loyal, but inconstant; frank, but cynical; sympathetic, but mocking; generous, but callous. He was a bundle of

virtues stored by cynicism in some cupboard of vice.

Intended by Nature to be the *beau idéal* of a prince, Dubois had converted him into the genius of debauchery. This little abbé with his blonde peruke, his eyes that could pierce a heart at a glance, and his thin lips on which epigrams perpetually writhed like serpents, had crawled like a rat from I know not what hole of an intrigue into the Palais Royal, where gliding about for years, nibbling the crumbs under the table, he had gnawed his way into the Regent's confidence. No blasphemy shocked, no filth disgusted him; sly, cunning, and infinitely wicked, he was as ready to pander and pimp as to bestow the blessing which his valet besought every morning on his knees before receiving his orders for the day. Having become indispensable to the appetite he stimulated, he asked but one favour—the red hat of a cardinal to save him from the gallows. The granting of this request outmatched the cynicism that inspired it. For the Regent “reddened” Dubois, whose ability he recognised, not so much to save him from being hanged as he deserved, as to provide the moralists whom he despised with the spectacle of a gallows-cheat leeringly governing a great nation and governing it well!

Mais, place aux dames!

First in rank, beauty, and vice was unquestionably Madame la Duchesse de Berri, the Regent's favourite daughter. Like her father, she was a charming mosaic of vices and good qualities. She had learnt

early to tread under foot what the more straight-laced term "prejudices." With her liberty was licence ; her eyes were so roving as to give credulity to all the libertine adventures that were attributed to her, for she was little concerned at the publicity of her revels provided she was not prevented in them. Pleasure was the only god in whom she believed ; but she had fits of repentance when she talked of becoming a nun. I have heard it said that she was epileptic ; at times I have thought her insane. Once she—well, on second thoughts I will be silent. If I told all I knew of Her Royal Highness I should never have done.

The Marquise de Parabère is another of whom the anecdotes would make a rosary. Of all his mistresses she was the one of whom the Regent was most fond. He loved her by fits and starts, off and on, throughout the Regency. She was the daughter of one of his governors when a boy, the Duc de la Vieuxville, who it was said had not been above making use of her to keep his place. She was about twenty-five when I first met her in Cythera, to which she did not come from Olympus. For there was nothing of the goddess about Madame de Parabère. Pretty rather than beautiful, lively rather than brilliant, bewitching rather than adorable, with her plump figure, her saucy mouth, her languishing eyes, she was a true daughter of the earth. Berenice would have envied her hair : it was of a beautiful raven black that fell in waves to her garters. She generally wore it more decorously when, as it rippled off her white fore-

head, it resembled a pyramid of ebony resting on alabaster.

Of all the *rouées* she was the best tempered. A smile was always on her rosy lips. She seemed crowned with an aureole of perpetual youth and good humour. Hers was the good heart that comes from a good digestion. With health of steel she had the heroism of pleasure. At the *petits soupers* it often happened that the Regent's guests would sink successively under the table as if crushed by some invisible hand. On these occasions Madame de Parabère was always the last to disappear, going down with glass in hand and a smile on her lips. For she carried her champagne, of which she was inordinately fond, as lightly as she loved. An hour's repose was sufficient to revive her fresher than the roses of her cheeks and more disposed than ever to laugh at a *bon mot*, or to drink with a good heart.

She had the whim once to have her portrait painted as Minerva. But I always think of her as Eve—Eve in her *beaux jours*. By some strange coincidence she was christened Marie Madeleine. The history of her life is in the name, and as she loved much, much should be forgiven her.

The Comtesse de Sabran was a sinner of quite a different type. If it be not too great an effort of the imagination to conceive of Madame de Parabère as the Vallière of the Regency, Madame de Sabran might be termed its Montespan. She alone possessed ambition. She made the mistake of regarding the Regent as a lucrative post rather than



THE MARQUISE DE PARABÈRE.

(From an engraving by Leguay, after the portrait by Antoine Coytel.)

Kindly lent by Mr. Daniell, Print-seller, Craubourn Street, W.

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as a man. She could never accustom herself to the fact that his heart was as movable as a tent, as accommodating as an hotel. Faithless herself, she could not endure the idea that her charms should be neglected for those of a *grisette* or an opera dancer. She was the stormy petrel of the *petits soupers*, which were often tumultuous affairs. I have got a scar as a relic of one of these Bacchanalia caused by a crystal vase that Madame de Sabran threw at me because I kissed her. When she was in a good humour she would call the Regent her "night" to distinguish him from M. de Sabran, whom she termed her "morning." Sometimes her "night" became "an old thoroughbred," "a libertine," or even worse, for she never hesitated to make the most of the licence accorded her.

One night she told him that "the soul of princes seemed to her to be made of the same mud as that which served for the soul of lacqueys." For a moment there was a movement of surprise and even terror among the *roués*. Rising from her seat pale and trembling, the whilom *insouciant* Bacchante suddenly became inspired, prophetic, a very Nemesis, and cursed the whole assemblage. Had she departed after that the effect would have been dramatic, magnificent, impressive, but her mouth was only an abortive thunderbolt of which the lightning was instantly quenched in a glass of champagne. The Regent merely laughed and passed the incident off with a jest, to the effect that everybody knew that poor Madame de Sabran had no head for wine.

I have mentioned Mesdames de Parabère and de Sabran at some length because they were on the scene almost throughout the comedy. Madame d'Averne, however, merely flitted for a moment across the stage—a moment she made the most of. Her name, suggestive of the infernal regions, lent itself to the wit of the lampoons with which Paris pelted the Palais Royal. People swore by d'Averne as the ancients swore by Styx. Madame de Sabran, who hated her, used to ease herself of her bile, as bitter as a serpent's, by declaring that she smelt of brimstone. But there was nothing of the atmosphere of Avernus about Madame d'Averne. Plastically, majestically beautiful, she looked like some Eastern queen. I never knew a woman who rouged and patched better than she, or was more rapacious. During her brief favour she managed to ease the treasury of three millions. Her rapacity was the cause of her fall; but dismissal caused her no regret, and she returned to the Nowhere she had come from with the same Queen-of-the-Orient air with which she had arrived. It was better than waiting till the curtain dropped when the decadence had completely corrupted manners, and Parabère and Sabran pulled one another's hair at the table!

Messieurs les Roués, I have said, were of two kinds—the young and the old. Among these veterans of the bottle, these patriarchs of debauchery, Brancas, Broglie, and Nocé took precedence of all in the merry depravity that afforded the Regent the relaxation his nature required. They were the jesters of his court, and owed their favour solely to the

amusement their eccentricities created. The chief characteristic of the Duc de Brancas was his incurable absent-mindedness, of which I could relate a hundred drolleries. He had been gentleman-in-waiting to the queen of Louis XIV. Having accompanied her one day to church, he forgot her so completely that he mistook her as she knelt with bowed head at her prayers for a *prie-dieu*, and feeling in the mood for a paternoster, he dropped on his knees behind her and leant his elbows on her shoulders.

The Comte de Broglie knew every *risqué* story that had ever been told. Repeated by this old Silenus, the indecency with which they were salted lost none of its savour.

Nocé was a well-mannered scoundrel of fifty, as bilious-looking as an Arab. He might be termed the ill-humour of the Regent, who, finding it too much of an effort to vent his own spleen, pricked Nocé's. It was an effective substitute, for the Comte de Nocé's name, which Richelieu wittily declared was derived from the Latin *nocere*—to harm—fitted him like a glove.

Of the Duc de Richelieu himself, the most perfect development of the *roué*, he was at the time I am referring to in disgrace, and one did not see him at the *petits soupers*. His place was filled by La Fare, the captain of the Regent's Guards, and a delicate voluptuary, as might be expected of the son of a man, who, in the previous reign, had played Pythias so poetically to the anacreontic Damon of the Abbé de Chaulieu.

Then there were Fargis—"le Beau Fargis," Camillac, Simiane, Effiat, Nancreé, and a host of others equally noted for their epigrams and impiety, their licence and cynicism, their malice and gaiety, their corruption and dissipation. Oh, *la belle compagnie!* It was a sort of freemasonry of pleasure to which I was admitted, sufficiently harmonious, like all societies formed by interest, and of which the members have only the vanity and jealousy necessary to bring them together without causing them to fall out. We lived, drank, ate, laughed, slandered, without quarrelling. A story of Broglie would make the windows rattle; while an indigestion of Sabran or an indisposition of the Regent was the only accident that clouded the blue sky of *rouerie*.

Never clustered round a throne less noxious creatures; they were merely butterflies sipping the perfume from the pleasures of civilisation. Power was a scentless flower all disdained. The Regent's favourites were merely favourites, *bon rompu*; his mistresses merely mistresses, "*putains car cela nous divertit*," as Madame de Sabran expressed it. They loved, but did not rule him. A sign was sufficient to begin or to finish a *liaison*. Their debonair lover beckoned them with a smile and dismissed them with a *bon mot*. No minister attended the toilette of these inoffensive and inexpensive forerunners of the Châteauroux and the Pompadour. The Hebrew prophets would have poured vials of wrath on the head of the Regent-King of France, but he was for all that *toujours bon garçon*, and

in his time no woman was ever allowed to decide a treaty or a war by a sign of her fan.

The *petits soupers* I have said were often tumultuous affairs. They generally began at ten with a sobriety, a decency, an air almost of solemnity that was in marked contrast to their finish. It was the custom for the guests to serve themselves. I once asked Madame de Parabère the reason of this regulation, which offended the *bourgeois* who are always shocked when the aristocracy claim one of their privileges.

“Because,” she laughed, “we are afraid of scandalising the valets.”

In case of need, however, there were always two gigantic lacqueys waiting in an antechamber. From the colour of their liveries they were known as the “plums” of the Duchesse de Berri, to whom they belonged, and who declared they blushed at nothing.

Oh, *petits soupers* of the Regency, how Lucullus would have envied you, Trimalchio esteemed you, and Petronius described you! What flowers, what perfumes, what a sparkle of silver and crystal were dedicated to the Venus Anadyomene enshrined on the ceiling of that *salon joyeux* in which the guests of the Regent assembled! And what a cook! For the first half-hour so wrapped up was everybody in eating that nothing was heard but the popping of champagne corks. Champagne was the favourite wine of the Regent, who, by the way, did not like his guests to get only half drunk. It was not till they were animated by this nectar of the gods

that conversation began. Then each called the other by the name that intimacy reserved for such occasions. Thus Monsieur le Duc de Brancas was known as the "Giddy Goat"; le Beau Fargis as "Pumps"; I was designated the "Boar." After the first glass of champagne Madame de Parabère was addressed as the "Black Crow"; after the second Madame de Sabran as "Sirloin"; while at dessert Her Royal Highness the Duchesse de Berri herself was nothing more than the "Princess Fat Head."

Epigrams leapt into the air like rockets. Broglie's stories flung off the last shred of decency and revealed their gross wit naked and unashamed, at which Madame de Sabran would hide her face behind her fan, while Madame de Parabère and the Duchesse de Berri laughed, laughed—hiccough—and laughed again.

Perhaps the Regent becomes reminiscent and relates some amusing experience he has had in Spain or Italy in his youth. When he speaks there is silence, for he is a *raconteur* of the first order and relates an anecdote so well that all listen as if he were not a prince.

Suddenly Brancas, the absent-minded, forgets where he is, and Nocé with his laugh, as full of mockery as a volume of Voltaire, extinguishes all the lights—save one that Broglie secures. Shall I make him raise it so that you may peep under the table? But perhaps it is better to retire, for the candlestick in Broglie's hand is not the one History is accustomed to hold. *On peut se débaucher, mais on doit se débaucher avec de l'esprit.*



THE DUCHESS DE BERRI.

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NO. 1000
ANNEX 1A

You will not mind, however, as we leave, if I call the Duchesse de Berri's "plums" from the antechamber, where they have unblushingly glued their eyes to the keyholes, to take Her Royal Highness back to the Luxemburg?

III

No picture of this Court of the Regent would be complete from which his mother was excluded. A more curious and original character than Madame, to give her the title by which she was known, it would be hard to conceive. In appearance she resembled a man rather than a woman, and a coarse and ugly man at that. Her manners were rough and repellant. She constantly gave offence by her frank, blunt habit of saying exactly what she thought. Exceedingly strict and strait-laced, she had no complacency for the failings and weaknesses of the world in which she lived. Her grandchildren were terribly afraid of her, and even the Regent held her in awe. She was, however, affectionate and devoted to those she liked, and her passion in early days for dogs and horses won her the regard of Louis XIV., who greatly esteemed the sincerity and goodness that rendered her so unpopular.

Madame was the daughter of the Elector Palatine, and a German to the last degree. Apart from the House of Bourbon into which she had married, I do not think she had any love for France. She

never learnt to speak French correctly, and her Palatine accent was a constant source of amusement and ridicule. The greater part of her time, particularly after her increasing corpulency prevented her from hunting, was employed in writing letters to her relations, of whom she had many, not only in Germany but all over Europe.

It was her custom to devote each day of the week to a different country. For instance, Sunday she wrote to Lorraine and Hanover ; Monday to Savoy and Spain ; Tuesday to Prussia and the Palatinate ; Wednesday to Modena ; Thursday to England ; Friday to Bavaria ; while on Saturday she worked off the arrears of the week.

“When in one day,” I have heard her say, “I have written twenty sheets to the Princess of Wales, ten or twelve to my daughter the Duchesse de Lorraine, and half a dozen to the Queen of Spain, I feel almost tired out.”

She was inordinately proud of her parentage, and used to boast that Louis XIV. had thanked her for the honour she had paid him in marrying into his family. The walls of her apartments, perpetually perfumed with the scent of *sauer-kraut* and sausages, her favourite dish, were covered with the portraits of her relations and ancestors, whom she addressed in the course of conversation as if they were alive.

I was certainly not the sort of person of which Madame approved ; but my German nationality seemed to atone for my sins. I was, moreover, a Lutheran, the religion to which she, too, belonged,

before she was made to change it to marry Monsieur who had none ; for though she had become a devout Catholic, she had a tenderness for the creed of her fathers. Consequently, from my first arrival in Paris, I was something of a favourite with Madame. On the occasions I visited her I always found her writing, and as she could write and talk at the same time she would receive me without interrupting her correspondence. As she kept it up for nearly forty years, one is almost aghast at its magnitude. .

I often wondered what she wrote about me, and as she said she jotted down everything just as the thoughts came to her, perhaps I was sandwiched between a swindler and soubrette.

I went to see her the day before she expired. It was the only time I had seen her without a pen in her hands.

“Cousin,” she said, “when you next see the King of Poland, give him my regards.”

Remembering the uniform kindness with which she had always treated me, the thought that I was about to lose a sincere friend tied my tongue. I made her a silent obeisance.

“You are very *triste*,” she said, observing my emotion. Then, as if struck with a sudden thought, she added, half jokingly, half seriously, “Do you ever read your Bible?”

Aware of the great value she attached to this book, the reading of which had been prohibited in France by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and not wishing to appear to scoff at such a moment

at the consolation she derived from it, I reminded her that the law did not permit me.

“You should read the third chapter of Ecclesiastes,” she replied, and then added sadly, “You at least ought to regret me, for I have always been one of your friends.”

A lump rose in my throat, and as others had entered I left.

Haunted by what Madame had said, as soon as I returned to my home I searched among my books for a Bible and found the passage she had recommended. Strange to say, the chapter, which was certainly very curious, had been underlined by an unknown hand and covered with notes from beginning to end.



*Elizabeth Charlotte
Duchesse*



*Palatine du Rbin
d'Orléans.*

MADAME.

(After Rigaud.)

To face page 184.]

TO VMD
ABSORBED

CHAPTER VI

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

I

WHAT roses perfumed with their charms, of which the memory at least is unfading, this Armida-garden on the Seine, where for nearly four years, Rinaldo-like, I lingered pleasure-snared !

Roses of all varieties—the winter rose, the spring rose, and the last rose of summer, white roses, yellow roses, and red roses, the moss rose, and the rose set about with thorns. Grisette, soubrette, cocotte, grand dame, princess of the blood, goddess of the opera !

What round shoulders you had, Denise ; what an ankle, O Francine ; Lais, what a bosom ! I kiss your white hands, belle marquise. Madame la Princesse, a toast to your wit ! Poet, a thousand louis for a sonnet on my Terpsichore's grace !

And what Pantagruel-appetites, what a Silenus-thirst, what powers of endurance, what a capacity for enjoyment ! *Beaucoup manger, beaucoup boire, beaucoup aimer* was the device of the Regency. O lips purpled with wine, O sparkling eyes, O

flushed cheeks, O . . . *Mais, tais-toi donc, vieux cœur!* . . .

In this triumphant corruption, on this gilded dunghill of the Regency, there bloomed one rose of a more fatal beauty, there gleamed one pearl of a more fatal intelligence than all the bacchantes of quality and *figurantes* of the opera—Adrienne Lecouvreur, the Queen of the Comédie Française.

She was of middle height and admirably made, with a noble and confident air, a well-poised head, shapely shoulders, eyes full of fire, a pretty mouth, a slightly aquiline nose, and very agreeable manners. Her features were the index of an extremely emotional nature, and her eyes in particular often supplied the place of her voice. There was something so delicate in her charm that I can do no better than compare her to a miniature exquisitely painted.

Her parentage was extremely obscure. If one ever speculates on anything so unimportant as the origin of an actress, you would have said she was the daughter of at least a prince or a poet. Her father, however, was nothing more distinguished than a hatter in some town of Champagne, from which he was driven by circumstances as likely to befall any hatter whose hats fail to please his customers as any Maréchal of France whose battles fail to please the king. Adversity having followed him to Paris, whither he had gone in the vain hope of finding in Fortune a protector, he was so maddened by her persistent persecutions that to escape them he took what Voltaire calls "a leap into the

dark," by setting fire to the four corners of his room and clambering into the chimney.

A kind-hearted laundress, whom the infant daughter of the distraught hatter called aunt, having rescued little Adrienne from the flames, decided to adopt her. Among the patrons of this honest woman was an actor of the Comédie Française named Le Grand, who frequently paid his washing bill in tickets to the gallery of the theatre. Fascinated by the performances she was thus enabled to witness, Adrienne committed to memory the scenes that impressed her, and once astonished Le Grand by reciting some passage from *Le Cid*. An artist himself, recognising in the little Melpomene of the wash-tub the divine spark which was to make her one of the most brilliant luminaries of the stage, he offered to become her second master, since Nature had been her first.

Adrienne was at the time Le Grand undertook to train her about ten, and her career for the next fifteen years was the usual one of apprenticeship common to the theatrical profession. When she was old enough, or tall enough, to appear before the public she joined a travelling company, which confined its theatrical peregrinations to Flanders and Lorraine. During Malplaquet year she acted in Lille, Tournay, and Brussels, and I must have seen her in the latter city more than once, for I frequently went to the theatre during my stay there. She was twenty-five when the opportunity she desired of appearing before a Parisian audience arrived. She made her *début* in the "Electra"

of Crébillon, and leapt into fame at a bound. Her success was so prodigious that it was remarked she had begun where great actresses usually finish.

Apart from her rare histrionic gifts no one was better calculated to capture the suffrages of so critical and fastidious a world as that of Paris. Her charm and originality lay in her conception of love, the belief in which, killed by the cynical persiflage of the Regency, she restored. With Adrienne a need of loving and being loved was imperious. She had the melting tears, the bewitching grace, and the voluptuous modesty associated with the memory of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The power she exercised over hearts transformed beasts into men. So subtle was the fascination of her spell that her portrait painted by Coypel, a feeble and mediocre artist, drew tears from those who had never seen her. One distinguished critic declared that it was not a work of art, but a dream of grief.

Perhaps nothing proved at once and more conclusively her indescribable personal fascination and her genius as an actress than the manner in which she was treated by the most exclusive society. At this time actors and actresses still lived beyond the pale of the respectable world. As auxiliaries to refined pleasures they were applauded and flattered by *grandes dames*, and the greatest lords did not disdain to associate with them in debauchery on terms of equality. But the gates of the Paradise of Respectability were pitilessly closed to them.



ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR AS CORNÉLIE.

(After Antoine Coyſel.)

THE
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The Regency, which broke down so many social barriers, did not put an end to their exclusion ; and extreme as was the licence society permitted itself, the most it would concede to these agreeable pariahs was to visit them in secret or entertain them with closed doors. For Adrienne Lecouvreur alone was an exception made. From the day of her arrival in Paris, from the night of her wonderful and instant triumph, the most exclusive had recognised the distinction of this soiled dove of the provinces, whose innate refinement had by some miracle escaped the deteriorating influence of the lamentable life of a strolling player in her long *wander-schmerz* in Flanders and Lorraine.

Among her friends of the first rank were Madame la Duchesse de Maine, a Princess of the House of Bourbon-Condé ; the Duchesse de Gesvres, the Marquise de Simiane, Madame de Sévigné's granddaughter ; and the Marquise de Lambert, who was the most exclusive woman in France. At the receptions of Madame de Lambert, to which the honour of an invitation was sought by the greatest personages, Adrienne was always to be seen. Nor did these ladies disdain to be received by her in return at dinner or supper. A supper at Adrienne's charming house in the Rue de Marais was one of the most exquisite and difficult to obtain of all the pleasures of Paris. On these occasions she would recite and even act whole scenes from her *répertoire*, which no other actor or actress ever did before off the stage.

For all this popularity, however, she paid dearly

in the jealousy and animosity it excited among her theatrical comrades. The least quarrelsome of women, their rancour deeply grieved her, and contributed not a little to the fits of depression and ill-humour to which she was subject. The latter she was the first to acknowledge and condemn; indeed, her ill-humour troubled her much more than those on whom she vented it. The depression to which she was subject was the wistful *tristesse* of a poetical nature, what La Fontaine called "the sombre pleasure of a melancholy heart."

"You cannot appreciate my state of mind," she said to me once when I sought explanation of her sadness, "because you are neither a woman, nor weak, nor melancholic. My languor is not at all insupportable; my thoughts are tender rather than black."

She would have much preferred a quiet life confined to the society of a few intimate friends to the brilliant whirl to which her popularity and fame condemned her. Her tastes were exceedingly simple; reading afforded her almost as much pleasure as acting; she liked to cry over a romance, but the books she was most fond of were histories and the biographies of great men. Her favourite hero was Gustavus Adolphus. She could write a charming letter, and in conversation she would have held her own with any at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, for she had great wit and a sense of humour. Gossip or scandal had no interest for her.

Beyond her training for the stage she had had no regular education, yet Nature, which had been

so bountiful to her, seemed to have given it to her without the trouble of acquiring it. In the society of the most brilliant men she never appeared at a disadvantage. Her powers of assimilation were so great that she could impart what she had received. But to explain how the daughter of a mad hatter, the niece of a washerwoman, the actress of a strolling company, came to possess the refined manners of a *grande dame* and the culture of a *salonnière* is useless. Adrienne Lecouvreur was, it goes without saying, a genius.

In private life as well as on the stage, where she had no rival in tragedy, the real secret of her charm lay in her personality. She had the rare gift of sympathy. One had only to look at her to trust her, nor was any one ever betrayed who confided in her. She was the very soul of loyalty, all the acts of her life proved it. A debt tormented her like remorse.

“The respect of honest men,” she said, “is the greatest good I know.”

She had two daughters, the treasured souvenirs of two great, all-absorbing, tragic amours. After she had become famous many men disputed the honour of being the father of her children. The implication is not a slur. Adrienne had been a strolling actress, she and her vagrant mimes had followed in the wake of the great armies that had disputed the throne of Spain in Flanders, she was young and beautiful. To love was as natural to her as to act; in her profession, moreover, the one was expected of her as much as the other.

But with Adrienne to love lightly was impossible ; the gift of her person was the pledge of her heart. Polluted, she had never been corrupted. Loving, she had known what it is to be loved till death, and what it is to be forsaken. The tragic actress, the heroine of Crébillon and Corneille, of Racine and Voltaire, could have had no better training. Love to this worshipper of love had been splendid misery. Of her two great amours, of the fathers of her two darling daughters, one had died loving her ; the other had deserted her at the zenith of her passion. In her grief for the first she had tried to kill herself ; from the sorrow caused by the second she had tried to kill the love in her.

But love would not die. It clung to her heart like the Old Man of the Sea to Sinbad, it dominated her, it enslaved her. Taught by experience she endeavoured to escape the caprices of its servitude of which she had proved the sweetness and bitterness by narcotising it with friendship. To drug the lovers who would fain have lured her into the passion of which she was afraid she sought friendship with ardour. It was no easy task she set herself. Her lovers were persistent and alluring. To her imagination, erotic guardian of her susceptible heart, fed on romances, histories, and the biographies of heroes, they appealed with the siren-song of a great name like Lord Peterborough, that English knight-errant who wandered restlessly about Europe, from London to Lisbon, from Stockholm to Madrid, from Paris to St. Petersburg, in search of the unattainable ; or a great position like the Cheva-

lier de Rohan ; or a great fame like Voltaire ; or adorable youth like d'Argental. Perhaps none but a woman can understand what it cost her to refuse the virgin love of this boy of seventeen, many years her junior, which neither absence in England, nor the threat of exile in St. Domingo, nor her pledged promise to his arrogant mother could conquer.

"It is only as a friend, a true friend," she told him, "that I can receive you."

"So be it, then," was the submissive reply of his idolatrous heart; which panted about Adrienne's house in the Rue de Marais, like a faithful dog content merely to be near its mistress.

This was no mean privilege, for friendship has its enthusiasm as well as love, and as d'Argental of all Adrienne's lovers was the most difficult to turn into a friend, he was the most preferred—till I crossed her path and entered her life.

II

From her success in substituting friendship for love she had come to believe that her heart could never again be enslaved. This sense of security was so great as to make her careless of danger.

To appreciate the charm of Adrienne one had to know her. It was in the *salon* that the spell she exercised on the stage was sealed. Indeed, great though the triumphs of the actress were, I doubt not that history will forget them sooner than the conquests of the woman. Attracted, as a

matter of course, to the theatre to behold one who held so unique a position in Paris, curiosity impelled me to meet her in society.

Was my heart touched by the grace of her personality, or was my pride pricked by the thought of increasing the notoriety I craved by the conquest of so illustrious a woman? I do not know. But most certainly the mere glory of sieging and reducing a citadel on whose battlements a flag of truce perpetually waved would have had little attraction for me had I not been tempted by the treasure stored in it and defended so unsuspectingly—I mean the heart, the soul, if you like, of Adrienne Lecouvreur.

The first glimpse I had of it was enough. Entering by the gate of friendship, which was ever open, I passed in the twinkling of an eye, torch in hand, to the powder magazine. Taken unawares, resistance was useless, and Adrienne surrendered herself to me as she had never surrendered before.

“I feel,” she told me, “in loving you that I have only just begun to live!”

As it would be impossible to find two people more dissimilar, or whose characters, tastes, and mode of life seemed to possess so little in common, Adrienne’s infatuation was the source of a great deal of wonder.

The explanation of the enigma was, however, very simple. Love is blind, and the feminine imagination is easily fascinated by the *roué*, whose vices and debaucheries instead of blighting the natural distinction of his manners and appearance

seem to encircle them with a mysterious and magnetic halo. In those days—I can say it now, without vanity—there was no young fellow of my age and inches handsomer than I. The close resemblance I bore to my father, not only in looks, but in his peculiar joyous *debonair* manner and his open-handed, good-natured disposition, was a key to unlock any heart I cared to enter. The great popularity enjoyed by the King of Poland was due to the fact that he was a past-master in the art of pleasing. I, too, possessed this quality, to which I owe the devotion of my soldiers, the loyalty of my friends, and the love of my mistresses that when it was betrayed and forsaken, like a faithful dog, died kissing the hand that slew it.

Add to my manners and appearance the picturesque interest, at once sympathetic and contemptuous, of the stigma on my birth, and instead of wondering "what Adrienne saw in me," you will perceive that such a man could not fail to appeal to the imagination, to tempt the heart, and to dominate the soul of such a woman.

The physical desire, which is ever the first and instinctive expression of love, developed naturally in such a woman into a spiritual need. It pleased her, therefore, to evolve from my good qualities, which, though often obscured by debauchery, were never wholly extinguished, an ideal that was as flattering to me as it was captivating to her. Knowing me as she did, she was quick to perceive that though I sought pleasure in all its forms I had only fully

enjoyed one—that of action, in which I was able to give the rein to a daring and masterful spirit of energy that, doomed to idleness, went mad.

The Chevalier de Folard had discovered a strategist in the colonel of the Saxe regiment; from praising in his *Polybius* the method I employed in training my men he had taken to asserting in *salons* that I not only “had the finest instinct for the art of war of any man he had ever met, but that the first campaign would prove he was right.” Encouraged by the prediction of so great an authority as Folard was universally admitted to be, Adrienne, woman-like, at once discovered a hero in one in whom others had merely seen a Polish adventurer, and undertook to turn the Achilles of Homer, as she was pleased to call me, into the Achilles of Racine.

It was a task for which she was peculiarly fitted. Through her tender care and sensible advice the wild boar, the *sanglier*, as I was familiarly called at the Palais Royal, became domesticated. She gave me the polish I lacked, developed virtues of which I was ignorant; and naturalised me a Frenchman twenty years before my victories made me a Maréchal de France. It was Adrienne who initiated me to the delights of French literature, and inspired me with a taste for poetry, music, art, and the drama, for the last of which I conceived so great a fondness that I engaged a company of players to follow me to the wars, where, save on battle-days, they gave

consecutive performances throughout the whole campaign. In fine, with the exception of the science of war, which I think I know better than any one, and spelling, which I have never been able to learn, she taught me all I know. At the same time she took care—though my character was a sufficient protection from the danger she feared—to prevent the Saxon hussar from degenerating into one of the effeminate *mignons* of the Court, who were be-ribboned like the shepherds of Watteau and perfumed like an abbé.

It would have been impossible to have found a mistress who understood my wants and provided for them so thoroughly. Perceiving from the first that our *liaison*, which was to her the chief interest of her life, was but an episode in mine, she sought to hold her lover by charming him into a friend, like d'Argental. Since to have rebelled against my infidelities would have unquestionably defeated her object, she schooled herself to submit to them without a murmur, consoled by the thought that if others disputed with her the possession of my heart she alone possessed my confidence. It was not long before her sacrifice earned the reward she craved. For the knowledge that I always came back to her so completely proved she had succeeded in making her friendship an imperious necessity to me as to enable her not only to bear philosophically the tyranny of the passion that enslaved her, but—greatest sacrifice of all—to face heroically the prospect of my indefinite and, perhaps, eternal absence.

III

The idle existence, of which this cynical romance, this splendid tare in the garden of love, was my talisman, terminated by a curious and fitting coincidence with the life of him who was its evil genius, or patron saint, as you please—the Regent.

He had a horror of a lingering death, and frequently declared that he hoped when he went from the Palais Royal to the Champs Elysées he would not be an unconscionable time on the journey like poor Charles II., who took a fortnight to go from Whitehall to hell. *Shameful!!!*

His wish was granted, and his departure for the next world was so sudden and so swift that there was neither time to bid him farewell nor to detain him, as many would have liked to have done. The Duchesse de Falari was the only person who saw him off, but even she did not have time to wish him *bon voyage*.

“When I entered the room,” she said afterwards, “I found him cutting the leaves of a book which he had just received from the author, who was dying. It was called the ‘History of Dancing: Sacred and Profane.’ On seeing me he put it down, and asked me in his mocking way if I believed in heaven and hell. The words were hardly out of his mouth when he sank back in his chair unconscious.”

The Duchesse hereupon promptly swooned from terror, and some time must have elapsed before

she came to her senses and gave the alarm. Of the panic-stricken crowd that assembled in answer to poor Madame de Falari's shrieks a lacquey alone had any presence of mind, and seeing that no surgeon was present he proceeded to bleed the Regent by opening a vein with his penknife. But it was too late, Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans had already arrived at the Champs Elysées.

With the passing of this neo-pagan philosopher, the scene of the Watteau-Rabelais *fête* at the Palais Royal shifted to Chantilly, where history, which the Regent had cynically confined to the backstairs of his palace, was now with equal cynicism confined by his successor, the Duc de Bourbon, to the boudoir of his mistress, the Marquise de Prie.

Under this "second Regency," as it was termed, my boon companions were supplanted by a new set of *roués* and *femmes galantes*. Fate, however, kinder to me than to the favourites of the late Regent, provided me with the opportunity of avoiding the oblivion into which they sank. Aware on leaving Dresden that the state of peace which prevailed throughout Europe deprived me of any prospect of finding employment of the sort I craved, I had hoped, nevertheless, on coming to Paris that fortune might be obtained somehow. But the Regent, unlike Louis XIV., was not the banker of those on whom he conferred his favour; to support myself I was, therefore, obliged to have recourse to Augustus. To prevent Flemming's resentment from depriving me of his good-will I sought to make myself necessary to him. Accord-

ingly, knowing how great an interest he took in the doings of the French court, I kept him regularly and minutely informed of everything that transpired in Paris. As my relations with the Regent were more intimate than Watzdorf's, my despatches contained information which the latter was not in a position to obtain. I thus became so useful to Augustus that he not only constantly employed me to transact his personal commissions, but on more than one occasion to act as his private ambassador.

Some idea of the value he set on the services I rendered him may be gathered from the manner in which he expressed his thanks.

"I cannot express," he wrote once, "how satisfied I am with the way you have acquitted yourself of my commission. Be sure I shall not forget your zeal, and I shall give you a proof of my gratitude."

At another time he promised "to make me a prince"!

Beyond the fact that such tributes proved to me that I had succeeded in establishing myself too firmly in his favour for Flemming to dislodge me, I was not inclined to treat his promises seriously. Adrienne, however, was always of the opinion that the day would come when they would be realised. Taught in her sweet school to regard my present unsatisfactory career as a *pis aller*, my ambition was finally aroused—the natural ambition of one who, born on the steps of a throne which he is prevented from mounting, dreams of a crown. When lo! one waiting for a head suddenly glittered on the Northern horizon, in those regions of myth

where the impossible is possible, in that world of magic where sorcerer-kings conjured empires out of the smoke of a Narva and a Pultawa.

At such a moment nothing less than the throne of France could have reconciled me to Paris and the inactivity that was consuming me.

And Adrienne, how did she bear the separation?

As might have been expected of the *maîtresse en titre* of the Duke of Courland to be. Oh, *les châteaux d'Espagne!*

CHAPTER VII

THE THRONE IN THE AIR

I

COURLAND had formerly been the Malta of the Knights of the Teutonic Order, those Chevaliers of the North who policed Germany in the early days and carried civilisation into the Cimmerian regions on the Baltic. About the middle of the sixteenth century, threatened by the decay into which institutions, like nations, fall when they have served their purpose, they endeavoured to save themselves from extinction by converting their states into a duchy, hereditary in the family of their Grand Master, Gotthard von Kettler, and placing it under the protection of Poland. As the vassals of the Sarmatian Republic the Courlanders had thus continued to preserve the management of their own affairs. They had their Diet, or Parliament, which met at Mittau, the capital and seat of government; they coined their own money, levied their own taxes, and were represented at foreign courts by their own ministers. The Dukes of Courland were, moreover, recognised as the equals

of the greatest sovereigns. The King of France addressed them as "cousin," the Emperor as "most illustrious," and the King of Poland, their suzerain, as "most illustrious and most puissant."

But while the Poles had respected their liberties, chiefly because they were kept too busy defending their own from the encroachments of Sweden and Russia to think of anything else, they had demanded the Courlanders to assist them in their wars in return for their protection. The value of this "protection," however, had proved in the long run so negligible as to be of almost no value at all. Poland had benefited far more from the assistance she received from Courland than she gave in return. The ducal descendants of Gotthard von Kettler had twice been driven from their throne by Sweden, and the Courlanders had beheld Saxons, Swedes, and Russians successively in possession of their country. Courland, in a word, had been Poland's battle-field.

During the Great Northern War, Frederick William the last Duke but one of the Kettler line had been deprived of his throne by Charles XII., and only recovered it after Pultawa by the aid of Peter the Great, who, with the intention of annexing the duchy at some future and more favourable date, had obliged him to marry his niece, Anna Ivanovna. Frederick William, however, did not long enjoy his restoration, for he drank and feasted so excessively at his wedding banquet that he died from the effects before he reached Mittau.

Being childless, he was succeeded by his uncle,

Ferdinand, the last of the Kettlers. Between Ferdinand and his subjects there was from the start complete disagreement. The Courlanders were Lutherans, the Duke was a Roman Catholic. The hostility he aroused by a foolish and fruitless attempt to impose his faith on the duchy had resulted in his voluntarily leaving the country, after appointing Anna Ivanovna to act as Regent for the remainder of his life. Since he was unmarried, old, and infirm, the impossibility of his begetting an heir to succeed him made the future of Courland a burning question.

As suzerain Poland claimed the right of deciding the fate of her vassal as she pleased, and openly talked of absorbing it, as she had done Mazovia, on the death of Ferdinand. But Poland was no longer the power she had been. Russia had risen to prominence, and was prepared to prevent Poland from executing her design by absorbing Courland herself. Placed thus between the frying-pan and the fire, the Courlanders endeavoured to save themselves from the extinction with which they were threatened by claiming their own right to elect their Duke. But in admitting this right, which had never before been challenged because the question had never before arisen, Peter the Great saw his advantage. Realising that Poland's hands were tied as long as Ferdinand lived, he had attempted to take time by the forelock and get his successor elected before he died. Poland, of course, disputed the legality of this proceeding, but Peter gave the Courlanders to understand that if they

would elect the candidate he nominated he would support them against Poland.

The unhappy Courlanders, perceiving that they were doomed to perish, preferred that Russia should be their executioner. Her iron hands were at least gloved, Poland's were bare. Moreover, the method of strangling employed by Peter was calculated to defeat its purpose. He proposed that Anna Ivanovna should marry again and her husband be elected by the Courlanders as Duke. The Regent, who as a Russian princess naturally favoured the policy of Peter, readily consented to be wedded a second time, and as soon as it was known that the throne of Courland went with her hand she had suitors galore.

But Ivanovna made her marriage subject to one condition. She stipulated that she would only marry a man she could love. Such a condition would have been considered absurd in a princess of any other country but Russia. There it was regarded as so natural and legitimate that no attempt was made to force her into a marriage she had no taste for. On one occasion she had changed her mind almost at the last moment. Eager to marry, if ever a woman was, the difficulty of pleasing her had been so great that after fifteen years—Duke Ferdinand still continuing to live—the future of Courland was still undecided.

However, as the years passed and their situation became no worse the hopes of the Courlanders revived. They even dared to hope they might secure their independence altogether by playing into the

hands of both Poland and Russia at the same time. Brakel, who was the soul of this intrigue, was the minister of Courland at Warsaw, and a very adroit man. I had been well acquainted with him at the Court of Augustus, and the good relations that had existed between us inspired him with the idea of adding me to the list of suitors of Anna Ivanovna.

“From the personal knowledge I have of his character,” he informed his fellow-conspirators, “I am convinced the Comte de Saxe would make the best Duke that Courland has ever had.”

He believed that my candidature would be sure to have the personal support of Augustus, if not of the Poles, who, however they might object to it, would accept it as a compromise sooner than fight Russia. The fact that I was a Lutheran was also a great point in my favour; and Brakel's friends having agreed to accept his recommendation of me, he had informed both Augustus and myself of his scheme.

Augustus was captivated with the idea from the first, and I, you may be sure, did not wait to be asked twice. I would have left for Warsaw at once, but Brakel advised me to remain in Paris until his plans were matured. As their success depended on my ability to captivate the capricious fancy of Anna Ivanovna, he wished to fire her curiosity in regard to me as the means of preparing her heart to receive without a flaw the favourable impression he expected my arrival to make upon it.

While Brakel, as it seemed to me in my im-

patience, was needlessly wasting precious time in a well-nigh vain effort to awaken a passion in a woman so hard to please for a man she had never seen, his object was achieved by a most curious coincidence. Lefort, the Saxon Minister at St. Petersburg and an intimate friend of mine, suggested to me that I should seek a marriage with Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter the Great, and the favourite child of the Czarina Catherine I., who, since the death of Peter, was Empress of all the Russias.

“Without speaking of the possible chances such a match would give you of a great future in Russia,” wrote Lefort, “what better means could you have of securing the throne of Courland? In marrying her daughter to you the Empress would, no doubt, willingly propose you as the Russian candidate to the ducal throne, and in case of need support your cause by force of arms.”

Infatuated with a project which so cunningly increased my chance of winning the crown I sought, I ordered Lefort to commence the siege without delay. This he conducted so cleverly that Elizabeth surrendered at the first fire.

“She is so mad to marry you,” wrote Lefort, “that she fairly itches for you. To assure you that your cause is won I have only to remind you of the old saying, that the mere wish of a Russian is enough to blow up a town.”

At the same time Brakel informed me that Anna Ivanovna, who happened just then to be visiting St. Petersburg, was so favourably impressed with

what she heard of me that "she, too, had her 'yes' all ready."

After this, to remain in Paris any longer was out of the question, and I set out immediately for Warsaw, where I arrived feeling, between Brakel on the one hand and Lefort on the other, as if I were already Duke of Courland and Semigallia.*

II

If in the exuberant state in which I left Paris my mind had room for anything of the nature of a doubt, it was merely as to which of the hearts the two princesses had so obligingly placed at my disposal I should choose as the stepping-stone to the throne.

Elizabeth was only sixteen, and said to be very charming; she was, moreover, the daughter of the reigning Empress. Anna Ivanovna, on the other hand, was thirty-three, or my senior by three years, reported to be no beauty, and only the niece by marriage of the Czarina. Lefort was naturally all for Elizabeth. To Brakel, however, seeing that both princesses were Russian, it was a matter of minor importance. The question that concerned him was my elevation to the throne of Courland, which was only to be secured by my marrying one or the other. With me it was a case of *embarras de princesses*. If I could be said to have had a prefer-

* The official designation of the Dukes of Courland: Semigallia was one of the two provinces that formed the Duchy, Courland proper was the other.



CATHERINE ALEXIEWNA
CZARINE DE MOSCOVIE
Séconde femme de Pierre I. dit le Grand
Couronnée le 18 May 1724. Morte le 17 May 1727
Agée de 38 Ans.

THE CZARINA CATHERINE I.

(After Nattier.)

TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE

ence it was for Elizabeth, as the younger and more charming; but I realised that Anna had the advantage of being already at Mittau. The fact, however, that it was advisable for me to go to Russia, as an act of policy as well as of courtesy to the Czarina, finally induced me to choose Elizabeth.

But now I was faced with a fresh dilemma. Since my attentions, though approved by Augustus, would, if made public, surely be opposed by a powerful party in Poland who were resolved to annex Courland on the death of Ferdinand, it was expedient that I should have another pretext for going to Russia than that of canvassing the favour of the Czarina. The invention of a plausible excuse for the journey was a source of much perplexity to both Brakel and Lefort. My mother, however, fortunately provided me with it.

Aware that in her, of whose abilities I had so often had the benefit, I should have a valuable ally, I had taken her into my confidence from the first. Consequently, on going to Warsaw I stopped at Quedlinburg to consult her. I found her greatly altered in the four years since I had seen her. She was so aged by ill-health, financial worries, and the repeated failure of all her schemes that I scarcely recognised her. The sight of me, however, with ambition at last awakened and a throne to win, seemed to give her fresh life, and she became at once the *intrigante* and devoted mother I had always known.

From her uncle Otho—he who had laid the Parthenon in ruins—she had inherited some pro-

perty in Russia which had been confiscated in the turmoil of the Great Northern War. For years she had been vainly seeking to obtain its restoration from the Russian government, and as ill-health prevented her from going to St. Petersburg in person, it occurred to her that I could have no better pretext for my visit to the Russian court than to go on this errand. She accordingly transferred all her rights in the property in question to me, and let it be widely known that in doing so she obliged me to go to Russia to press my claim as a duty I owed to the family of Königsmarck.

Everything now seemed to favour me. But I counted without my enemy. Augustus, who had up till my arrival in Warsaw kept the project, in which he was scarcely less interested than myself, a profound secret, saw fit to impart it to his Saxon cabinet, who likewise approved of it. But Flemming was no sooner informed of the secret than he saw the opportunity it afforded him to have the revenge I had cheated him of in Paris. Conscious that Augustus was greatly in favour of the enterprise, he, too, appeared to encourage it, in order that the higher my hopes were raised the greater should be their fall.

A whisper, sufficient to blow the news of my design over Poland, produced the effect he desired without convicting him of treachery. At the best of times it required but a spark to set the disaffection of the Poles ablaze. The Lubomirskis and the Oginskis, the Potockis and the Czartoriskis, the Sapichas and the Radzivils were incensed at

the duplicity of Augustus, who while appearing as King of Poland to favour their designs on Courland, was all the time secretly playing another game. They were indignant enough as it was that a Saxon Elector should have mounted their throne, drained their treasury to satisfy his extravagant pleasures, and married his natural children into their best families, but when it came to seeking to enrich his *bâtards* with appanages torn from the nation itself their exasperation unleashed itself. The uproar was so great that Flemming and the Saxon ministers advised him to abandon an enterprise which if persisted in would lead to civil war and perhaps the loss of his throne.

Augustus, accordingly, bent before the storm, which Flemming timed to burst on my head on the very night I was to have set out for Russia. I was waiting, booted, spurred, whip in hand, for the letter of recommendation that the King had promised me for the Czarina when one of his ministers, Manteuffel, brought me word from him not to leave.

"Is it an order?" I asked, unable to conceal my discomfiture.

"I believe so," he replied.

The suddenness of the blow stunned me, but, pulling myself together, I said, "I have no wish to disobey the King, but if I do not go all is lost. I must consider what I shall do." And, turning abruptly on my heel, I left Manteuffel to await the result of my meditations.

I went first to inform Brakel of what had hap-

pened. He besought me not to abandon an enterprise in which my honour was so deeply engaged and the hopes of a nation centred.

“The King,” he said craftily, “has only forbidden you to go to Russia. Go, then, at once to Courland. If it is not to be Elizabeth, let it be Anna Ivanovna. Remember, the affair is now public ; it is a question of your honour, your courage. Europe, the world, is watching you !”

This decided me. I then went to take leave of two ladies, wholly devoted to me, who had been let into the secret for sake of the valuable assistance they were in a position to give me. One was my sister, the Countess Bielinska, a daughter of Augustus and the Countess Cosel, whose husband was Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army ; the other was the Countess Pociey, who had tempted her husband, the Grand-marshal of Lithuania, into my affair, as Eve tempted Adam. They were waiting for me, as arranged, at the house of the former, and were already aware of the King’s decision. I told them that I had decided to disobey his order, and implored them not to fail me after my departure, as I had the greatest need of friends in Poland. They assured me that I could rely on them to support my cause, and urged me to leave at once. Even the King, in spite of his prohibition, they gave me to understand, was anxious that I should leave. It seems that he suspected I would disobey him, and in order to give me the opportunity to do so with impunity had gone to bed earlier than usual to avoid the necessity of ordering

my arrest should my intention become known. As a matter of fact I had no sooner turned my back on Manteuffel than he had rushed off to Augustus, but was unable to communicate with him since no one dared wake him.

As I kissed the hands of the Countesses, Major Glasenapp, a spy of Flemming's, appeared.

"So, it seems, you are leaving after all!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," I replied, with a shrug, "and he who would stop me will have to be quick;" and, concealing my contempt in order to disconcert him the more, I added, with an air of ironical gaiety worthy of the brilliant Parisian world I had so recently left, "By the way, have you any books you can lend me that would amuse me *en route*?"

"I have the very thing," returned Glasenapp, with a wit I would not have believed he possessed. "It is a life of the Duke of Monmouth."

"I will take it with pleasure," I retorted; "I am sure it will contain much valuable information for me as well as amusement." And bowing to the ladies I withdrew.

Five days later I reached Mittau, and in a letter to my mother announcing my arrival I had the satisfaction of being able to inform her that I had proved so pleasing to Anna Ivanovna that she had written to the Czarina declaring her intention to share my lot.

III

Nor was the reception I was accorded by the Courlanders themselves less enthusiastic. My popularity seemed to increase from hour to hour. The Diet assembled without loss of time to settle the date of the election, the preparations for which were made in such an *élan* of joy and hope that it seemed rather an acclamation than an election.

Such enthusiasm was the more remarkable from the fact that I came to the country a perfect stranger, without money to purchase votes or the influence to command them. Its explanation, however, is simple. Adventurer though I was, of all the candidates who for the past fifteen years had aspired to be Duke of Courland I was the only one who had even given the *people* a thought.

My programme proclaimed my patriotic intentions, while the very weakness of my candidature, unsupported as it was by any power, was in itself a guarantee of my sincerity. Plenty of bayonets and guns in the arsenals, few chamberlains in the ante-chambers was my motto. To maintain and preserve the national independence I meant to have a thoroughly efficient defensive unit. As a means to this end I proposed to create a militia composed of nobles, who alone having the right to a commission would thus have acquired the sort of training I deem essential to an officer. On the other hand, in preparing for war I by no means ignored the benefits that peace provides. Since it was only by industry and strict economy that the country could

recover from the effects of the pestilence and wars by which it had been ravaged, I intended to live as simply as possible. This would have been no sacrifice to my inclinations, for I have always abhorred luxury in little courts, than which nothing seems to me more ridiculous. Nor did my theory of government fail to make provision for education and amusement. The latter particularly engaged my attention. With the establishment of schools I intended to erect a theatre in Mittau. It would have attracted the *noblesse* to the capital, where I trusted to the refining and educating influences of the French drama to deprive them of the roughness that a life spent perpetually in the country increases. At the same time, it would have helped trade to revive by increasing expenditure and consequently industry.

In the meantime, as a counterblast to these fine intentions, Augustus, at the command of the Poles, forbade the Diet to assemble, and threatened to take forcible possession of the country unless I immediately left it. Duke Ferdinand, too, who for years had been living at Dantzic utterly oblivious of the throne he had vacated, protested vehemently against what he termed my usurpation. Russia maintained an ominous silence.

Notwithstanding, one month after my arrival in the country the thirty-two deputies who composed the Diet of Courland assembled on the date they had fixed for the election, and unanimously elected me as their Duke. Even Brüggen, one of the most influential men in the country, who had at first

refused to take any part in an affair calculated to still further antagonise the Poles, was finally induced to cast his vote in my favour. The same night Mittau was illuminated, and Anna Ivanovna gave a ball in my honour, at which all the nobility of Courland assisted.

I leave it to the imagination to picture my joy on finding myself elected Duke of Courland and Semigallia. Alas! it was only a castle in Spain, a throne in the air.

It was not from Poland, however, that the attack I expected came, but from Russia. It is true the blow that was intended to knock me off my throne was not delivered by the Russian government, but by a single man, the celebrated Menzikoff,* who, accustomed all his life to trample upon everybody that stood in his way, now proposed to undo by violence all that had been done at Mittau. But on this occasion this favourite of fortune, before whom the highest personages at St. Petersburg had quailed, was to find his master.

The very day after my election, in fact, Prince Dolgorouki, calling himself the ambassador of the Czarina, arrived at Mittau with a ukase ordering the Diet to cancel my election, giving it the choice of three candidates—the Landgrave of Hesse-Homburg, the Duke of Holstein-Glucksburg, and Prince Menzikoff—the emphasis laid on the last clearly intimating the Czarina's wishes—and concluding with the threat that in case of refusal Courland would be wiped from the map and myself and my

* The spelling of the name adopted here was customary in the eighteenth century.



PRINCE MENZIKOFF.

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supporters sent to Siberia! At the same time Menzikoff sent one of his creatures to announce his impending arrival with twelve thousand men.

Unmoved by this incredible insolence I proceeded to announce my election to the Powers, while Dolgorouki, irritated by the disdainful indifference with which his ukase was received, went to Riga, where Menzikoff awaited the reply of the Diet. The terror that this redoubtable man inspired in Anna Ivanovna was so great that she, too, went to Riga, with a single servant and three dragoons for escort, to implore him on her knees not to invade the duchy. But at the first word he uttered, perceiving how useless it would be to attempt to deter him, she refused to humiliate herself further and returned at once to Mittau to protect me by her presence. As for me, the danger of my situation would alone have been sufficient to prevent me from deserting my brave Courlanders, who, assuring me that their loyalty was adamant, swore to renew at my side the heroism of their ancestors, the Knights of the Teutonic Order.

Menzikoff's arrival, however, two days later with only three hundred, instead of twelve thousand, men, convinced me, as I had suspected, that his bark was worse than his bite. He took up his quarters at the Russian embassy, at the doors of which he mounted a guard of sixty men, and to keep up the farce of intimidation gave out that the contingent that accompanied him was only the advance guard of a formidable army.

The career of this man who had come to dispute

with me the throne of Courland is one of the romances of history. He had literally risen from the gutter. His father was either a peasant or a boatman, and he himself was first heard of selling meat-pies about the streets of Moscow, where the notoriety he acquired by his witty and good-natured retorts to the gibes of the passers-by eventually attracted the notice of Lefort, the French ambassador, whose son was afterwards Augustus's representative at St. Petersburg. Lefort took such a fancy to the itinerant pie-man that he eventually employed him as valet, in which occupation he managed somehow to strike the fancy of Peter the Great, who in his turn took him into his service.

Though so ignorant that he could scarcely sign his name, Menzikoff possessed a marvellous intelligence that was nothing short of genius, as is proved, not by the height to which he rose, but from the ability with which he grasped the great ideal at the bottom of Peter's reforms, entered into the spirit of it, and helped the Czar to realise it. It was, of course, impossible that such a man, having obtained his opportunity, should fail to seize it. From being Peter's servant Menzikoff soon became his friend, and from accompanying his no less marvellous master in his tours of apprenticeship to England, Holland, France, and Germany, he managed to educate himself too, and even to acquire the manners of polite society. He could turn his hand to anything at a moment's notice and with enthusiasm, from commanding an army to building, like Peter, a ship, or chopping off heads.

After the battle of Pultawa, in which he greatly distinguished himself, Peter made him a prince and enriched him with the estates of Mazeppa, the famous hetman of the Ukraine, who had made the blunder of casting in his lot with Charles XII. At the close of Peter's reign, Prince Menzikoff was the mightiest satrap in the Russian Empire, and perhaps, the richest man in Europe. His power, dignities, and wealth could not, however, civilise him. You had but to scratch the polish with which the pie-man had smeared himself to perceive the Tartar. To his rivals and equals he was outrageously overbearing; his inferiors he treated as so much dirt beneath his feet. It was to him that Peter's peasant-wife Catherine owed the throne on the death of her husband. This was the zenith of his glory, and Fortune having raised him to the highest pinnacle began to desert him. His star paled slowly, but to any one aware of his career it was easy to perceive that in stooping to the throne of Courland after aspiring to the dictatorship of Russia all was not well with Prince Menzikoff.

Since I was to have a rival I could not have had one more flattering to my *amour propre*. Better be conquered by him a thousand times than by some petty Landgrave of Hesse-Homburg or some paltry Duke of Holstein-Glucksburg. The idea, moreover, of matching myself against such a man appealed to the gambler in me. Adventurer against adventurer, the Comte de Saxe *versus* Prince Menzikoff, a duchy for dice, a throne for the stake, *violà un beau jeu d'enfer!*

I was no sooner informed of my antagonist's arrival than I sent to demand the honour of calling on him. He growled his consent, and that he should be in no doubt as to the importance I attached to the dignity the Diet of Courland had conferred upon me I called upon him in state with an escort of cavalry and accompanied by the chief officials of the 'duchy in twelve gala carriages.

On reaching the Russian embassy I was met at the foot of the staircase by Menzikoff's aides-de-camp, who conducted me to his presence. The interview was long, and though it began with an insult, it ended amicably enough with a handshake. Accustomed, as I have said, to be outrageously insolent to his equals, on hearing me announced as the Duke of Courland he gave vent to a contemptuous laugh, and said brutally :

“Duke of Courland, pray who are your parents?”

To show him from the start I 'was neither to be bullied nor trapped into any violence that I should have cause to regret, I assumed an attitude of impeccable politeness, at once intrepid and graceful, worthy of the French school in which I had acquired it.

“I will satisfy your Highness's curiosity,” I said, “if you will tell me who are yours.”

Disconcerted by a retort, which was the last in the world he expected, he began to recapitulate the will of the Czarina as expressed in the ukase I had ignored. Rightly interpreting the air of resignation with which I listened to him as my answer,

he immediately inquired with a snarl how I could pretend to resist.

“Oh,” I said airily, “I am aware that nothing can seem more ridiculous ; it is not, however, a question of my resistance, but of the resistance of myself and my subjects—of my situation in fact.”

He then began to bluster about the folly of the Courlanders in being so blind to their interests as to refuse the honour he wished to pay them by ruling over them, and threatened to kick and thump them into repentance. As I had no desire to be persuaded after such a fashion, I cast about in my mind for some way of bribing him to return to Riga. At last the only means I could invent of offering him 100,000 roubles was to suggest that as it was clear Poland would in any case have something to say in the matter, the one whose election was confirmed by the Polish King should pay the other this sum.

Hereupon the interview immediately became friendly. Menzikoff not only accepted the expedient which he took as a desire on my part to be bought out, but naïvely asked me for a letter recommending him to Augustus. This request so highly diverted me that I there and then wrote him the recommendation he wanted and begged the King to give it his particular attention ; after this I took my leave, it being agreed that Menzikoff should go back to Riga till the matter was definitely settled.

Before he went, however, considering that I had abdicated by giving him a letter recommending him to the King of Poland, he gave his supposed subjects

a taste of the despotism he proposed feeding them on by giving them ten days to annul my election under penalty of being sent to Siberia. But the Courlanders were inflexible. Exasperated by their defiance, Menzikoff tried to frighten them into subjection by declaring that he would find the way to get rid of me. This threat, however, inspired by the letter I had given him and the thought of the 100,000 roubles he intended to pay me, was misunderstood by the Courlanders, who, believing that he intended to have me kidnapped or assassinated, immediately armed themselves to the teeth and came to protect me. One misunderstanding led to another. Seeing the preparations the Courlanders made to resist, Menzikoff imagined that I had played him false, and expecting in his turn to be attacked he proposed to attack me.

Informed that my house was surrounded by the Russians I employed the same means of defence as I had done at the inn at Crachnitz. Anna Ivanovna, however, no sooner learnt what was happening than she came to my rescue with her guards, whereupon Menzikoff, realising the disadvantage in which he was placed, promptly withdrew his men and left Mittau the same night.

This event was accompanied by one of those little tragi-comedies in which one would rather not perform before the public. The daughter of a prominent *bourgeois* with whom I had become enamoured, having, after much solicitation been persuaded to pay me a secret visit, was waiting for nightfall to return home, when the house was sur-

rounded by the Russians. This, if it did not prevent her from leaving altogether, seemed to render it well-nigh impossible for her to leave without being recognised, which she feared above everything in the world. As I had my own situation to think of, which was much more serious than hers—for if she were caught she would only lose her reputation, of which rumour had previously attempted to deprive her, but my capture meant Siberia, whence it was not likely I should ever return—I confided her to one of my valets. He believing that the surest means of effecting her escape without disclosing her identity was to disguise her as a man, dressed her in a suit of my clothes and let her down by a rope from a window into a neighbouring garden. The Russians, who were everywhere, seeing her descend in this way fancied that it was I who was seeking to escape. Consequently more than fifty of them with fixed bayonets ran to the spot to seize her. Some recognising my costume were convinced that they had caught the Duke of Courland, and in spite of their prisoner's prayers and tears carried her to their commander. He, of course, at once perceived their error, but the beauty and fright of the unfortunate captive made so deep an impression on him that instead of letting her go, as she implored in a manner capable of moving the stones themselves, he ordered that the greatest care should be taken of her and carried her away with him that night when Menzikoff left Mittau! But as I afterwards learnt that the Russian officer married her, I fancy the fair Courlander in the end gained more than she lost by this adventure.

Incensed by this high-handed attempt of Menzikoff to seize the throne of Courland, Anna Ivanovna herself set out the day after his departure to protest to the Czarina in person. At the same time the Courlanders, in spite of my warnings, sought to protect themselves from a repetition of his violence by complaining to the King of Poland as their suzerain. He accordingly, only too eager to have so plausible an excuse for intervention, charged Lefort to demand an apology of the Czarina. She, besieged at once by Anna Ivanovna on the one hand and Lefort on the other, recognised the justice of the complaint and abandoned the cause of her arrogant subject.

Warned by this defeat that fortune intended to desert him, Menzikoff made a colossal effort to prevent its flight. Though she had disavowed him the Czarina, remembering all she owed to him, refrained from turning his humiliation into disgrace. On the accession of Peter II., a boy of eleven, who succeeded to the throne a year later, Menzikoff once more came to the front. Nominated as one of the members of the Council of Regency that the dying Czarina appointed to govern the state during the young Czar's minority, he managed to become the sole arbiter and master, precisely as the Regent had done in France on the death of Louis XIV. But unlike the Duc d'Orléans, Prince Menzikoff committed the gravest blunders. Aware that his enemies were as numerous as the hairs of his head, he thought to nail his star to the zenith, so to speak, by marrying one of his daughters to the Czar. The

betrothal did, indeed, take place, but four months later, intoxicated with power, he pulled the nails out of his star with his own hands, and from the zenith fell in the twinkling of an eye to the nadir. Had he acted with the least discretion it is possible that he might even eventually have become Czar himself. He had, however, the folly to treat his prospective son-in-law as if he were an infant in arms, and Peter's resentment finally gave him the courage to order his arrest.

This time fortune completely and for ever deserted him. He was stripped of all his dignities and wealth and banished to Siberia. His entire family followed him into exile. The spot chosen for his confinement was Berezov, a village on the most distant frontiers of Siberia. From these inhospitable regions to which he had threatened to send me, Prince Menzikoff never returned. He and the daughter he had betrothed to Peter died at Berezov within a month of one another two years later. Of his family, his wife alone escaped the horrors of the ruin in which he entangled them. She died, grown blind with weeping, on the road to Siberia.

IV

As I expected, the action of the Courlanders in appealing to the King of Poland as their suzerain to protect them from the violent designs of Menzikoff, only exposed them to the still more destructive schemes of the Poles. The former would have

seized their throne ; the latter desired to seize their territory.

Encouraged by the apology of the Czarina, which was tantamount to an acknowledgment of the paramount right of Poland to meddle with the internal affairs of Courland, the Polish Diet hastened to assemble at Grodno for the purpose of annexing the duchy. To secure the unanimity, on which, according to the Polish constitution, the legality of every decree depended, the "Patriots," as they styled themselves, prevented the nobles, who intended to oppose their designs on Courland, from attending the Diet. Thus, without a protest, my election was annulled and a price set on my head, while the members of the Diet of Courland by whom, in spite of the prohibition of the King of Poland, I had been elected, were declared traitors and summoned to Warsaw for trial. At the same time the union of Courland with Poland was proclaimed, and a Commission appointed to go to Mittau to enforce these decrees.

The Czarina, however, was no sooner informed of what had transpired at Grodno than she notified Augustus that "if the Polish commissioners attempted to enter Courland a Russian army would immediately occupy the country, since it was the intention of the Russian Government to employ force, if necessary, to prevent the duchy from being absorbed by Poland."

To Augustus the situation in which he was placed was exceedingly embarrassing. Secretly sympathising with my cause and at the same time obliged in

his own interest to conform to the wishes of his subjects, who treated him as their servant rather than their master, he had endeavoured before the Diet assembled at Grodno to devise a plan that would harmonise his private feelings and his public actions. Difficult, it was perhaps a not impossible task ; but as he relied on Flemming to assist him, it is needless to say he failed. For thanks to Flemming's irreconcilable hatred of me, which he was always skilful enough to mask, Augustus was placed by the threat of the Czarina in a more embarrassing position than ever. Under such circumstances he naturally hesitated to permit the commissioners to leave for Courland ; but though he was privately only too glad of the opportunity to detain them, to do so in the present temper of the Poles was to expose him to the charge of acting in collusion with Russia to cheat them of Courland in my interest.

As Flemming had succeeded in thoroughly frightening him by exaggerating the danger he ran of losing his throne if he exasperated the Poles, he implored me to abandon mine.

“ If you will make this sacrifice for me and return to Paris,” he wrote pitifully, “ I will recompense you in any way you may desire.”

But I was not to be tempted like a child with the offer of some honey on the end of a stick to sacrifice my ambition in order that Augustus might be saved a *mauvais quart d'heure* with his subjects. There was nothing I desired in the world so much as to keep the crown the Diet of Courland had unani- mously given me. Besides, had ambition permitted

me to oblige Augustus, honour would have prevented me. To have deserted the people who had staked their existence on my pledged word was a baseness I refused even to think of.

Another complication, however, arose which deprived his detention of the commissioners of the construction he dreaded. The Poles who had been excluded from the Diet at Grodno made their protest heard all the same in the most emphatic manner. Several hundred of them, led by the princes of the influential family of Sapieha, assembled at Kodveno on the frontier of Courland and threatened if the commissioners left for Mittau to raise the whole of Lithuania in revolt.

Leaving Augustus to turn this threat to his own account, if he could, I endeavoured at the same time to turn it to mine. Aware of the immense advantage of securing the assistance of the Lithuanians, I went to Kodveno to arrange a plan of mutual support in case of attack. I found them conspiring in the usual Sarmatian fashion, glass in hand. My proposal was received with the greatest enthusiasm, and I with the greatest hospitality.

But the success of a cause does not depend only on enthusiasm. Men and money are equally essential. I lacked both. Accordingly, finding that neither the Lithuanians nor the Courlanders could be induced to provide me with the former, before what they regarded as "the decisive hour," and would, I fancy, even then have sacrificed their lives sooner than their fortunes, I sought my army and treasure abroad.

In this attempt I had the active and devoted co-operation of a legion of women, recruited from all classes and countries, inspired by all sorts of love. My mother, in spite of her infirmities, left Quedlinburg to flit as of old from city to city, from court to court, raising money, pleading, intriguing for me. The Countess Pociy sent me her diamonds; Madame Bielinska her plate; while Anna Ivanovna and Elizabeth each besought the Czarina to give them and Courland to me.

But it was in France that my appeal produced the greatest results and provoked the liveliest outburst of generosity. Adrienne Lecouvreur was the first to respond to it by sending me 40,000 livres, which she obtained from the sale of her jewels. To follow this noble example became the fashion in Paris, where *grandes dames* of the Court and *figurantes* of the Opera alike sent their subscriptions to Leger, a banker whom I had authorised to receive them.

Unfortunately, from the greater part of the money thus subscribed I derived but little benefit. My idea was to raise three thousand men, and I employed an agent at Liège to recruit all the deserters he could, regardless of their nationality. A host of young lords and even *bourgeois* volunteered. However, when the cost of equipping those thus raised exceeded the money subscribed Leger discontinued his advances, and of one thousand eight hundred men who were enrolled, more than half deserted before reaching Lubeck, the port from which they were to embark for Courland. In the end only

about three hundred reached Mittau, where I at once formed them into a regiment and drilled them after the method I always employed.

Had I taken advantage of the deadlock that followed the decrees of the Polish Diet to marry Anna Ivanovna, I must have escaped the disaster which finally befell me. But this I neglected to do from an instinctive objection to matrimony, emphasised by a physical aversion for the Princess. The fault, no doubt, lay with me, for if you picked Anna to pieces you found much to admire. For instance, she had fine hair and eyes, and very fine dimensions—she was of massive proportions—she had too great dignity, and unlike most Russians there was nothing cruel in her nature. But the *ensemble* was coarse, swarthy, and masculine. Her cheeks resembled nothing so much as a brace of Westphalian hams, and though I am the last to deny the succulency of this delicious delicacy I must confess to a ridiculous aversion to it in this particular form.

I was, however, careful to conceal a prejudice, which, if apparent, would have increased my difficulties. This was at first easy, for Anna Ivanovna was so infatuated as to deem her hand the least of the blessings she wished to confer on me. The means I took to defend myself against the attempted attack of Menzikoff, which was foiled by the support she sent me, having rendered my house uninhabitable, I had on her invitation taken up my abode in a wing of her palace. Living under her roof and



ANNA IVANOVNA.

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ALABAMA

at her expense, I was the recipient of all sorts of delicate attentions. Every morning she sent a page to inquire after my health and an orderly to take my orders. Propinquity, however, only increased my aversion and rendered my efforts to conceal it the more difficult. Perceiving that the gratitude her compliments elicited lacked the tenderness she craved, she redoubled them. I, on my part, more and more bored by a love I was unable to return, avoided every occasion of being alone with her.

At first the political situation engrossed me to the exclusion of all other matters, but as time passed and my position, if it did not improve, did not become worse, I sought relaxation in intrigue, which was the only sort of distraction Mittau had to offer. Accustomed herself before my arrival to while away the tedium of Mittau in a similar fashion, Anna Ivanovna was not disinclined to suffer me to indulge in an occasional gallantry. I was, however, so imprudent as to exceed the bounds of her generosity. Affection suggested reproaches which jealousy envenomed, till passing through all the stages of passion she arrived at that in which love turns to hate.

Alas! too late I realised what an incredible fool I had been. Three years later by a series of unexpected events Anna Ivanovna became herself Czarina. How little it takes to tip the scales of destiny! Had Cleopatra's nose been a trifle longer or shorter Antony would not have lost the world at Actium. Had Anna Ivanovna's cheeks been a trifle less like the hams of Westphalia, I should now be Czar of Russia!

How true it is that misfortunes never visit one singly. Scarcely had I made a vindictive enemy of one whom I might just as easily have made a devoted wife, than the Czarina died. From being perpetually censured, so to speak, with my praises by Lefort, she had been charmed into a state of friendly neutrality to my cause. Knowing, as I did, that in Russia a change of reign always denotes a change of policy, I had every reason to regard her death as a calamity. Nor was I mistaken. Three months later Menzikoff, whose paling star the accession of the boy-Czar, Peter II., caused to gleam again more brilliantly than ever—like a candle before it goes out!—determined to be revenged on me for the humiliation he had suffered at Mittau. Become all-powerful at St. Petersburg, he no longer, it is true, desired the crown of Courland for himself but to deck the brow of his son.

He accordingly sent Generals Lacy and Bibikoff with two regiments of infantry and two of cavalry to Mittau with an order to the Diet to cancel my election. This high-handed proceeding deprived Augustus of the least excuse for further detaining the Polish commissioners, who accordingly set out likewise for Courland.

To defend Mittau owing to its position would have been extremely difficult at any time, but to attempt to do so with the handful of men I had would have been utterly impossible. I consequently withdrew to Libau, which, being situated on the Baltic, would enable me to receive the

supplies I was expecting from my friends and to conclude a secret negotiation with England, in which I had offered her a port on the coast of Courland in exchange for her active support.

Alas ! Fortune, which for over a year had maintained me on the throne to which it had so miraculously raised me, deserted me. Considering that now, if ever, was the decisive hour when my brave Courlanders would prove their loyalty as they promised, I issued a proclamation—my first sovereign act—summoning them to join me. The effect, however, of this assumption of authority was contrary to my expectations. Menaced with a Russian invasion on the one hand and annexation to Poland on the other, the Diet of Courland assembled at Mittau, and thinking the Russian frying-pan preferable to the Polish fire annulled my election. At the same time, having by this act assured themselves of the protection of Russia, they implored Ferdinand to return and rule them, and sent the Baron von Medem to Warsaw to protest against the decrees of the Polish Diet.

Whilst my subjects were seeking to test the truth of the old proverb that discretion is the better part of valour, one misfortune after another befell me, Ferdinand caused a thousand rifles destined for me to be seized at Dantzic ; the King of Prussia detained at Königsberg two hundred men whom my agent had recruited ; advances of money I expected from Hamburg were delayed ; and the English Government broke off its negotiations with me.

In so desperate a situation there were only two

courses open to me: to throw up the sponge, or to continue the struggle, counting on the mutual jealousy of the Russians and Poles to extricate me from my plight. Needless to say, I chose the latter and more dangerous course. An island in the middle of Lake Usmaiten—the largest sheet of water in the wilderness of marsh and swamp that fringes the greater part of the coast of Courland—was the spot I chose in which to dice with destiny.* I had with me about three hundred men all told, including a hundred peasants, whom I compelled to join me. Mere handful though they were, in a place so admirably adapted for defence they would have been sufficient, once the fortifications I immediately began to construct were completed, to have kept twenty thousand men at bay.

In the meantime, whilst I was hastily entrenching myself in Lake Usmaiten, the Russians arrived at Mittau. Informed of my place of retreat, General Lacy, having marched his army thither, sent his subordinate, General Bibikoff, to demand a conference with me. I granted Bibikoff the interview he requested, in the course of which he very frankly confessed that the object of the expedition was to force me to leave Courland. Realising that resistance was useless, owing to the incomplete state of my fortifications, which could not be finished under ten days, I sought to gain time by appearing to bow to the inevitable. Accordingly I told Bibikoff that I was ready to leave Courland and abandon my claim to the throne on condition that I was allowed

* This island is still known as Moritzholm.

to retire with honour and ten days to withdraw my baggage, ammunition, and stores.

As Bibikoff was not empowered to give me a positive answer he returned to report what I said to his superior. General Lacy, however, guessing that my motive in asking ten days was to entrench myself the more securely, determined to capture me by treachery. Proposing that I should come in person to confer with him, he posted twelve hundred men round the island with orders to seize me at a given signal. Advised, however, of his design, I declined his invitation and invited him to come to me instead—alone, if he dared! Hoping to disarm my suspicions, he came. But my indignation at the baseness he contemplated would not permit me to bribe him, as I might easily have done, to give me the grace I desired.

“Were I so ungenerous, so ignoble as you,” I said, confronting him immediately with his treachery, “I would this moment plunge a dagger into your heart! Do you consider it becoming of a general with four thousand men to employ a distardly stratagem to subdue an injured and persecuted man whose force does not exceed three hundred?” And without another word, disclaiming further intercourse, I turned my back on him.

This contemptuous reproach, though it deprived me of the last chance of success, in a measure restored Lacy’s sense of honour. Having withdrawn shamefacedly, he sent later in the day to inform me that he gave me twenty-four hours in

which to surrender, and if I refused I should receive no quarter.

It was not—it never has been—of the least importance to me where, when, or how I die, at the head of my men, on the scaffold, or in the bed of some miserable fever. The only favour I would ask of the Fatal Three when they send me their imperious summons to the next world is that it may find me in the harness of action. Fascinated by the perils that faced me and feeling as if all the Königsmarcks had been reborn in me, I was for resisting and surrendering my crown with my life. But though I held my own life of little account, humanity compelled me to think of the lives of my men. For I have always had a horror of shedding the blood of my soldiers needlessly, and this must have been the case had I followed my personal inclination in the matter.

Accordingly, assembling my comrades, I ordered them not to defend themselves on the morrow.

“As for me,” I added, “they shall not take me either to-morrow or the next day. You will see how the comedy will end!”

The same night, disguised as a fisherman, and accompanied only by Beauvais, my faithful valet, who refused to leave me, I escaped across the lake and reached Prussian territory in safety. The next day my little army surrendered unconditionally. Men and officers alike were well treated by the Russians. Of my baggage, which I was obliged to abandon, and which included a portrait of the Princesse de Conti, as well as some very compro-

missing letters I had received from the Countess Pociy and other ladies, Beauvais rescued at the last moment, knowing the value I attached to it, only my diploma of election to the throne of Courland.

I still cherish it as a priceless souvenir of those eighteen months of sovereignty!

CHAPTER VIII

MARKING TIME

I

THE Russians and Poles, instead of coming to a conflict as I had expected, decided to make my departure from Courland the means of coming to an agreement. Duke Ferdinand was recalled, and the question of his successor was postponed till his death, which, strange to say, in spite of his great age and ill-health, did not occur for nine years. As for the Courlanders, thankful to preserve their independence at any price, they suffered the humiliation of being compelled to annul my election without the least protest.

But even now I did not abandon my rights, and for over a year, hovering on the frontiers of Courland, flitting from place to place, hoping against hope, I left no stone unturned to recover the throne from which I had been so unjustly evicted. At London, at Berlin, at Vienna, at St. Petersburg, at Dresden, and even at Warsaw itself, my agents and friends were actively engaged in openly pressing my claims or secretly intriguing in my behalf.

Twice it really seemed as if my efforts would be successful. Within three months of my enforced flight Prince Menzikoff was himself on the road to Siberia. With his fall Lefort encouraged me with the hope of marrying Elizabeth. She, indeed, testified in the most flattering way a desire to see me, if not to marry me. But Augustus, who by disavowing me had recovered the capricious favour of his recalcitrant subjects, or rather masters, aware that such a marriage would at once arouse their suspicions, promptly took such measures to prevent it as would have rendered my visit to St. Petersburg a humiliation.

Then even death seemed to favour me by removing the implacable enemy who was the real cause of all my misfortunes. Flemming died suddenly in Vienna. The news filled me with the greatest joy and rekindled all my hopes. Thanks to the good offices of Frederick William, King of Prussia, whose favour I had managed to gain, Augustus, whom my refusal to leave Courland had greatly exasperated, had recently restored me his friendship. Accordingly, in the hope of making capital out of Flemming's death, I immediately set out for Moritzburg, where he was at the time.

He received me with all his former kindness, but forbade me to mention Courland or Russia to him. It had been the dream of his life ever since he first mounted the throne of Poland to render it hereditary in his family. This was the secret of his fear of offending the susceptibilities of the Poles. By sacrificing me to their prejudices he

had hoped to obtain their suffrages for his son, the Electoral Prince ; but since Polish loyalty was never to be relied on, he sought to create surer means of achieving his object apart from his subjects. This he thought was to be effected by allying his dynasty to that of Prussia. When I arrived at Moritzburg the Courts of Warsaw and Berlin were discussing the matter. Augustus had proposed that the Electoral Prince should marry the Princess Sophia of Prussia, while he himself, lately widowed, should honour her sister the Princess Wilhelmina with his hand.

These negotiations were destined to be broken off, and the Electoral Prince eventually married the daughter of the Emperor. But at the time of which I speak an alliance between the Prussian and Polish dynasties seemed likely to be concluded, and Augustus sought to compensate me for the throne, the loss of which he was responsible for, by offering me a fortune greater than the revenue of Courland—the hand of Flemming's widow.

Flemming had been twice married, selecting his wife on both occasions with an eye to the future. His first wife was a Princess Sapieha, by means of whose powerful connections he had rendered himself invaluable to Augustus. It was, indeed, through the influence that Flemming thus acquired, as I think I have stated before, that Augustus had secured the election to the throne that the Countess von Königsmarck was the first to urge him to seek. His second wife was likewise a Pole, of the noble family of Radzivil. Being many years his junior,

she was still young and sole heiress—there being no issue living of either marriage—of Flemming's vast fortune. This was estimated at sixteen million crowns, exclusive of the sums he had spent during the splendour of his favour, which lasted about thirty years. Whether Richelieu or Mazarin left a greater fortune I cannot say, but in the countries beyond the Rhine there is not an instance of one sooner acquired and better preserved than his. Menzikoff's wealth was confiscated on his fall, but Flemming kept his favour to the last. Since he owed it all to his master he ought, out of sheer gratitude, to have made him some restitution at his death, when he might easily have given up with a good grace what he must have foreseen would have been taken from his heirs by force; for he was scarcely in his grave before Augustus condemned his ill-gotten wealth to the purgatory of a special tribunal, which adjudged him one half and the remainder to his widow.

Desperately in need of money and obliged to admit in spite of myself how slight was the prospect of recovering my throne, I was dazzled by Madame Flemming's eight millions. Besides, the idea of possessing the wife and fortune alike of the man who when living had been my irreconcilable enemy gave me all the pleasure of a consummate revenge. It was enough to have made Flemming turn in his grave.

A marriage, then, to which Madame Flemming was not averse, was arranged by Augustus. But the wedding was never destined to take place. It soon

became apparent to both of us that our union would be a catastrophe. My temperament was not one to which Madame Flemming could accommodate hers ; while in her the avarice of which she seemed to be the personification would alone, apart from other considerations, have repelled me. The meanness of her nature was so great that when it was reported to her that Flemming's coffin was found to be too short to contain his corpse she ordered the feet to be cut off sooner than incur the expense of another coffin !

In the midst of these abortive attempts to recover my throne, I had the great misfortune to lose my mother. Accustomed to the miscarriage of all her projects and intrigues, she had begun to despair of my success on the day she learnt of the decrees of the Polish Diet. After the death of the Czarina Catherine she abandoned all hope, and crept back broken-hearted to Quedlinburg, where she lived in an agony of suspense, expecting every courier that arrived at the Abbey to bring her the news of my capture or death. So tortured was she by the thought of the dangers with which I was incessantly surrounded, she at last longed as much for me to leave Courland as she had done for me to go there. But when informed that I had escaped from Lake Usmaiten her anxiety gave place to a no less acute grief ; and ceasing to struggle against the cares and infirmities that had prematurely aged her she sank into the grave.

Aware that she was dying, but prevented by circumstances from going to her, I sent my servant

to receive her blessing and last messages. As I have related elsewhere, he arrived while the Abbey bells were tolling for her, and returned to me with her papers and fifty-two crowns, given him by the Abbess, which was all that remained of her once great fortune.

Alas ! the resentment against which she had had to contend at Quedlinburg when living pursued her even when dead. For the canonesses, making her penury their excuse, refused to provide the money necessary to bury her as became either her illustrious birth or her position in the Abbey. Since I was myself hard pressed for money at the time, some months elapsed before it was possible for me to rectify this wrong and inter her coffin in the vaults of Quedlinburg, where it now reposes in a fitting manner.*

Recognising at last the futility of attempting to regain my crown, I reluctantly accepted the inevitable, and, following the advice of Augustus, which in the present instance coincided with my own inclination, I returned to Paris.

During my three years' absence many changes had occurred. The Duc de Bourbon and the Marquise de Prie had fallen from power ; the seventeen years' ministry of the aged Cardinal Fleury had begun ; the boy-king was married ;

* According to all authorities, Saxe, as I have endeavoured to indicate, was but slightly affected by the death of his mother.

and History, like the Court, after its undignified sojourn at the Palais Royal and Chantilly, had returned to Versailles. In a word, the world of the Regency had completely disappeared.

After such changes and so long an absence I expected to be treated as a stranger of no consequence, a ridiculous adventurer who had overleapt his ambition. Instead my return was a veritable triumph. Paris continued to give me the titles of Duke and Highness that Russia and Poland denied me. Everywhere: at Court, in the *coulisses* of the Opera, at the suppers in those *petites maisons* devoted to pleasure, where *grands seigneurs* and rich *bourgeois*, *grandes dames* and actresses, used to meet on equality in secret, I was greeted as a conqueror. To test their admiration of my exploits in Courland, which they regarded as miraculous, men sought in history for a hero with whom to compare me. The fact that it had taken the might of the Russian empire to drive me from the country of which I had won and worn the crown recalled the celebrated Arminius, who had held in check the Roman legions. The name of this warrior was accordingly applied to me, and so frequently that many forgetting the connection have come to believe that I actually received it at my birth.*

* Nearly all the eighteenth-century historians have fallen into this error, which is still perpetuated in many biographical dictionaries and encyclopædias, where Saxe is named Hermann Maurice, or Maurice Hermann de Saxe. Hermann is the usual German designation of Arminius, whose crushing defeat of the Roman general Varus, it is perhaps scarcely necessary to remind



A PETIT SOUPER.

(From an old French print.)

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TO THE
ALLEGED

In this enthusiastic *gaudeamus*, in this spontaneous *Te Deum*, no one joined more eagerly than Adrienne Lecouvreur. The bond that united us neither time nor absence had been able to sever. Never had I been so preoccupied by affairs in Courland as to forget my Egeria. With the half of Europe between us she had still been my confidante and adviser, and during my three years' absence I wrote her regularly twice a week. Nor had the flame of her passion burned less brightly; my mother herself had not been more ambitious for my success, more cast down by my failure than she.

But what separation had been powerless to effect reunion very nearly accomplished. At first the popularity I enjoyed seemed almost to compensate me for all I had lost. Quickly, however, growing accustomed to it, I missed the excitement, the political intrigues, the ceremonies, the audiences, the hundred and one details of a sovereign's life that in my attempt to recover my throne I had not had time to think of. Idleness, to which I was once more condemned, and of which I had previously exploited all the resources, magnified the disappointment I had suffered. Bored, I vented my humour on Adrienne. During my absence her friendship for young d'Argental seemed to have increased. She consulted him in everything, and the servants treated him as if he were the master of

the reader, so disturbed the repose of Augustus Cæsar that he was heard to call in his sleep, "Oh, Varus, Varus, give me back my legions!"

her house. I accused her of infidelity; she repelled the accusation indignantly, passionately, but refused to break with d'Argental. The old harmony of our intimacy was broken, and there were frequent "scenes" between us. Reproaches were mutual. In a word, the blight of my lost throne seemed to have fallen on our amour. Its death was slow, painful, and sad. Embittered and exasperated by jealousy, Adrienne still loved me; tired and disillusioned, I still continued to visit her, to consult her, impelled by some peculiar fascination.

By a curious coincidence, for which mystery and tragedy have carved a niche in history, a cause of estrangement effected a reconciliation, to which the sudden and lamentable end of Adrienne was to set an eternal seal. To explain this event which has given rise to so many conjectures, and of which the truth will never be known, I can do no better than to relate those details that are at least above suspicion and from which each may form his own conclusion.

II

On my return to Paris, among the passing inclinations to which my heart has ever been prone, I took a fancy to the Duchesse de Bouillon. She was about twenty-three, and very beautiful, with a graceful figure, delicate features, broad forehead, great black eyes with long lashes, a forest of brown

hair, a mouth made for kisses, and a mole, like a patch, near her right eye. Married to a man forty years her senior, she had made the quest of love the chief purpose of her life; and, if the gossips of Paris spoke the truth, there was not a walk in the garden of life she had not explored. It was in one of these—the shady *promenade des coulisses*—that we had met. Attracted by the similarity of our tastes we soon became intimate. She and Adrienne formed two of a small party I gave for the Easter holidays at a hunting-box I rented near Paris. So warm was the friendship they formed that the duchess invited Adrienne to visit her at her country house at Pontoise, and treated her like a queen.

Not long afterwards I received a visit from a certain Abbé Aunillon, who was an old and devoted friend of Madame de Bouillon. The object of his visit was to implore me to cease my attentions to the duchess before they had become indispensable to her happiness.

“You could not do such a woman a greater injustice,” he said, “than to engage her affections and then tire of her, as you must confess you would eventually. The sacrifice I demand of you,” he added, “is not difficult to make, for surely you have no need of her heart to augment the list of your spoils.”

He did not conceal that he had tried to influence the duchess against me, and even showed me a letter he had written her to this effect. Instead of resenting such astounding audacity, which his

sincerity robbed of all suspicion of offence, I suffered him to convince me he was right, inasmuch as I had already ceased to be attracted by the duchess. She, however, regarded my sudden indifference as a slight, and since she could not believe that Aunillon had the power to influence me, she attributed the change to Adrienne, with whom she broke.

The truth of the old Portuguese proverb, which declares that hell is paved with good intentions, was never better illustrated than in the sequel to Aunillon's well-meant interference. By undertaking to save Madame de Bouillon from the ills his friendship caused him to anticipate he created others, which not only deprived her of her peace of mind, but branded her as an assassin.

About three months after my rupture with the duchess at Aunillon's instigation, Adrienne sent to request me to come to her on a matter upon which she wished my advice. On arriving at her house she handed me the following anonymous letter :

“*MADemoiselle*,—You will be surprised that a person who is quite unknown to you should write to beg you to be to-morrow afternoon at half-past five on the grand terrace of the Luxemburg, where you will meet some one who will enlighten you fully as to a matter which closely concerns you. You will recognise your informant in an *Abbé*, who will tap his hat three times as he approaches you.”

As if she had a presentiment of some grave danger that threatened her, she attached such importance to the anonymous letter as to convince me too of the advisability of granting the rendezvous. Accordingly, the next day, accompanied by Mademoiselle Lamotte, one of her confidential friends, she repaired to the Luxemburg and met the Abbé, who told her that he deemed it his duty to warn her that an attempt was being made to poison her. In reply to her questions as to the quarter from which the attack was to be expected, the Abbé declared that it was the Hôtel de Bouillon. Adrienne bound him to secrecy, and told him to come to her on the following day, when, in conjunction with her friends, she could consider the matter further.

Curious, rather than anxious, to hear what he had to say, for I was not inclined to believe his story, I was at Adrienne's when he arrived. He was a pleasant-faced little hunchback of nineteen or twenty, with an engaging manner. He said his name was Simon Bouret, and that he came from Metz, of which his father was the treasurer. His object in coming to Paris was to study drawing and painting, for which he had shown talent; but a passion for the theatre would appear to have absorbed most of his time and all his money. He confessed that he went nearly every day to the Comédie Française, and made a point of never missing an occasion of seeing Mademoiselle Lecouvreur—an infatuation that may explain all that is surprising in his story. Let me give it in his own words.

“I was going to the fair at St. Germain,” he said, “one afternoon with a young gentleman named Perigord, whom I had met at the Academy of Painting. As we were passing through the Rue Dauphine we met a friend of Perigord’s, a good-looking fellow in livery, who said he was the page of the Duchesse de Bouillon. He asked permission to join us, and we all three went to the fair together. At St. Germain we entered the shop of a dealer in pictures. The page asked me if I was a connoisseur like Perigord. I said I was studying miniature painting, and offered to paint his portrait. This he readily accepted, and having dined together we returned to Paris.

“The next day I sought the page, as he had desired, at the Hôtel de Bouillon to commence the portrait, which was for the lid of a snuff-box. It took me six days to finish. A couple of days later the page came to me and said that his mistress, to whom he had shown the portrait, was so pleased with it that she wished me to make one of herself. Naturally flattered by such a request from so great a lady I undertook to oblige her. The miniature of Madame la Duchesse—a bust for a bracelet—occupied me ten days.

“At the third sitting, having heard from her page how much I liked the play, she asked me if I knew any players, and whom I liked the best. I declared that I knew none, which is the truth, and that Mademoiselle Lecouvreur was my favourite.

“‘Since you are so anxious to know her,’ said

she, 'I will give you a letter that you may deliver in person.'

"And she at once proceeded to dictate a letter to me which purported to be from a prince of the blood, who declared his love for Mademoiselle Lecouvreur, and implored her to forsake the Comte de Saxe.

"I put the letter in my pocket, but as I thought Madame la Duchesse had planned to amuse herself at my expense I did not deliver it. The next day, having informed herself that I still had it, she asked me to destroy it.

"'I have,' she said, 'a much better plan. As you are a painter of portraits, you can at any time easily obtain access to Mademoiselle Lecouvreur. In the pursuit of your profession you have but to present yourself at her house to be admitted.'

"I thanked her for the suggestion and went on with my work, in the course of which Madame la Duchesse suddenly inquired if I was willing to do her a favour. I replied, as indeed I felt, that the bare suggestion overwhelmed me with honour.

"'Well, then, my little Abbé,' she said, 'be at the Pont Royal, near the Tuileries, this evening, between eleven and half-past, and you will be informed of the nature of my commission.'

"I went there at the hour named, when almost immediately two men appeared, very richly dressed and masked. From their manners I took them to be persons of consequence. Approaching me they asked if I had come on the part of the Duchesse de Bouillon. On replying in the affirmative, they

asked me if I was willing to earn money, adding that if so my future was assured, provided I kept my mouth shut.

“ ‘Certainly,’ I said, ‘so long as I am not asked to commit a crime.’

“ ‘No, no,’ they responded, ‘it is nothing of that sort. It is only a question of a love potion, a mere bagatelle. You have but to make the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Lecouvreur and offer to paint her portrait, which she will no doubt agree to. Then you must find the means of inducing her to eat some pastilles, which will make her indifferent to the Comte de Saxe.’

“ ‘If that is all,’ I said, ‘I agree.’

“The men then promised me the sum of 6,000 livres and a pension for life of 600 when they were assured I had executed the commission.

“I had no sooner parted from them than I began to have misgivings, and to get out of the affair I left Paris and took up my abode at Melun. The page of Madame la Duchesse, however, discovered my retreat, and sent me word to meet him at a certain hour in the garden of the Tuileries, as he had a matter of importance to communicate to me. I did as requested, but instead of the page I found the two masked men, who told me that, since I had undertaken to do what they asked, I must keep my word or it would be the worse for me.”

It was after this meeting that Bouret, acting on the advice of his confessor, wrote his letter to Adrienne, who, as I have said, met him as he desired in the garden of the Luxemburg. He went on to



ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR.

(After Fontaine.)

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state that as he was entering his lodging on the previous night, after the meeting in the Luxemburg, he was stopped by the two masked men, who reproached him with having betrayed them, and seizing him by the throat threatened to kill him. Terrified out of his senses he swore he had not betrayed them, declared he was ready to do what they wished, and asked them to give him the pastilles. He said that then they had let go their hold of him, and indicated a certain spot in the garden of the Tuileries where he would find a small packet containing the pastilles.

I ordered him at once to go and fetch the packet. He went away and returned later with a small box, which he declared he had found in the spot indicated by the masked men, and which, on being opened, contained some white pastilles. I immediately took them to Hérault, the lieutenant of police, and informed him of the whole affair. The next day Bouret was arrested and sent to St. Lazare, where he was confined for three months.

The pastilles on being analysed by Geoffroy, the celebrated chemist, were found to contain poison, but in so small a quantity as to render them harmless. This fact cast suspicion on Bouret's story, and though he stuck to it in spite of all attempts to make him contradict himself, Hérault, who questioned him, came to the conclusion that he had invented the whole affair in order to make the acquaintance of Adrienne.

She, however, was too greatly upset by the bare thought of an attempt on her life to rest satisfied

with Hérault's plausible conclusion. Tortured by the uncertainty as to whether her life was or was not secretly threatened, she wrote to Bouret four or five times exhorting him to confess if he spoke the truth or not, promising in the latter case to obtain his pardon and release. She even sent him food and clothing while in prison, hoping to tempt him by her solicitude to give her an answer that would convince her. But Bouret, though threatened by Hérault with the most terrible penalties, persisted in maintaining the truth of what he had stated.

“What object could I have in inventing a story,” he replied to all her entreaties, “so calculated to deprive me of my liberty?”

Owing to the intercession of his father, a most worthy man, Bouret was finally released and the affair which had till then been kept secret became known. Connected as it was with three persons whose names were so familiar to the public, as the Duchesse de Bouillon, Adrienne Lecouvreur, and the ex-Duke of Courland, it created a great scandal. The public, always hungry for sensations of this sort, refused to accept Hérault's explanation of the “mystery.” They were convinced that the Duchesse de Bouillon was a *poisoneuse*. It was known that I had forsaken her, and that she was jealous of Adrienne. To the Parisian imagination this was enough to make her desire revenge. Besides, her name was associated with poison in the popular mind. Had not a Duchesse de Bouillon, one of Mazarin's nieces, been implicated in

the famous "*Affaire des Poisons*" in Louis XIV.'s time?

Inclined from the first to believe Bouret by the fears that obsessed her, and which popular opinion strengthened, Adrienne was finally convinced of his sincerity by the conduct of the duchess herself. Informed by Aunillon of the accusations made against her in every *café* in Paris, Madame de Bouillon was not content with vehemently denying them and disowning all knowledge of Bouret, but accused Adrienne with having invented the whole affair to destroy her reputation. At the instance of her husband, who swore to cleanse her name of the stigma cast upon it, Bouret was re-arrested and thrown into the Bastille, a fate which the family of Bouillon vowed his accomplice should share. From this moment Adrienne no longer doubted. She frequently declared that she felt that she was doomed to be sacrificed in one way or another to the implacable vengeance of her enemy.

But Bouret stuck obstinately to his original story. In the hope of convicting him of falsehood, he was questioned about the interior of the Hôtel de Bouillon. From the manner, however, in which he described the boudoir of the duchess, in which he declared she had sat to him for her portrait, it was evident he had seen it.

Adrienne, in the meantime, saved from the Bastille by the failure to associate her with Bouret's imputations, continued to perform at the Comédie Française, whither her sympathisers flocked nightly to cheer her. On one occasion the duchess, who

had previously sent her lacqueys to hiss the actress, had the audacity to come herself, and from her box adjoining the stage endeavoured to disconcert her enemy by speaking of her insultingly to her companion in a voice loud enough to be overheard throughout the theatre.

Adrienne's retort is famous. Stung to the quick by the brazen and pitiless persecution of which she was a victim, she addressed to the box whence the insult came, the lines she was about to utter in which Phèdre—the part she was acting—declares :

“ Je ne suis point de ces femmes hardies
Qui, goûtant dans le crime une tranquille paix,
Ont su se faire un front qui ne rougit jamais ! ”

The audience, who had heard the insult, frantically applauded this manner of avenging it, and recognising the duchess, hissed her out of the theatre.

It was not long after this incident that the *Affaire Bouillon-Saxe-Lecouvreur* reached the fatal *dénouement* which has given it a notable place in the list of classic mysterious scandals. A prey to nameless terrors, Adrienne's health, ever delicate, finally broke down. Her efforts to conquer the extreme lassitude and depression from which she suffered only increased the physical exhaustion that was gradually reducing her vitality. One night, while acting, she was seized with violent intestinal pains, to attacks of which she was subject. In spite of her suffering, however, she went on with her

part, only to collapse on the final fall of the curtain.

Faguet, summoned the next morning to attend her, found her condition so deplorable that he despaired from the first of saving her. The news of her illness spread rapidly and caused the greatest excitement. All sorts of people, drawn by sheer idle curiosity, flocked to inquire concerning her health. Many forced their way into the house, and, like people at an auction, roamed from room to room examining everything; some were with difficulty prevented from penetrating to the chamber in which the great actress lay betwixt life and death. Even the Duchesse de Bouillon herself sent to make inquiries; not in mockery or even from curiosity, but impelled by an unfeigned anxiety, knowing only too well that the death of her rival at such a time would be regarded by the public as absolute proof of the damning accusations that had been made against her.

On the fourth day Adrienne's sick nurse, Guillotin, sent me word that the end was near. I answered the dread summons instantly. On entering the chamber I found Voltaire on his knees at her bedside; Faguet and the nurse were the only others present. She was in a state of great distress, having just bade adieu to her two little daughters, who were sobbing in an adjoining room.

While we were trying to console her as best we could, Languet, the *curé* of St. Sulpice, who had been sent for at her request, arrived. But instead of ministering to her spiritual wants he informed

her coldly that he could only accord her the last rites of the Church on condition that she repented the scandal of her profession and abjured the stage. Far, however, from bowing, like poor Molière in similar case, to the intolerant bigotry of the creed she professed, she had the courage, even at such a moment when even the strongest will is broken, to refuse the brutal demands of the priest with indignation. He then endeavoured to terrorise her into subjection by promising her the tortures of the damned if she did not obey. But weak though she was she would not yield. At last, exhausted by the urgency of the priest, who, instead of bringing her the consolation she had expected, made her revolt against death, destiny, and God, she stretched out her hands towards me and exclaimed triumphantly :

“Voilà mon univers, mon espoir, et mes dieux !”

The next moment she fell back dead in the arms of Voltaire.

The burial of Adrienne was even more shocking, more outrageous, than her death. The rancour of Languet was implacable. After her refusal to submit to his demands, he declared as he left the room that there could be no question of any religious service being held over her corpse. As a priest he had the right to refuse to admit into a church the body of one who had died unrepentant. Unfortunately, ecclesiastical authority extended also to the cemeteries, which it had the power to shut



LANGUET, CURÉ OF ST. SULPICE.

(From an old print.)

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against those it damned. Adrienne was accordingly buried under circumstances peculiarly revolting.

To avoid a disturbance, which the decision of the Church when it became known would have created, Maurepas, who had been officially notified of her death, resolved to have her buried secretly that same night. Unaware of the ministerial intention, her friends were not only prevented from protesting, but from assisting at her burial. For at midnight two agents of the police arrived and hastily wrapping her body in a sheet, packed it into a cab and drove off to a lumber-yard on the Seine, where a pit had been prepared for it, into which it was thrown like a dog and sprinkled, I was told, with quicklime. Furthermore, as if this was not precaution enough, the utmost care was taken to remove all traces by which the shameful spot could be identified !

The next day Voltaire voiced the great indignation that I and all Adrienne's friends felt, but which he alone could express with a chance of effect. He called a meeting of the entire troupe of the Comédie Française, and proposed that they should swear to refrain from acting, until their profession, of which the King was the patron, was treated with the honour accorded to all other careers. This resolution was passed unanimously, but nothing came of it. The popular indignation, too, merely contented itself with blasting the reputation of the Duchesse de Bouillon. Finding all attempts to revenge the death and burial of the woman to whose charm and genius he owed to no little extent his

own dramatic fame, Voltaire erected a poem over that bed of quicklime a mausoleum of imperishable verse that a pope might envy, in which the memory of the great tragedienne lies for ever embalmed. It was perhaps after all the most suitable and effective manner of avenging the inhuman outrage to which the Church of Rome had subjected her. D'Argental took upon himself to settle all her affairs and to educate her children. As for me, I, too, did what I could to show my esteem—I regretted her.

Bouret, after being kept in the Bastille over a year, finally resolved to deny the story, the truth of which he had so long persisted in maintaining. He was then released and has since completely disappeared. The public, however, utterly refused to put any faith in his so-called confession.

The Duchesse de Bouillon always maintained she was the victim of a conspiracy to ruin her, and died a few years later protesting her innocence of the crime of which she was accused. Personally, I believe she spoke the truth. Flattering though the verdict of the public is to my vanity, I have no desire for women to express their homage in so tragic a fashion. I am sometimes inclined to think that the whole affair of the masked men was a practical joke of the duchess's page and Bouret's friend Perigord. Infatuated with Adrienne, and infinitely credulous, the little hunchback was the very target for this sort of humour.

But whether Madame de Bouillon did or did not attempt to poison Adrienne, of one thing at least

there is no doubt, the *direct* cause of her rival's death, in spite of the popular opinion to the contrary, was due to dysentery.

III

Doomed to idleness by the universal peace that prevailed in Europe, I passed the next three years chewing the cud of balked ambition. Seeking to kill time, I occupied myself with all sorts of nothings: I hunted, I slept, I loved; I bought horses for the King of Poland; I sent him weekly despatches containing all the scandal of the court, to which I seldom went since the favour of Louis XV. was too zealously guarded by Cardinal Fleury and his satellites to permit me to hope of attracting it; I devoted several hours a day to the study of mathematics and the science of war—in fine, consumed with the thirst of dominion, with the hunger for action, I died of *ennui*.

Once during an illness which confined me to my bed, I amused myself by writing a little book on the art of war. It occupied me thirteen nights, and I called it “*Mes Rêveries*.” Praised by such authorities as the Chevalier de Folard and the Maréchal de Noailles it obtained a considerable vogue, and since the battle of Fontenoy has been translated into all the principal European languages.

When the tedium of such an existence became insupportable, I would pay a flying visit to Dresden

or Warsaw. It was on one of these journeys that I was informed of the death of Augustus, whose loss I had many reasons to regret. Since the death of Flemming he had given me unmistakable proofs of his affection, and before he died he particularly recommended me of all his children to the Electoral Prince. The latter discharged this duty nobly, for he immediately increased the allowance his father had made me and offered me the command of the Saxon army. But I had become too attached to France to forsake it for anything short of a crown ; besides, I had a presentiment that the question of the Polish succession would break the peace which had reigned so long in Europe, in which case the service of the King of France would undoubtedly provide me with a career more suited to my ambition than that of my brother.

This anticipation was, indeed, very shortly realised. Supported by France, Stanislas Leczinski, whose daughter was the queen of Louis XV., took advantage of the death of his old rival to revive his claim to the throne of Poland. This the majority of the Polish nobles, who regarded the schemes of Augustus to render their throne hereditary in his family as a menace to their liberties, were easily induced to recognise, and the Diet, hastily summoned by the Cardinal Primate, unanimously elected him king.

The Electoral Prince, however, was not to be dispossessed in any such fashion. Supported by Austria and Russia, he at once invaded Poland with a Saxon army and obtained the crown precisely as

his father had done in the previous election thirty-six years before. Stanislas, who had managed to reach Warsaw, fled to Dantzic, whence, after a futile resistance, he was obliged to return to France, leaving the throne of Poland in undisputed possession of the Electoral Prince, who mounted it as Augustus III.

Peace, however, was not restored by the flight of Stanislas. Prevented by geographical reasons from giving him the material help he needed, the French, backed by Spain and Sardinia, declared war on Austria, to whose intervention Augustus III. owed his success, in the hope of filching the crown from him in the treaty of peace.

On the outbreak of hostilities, which occurred shortly after I had returned to Paris, I received orders to join the French army in Alsace under the command of the Duke of Berwick, the brilliant *bâtard* of a stupid sire.* Berwick's plan was to cross the Rhine and invade the Empire before the Court of Vienna, surprised by a brusque declaration of war, should have time to collect an army to defend the frontier. Thus began what is known as the War of the Polish Succession.

The mood in which I departed for the front may be imagined. Fatigued by the occupations of an idle life, bored by pleasures that familiarity withers, I was impatient for action, thirsty for glory. The campaign in perspective produced on me the refreshing effect of an oasis to the parched senses of a traveller in the desert. I felt ripe for the occa-

* King James II.

sion, and longed to hide under the heroic laurels of war the frivolous myrtles of peace.

But a passion for action was not my only incentive. The death of Augustus had suddenly despoiled me of the prestige of royalty that I had hitherto enjoyed as the son of a king, and shoved me back into the crowd of soldiers of fortune who have only their genius or their swords to rely on. Ambition, the ambition of a man who has worn a crown, commanded me to rehabilitate myself by some shining feat of arms. To obey that imperious command, careless of death, I sought danger as of old. At Kehl I fought side by side with my men in the trenches. At Traerbach I was spattered with the blood and brains of seven of these brave fellows. But it was at Ettlingen I found glory.

Prince Eugene, laden with years and victories, commanded the Austrians. By a clever manœuvre he had cut the French army in two, and entrenched at Ettlingen, in what was supposed to be an impregnable position, threatened it on both sides. To effect a junction, which alone could save us from annihilation, Berwick commanded the Duc de Noailles to reconnoitre the passes through the neighbouring mountain, with a detachment of dragoons, hussars, body-guards, and grenadiers. I commanded the hussars, and whilst carrying off twelve hundred of the enemy's sheep, discovered a defile by which it would be possible to place Eugene in a position similar to that in which he had placed us. Accordingly I informed Noailles, and the next day the attack was made with the utmost success.



THE DUKE OF BERWICK.

(After the portrait at Versailles by Chamfmartin.)

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TO THE
ATTORNEYS

Taken by surprise, the Austrians were seized with panic and fled leaving their artillery behind.

As for me, never have I felt so proud as when I found myself in possession of the very camp in which Eugene had held us in check, and realised that he, counted the ablest general of the day, was retreating in disorder before me. Noailles was kind enough to give me all the credit of this engagement, and Berwick went so far as to say that I was worth three thousand troops.

But empty praises are a poor reward, and my ambition craved some more substantial recompense than the *Chapeau bas!* of history. So I wrote to Noailles, who was not only my friend, but possessed influence at Court, that though fine actions speak for themselves, I found myself in the position of singing my own praises as I had neither friends nor relations to do this for me at Versailles, and false modesty degenerates into stupidity. In a word, I requested him to obtain promotion for me.

He, only too glad to serve me, at once set the machinery working by means of which these things are accomplished—and behold me appointed lieutenant-general!

The cessation of hostilities prevented me from thanking the King in a manner worthy of such a favour, and instead of offering him a victory as a token of my gratitude, I could only promise him one when I next had the honour to serve him. It was nearly four years before the opportunity I craved presented itself, when the inglorious peace with which Fleury had plastered Europe was broken by the War of the Austrian Succession.

CHAPTER IX

FROM PRAGUE TO FONTENOY

I

ALTHOUGH nominally elective the Imperial throne had become virtually hereditary in the House of Hapsburg by reason of their dominions, which, accumulated in the course of five centuries by conquests, treaties, and marriages, were by far the most extensive in Europe. An Imperial election was, in fine, merely a ratification by the Imperial Diet at Frankfort of the Hapsburg succession. While there was a Hapsburg to succeed no one ever dreamt of disputing this prerogative. But there came a day when the males of the line failed. The Emperor Charles VI., on whom this blight had fallen, had spent the latter years of his life endeavouring to remove it. Foreseeing that without the Imperial sceptre to protect his vast and scattered realms his daughter and heiress, Maria Theresa, on whom they would devolve at his death, would probably be forcibly deprived of them by covetous neighbours, he sought to guarantee their integrity by an international treaty, which, after a world

of trouble, he had persuaded all the powers of Europe to sign. By the terms of this treaty, which was known as the Pragmatic Sanction, the powers not only agreed to maintain Maria Theresa's inheritance inviolate, but to suffer her husband, Francis of Lorraine, to whom the Emperor had given the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, to succeed to the Imperial throne as well.

No man, certainly no sovereign, has ever taken greater pains to prevent his will from being disputed after his death than the Emperor Charles the Sixth. But what's a will but a piece of parchment after all? That on which monarchs dispose of their posthumous power is so perishable a wish is sufficient to tear it. The Emperor was scarcely cold before his Pragmatic Sanction was in shreds.

Whilst Maria Theresa was being proclaimed in Vienna Queen of Hungary and Bohemia, Duchess of Austria, and Sovereign Princess of the various provinces she had inherited from her august father, the Elector of Bavaria was publishing a manifesto in Munich, in which he offered himself as a candidate for the Imperial crown, and claimed the whole of the vast dominions of the House of Hapsburg into the bargain, as the husband of the daughter of the late Emperor's brother, who had predeceased him. Hereupon the young King of Prussia, afterwards known as Frederick the Great, possessed with a similar predatory craving, at once took advantage of a circumstance so favourable to his designs to offer to assist Maria Theresa to maintain the

integrity of the Pragmatic Sanction, on the condition that she would relinquish Silesia to him.

As she haughtily refused to do this, Frederick promptly proceeded to take forcible possession of the coveted province. His example was quickly followed by others, who, equally anxious for a share of the spoils, like vultures on a corpse alighted upon the Hapsburg dominions to pluck off some rich morsel. The Elector of Bavaria, powerless to prevent this general scramble, for which his manifesto had been the signal, appealed to France for the means to support his claim. The Court of Versailles, whose ancient feud with the House of Hapsburg had not been extinguished by the establishment of the grandson of Louis XIV. on the throne of Spain, eagerly responded to this appeal. Dynastic jealousy was still further aggravated by national antipathy. The war of the Polish Succession, in spite of the French victories on the Rhine, had ended in humiliation for France, which no less than the Court hailed so favourable an opportunity for revenge. Old Fleury, who at ninety still ruled France, alone mumbled a protest in favour of neutrality, anxious as ever for peace at any price. But the forces arrayed against him were irresistible, and, clinging to power on the brink of the grave, he yielded to the war party, of which the scheming and ambitious Belle-Isle was the leader.

This man, who to a genius for diplomacy combined a brilliant military capacity, was possessed by the demon of megalomania. Like Alberoni,



MARIA THERESA.

(After the portrait by Marten.)

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To VMI
ANNOUNCED

Goertz, and Flemming, he was haunted with dreams of empire, which were to be realised by the extinction of the House of Hapsburg and the partition of Germany into states so weak as to be incapable of aggrandising themselves at the expense of France, but at the same time formidable enough to be a constant menace to the Emperor, who to defend himself from their aggression would be obliged to rely on French support. The eloquence with which Belle-Isle had described this dream of empire, this policy of state, had finally procured him the influence he required. Two French armies crossed the Rhine to overwhelm the House of Hapsburg and cut Germany into four, while Belle-Isle himself undertook to trick, coax, bribe, or intimidate the Diet into making the Elector of Bavaria Emperor, who, owing both election and means of maintenance to the French, would thus practically become the vassal of France.

Thus commenced that long struggle known as the War of the Austrian Succession, which, having involved all Europe, ended in a sort of "as you were" after such chopping and changing, such complications and confusion that history cannot describe it without stammering. From the first I perceived that the war was of too frivolous and incoherent a nature to have any definite result. This, however, did not prevent me from indulging the hope of deriving some benefit from the general *mêlée*. Nor was I destined to be disappointed. Indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that with the exception of the King of Prussia the War of the

Austrian Succession benefited nobody but myself. He, knowing how to plan and perform, managed to raise his young kingdom to the rank of a great power. Whilst I, knowing how to conquer, managed to compensate myself for the loss of Courland by the glory of never losing a battle.

II

Of the two French armies that crossed the Rhine, one, under Maréchal de Maillebois, proceeded into Westphalia; the other, under the Elector of Bavaria, invaded Austria. It was in the latter that I served. A weaker and more irresolute general than the Elector would be hard to find. Knowing nothing of the science of war, he was utterly unable to make up his mind to follow the advice he was willing enough to seek from his subordinates, who, unfortunately, as incapable as himself, regarded him as merely the uniform, so to speak, of the commander-in-chief which each was anxious to don.

His first blunder will illustrate his astonishing unfitness for the command with which he had been entrusted out of compliment to his rank.

Owing to the total absence of any serious resistance the army had arrived within eight leagues of Vienna, which was quite unprepared for defence, and would undoubtedly have capitulated without a struggle. The fortunes of Maria Theresa were at this time at so low an ebb that the fall of

Vienna would have stabbed the House of Hapsburg to the heart. Instead, however, of striking this fatal blow the Elector, after wrestling with his indecision, hearing that Bohemia, which had been allotted to him as his share of the spoils, had been invaded by ten thousand Prussians and twenty thousand Saxons, whose sovereigns Belle-Isle had induced to join France and Bavaria in their war against Austria, he decided to abandon Vienna and march on Prague, lest his allies having captured it should be inclined to keep it for themselves.

To derive any benefit from so incredible an act of folly it was necessary to capture Prague. But this inland Gibraltar was not to be had for the asking. Stoutly defended by an Austrian garrison, it was all but impregnable. Confronted with the problem of its reduction the irresolution of the Elector exposed the army he commanded to the gravest perils. Listening, as usual, to every opinion that was offered him, he made up his mind to follow none. His suspicion, which he would fain have made people believe was prudence, was so great that he saw enemies even in his allies. The Prussians and Saxons, observing his lack of confidence in their loyalty, increased the embarrassment of the situation by their own suspicions of his integrity. The insubordination of the officers, who did not conceal their contempt of such a commander, threatened to extend to the ranks. The councils of war, distracted by the jealousies and intrigues of the generals, degenerated into wrangles.

To increase the danger winter approached, reinforced by an Austrian army, which Maria Theresa, profiting by the blunders of her enemies, had found the means to raise.

The news of the approach of the Austrians was, however, not without a salutary effect on the vacillating Elector. For aware that if they arrived before Prague was reduced he would be placed between two fires, he was compelled to adopt some plan of action, even though it were the wrong one. There were three courses open to him: to evacuate Bohemia, to lay regular siege to Prague, or to capture it by a *coup de main*. The first was humiliating, the second impossible, and the third desperate. At the council of war called to discuss what was to be done I urged the last vehemently.

One of my lieutenants, M. de Goursu, disguised as a Bohemian peasant carrying vegetables to market, had managed to enter the city and acquaint himself with its strength and weakness without exciting suspicion. My project was to make a feigned attack on Prague at night, and while the garrison was engaged in repelling the assault to scale the walls by stealth and take the city by surprise. The proposal was received with ridicule and violently opposed by generals, who had no counter-plan to propose and no reason to give for rejecting mine. I, however, succeeded in convincing the Elector that it was imperative he should make up his mind to do something. Since he had no plan of his own he finally consented to adopt mine, the entire execution of which he likewise confided to me, as other-



THE EMPEROR CHARLES VII.

(After the portrait by de Marris)

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TO THE
ASSEMBLY

wise I should have refused to take any part in the enterprise.

The necessity of immediate action increased the difficulty of the project, the success of which under the most favourable circumstances would have hung upon a hair. I had no time to make elaborate preparations. Informed that the Austrians, proceeding by forced marches, would reach Prague within forty-eight hours, I was compelled to act without a moment's delay.

The same day,* picking up some ladders and improvising a battering-ram out of a couple of beams and some rope, I crossed the Moldau with one thousand foot and two thousand horse between Konigsal and Prague. The Marquis de Mirepoix joined me at nine that night with six thousand foot, and we marched straight towards Prague. At the same time the assault intended to conceal my operations began on the opposite side of the city. An hour after midnight I halted my men, and whilst the ladders and ammunition were being distributed I proceeded with Colonel Chevert to select a spot in which to make the scalade.

Letting myself into the ditch under the ramparts I proceeded along it as far as the Neu-Thor, the only gate on the side of the city I was reconnoitring that had not been walled up. Near it was a bastion about thirty-five feet high, opposite which, and almost on a level with the ramparts, was a sort of platform, composed of the rubbish of the city. As time pressed I was unable to reconnoitre the place

* November 25, 1741.

further, so I decided to set the ladders against the bastion, and informed Chevert, to whom I gave the command of the scaling party, that as soon as I perceived he had reached the ramparts I would attack the gate in order to draw attention from him.

Having seen the ladders distributed I ordered a sergeant to mount with eight men. He was followed by Chevert, with four companies of grenadiers and four hundred fusiliers. They had received orders to stab the sentinels if they could not capture them, and if they met with resistance to defend themselves with their bayonets. I forbade them to fire, no matter what happened.

So silently was everything done that the sentinels had not the least suspicion of what was taking place till the sergeant and his eight grenadiers arrived on the ramparts. The sentinels at once gave the alarm. It was the signal I was waiting for. Rising from the platform of rubbish where I had been crouching I ordered the eight squadrons of dragoons, who were concealed thirty paces behind me, to advance. They instantly appeared, whereupon the enemy on the ramparts began to fire on us, a compliment that was returned with right good will.

In the meanwhile Chevert and his men were engaged in scaling the walls. The enemy only perceived them when the first company was on the ramparts. An attempt was made to repulse them, in which many were shot, but the grenadiers, as I had ordered, only defended themselves with their

bayonets. They were speedily reinforced; but some of the ladders, unequal to the strain of supporting so great a weight, broke in the haste of the men to mount them, which very nearly ruined everything. I sent an officer to repair them as quickly as possible, and hastened to attack the gate with my eight squadrons of dragoons. At the same time Chevert, having succeeded in driving the enemy from the ramparts, proceeded to lower the draw-bridge.

Having entered the city with the cavalry I went to the bridge across the Moldau which divides Prague in two. It was barricaded and defended by some troops with several cannon. The officer in command at first refused to surrender, but the Saxons having entered the city behind him, he perceived that he was placed between two fires and lowered his arms. In a word, the whole garrison was obliged to do the same.

Thus in a few hours the audacity and bravery of a handful of men accomplished what would have been difficult for an army equipped with all the resources of military science. The reduction of this formidable stronghold—which was only to be taken by the strategy I adopted or starved out, a process that would have necessitated a siege, which was, under the circumstances, impossible—only cost the French two soldiers. The Saxons were less fortunate, they had thirty-four men killed and wounded. So swiftly, quietly, and effectually did the city pass from the hands of its old masters into those of its new that three-quarters of the population only

learnt on rising of the great event that had occurred during the night.

This was due to the precautions I took to prevent the pillage to which the conquered are liable. For I gave the strictest orders to my officers to hang every dragoon who should dismount from his horse without permission, and to sabre every foot soldier found wandering about the streets. The citizens, conscious that they owed their lives and property to this order, presented me with a superb diamond, valued at 200,000 livres, with an inscription on the setting expressing their gratitude for the manner in which I atoned for the sacking my brave, but barbarous, old ancestor, Marshal Königs-marck, had given the city one hundred years before.

Thanks to the discipline of the troops, the Elector was able to enter the city, the possession of which gave him the crown of Bohemia, like a king. From the moment I met him on the drawbridge and gave him the keys of Prague to the hour when the clérgy celebrated the *Te Deum* in the cathedral of the old Czech kings, he was received with acclamation by the populace. There was not a sign of desolation, not a complaint, not a murmur of distress to mar the splendour of his triumphal progress.

Like the good people of Prague, the Elector sought to testify his gratitude ; not with diamonds, for he had none, poor man, but with words. He complimented me effusively, and seemed only to fear lest his thanks should not equal his admiration. As a small mark of the esteem in which he held me he promised to assist me to remount the

throne from which I had been so unjustly driven. In reply to the speech, in which, as I handed him the keys of Prague, I hailed him "King of Bohemia," he greeted me as "Duke of Courland." Had Fortune not deserted him after she gave him the Imperial crown I have no doubt he would have made good his fine promises, for if he was a bad general he was a good friend.

Unfortunately, he was destined to spend the remainder of a short and hunted existence in fruitless efforts to rectify the incredible blunder he made in not seizing Vienna. For Fortune never forgives those who scorn the opportunities she offers them. Finding that Prague had fallen, the Austrians proceeded to invade Bavaria. Six weeks later, on the very day that the Elector was receiving the Imperial crown at Frankfort, under the weight of which he was to sink, Maria Theresa's victorious troops entered Munich, his capital.

III

Whilst the French and the Austrians were pirouetting to the music of the cannon in Germany, revolution was treading a measure in Russia. After a reign of ten years Anna Ivanovna died, just before the War of the Austrian Succession commenced, leaving the crown to the infant son of her favourite niece, the Duchess of Brunswick, and appointing her favourite, Biren, whose slave she and Russia had been, Regent.

Biren was another Menzikoff. Like the latter, he had risen from the lowest origin to the pinnacle of power. Though he afterwards boasted he was related to the French ducal family of Biron, he was in reality only the son of a Lithuanian peasant, and when first heard of was nothing but a groom in the stables of the Duchess of Courland at Mittau. Nature had, however, blessed him with a god-like face and form—at least so Anna Ivanovna thought. Observing this Adonis at the moment when her passion awakened by me was tortured by the discovery of my infidelities, she offered him the heart with which I had trifled. Biren being a groom and a peasant was not fastidious. Ignoring his mistress's ham-like face, he gratefully accepted her broken heart. From that day the fortune of the groom was made. Like Menzikoff, he knew how to take advantage of his opportunities. When old Ferdinand died in 1737, Anna, who was then Czarina, made him Duke of Courland. She would have married him had he been single, for she could deny him nothing. Courland was, however, to Biren merely a title; he remained in St. Petersburg, and continued as before to be the virtual ruler of Russia, where he was hated as no favourite had ever been.

This universal hatred, which he foolishly affected to disdain, finally tripped him up. In spite of the terror he inspired and the pains he took to strengthen the vast power he had acquired, his Regency only lasted one month. Unlike the French, who temper despotism with epigrams, the Russians



THE, CZARINA ELIZABETH.

(After the portrait by Benner.)

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temper theirs with revolution. In the twinkling of an eye, in the middle of the night, Biren fell from the dazzling summit to which he had climbed to the lowest depth of the nadir, and, like Menzikoff before him, took the road to Siberia with all his family.*

The Duchess of Brunswick and her husband, who had effected his fall, did not, however, long keep the power they had usurped. Exactly twelve months after they had supplanted Biren they were themselves in their turn, with their son the infant Czar into the bargain, supplanted by Elizabeth, to whom Lefort had tried to marry me many years before.

The revolution that placed Elizabeth on the Russian throne coincided with the scalade of Prague. The fresh celebrity I acquired from this feat which astonished Europe, coupled with the unexpected elevation of Elizabeth, whose recollection of me I had every reason to believe was pleasant, rekindled my hopes of Courland, the throne of which was now once more vacant. These hopes received the greatest encouragement from the Marquis de la Chétardie, the French ambassador to Russia, and one of the chief organisers of the revolution that brought Elizabeth to the throne. I consequently determined to make another attempt to recover the crown I had lost by appealing in person to the Czarina to support my cause.

Having obtained the furlough I asked for, I

* He was recalled twenty-three years later by Peter III. who restored Courland to him.

set out for Moscow, accompanied by a single servant. On the night of my arrival Chétardie, whose guest I was during my visit, gave a magnificent supper in my honour, at which the principal personages of the Court assisted. The next day I was presented to the Czarina, who encouraged my hopes by the excessive cordiality with which she welcomed me to Russia. Chétardie undertook to pull the necessary strings, and since it was to him that Elizabeth in a great measure owed her throne, I regarded the object of my journey as good as attained.

He was a singular man. In appearance, manner, and even in character, he was more suggestive of the adventurer than a diplomatist. Diplomacy, indeed, was to him merely a field in which adventures were to be found, and, like myself, he preferred them to be difficult and dangerous. He was a brilliant conversationalist, and noted for his anecdotes, of which he had an inexhaustible fund. These were usually very indiscreet revelations concerning the events in which he had played a part at the various courts to which he had been accredited. His particularly happy gift in relating his stories caused Frederick the Great to term him wittily "a box of bon-bons."

Chétardie was also equally noted for his love of luxury. Even the Czarina herself did not keep greater state than he. At such a court as the Russian, noted for its luxury and intrigues, he was in his element. Intrigue was his special hobby. It was a veritable passion with him. He conspired

from sheer love of the art. He had spent his whole diplomatic career playing with fire without burning his fingers ; but at last by some mischance he excited the hatred of Elizabeth, who, not daring to send the ambassador of France to Siberia, none the less effected his ruin by demanding his recall, which caused him to disappear into the obscurity of private life.

Unfortunately, his credit with the Czarina was already shaken when I arrived at Moscow. Whether this militated against the realisation of my hopes I do not know, but I soon perceived, in spite of the flattering attentions she showered on me, that the throne of Courland was a chimera, and convinced of the futility of pursuing it further I returned to the theatre of war.

IV

Now commenced the fatal *chassé* of the militant quadrille Europe was dancing, when the beaten advanced and the conquerors retreated, when the first became the last and the victors the vanquished. Circumstances had formed alliances for Maria Theresa more advantageous than victories. Having collected an army, thanks to the blunder of the Elector in failing to take Vienna when he had the chance, she had found friends. England was preparing to come to her assistance with money and men ; Holland and Hanover had ranged themselves

on her side ; Sardinia, jealous lest Spain should get the lion's share of the Milanese, joined her ; and the crafty King of Prussia, seeing how the wind had veered, contented himself with Silesia, which she deemed it wise to suffer him to keep for the time being, and made his peace with her.

The defection of Prussia, which was followed by that of Saxony, left France to contend alone against Austria and her allies. The French army, which I had left mistress of Bohemia, reduced from forty thousand to twenty-eight thousand men, found itself besieged in Prague. Between old Fleury's abject overtures for peace, which were haughtily refused by Maria Theresa, and the rivalry and incapacity of the generals to whom he entrusted the care of relieving the beleagured garrison, the latter, after six months' heroic resistance, confronted with the alternative of an impossible victory or inevitable captivity, resolved to save at least the honour of France from the *débâcle* of her prestige.

In the depth of a terribly severe winter, Europe, thrilled with astonishment and admiration, beheld a handful of ragged, famished, frozen heroes, harried by the vulture-like hordes of uhlands and pandours who hovered around them unceasingly, make that sublime Retreat from Prague, which quite throws the fame of my scalade twelve months before into the shade, and deserves to rank in history with the famous Retreat of the Ten Thousand immortalised by Xenophon. To the Maréchal de Belle-Isle, who had shared with the garrison the horrible sufferings of the siege, belongs the



THE MARÉCHAL DE BELLE-ISLE.

(After the portrait by Anne Nivelon.)

glory of this noble vindication of his country's honour.

Had the Court of Versailles followed the advice which Belle-Isle and Noailles gave it, the issue of the war would have been different. But the indomitable courage of the French soldiers was unable to redeem the blunders of the other generals who commanded them. Bohemia, so brilliantly conquered, was lost by the incapacity of these court favourites, whose armies, without fighting a single great battle, were humiliated to the point at which a retreat that is necessary and apparently impracticable is regarded, if effected, as a signal of good fortune. At Dettingen it seemed for a moment as if the tide of disaster was about to turn, but the disobedience of the Duc de Gramont upset the well-laid plans of the Maréchal de Noailles, and turned what would otherwise have been a great victory into a masterly retreat.

The evacuation of Germany now became imperative, and I was appointed to bring the armies decimated by the blunders of the various generals, who had in turn commanded them, back across the Rhine. The manner in which I accomplished this humiliating task increased the reputation which I had acquired at the scalade of Prague, and which the intrigues of the envious generals over whom I had been promoted on returning from my fruitless Muscovite adventure had failed to damage in the general rout.

On reaching Paris I was received with marked favour by the king, and in the street-songs with

which Paris lampooned the discredited chiefs of the army I was hailed as Maréchal.

Anxious to justify the confidence I inspired, I conceived a daring project, which, if successful, would have caused a sudden revolution in the affairs of Europe. This was nothing less than to restore the Stuarts to the throne of England. I had several conferences on the subject with the king and his ministers, as a result of which the dethroned family, which had languished for over half a century in exile, received private encouragement to test the zeal of their friends in Great Britain and Ireland. At the same time an army of ten thousand men assembled at Dunkirk, where a fleet of twenty-six ships of war was fitted out to transport them to England.

As the author of the project, the adventurous character of which was in conformity with my own, I was chosen to command the expedition. Its success seemed assured, provided the secrecy and speed with which the preparations had commenced should continue to be observed. For once a landing had been effected, London, utterly unprepared for defence, must have been captured before the English armies absent in Flanders could have been recalled.

Unfortunately, the best-laid schemes are always at the mercy of chance. On arriving at Dunkirk I found to my dismay that Prince Charles Edward, known as the Young Pretender, unable to curb his

impatience to possess the diadem without which he declared his head was to him a useless encumbrance, had preceded me by some days, thus divulging by his presence the secret he had promised to keep. The transports of joy, however, with which he welcomed me disarmed my indignation. I could not but recall my own impetuosity and rashness at the same age when I also had deemed a head without a crown an ignominious burden for my shoulders to bear.

Trusting to fortune to save the expedition from the ruin with which the Pretender's unthinking zeal had threatened it, I accelerated the embarkation of the troops. Not wishing to lose an hour, for I knew that the English fleet, having got wind of the affair, might appear at any moment, I went on board the flagship with young Stuart, whose heart had already flown in anticipation to the inviting cliffs of England, which his eyes now beheld for the first time.

But alas! the wind on which all hopes of success now depended was not Jacobite. Half the men had embarked when a terrible storm arose, which wrecked several of the ships. Undaunted by this catastrophe, the young prince, who joined to the ardour of youth a most enterprising and resolute spirit, was with difficulty prevented from attempting the crossing with only one transport. He declared that his courage assured him he needed only to land on the British shores and erect his standard to be acknowledged sovereign of the three kingdoms.

Two days later, however, the sea having once more become smooth, I determined to make a second attempt to cross, in spite of the fact I had learnt a formidable English fleet under Admiral Norris was in the Downs waiting to intercept our passage, and that there was not the least indication of our receiving help in England from the Jacobites. But again the elements were on the side of King George, and another tempest, more violent than the first, stopped the re-embarcation we had joyfully begun.

Even now, out of sympathy for the feelings of the young Pretender, I would have continued to dispute with Fortune for the possession of the crown which she seemed resolved to withhold from him. But before the weather permitted me to resume the preparations it had twice interrupted, I received orders to abandon the project altogether and join the army that was about to invade Flanders.

As for Prince Charles Edward, whom I was obliged to leave at Dunkirk indignantly cursing the elements, having reached the Rubicon of his hopes, nothing would induce him to turn back. He accordingly seized the first favourable opportunity, for which he was obliged to wait, however, till the following year, and set out alone for Scotland. But fortune, like the elements at Dunkirk, was not Jacobite, and he was deemed fortunate to be able to return alive after his cause, resuscitated for a moment by his fascinating presence, was slain and buried for ever in the bloody field of Culloden.

V

Nothing more vividly illustrates the confused and complicated character of the War of the Austrian Succession, in which Europe was entangled from 1741 to 1748, than the fact that France at the time of the events I have mentioned was nominally at peace. From the diplomatic point of view it was not France that England had humbled at Dettingen and that Maria Theresa had obliged to evacuate Germany, but the Elector of Bavaria, or rather the Emperor Charles VII. as he should more properly be called. When Cardinal Fleury made his humiliating overtures for peace before Belle-Isle's retreat from Prague, which were so haughtily refused by the triumphant Queen of Hungary, it was, strictly speaking, not France but the Emperor, to whom France had lent her armies, that sought a cessation of hostilities. In fine, in spite of the fact that the French armies had crossed the Rhine in the summer of 1741, it was not till the spring of 1744 that France actually declared war on England and Maria Theresa.

The whole nation burned to avenge the humiliations to which the army had suffered from incapable commanders; and the patriotism of the people willingly provided the government with the necessary men and money. Preparations for attack and defence were made simultaneously on an extensive scale. An army of 120,000 men marched into Flanders under the command of the Maréchal

de Noailles. At the same time 50,000 under the Duc de Coigny defended the Rhenish frontier ; a considerable force under the Maréchal de Belle-Isle protected Lorraine and the neighbouring provinces ; while the Duc d'Harcourt at the head of 40,000 men was ready to act as occasion demanded. Independently of these armies France furnished the Emperor with 20,000 seasoned troops, and sent 22,000 men under the Prince de Conti to reinforce the Spaniards in Italy.

Louis XV., delivered the previous year from his long tutelage by the death of Fleury, determined to practise in person his *métier* of king. Accompanied by his ministers, mistresses, and half his court, he burst forth from his Versailles cocoon and flew off to Flanders to flutter round the flame of glory that the ardour of his soldiers kindled there.

Before I departed for Flanders to join the army in which, thanks to Noailles, I had been given an important command, the king, desiring to express still more emphatically the great confidence he placed in me, gave me the *bâton* of a Maréchal de France.

This honour increased the jealousy of the numerous enemies that my nationality, my religion, and above all the reputation I had acquired in Bohemia, had inspired. Conscious, however, that by rendering myself indispensable I should most effectually defeat their intrigues and justify my appointment, I devoted myself more actively than ever to the pursuit of victory. This the ardour

of my soldiers, the life of any one of whom I have always regarded worth those of any six generals, enabled me to capture in a manner which served my purpose, and at the same time flattered the King, whose first campaign was thus distinguished by a series of triumphs.

Suddenly the rapidity of these conquests in Flanders was checked by the news that 80,000 Austrians, under Prince Charles of Lorraine, had crossed the Rhine. Whereupon Louis XV., leaving me in Flanders with 35,000 men, rushed off with the bulk of the army under Noailles to repel the invasion with which France was threatened. He may be said to have taken History with him on this journey and kept it with him till he rejoined me in the campaign of the following year at Fontenoy. As for me I had no adventures worth recording during this interval, of which the principal events may be roughly summed up as follows: the alliance of Prussia with France, which caused the Austrians under Prince Charles to recross the Rhine, and the death of the Emperor.

This latter event occurred at the beginning of 1745. France having ostensibly taken up arms against Maria Theresa on his account was now willing to make his death an excuse for laying them down. But Maria Theresa, whose ever mounting fortunes had inspired with a desire for revenge, once again refused to listen to peace. In company with her allies she prepared to deal France and Prussia a crushing blow. While she endeavoured to settle her account with Frederick the Great in

Germany, an army of 60,000 men, composed of English, Dutch, Hanoverians, and Austrians, under the Duke of Cumberland, prepared to drive the French out of Flanders.

The departure of Louis XV. for the Rhine the previous year with the bulk of the army had interrupted the conquest of this province which had been so successfully commenced. Many important strongholds remained to be reduced, when the campaign of 1744 closed. Of these, circumstances reserved for Tournay the honour of being the first to receive the attention of the French on taking the field the following year. But Cumberland was no sooner informed that I had invested Tournay than he proceeded to come to its relief.

As I had, in the meantime, been powerfully reinforced, I decided to accept a battle without raising the siege. I knew every inch of the country and made my preparations accordingly. The jealousy, however, which never ceased to dog me, endeavoured to upset them. At the council of war held to discuss the situation, my scheme met with as hostile criticism as my project for the capture of Prague had received three years before. Replying to the criticism of the Marquis d'Argenson, the minister of war, I declared that since I was in charge of the stove I should be allowed to cook the English lobster to my taste, for as I was responsible for everything, I naturally desired to have the ordering of everything.

The King, who with the Dauphin had joined the army the previous day, smiled at this repartee and

gave me the free hand I desired in a manner that effectually silenced all further protest.

“As,” he said, “in confiding to you the command of my army, I intend that every one shall obey you, I shall be the first to set an example of obedience.”

This the Maréchal de Noailles hastened to follow by declaring that so great was his faith in me he would, if I commanded, readily take his place in the ranks.

On the approach of Cumberland the next day (May 9, 1745), I occupied the village of Fontenoy, which, from its advantageous situation, I chose as the key to the situation. Cumberland arrived at Vezon in the neighbourhood on the 10th, and from his movements left me in no doubt as to his intention of attacking me on the morrow. I spent the interval preparing for the shock, explaining the plan of battle to my aides-de-camp and supervising the execution of my orders.

Never have I known the day before a battle so joyous. The King, in particular, was in the highest spirits. Hearing some one observe that since the Battle of Poitiers in 1356 no King of France had ever taken part in a battle in which the French had beaten the English, he gaily expressed the hope that he would be the first to break the record.

For me the day before the battle was one of physical torture. My health had for some months been deplorable. At the opening of the campaign it was generally believed that the dropsy with which

I had been afflicted during the winter would prevent me from resuming my comand. My enemies, anxious to discredit me even on the eve of battle, spread the report that my brain was affected and my days numbered. As such reports were well calculated to shake the confidence of the troops I determined to deny them by displaying my wonted energy. This, in my weak state of health, occasioned the most cruel suffering, which only my will permitted me to bear. From the opening of the campaign, unable to sit my horse, I had been drawn about in a sort of wicker basket, which I called my cradle. In this I was drawn at day-break, sucking a bullet to allay my terrible thirst, to the Redoubt of Eu on the left flank, where I intended to take position.

At five o'clock the mist which concealed the enemy lifted and they advanced ; the English and Hanoverians on the left and centre, the Dutch and Austrians on the right. The latter proceeded to attack the Redoubt of Antoine, but they were so discouraged by the reception they got that they cautiously retired out of range of our fire, where they remained for the rest of the day ; fortunately for us, for had they supported the English at a certain critical juncture a few hours later, we should probably have been beaten. The English marched direct towards Fontenoy with the intention of turning our left, and were repulsed three times with great slaughter owing to the precautions I had taken to disconcert this project.

Cumberland, however, was in no mood to accept

defeat. Determined to have a battle, he adopted the expedient of forming his men into three columns, and having, by force of one of those chances which it is impossible to foresee, pierced the one weak spot in my defences, he advanced in violation of every rule of war under a scathing cross-fire which crushed his three columns into one. Incredible as it seems, this English column, immense, dense, continually repairing the breaches made in it by the cannon batteries that played upon it at four hundred yards distance, continually increasing in size, came on irresistibly, like destiny, towards Fontenoy, threatening to cut us in two and remain master of the field.

To defeat its object a new plan had to be devised at once, without delay. Forgetting the pain with which I was racked in the imminence of the peril, I sprang from my wicker cradle, mounted a horse—I who had not been in the saddle for months!—and galloped off to rally the cavalry. My plan was to permit the column to advance, constantly raked by a deadly cross-fire, till it reached Fontenoy, where the main army was entrenched, and then destroy it at a single blow. It was dangerous, no doubt; but its audacity, which in danger I regard as the greatest prudence, recommended it to me.

Having taken the necessary measures to restore the confidence which the advance of the English column threatened to shake, I galloped off to reassure the King, whose retreat at such a time would have caused a *sauve qui peut*. He had taken up his position with the Dauphin on a hill behind

Fontenoy, which commanded a bird's-eye view of the whole battle. A great crowd of people, mostly peasants, drawn by curiosity, had collected in the vicinity, many of whom had climbed into the trees in the hope of seeing better. I found the King perfectly calm, a striking contrast to the ministers and officers who surrounded him. Even Noailles, convinced that the day was lost, implored him to seek safety while there was yet time. On seeing me approach Louis asked if the battle was really lost.

“Whoever told you that, sire,” I exclaimed with an oath, “is a coward!” And I implored him to stay where he was and permit me to act alone.

Encouraged by the spectacle of seeing me, whom he knew to be half-dead with fatigue and suffering, displaying my wonted energy and activity, he declared that he placed implicit confidence in me and that nothing would induce him to quit the field. I cannot sufficiently praise the courage he displayed throughout the day; its effect on the army was undoubtedly one of the determining causes of victory.

In the meantime the English column, riddled with cannon, continued to advance slowly like a glacier, sweeping everything before it. The recollection of that immense scarlet wall, that human rampart bristling with steel and fire, against which our best regiments dashed themselves in vain, often recurs to me in the nightmare visions of a troubled sleep. Again and again and again for six hours I saw our troops, whose valour rendered it incredible

they should not be victorious, return to the charge with undiminished ardour, only to be driven back with fearful slaughter. In this way the English, advancing over the dead and dying, reached the summit of the slope, crowned by Fontenoy, to find themselves at last, as Cumberland had from the first desired, face to face with the French army. The space between our front and the column was not above thirty paces.

For an indescribable second the surprise on both sides was so great as to cause each instinctively to pause. At this moment a captain of the English Guards, Lord Charles Hay, carried away by the *élan* of a chivalrous nature, stepped to the front of his battalion and doffed his hat. Dumbfounded by conduct so strange, several officers of the Gardes Françaises followed his example. Not knowing whether the salute of the Englishman was intended as a signal of truce or surrender, or as an invitation to one of those Homeric combats or knightly encounters on which in former times the victory or defeat of a whole army was staked, the Comte d'Auteroche went to inquire of his singular enemy. There are two versions of this famous episode, one by d'Auteroche and the other by Lord Charles Hay. The former declared afterwards that the English officer exclaimed chivalrously as he approached :

“ Monsieur, order your men to fire.”

Whereupon d'Auteroche replied with equal chivalry, “ No, monsieur, it is for you to do so. The Gardes Françaises never fire first.”

Lord Charles Hay, on the contrary, has denied that, far from any such exchange of courtesy taking place, he exclaimed ironically :

“Monsieur, I hope you will bid your men to stand till mine come quite up to them and not swim the Scheldt” (the river on which Fontenoy was situated) “as they did the Main at Dettingen !”

The truth, one way or other, is, however, of trifling consequence. Certain it is the interview at all events did not last long. And whether the English fired first or not, they made a hole in our ranks into which they plunged, cutting our lines in two. It now seemed to me that the day was as good as lost. At Fontenoy the ammunition had run short : there were no balls for the cannon and the men were firing powder. At this moment had the Dutch and Austrians once more attacked the Redoubt of Antoine, the victory had been Cumberland's.

The marvellous column, however, having advanced three hundred yards beyond Fontenoy, every inch of which still continued to be fiercely disputed, suddenly paused. At the same moment the Duc de Richelieu, discovering some cannon lying idle, galloped up to the King and implored him to suffer the cannon to be brought ahead of the column, which if played upon in front while the flanking fire still continued might yet be destroyed.

Louis, who was nervously biting the *fleur-de-lys* embroidered in the corner of his handkerchief—the sole sign of agitation he betrayed throughout the battle, though he was now within range of the

enemy's fire—eagerly accepted the suggestion. Observing the effect of this artillery fire, which cut deep lanes in the column, I mustered every available man for a final universal rally and simultaneous charge. Slit into ribbons, the once terrible column wound itself into coils and rolled back out of the field. In ten minutes it was all over. Victory, which had hung on a hair from eleven to one, was ours. At two o'clock the King proceeded over the battlefield with the Dauphin, whom nothing could prevent from taking part in the final charge, and was received with acclamation by the army.

No sooner was I relieved of the terrible anxiety, which had deadened the pain of my dropsical malady, than I was once more tormented with suffering. Senac, my doctor, deemed an operation necessary, and this was performed while the King made his triumphal progress over the field of Fontenoy. The operation was not a complete success, but I nevertheless found a great relief on being tapped, and was able to receive the King when he entered my tent to compliment me on the victory I had given him.

“My cousin,” he said, “if I owe this great victory to the valour of my troops, you have none the less contributed to it by your courage, advice, and foresight.”

The following day he testified his sense of indebtedness in a more marked and substantial manner, by creating me Governor of Alsace with a salary of 120,000 livres, to which he added the sum of 40,000 livres and the honours of the Louvre,

all of which increased the income I received from my rank in the army to the sum of 300,000 livres.

To the royal munificence and compliments, France and Europe alike added their wreaths of laurel. I was called the "Turenne of the Eighteenth Century," and "the Saviour of France." Poetry, which on these occasions acts as the herald of fame, tuned her lyre to suit any voice. Voltaire, in particular, who never let slip an opportunity of associating his name with glory, attempted to express in his *Poëme de Fontenoy* the delirious joy all France felt in having at last, after centuries, beaten her hereditary foes. Twenty-one thousand copies of his dithyram were sold in a few days. Everywhere there were fireworks, illuminations, *Te Deums*. The battle of Fontenoy, in a word, had a great renown; perhaps no military exploit has ever been so belauded.

The taking of Tournay was the immediate result of the battle. Bruges, Oudenarde, Vandermonde, Ostend, Nieuport, all fell in rapid succession, whereby I recovered for Louis XV. that fine collection of golden keys presented by the great Condé and Turenne in the days of prosperity to Louis XIV., who had afterwards shamefully lost them. Intoxicated by success, neither France nor her King wearied of lavishing on me the most signal proofs of their admiration.

Popular manifestations of gratitude were, however, of a somewhat embarrassing nature. My return to Paris after the taking of Brussels was a triumphal progress. Wherever I halted *en route*

young girls clothed in white presented me with laurels. On arriving at Peronne, I received a less solemn but no less flattering mark of my popularity. Seeing an official of the *douane* approach my carriage, his chief exclaimed :

“Are you mad, canaille? Do you think laurels are contraband?”

Paris, of which I had been the idol for a short time on returning from Courland, prepared to replace me on the pedestal from which the unfortunate rumours connected with my relations with another of its idols, Adrienne Lecouvreur, had removed me. Everywhere the victor of Fontenoy was greeted with acclamations. Whenever I appeared in the streets I was mobbed by an admiring populace.

The King, who received me at Versailles with every manifestation of delight, created me commander-in-chief of all the forces of the kingdom, presented me with papers of naturalisation, and the tenure for life of the famous Castle of Chambord—a great distinction by reason of the princely memories associated with this residence, to which is attached a revenue of 40,000 livres.

On appearing at the Opera a tempest of applause burst upon me. Above the clapping of hands and stamping of feet rose shouts of “Vive M. de Saxe!” Even my enemies were infected by the general enthusiasm. The applause culminated when Mademoiselle Metz, representing “Glory,” suddenly advanced to my box, which joined the stage, bearing a crown of laurels which she pre-

sented to me. Taken by surprise, I declined the tribute with many awkward bows.

“Take it, take it,” shouted the audience; “make him take it!”

Hereupon the Duc de Villeroy, who happened to be sitting next me, took the crown from Glory and placed it on my arm, to the delight of the audience and my own intense confusion.

The following day fearing lest Glory, to whom I was so much indebted, might take offence at my apparent objection to receive her favours from the hands of her impersonator, I sent Mademoiselle Metz a pair of ear-rings valued at 10,000 livres. She took the gift in quite another sense from that in which it was made, and desired that she might have the honour of a private interview in order to give me a more emphatic token of her devotion than was possible by a mere cold spurt of the pen. As, however, I had not conceived any very high opinion of her charms on beholding them the previous night at the Opera, I sent back word that, being a soldier, it was for me to seek Glory and not for Glory to seek me.

Even the Académie Française, infected with the *élan* of universal admiration, put itself to the expense of some flowers of rhetoric and offered me one of its armchairs which are said to possess the property of rendering immortal those who sit in them.

Fame, however, had not made me imbecile, as it so often does those whose heads it encircles with its halo. Fully conscious of the ridicule to

which I would expose myself by accepting what, under the circumstances, I would honour myself by refusing, I modestly rejected the advances of the worthy Academicians in a billet which was a masterpiece of its kind, well calculated to justify my modesty.

“Cela mire,” I wrote of the armchair I declined, “com une bag a un cha.” *

But these dispensers of immortality, unaccustomed to have their favours refused, were aghast at being snubbed by an illiterate *maréchal du pays de la porcelaine*. However, if I have deprived the Académie Française of adding this ridicule to its glory, others have given it enough of a similar sort to console it.

* An instance of Saxe's notorious inability to spell even the simplest words. Spelt correctly the sentence reads: “Cela m'irait comme une bague à un chat,” by which he meant, of course, to signify that it would be as ridiculous to make him a member of the Academy as to give a ring to a cat.

And not a word about the French
“Irish Brigade” - who saved the battle !!

CHAPTER X

THE LEISURE OF THE MARÉCHAL

I

AFTER my triumphal visit to Versailles and Paris, fresh victories awaited the army I had the honour to command, of which those won at Namur, Rocoux, Laufeld, and Berg-op-zoom are the most memorable. In fine, from Prague to Maestricht, in which peace was captured, this war was for me one long avenue of fame, a promenade lined with laurels.

The world, watching my glorious progress, called me the favourite child of Fortune. But it was to my prudence, and not to luck, that I owed my success. Taught by the scurvy trick Fortune had played me in Courland, I had long ceased, surprising as it may seem, to leave anything to chance. In war, especially, I had become the most prudent and cautious of men. I shunned risks with as much determination as I had formerly sought them, and reserved audacity for the campaigns of love and ambition in which my heart waged a perpetual guerilla.

The means by which victory was to be won occu-

ped my mind more than the thought of victory itself. I pride myself no general has ever got more out of his men than I. While maintaining strict discipline, it has been the rule of my life to be attentive to the wants of the private soldier. A saying of mine was current in the army to the effect that I would rather lose time than a grenadier, since the former might speedily be recovered, while the latter required twenty years to form. My troops knew that I did not expose their lives needlessly, and the moral effect of this reputation, enhanced by my cheerful and *souriant* air, enabled me to inspire that degree of confidence which in an army, commanded by a popular general, is a guarantee of success.

Nor was I less careful of the susceptibilities of my officers. I was always easy of access and ready to consider any opinion likely to insure the success of the operations in which the army was engaged. Merit, in particular, has ever commanded my attention, and I never lost an occasion of publicly praising and rewarding those who distinguished themselves. The only favouritism I have ever shown has been to intelligence, bravery, and experience.

In this connection a life-long friendship compels me to mention the Maréchal de Lowendal, to whose devotion and capacity most of the victories I won after the battle of Fontenoy were largely due. He was a Dane by birth, and though not actually, like myself, a *bâtard de roi*, he could at least boast that he was descended from one, for his

grandfather was the natural son of Frederick III. of Denmark. The desire for a military career, which he evinced from his earliest years, was so strong that when he was barely thirteen he ran away to Poland and enlisted as a private soldier in the Polish army. A year later Augustus, out of consideration for his family, made him a captain. It was at this time that I first became acquainted with him, and as our characters and tastes were very similar we quickly struck up a friendship, which was strengthened by the tie of blood. The Lowendals, indeed, were closely related to the Königsmarcks. In 1718 he accompanied me to the Turkish war, and was one of the galaxy of soldiers of fortune who served on the staff of Prince Eugene in Hungary.

Since then there is scarcely a country in which he has not practised his profession. The talent he displayed in the war of the Polish Succession, in which we fought on opposite sides—a fact that in no wise disturbed the harmony of our relations—attracted the notice of Anna Ivanovna, who was on the look-out for good officers. She offered him the rank of lieutenant-general in the Russian army, which he accepted. A war with Turkey gave him fresh opportunities of distinguishing himself, and he was rapidly rising to a position of great importance when the death of Anna blighted his prospects.

On the occasion of my flying visit to Moscow, finding him anxious to leave Russia, where he considered himself ill-treated and overlooked by Elizabeth, I urged him to seek employment in the French



THE MARÉCHAL DE LOWENDAL.

(After the portrait by Conder.)

THE
MUSEUM
OF
THE
CITY OF
NEW YORK
AND
THE
HUNTER
ROBERTS
MANUSCRIPTS
DEPARTMENT

service, in which, after the disastrous incapacity displayed by the French generals, I felt sure his abilities would be highly valued. He hailed the suggestion with delight, and the following year, a command having been obtained for him through my efforts, he joined the French army, where, in spite of the jealousy of the Court, his abilities were at once recognised and appreciated by the King.

To me Lowendal was indispensable, and without his assistance the "conquests of the King" would have been, if not impossible, at least shorn of their glory. Sieges were his great forte. His reduction of Berg-op-Zoom, considered the strongest place in the Low Countries, was a magnificent performance, the fame of which was, however, unfortunately stained by the pillage that followed. The soldiers, exasperated by a fierce resistance and the mockery and insults hurled at them daily from the ramparts by the defenders, who believed capture to be impossible, had no sooner made themselves masters than they began to sack the town. From the wine-shops, which first engaged their attention, they proceeded, drunk with triumph, curaçoa, and gin, to loot the churches and private dwellings, killing all whom they met. Blood flowed like water, and many a grenadier obtained booty, consisting of jewellery, plate, and horses, worth 14,000 or 15,000 livres, which he afterwards sold at slaughter prices. For it is only the Jews who follow the army that profit on such occasions, money being very scarce with the officers.

The manner in which Europe, outraged by the

massacre and plunder of defenceless citizens, expressed her indignation was nowhere more violent than in France itself. Lowendal's enemies, especially, were loud and bitter in their denunciations. He was not only accused of permitting the pillage, which he had really done his utmost to prevent, but of actually encouraging it. Popularly supposed to have amassed a fortune out of his share of the loot, his name was everywhere execrated, vilified, lampooned. At Versailles he was nicknamed "Verres" behind his back by courtiers who, jealous of his superior intelligence and the royal favour he enjoyed, cringed before him.

For Lowendal was not the man to be insulted with impunity. His appearance was sufficient to command the respect of all who met him. Of Herculean build he was, like myself, in his young days noted for prodigious strength and good looks, of both of which he has managed to save from the ravages of time a greater share than I have done. This is no doubt due to the chief, I had almost said the sole, point of dissimilarity between us—the difference in the manner in which we have displayed our devotion to the fair sex.

I have sought and bought love in all classes of society, and for the pleasure of sucking the honey from the roses of countless lips and fluttering moth-like round the flame of innumerable hearts I have paid away a fortune in health and strength. Alas! at fifty I am already old. Lowendal, on the contrary, has been constant to one love, and, though only four years my junior, is still young. On the

eve of entering the Russian service he deserted his wife and children to elope with the young Countess Branicka, whom he has since married, and to please whom he has become a Catholic.

For the rest, this Danish baresark was as witty, accomplished, and well educated as any in the brainless, envious crowd of carpet generals who detracted him. Their malicious intrigues, however, failed to deprive him of the Marshal's *bâton* he coveted, though, it is true, their reports of his rapacity and cruelty prevented Louis XV. from conferring it with the spontaneity that the reduction of Berg-op-Zoom should have evoked. In fact, but for me, Lowendal, who desired also to be blinded with the dust of a dukedom, as the Maintenon's brother used to say, was so indignant that the King should hesitate to reward his services, that he threatened to offer his sword to England or Austria. Hereupon I resolved to step into the breach.

"Sire," I said, with the careless bluntness I always found effective when dealing with Louis XV., "there is no middle course; you must either hang him or make him a Marshal."

The King, accordingly, took the hint, and Lowendal got his *bâton*. But this mark of royal favour, which was the just and fitting reward for his services, was regarded by the elegant and envious incompetencies of the Court and the camp as a cause of fresh complaint, not only against Lowendal, but myself. The thorns had not been stripped from the roses with which my path was strewn. Lean as famine, desperate as a suspected

treachery, intrigue slunk behind me. My enemies, envious of the favours the King showered on me, pursued me with even greater malice than Lowendal. Not only was I accused of rapacity, corruption, and brutality, but to effect my disgrace all means were regarded as legitimate, none as too base.

“How,” insinuated this crew of place-hunters and sycophants, exasperated at being prevented from discrediting themselves and humiliating France afresh in Flanders, as they had only too well succeeded in doing in Germany, “how can this Lutheran, this foreigner, this bastard brother of a king at war with France, be trusted to command our armies? His Majesty will pay dear for the confidence he reposes in him, you will see.”

After Fontenoy jealousy changed its tune, and instead of continuing to accuse me of treachery, to which my succession of victories gave the lie, charged me with prolonging the war in order to defer as long as possible the obscurity to which, as a soldier of fortune, peace would condemn me.

The most inveterate of my enemies and, by reason of his rank, the most formidable, was the Prince de Conti—the grandson of my father’s rival for the throne of Poland and son of that princess of the blood, to whose favours I owed the fortunate notoriety which had recommended me to the Regent twenty-five years before. The Princesse de Conti, whose fair face was covered with the scratches she had received in her encounter with Saturn,

having reached that period of life when a French woman becomes either a politician or a *dévoté*, had decided on the former, and consoled herself for the love she could no longer inspire by playing with intrigue. It was she who made me appear the chief obstacle to her son's ambitions and a perpetual affront to his vanity. Encouraged by his mother, the Prince de Conti's jealousy of me became a danger to the state. In the desire to effect my disgrace he actually attempted to foil my operations, but only succeeded in committing blunders, from the consequences of which his high birth alone protected him, and which exasperated him still more.

At first I was content to protect myself from his cabals by exaggerating his reverses, but when the King sought to silence his grievances by appointing him *generalissimo* of the army I commanded it became necessary to fight him with his own weapons. In a word, I gave His Majesty the choice of disgracing a general who had compromised the safety of the army, or one to whom France owed all the victories she had gained. I did not mince matters.

"Unless the Prince of Conti is retired," I told the Maréchal de Noailles and Madame de Pompadour, "Lowendal and I will resign our commands."

Louis XV. knew me too well to take this threat as an insult; and since in his gratitude for the victory I gave him at Fontenoy, when for the first time in four hundred years a French king had beaten the English, he was ever seeking fresh

occasions of rewarding me, he dispensed entirely with the services of the Prince de Conti.

Shortly afterwards the Princess Marie Josèphe de Saxe, one of the daughters of my brother the King of Poland, was married to the Dauphin. This alliance, as advantageous to me as it was to France, completed the discomfiture of my enemies. Deprived of all hope of revenge they abandoned their intrigues, if not their jealousy, and left me to prosecute the war undisturbed.

The following year, 1748, gave peace to exhausted Europe—a peace for which Louis XV. ignominiously surrendered to Marie Theresa all he had taken from her. Of the conquests I had won France retained merely the memory.

I was more fortunate—I kept all their glory.

II

Condemned once more by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle to inactivity, I repaired to Chambord to seek the repose my health required and the distractions my temperament demanded. I have seen in my life many magnificent edifices, never one finer, more superb than this gem which I picked up on the battlefield of Fontenoy. It was no old tower in which one felt squeezed like a soldier in a cuirass, no inhospitable keep of the Middle Ages ; but in the unity and solemn harmony of its towers with their belfries and chimneys, like Oriental minarets, surrounding and surmounted by a majestic central



LOUIS FRANÇOIS, PRINCE DE CONTI.

(After the portrait by Clothilde Gérard.)

To face page 310.]

TO THE
AMERICAN

donjon, with its battlements, courts, terraces, pavilions, and great park—some enchanted castle such as the poets have described as the abode of Morgan le Fay, some wondrous Abbaye de Thélème such as Rabelais has built in his Pantagruel with the pencil of Primaticcio and the brush of Paul Veronese.

The setting was worthy of so fine a gem. I built a dam to retain the water of the little stream that ran through the park, and placed on the lake thus formed three galleys of twenty-four oars, and some swans, wild fowl, and flamingoes. The gardens rivalled those of Versailles; the coverts were filled with game, and that nothing might detract from the grandeur of so noble a pile I had all the roads by which it was approached widened.

Thanks to the munificence of Louis XV., Chambord was furnished like a royal residence. The most sumptuous luxury, the most exquisite delicacy of taste, the rarest productions of art united to embellish it. Beside rich tapestries from the Gobelins were to be seen bronzes by Cellini, miniatures by Petitot, *faïences* by Bernard Palissy, paintings by the greatest masters, and marbles chiselled by Flemish and Venetian sculptors. My passion for the stage caused me to construct a theatre in one of the towers of the castle. It held eighteen hundred persons, and was superbly decorated. I sat on a daïs spread with cloth of gold opposite the stage, adjoining which was a box for the Bishop of Blois—my principal neighbour. The drop-

curtain bore the characteristic device, "Ludum in armis."

Having witnessed in turn the gallantries of Francois I., the intrigues of Catherine de Medici, the melancholy austerities of Louis XIII., the voluptuous *fêtes* of Louis XIV., and the devout *bourgeois* existence of Stanislas Leczinski, Chambord now became the theatre of the restless ambition of a perpetual candidate for vacant thrones and the fierce pleasures of a soldier out of work. Scarcely had I put my hand on this sixteenth-century wonder than I built barracks and stables for the regiment of light horse I had raised during the war, and which at my request the King quartered at Chambord. It was composed of six squadrons of uhlans of eighty men, and a similar number of dragoons. They wore a Turkish uniform and carried lances. The King paid me the honour of reviewing them on the Plain of Sablons before their departure from Paris, when their fine appearance evoked the highest praise from His Majesty, the Royal Family, and an immense crowd of spectators.

At Chambord the wives and daughters of the country folk were delighted to have so many fine fellows to flirt with. It was one of the sights of the neighbourhood—drawing the curious even from Blois—to behold them going to or coming from Mass on *fête* days and Sundays. Their conduct on these occasions was particularly edifying, and did the greatest credit to their discipline. To maintain this in soldiers accustomed to the licence of war is very

difficult without recourse to severity. After hanging a couple, however, the mere sight of a tree at one end of the parade ground which I had used as a gallows was sufficient to repress insubordination.

Six cannon that I had taken from the enemies of France ornamented the chief entrance of the Château, which was guarded by fifty men of my regiment, with a standard. My antechamber was adorned with trophies: English and Dutch flags, drums, halberds, guns, and swords. I had also a guard for my apartments, an honour to which only princes of the blood are entitled, and which I obtained by the stratagem of keeping the regimental chest in one of the rooms.

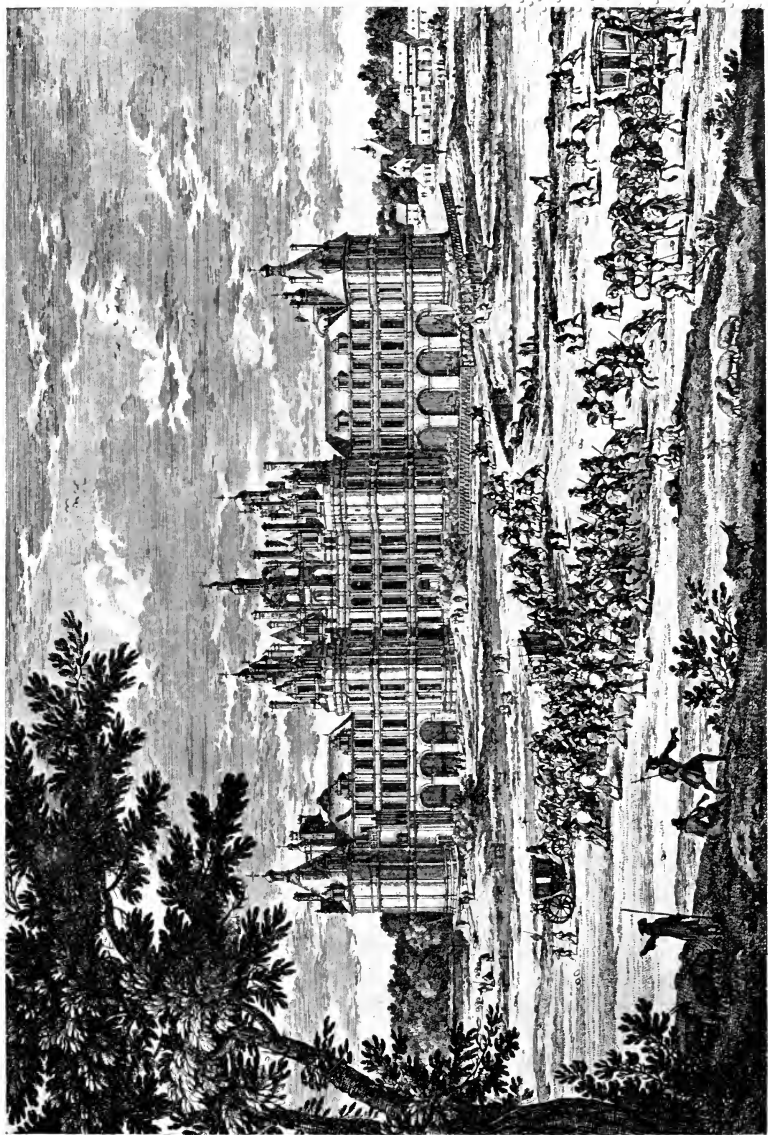
My stables will, perhaps, afford the best idea of the scale on which my establishment was mounted. They contained more than four hundred saddle and coach horses. Two of these, English geldings of great beauty, were a gift from the Duke of Cumberland. I had also thirty hunters and a pack of hounds. At the same time I resumed the breeding of Cossack steeds, in which I had interested myself on first coming to France. At my stud farm I could count twenty-four stallions, one hundred and ninety-two mares, and one hundred and eighteen foals.

The state I kept corresponded with the luxury of my surroundings and the magnificence of my tastes. Without counting the numerous *valetaille* in my service, I had all the officials of a Court—an almoner (Lutheran), a surgeon, a reader, a courier, several chamberlains, aides-de-camp,

equerries, &c. Every day covers were laid at two tables for one hundred and forty persons. I also had my days of *grand couvert*, like the King at Versailles ; and as on these occasions certain people had the honour of contemplating the monarch at dinner, the inhabitants of Blois were privileged to form themselves into a gallery of wondering spectators round the table of the sovereign of Chambord.

Perhaps nothing will give a better idea of the curious impression I produced on these people than the following incident. One day a young Bloisian admitted to the banqueting hall bet a friend he would make the conqueror of Fontenoy lower his eyes. He accordingly placed himself opposite and began to stare at me. Meeting his gaze fixed upon me I turned mine aside, but the persistency with which he continued to regard me caused me to glance at him a second time. Amazed at his boldness, from which I gathered it was his intention to stare me out of countenance, I cried in a loud voice to an attendant, "Send Captain Babache to me." This man was a *vieille moustache* of a uhlan, a bulldog of a Dalmatian, who would have cut himself in two to please me and a single glance at whom was sufficient to inspire terror. At the sight of him the impudent young fool took to his heels without more ado, and ran so quickly that he reached Blois while the hall from which he fled still echoed with the laughter of the spectators.

But this mimic sovereignty was not enough for me. A castle, a village, and twenty farms, behold



CHAMBORD.
(From an old French print.)

NO MORE
ABANDONED

my kingdom ! In a couple of hours I could gallop from end to end of my domain. There were times when the lion in me was stifled in its splendid cage, when the palace, which the virtues of Stanislas Leczinski had purified of the vices of Diana of Poitiers, seemed only the barracks of my regiment, when the champing and snorting of horses, the blare of trumpets and beating of drums, the voices of the sentinels on the ramparts, no longer produced a discord that harmonised with the tumult of my thoughts. People were pleased to term me eccentric, and knowing that, in spite of my royal pomp, never was head sounder than mine, were amazed at the contrast between my character in times of peace and my capacity in war. Truth is I have never been cured of the throne-fever I caught in Courland. I felt born to reign, impelled by ambition to be sovereign of some state, no matter how small, no matter where situated.

Ever dreaming of crowns, the ink was scarcely dry on the parchment of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle when I conceived the project of colonising the island of Madagascar with Germans. Being deterred by the cost of the expedition I looked about for another island nearer Europe, and obtained from the Government the grant of Tobago, a little island in the West Indies. The smallness of Tobago afforded my enemies the opportunity of ridiculing my project. But the insignificance of the island was in my opinion a decided advantage. I have always maintained that little armies are preferable to great ones ; you can hold them, so

to speak, in your hand, and thus move them rapidly wherever you please. So with a king of colonists. Begin with a rock, and, if you are intelligent and alert, you may finish with an archipelago. The Dutch and the English, however, were pleased to regard the grant as an infringement of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, and as France, after having abandoned Flanders, was not to be induced to maintain her right to dispose of a barren island on the other side of the sea, the sovereignty of Tobago followed that of Madagascar into the limbo of my dreams.

I then turned my attention to Corsica, where a Westphalian adventurer had lately reigned for a few months. This, however, proved equally impracticable; as did my projects for the conquest of Barbary and the transportation of the Jews to America.

But these visions of thrones, with which the inactivity to which I am condemned by the peace that now prevails in Europe is still haunted, have not prevented me from indulging that passion to which no less than to war and ambition I have ever been the slave, that passion in which the heart dominates the head and beholds in every woman a kingdom and in every kiss a crown.

III

Among my neighbours at Chambord was a lady distinguished by some gallant adventures—Madame

de Blot, lady-in-waiting to the Duchesse d'Orléans.* An extremely charming face and a very lively and piquant wit were the spells by which this enchantress held me. She quickly became the ornament and soul of my little court, and under her auspices a society was formed of agreeable women of middling virtue, which was a charm against *ennui*. So fascinated was I by the piquancy of Madame de Blot that one would have thought from the delicacy of my attentions the veteran warrior had become a love-sick gallant.

But this devotion of January for May was only an incident. Though pretty and intelligent women have always had a great attraction for me, I have always been careful to keep clear of their grappling-irons. I have known some who have flattered me in a hundred subtle ways, and even paid me frequent visits when I was ill, little capable of entertaining them though I was, and my room like an apothecary's shop. But when they had departed I would say to myself, "It is not *you* they love, but your glory, your fame, your position." So it was with Madame de Blot.

Maîtresse en titre she aspired to become *reine de Chambord*, and to obtain the homage she craved gave out that I did nothing without consulting her. Had she wished of her own accord to free me from her charms she could not have found surer means. Knowing that the King honoured me with his confidence, which I have always valued more than all the benefits he has showered on me, I perceived

* Wife of the Regent's grandson.

that I was but the doll of Madame de Blot's ambition, and immediately sought happiness elsewhere. As for the Omphale from whose web of intrigues I escaped, she turned, without too many regrets, to my favourite nephew, the Comte de Frise,* a good-looking, amusing, dissipated fellow, who proved, while she could hold him, a very good substitute for his fond old uncle.

Catholic though my admiration for the fair sex is, it has, however, chiefly been confined to nymphs of the Opera. In my devotion to the theatre I carried a company of players in *opéra comique* to the army. But I did not regard the troupe that followed me about Flanders merely as a means of amusement. It entered into my military schemes, and played an important part in their successful development. Knowing that the French fought best when gayest, and that what they feared most in war was *ennui*, it was my object to keep my men in good spirits. To this my players largely contributed. A topical song sung to a lively air had more effect upon the soldiers than the most eloquent harangue before battle.

To prove how accurately I gauged the spirit of the army, the day before the battle of Rocoux I sent for Favart, my theatrical manager, and said to him :

“To-morrow I shall give battle to the enemy. As yet I have issued no orders to that effect.

* Son of one of the daughters of Augustus the Strong and the Countess Cosel.

Announce it this evening at the play in a song suitable to the occasion."

Favart accordingly composed a couple of verses, which were sung to a popular air by his charming wife, who, observing the astonishment they caused in the audience, added gaily :

"To-morrow the theatre will be closed for battle, and will re-open the day after to-morrow with 'Le Coq du Village.'"

The silence with which the verses had been greeted was hereupon broken by a cheer, which the audience repeated with enthusiasm on gathering from my smiles that the information they had received so unconventionally was correct. Indeed, the intoxication of officers and men alike was so great that I could not fail to take it as a presage of victory.

Successful as a military contrivance, my troupe of players was, however, as a seraglio, a constant source of annoyance to me. The happiness I sought in it was continually clouded by the conduct of the odalisques, whose infidelities, jealousies, rivalries, and caprices caused me more trouble than the Queen of Hungary's hussars. Of these *pensionnaires* of pleasure, of these *vivandières* of the theatre, all of whom disputed in my inflammable heart an ephemeral throne, three succeeded in conquering a place in the gallant annals of my campaigns in Flanders—Navarre, Verrières, and Chantilly.

Mademoiselle Navarre was the daughter of a most respectable *bourgeois* family, who had gone on the

stage, not from love of the theatre, but in search of adventures. Gifted with great beauty, she had no difficulty in leading me, victor of Fontenoy and Laufeld, captive. She then cast her spells over Marmontel, a young poet, for whose rose-pink effusions I had taken a great fancy. But the distinction of wearing two such diamonds did not satisfy Mademoiselle Navarre. Becoming enamoured of the Chevalier de Mirabeau,* a youth as reckless and passionate as herself, she discarded her parure of hearts for a solitaire. She eloped with him. Weak enough to be furiously jealous I gave chase; but though they got away and got married they did not long enjoy their tumultuous idyl, for Navarre died shortly afterwards—of excess of happiness, they said. It was one of those tragedies of the *coulisses* that occasion more talk than a drama which has taken the town by storm.

Mademoiselle Verrières was a *charmeuse* of quite another sort. Marie Rinteau was her real name, and her father sold lemonade in the streets of Paris. One day, finding his trade declining, he abandoned it to become a *vendeur d'amour*, and retired into obscurity on the profit from the sale, recommendation, what you will, of his daughters to the patrons of the stage. Like Mademoiselle Navarre, Mademoiselle Verrières was less distinguished for her acting than her gallantries. Though I heaped benefits upon her and recognised as mine the child †

* A younger brother of the Marquis de Mirabeau, the "Friend of Men" and uncle of the Great Mirabeau.

† Aurore de Saxe, grandmother of George Sand.

she brought into the world in the *beaux jours* of my enchantment, she was ungrateful enough to expose me to ridicule by her infidelities.

Alas! I was no longer the triumphant Adonis, the Apollo of an eternal spring, for whose sake a Duchesse de Bouillon had been branded a murderess and an Adrienne Lecouvreur had been damned.

Having discovered the deception of Mademoiselle Verrières, I compelled her to abdicate her throne, and gave it, in an evil hour, to one who has caused me more trouble than all her comrades of the theatrical seraglio, of which her husband was the director, and who, in spite of her ingratitude and caprices, which she has expiated in a manner that she has managed to make redound to her honour and my shame, still occupies the chief place in my affections—I mean Madame Favart.

Her maiden name was Justine Duronceray, and she was the daughter of one of the musicians of the private chapel of Stanislas Leczinski, who after the War of the Polish Succession lived at Lunéville, in Lorraine, of which he had been given the government. Justine had received a brilliant education, under the personal supervision of Stanislas himself. Indeed, from the interest the ex-King of Poland had taken in the child of his musician it was rumoured—but let us respect the spotless reputation of this excellent prince and bid scandal hold her tongue. Suffice it to say that at eighteen Justine, accompanied by her mother, arrived in Paris to seek an engagement as a singer

and dancer at the Opéra Comique, of which Favart was then the manager.

A single interview was sufficient to satisfy him that in the *protégée* of the virtuous Stanislas he had discovered a *trouvaille*. He accordingly offered Justine a position in his troupe, which she accepted with delight, and having adopted the name of Mademoiselle de Chantilly * as her *nom de théâtre* scored an instant and great success on her first appearance. Shortly afterwards Favart, on whom Justine's charms and talents had produced the greatest impression, declared his passion, which its fascinating object was pleased to reciprocate. For some reason, best known to themselves, the couple were secretly married, a fact that afterwards furnished me with the means of punishing them for the scurvy manner in which both abused my generosity. This was in the first instance excited by the troubles of Favart rather than by the witcheries of his charming wife.

Favart was the son of a pastry-cook who had a knack of making rhymes which he utilised to advertise his cakes. It was his boast that he was the inventor of the bun, but as the learned declare buns were known to the Crusaders, I fancy he is only responsible for a particular variety. Indeed, so great a vogue had his buns in Paris in the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV., that had he been content with the profits of his trade he might easily have made a fortune. But he had a passion for

* Saxe spelt the name as he pronounced it in his German-French—Jantilly.



Pour charmer la raison, la gaité la chose,
L'Embellit de ses agremens ;
Et comme amant de leurs fit naître ses talens,
Pour en offrir un Bouquet à l'Italie

MADAME FAVART.

(After the drawing by Cochin.)

70 1941
ALABAMA

gambling as well as poetry, and having caught the Mississippi fever, squandered all he possessed in the delirium of that monstrous speculation.

On his death he left nothing but debts and recipes. As the latter was now the family's sole means of subsistence, young Favart, who had inherited his father's talent for verses, and had consecrated himself to the service of the Muses, was obliged to descend from Parnassus on which he had been living, and make pastry instead of poetry. In the intervals, however, of kneading dough the *pâtissier*-poet found time to compose poems, and even a vaudeville, which on being acted had the luck to attract the attention of a rich old farmer-general, whose hobby was to play the rôle of Macænas to young, struggling talent.

Thanks to the generous assistance of this benefactor, Favart was able to give up his *pâtisserie* altogether and return to Parnassus. The production of his "Chercheuse d'esprit" established his reputation and led to his being given the management of the Opéra Comique. He was, however, not destined to hold this appointment long. The Opéra Comique, which had been started as a dependency of the Opera, had long excited the jealousy of the Théâtre Français and the Comédie Italienne. The success of Favart's tuneful operettas was a grievance which the popularity of his wife's singing and dancing finally made insupportable, and to put an end to the feud, which threatened otherwise to put an end to acting as a public amusement, the authorities suppressed the Opéra Comique.

This misfortune befell Favart about the time of my visit to Paris after Fontenoy. Being personally acquainted with him, and recognising his talent, it occurred to me as a patron of the drama to play the *rôle* of Macænas as the farmer-general had done. I accordingly suggested that he should accompany me to Flanders with his troupe, an invitation that he eagerly accepted.

Madame Favart naturally accompanied her husband and proved as popular with the army as she had been with the Parisians. Indeed, the success of Favart's troupe was so great that the enemy even solicited the honour of having the benefit of their performances during the intervals of inaction between defeats.

Susceptible as I am to feminine charms, it goes without saying the talents and charms of the fascinating Justine made a deep impression on me, which her constancy and the difficulty of overcoming it made each day the deeper. Her virtue was not to be taken by assault, and as the fortresses that are prepared to offer a stubborn resistance are those which are most worth reducing, I made as elaborate preparations for the siege of her heart as if it had been a Berg-op-Zoom or a Maestricht. Every day I bombarded her with presents, benefits, and a hundred marks of my esteem. Nor did I fail to shower favours on Favart. I protected him from the vindictive jealousy of his enemies, obliged him by withdrawing my patronage from the troupe of his rival, Parmentier, who, having followed me about Flanders before Fontenoy had a prior claim

on me, and gave him to understand that he might draw freely on me in case of necessity—a privilege he made haste to avail himself of.

At last my persistency was rewarded, and there came a day when Justine was compelled to capitulate. But beyond the satisfaction of having captured the citadel I gained nothing but a barren victory. Whether in the *rôle* of Pierrot, or Cupid, or as a simple shepherdess, she cast a spell upon me I could not break. Young sorceress, her shepherdess's crook, indeed, was nothing else than the magic wand with which Armida touched Rinaldo. In fine, though this fortress of virtue succumbed, its treasure, the heart of Justine, eluded capture, and so cleverly did she counterfeit the affection I demanded that some months elapsed before I became aware of the deception of which I was the victim. She afterwards admitted that though she had surrendered from fear of the consequences of thwarting my desires, her own had prompted her to participate in the favours I bestowed on the other members of the troupe, and that having fallen she had continued to avail herself of them in order to make the best of a bad situation.

The thought, however, that she had made me her dupe by no means assisted to console her for the aversion she concealed. Pricked with remorse that she was even more faithless to her husband, who idolised her, and was unaware of her infidelity, than to me, she conceived a violent passion for him, and being possessed by the demon of conjugal

love, she confessed all to the unsuspecting Favart. He not only forgave her, but took advantage of her approaching confinement to free her from me while continuing to enjoy my patronage.

Determined to escape from me, and prevented by her state of health from acting, Justine decided to go to Paris, where I had furnished a house for her in which to be confined. Moreover, fearing lest her aversion for me should betray itself and that I might put obstacles in the way of her departure, she decided to go without taking leave of me. Accordingly, having made their preparations, she and Favart left the army one very stormy night when I was busily engaged in preparing to ward off an attack which the enemy were reported to be likely to make. Whereupon Favart having escorted his wife as far as Brussels returned to the army and conducted the performances of the troupe as before.

It was not till Justine had given birth to a son, on whom I was persuaded to settle an annuity of 2,400 livres, of which his mother was to have the benefit during her life, that I became aware of the duplicity that had been practised on me.

I am a man of quick temper, violent passions, but also of quick and generous impulses. The cruelty and brutality that I have been accused of in regard to Madame Favart are libels of my enemies. My answer to them is the humanity I have ever sought to display in war. Is it to be believed that I who saved Prague from pillage, who

have received the thanks of the enemy for showing the same attention to their wounded who have been taken prisoner as to my own, who have not hesitated to hang marauders out of respect for the rights of the vanquished and the laws of humanity—is it to be believed that I would persecute a woman I had seduced, that I would stoop to procure a *lettre de cachet* as a means of punishing her, and above all that I would choose such a revenge and carefully avoid associating myself with it in order to escape the opprobrium of society? No, it is not by these signs that Maurice de Saxe, Maréchal de France, is known.

Foreigner, Saviour of France, friend of the King and Madame de Pompadour, uncle of the Dauphine—a foreign princess—frank of speech, contemptuous of the incapacity I see all around me in high places, idol of the army and the masses, covered with glory and bounties—behold the materials out of which my enemies are made!

It has been easy enough for them, eager to stain my laurels, to hold me responsible for the misfortunes that overtook Madame Favart when she sought to recover her questionable chastity. It is also equally easy for me to ignore attacks that would degrade me still more were I to reply to them. It is an age of corruption, villification, and lies. The very air of this eighteenth century is polluted, above all that breathed in Paris and Versailles. I am no saint, but I am neither a liar nor a cur. It was not I who secretly persecuted Justine Favart with a *lettre de cachet*. *Ce n'est*

point ma façon de faire la guerre. I would have drowned her. . . .*

When I learnt that Justine had left the army without bidding me adieu or even informing me of her intention I was so furious that in my headlong, impulsive way I thought of sending some grenadiers to force her to return. But rage with me is short-lived. I had other things to think of besides the vagaries of this witch, and when a couple of days later Favart returned from Brussels I did not even reproach him.

It was not long, however, before the punishment they deserved overtook the pair. Favart had rented a theatre in Brussels for three years, the last of which had still to run when the war finished. Depending as he did entirely on the patronage of the army, which now returned to France, he found himself in the awkward situation of not being able

* On the authority of a manuscript said to have been found in the Bastille and to have been written by one who claimed to be the agent Saxe employed to arrest and imprison Madame Favart, it is popularly believed that she was the victim of the Maréchal's cruel and brutal persecution. Even George Sand speaks of it as "un gros péché dans sa vie." Sainte Beuve, Seilhac, and others, however, are inclined to acquit him of the charge of implication in her arrest and imprisonment, though believing he exploited her sufferings to gratify his lust. It is this latter opinion that I have adopted after a careful examination of all the material relating to the subject. There is no actual proof of his culpability. Such a method of obtaining revenge was moreover quite out of keeping with his character. In the Revolution it was the custom to defame all the notabilities of the *ancien régime*, especially any like Saxe whose services were calculated to excite sympathy with the past.

to keep his contract. As a result the proprietors of the theatre obtained an order from the courts for his arrest and the sequestration of his effects. To avoid imprisonment he fled to Paris and sought shelter with his wife, who, after the birth of her son, had recovered the mastery of her rebellious conscience and was once more living under my protection.

The appearance of her husband, however, again troubled the repose of her heart, and, taking advantage of my absence, she packed up not only all her own effects, but everything in the house she could carry off, and took up her abode with her husband at his mother's. She then wrote to inform me that it was "no longer possible for her to live in sin, and that her salvation was dearer to her than all the fortunes in the world; notwithstanding which she would ever retain for me eternal esteem and gratitude." To cap this, Favart himself wrote and prayed me to protect him from his creditors who had followed him to Paris and were endeavouring to obtain a warrant for his extradition.

My surprise at such conduct was so great as to disarm indignation, and being very much in love with my capricious mistress, I undertook to assist her husband. As I had no doubt his creditors would succeed in capturing him I advised him to make his escape while there was yet time. He followed this advice and fled the same night to Strasburg, where he remained in hiding for some months, during which, as I have heard, he supported himself by painting fans. Favart, indeed,

made his escape none too soon, for the very next day his creditors obtained the warrant they had applied for. And yet calumny has dared to suggest that it was at my request the order for his arrest was issued! Perhaps they would make the victor of Fontenoy and conqueror of Flanders appear a fool as well as a villain.

After the departure of Favart the spell his Armida of a wife had cast upon me forced me once again to offer her the throne she had twice abandoned. She had not, however, recovered from her second attack of chastity, and swearing that she was ready, if necessary, to beg her bread with her husband, she coldly informed me she was henceforth firmly resolved to live as an honest woman. In my anger I no doubt uttered many terrible threats, which the sequel gave my enemies the opportunity to execute in my name.

Immediately after this repulse I went to pay a round of visits in Germany in the course of which I was the guest for four days of the King of Prussia, Frederick the Great. Had I been a reigning monarch I could not have been received more graciously. I was lodged in the Palace at Potsdam and admitted to the *petits soupers* of the King, to which none but men who were noted for their genius either in war or the arts were invited. At one of them His Majesty engaged me in conversation on a number of subjects till far into the night, in the course of which he paid me the compliment of comparing me to Turenne and the great Condé, and declaring that all the generals in Europe might

profit by taking lessons of me. A review of the troops who had won Silesia from Maria Theresa in the late war was held in my honour, and on my departure Frederick presented me with his portrait and a snuff-box encrusted with diamonds.

In the meantime Justine finding herself reduced to sore straits to obtain the bare necessities of life decided to return to the stage. Her desire was to join the Comédie Italienne; as it was, however, not customary to admit French into the Italian troupe, or Italians into the French, she pocketed her pride, or had the audacity, which you will, to appeal to me to exert my influence in her behalf. Notwithstanding all the reasons I had to complain of her, being more in love with her than ever, I did as she requested, but got small thanks for my pains.

Her success was astonishing. So great, indeed, was her popularity with the pit that a cabal was formed by the members of the troupe to force her to resign. The jealousy of one woman in particular was notorious, and it is to her interest in powerful quarters, I believe that the persecution attributed to me of which Justine was the victim should be traced.

However this may be, a *lettre de cachet* procured by her father, a drunken old reprobate who suddenly turned up in Paris and declared she had been married to Favart without his consent, cut short her triumphs. Arrested very ungallantly in the middle of the night, she was carried off to the Ursuline Convent at Les Grands Andelys twenty-

two leagues from Paris, from which she was shortly afterwards transferred to a regular house of detention, where she was treated like a state criminal.

In spite of her great aversion to me, she had never been averse to making use of me when it served her purpose. Accordingly, she now began to implore me to procure her liberation. Had I been able to free myself from the peculiar charm she had for me I would have deemed her well punished, and turned a deaf ear to her prayers. But the desire she had kindled in my bosom prompted me to turn her desperate situation to account. It took me three months to effect her release under surveillance, and six more before I could get the *lettres de cachet* against her and Favart revoked. This interval Madame Favart spent at Chambord, but as she never ceased to mingle the most cruel reproaches with the favours she unwillingly granted me, I finally permitted her to return to Paris and console herself with her husband, or any one else if she preferred.*

* George Sand has condemned Grimm in scathing language for attempting to justify Saxe in his supposed persecution of Madame Favart by blighting the reputation of the latter. One cannot, however, help questioning her vaunted devotion to her husband on which the sympathy she excited is based. Nor is he so deserving of pity. Scarcely was this devoted couple reunited than Madame Favart became the mistress of her husband's intimate friend the Abbé de Voisenon, a shocking infidelity that Favart regarded with the utmost complacency. Of the morals of the Maréchal de Saxe, however, this singular trio could never find words strong enough to express their loathing.

Three months have elapsed since Madame Favart ceased to reign in my heart ; but though the throne is still vacant there is no appearance of an interregnum. My court, whether at Chambord or at La Grange and Les Piples, the two country houses I possess within easy distance of Paris and Versailles, continues to be presided over by the Graces. My vanity has always found pleasure in splendour, and the sumptuous hospitality of Chambord would have made a breach in the fortune of another less favoured than I. Princesses of the blood, Madame de Pompadour, the most illustrious people in France have visited me. Never did I make war more gaily than I slaughter the *ennui* of peace.

Peace ! Prodigious as is the activity of my pleasures, I have still had the time to think of war, and but yesterday I submitted to the King and his ministers the scheme of the reforms which I deem necessary for the army. But shall I once more conduct the orchestra of the bellicose opera of victory ? Shall I once again go to the woods where the laurel grows ? I shall only be fifty-five next roses, but shall I smell them ? Who can tell ? Perhaps they will perfume my grave. . . . Alas ! I am but the illustrious shadow of the hero of Fontenoy. O fatigues of past campaigns how you have exhausted me ! O fever of ambition how you have burnt ! O debaucheries of my youth, fore-runners of old age, how you have shattered my strength !

As from the beginning of our acquaintance, reader, I have intended to part company with you when

I should arrive at this crepuscular period of my brilliant career, what moment more fitting can I choose than that when regret commences? It is better to close this record of my life at the page where comedy gives place to tragedy. There are last chapters that one must not write. Let me go as I came—at the right moment. “Après nous le déluge!” as Louis XV. has said. My life has been a beautiful dream of which the moral . . . Bah!

EDITOR'S NOTE

THE Maréchal de Saxe died on November 30, 1750, in his fifty-fifth year. That he should have been cut short in his prime after a life so feverish, so prodigal of its resources, is not surprising. For years, owing to the excesses that had undermined his constitution, his health had been very precarious. A serious fall from his horse three months before his death was the signal for the general break-up. As a result of this accident the old wound in his thigh which he had received in the affair of the inn at Crachnitz re-opened, and a complication of disorders ensued. Thanks, however, to the strict regimen prescribed by Senac, his physician and close friend, which the restless voluptuary supported with impatience, he recovered his strength to a certain degree, and proceeded to busy himself with all his characteristic activity in preparing the *fêtes* which he intended to give in honour of Louis XV., on the occasion of that monarch's visit to Chambord. But this spectacle, which was projected on a scale of extraordinary magnificence, never took place. On November 22nd Saxe contracted a chill, which developed into pneumonia, of which he died eight days after.

At least this is the official version. It was, however, the popular theory at the time, which circumstantial evidence and the testimony of eye-witnesses years later render credible, if not conclusive, that the "chill" of which the Maréchal de Saxe died was caught on the point of the Prince de Conti's sword. The hatred of this prince of the blood for the "foreign bastard" was notorious. If it be true, as it was persistently rumoured, that a duel took place between them in the park of Chambord, in which Saxe received a mortal wound, the desire of those who witnessed the meeting to avoid a scandal would sufficiently explain their silence.

According to Madame de Pompadour, "Saxe died as he had lived, believing in nothing and hoping nothing!" The day before he died Lowendal, who, though as irreligious as himself, had become a Catholic in accordance with a rule of his life to conform to the religion of the various countries he served, appeared at his bedside and sought to convert him "to please the King." But to Maurice the subject had ever been one of too absolute indifference for it to possess any interest now. His last words to Senac were :

"Doctor, life is only a dream ; mine has been a beautiful one, but it has been too short."

The exclamation of the King on being informed of his death, "Ah, I have now, no more generals, only a few captains!" expressed the opinion of the nation. Throughout France the news was received with profound regret by all, save a clique at Court, envious of his abilities and their dazzling reward.

Some idea of Saxe's popularity, or as Carlyle has expressed it, "the roseate effulgence of a universe all in opera from which the devil carried him off," may be gathered from the extraordinary honour paid his corpse. He himself left instructions in his will that his body should be buried in quicklime so that, to use his own words, "in a short time nothing may remain of me in the world but my memory among my friends." This wish, however, Louis XV. decided should not be executed. His Most Christian Majesty, who was not prone to enthusiasm, was on this occasion so anxious to display his admiration for the man to whom he owed the glory of Fontenoy that he wished to inter him in the tombs of the French Kings at St. Denis. But since the prejudices of the Church would not permit him to show this culminating mark of his gratitude to the heretic, the honour of possessing the ashes of the illustrious warrior was reserved for the Lutheran Church of St. Thomas at Strasburg, which filled even the devout and strictly orthodox Queen Marie Leczinska with regret.

"It is very vexatious," she observed, "that one cannot say a *De Profundis* for a man who has made us sing so many *Te Deums*."

Nevertheless, though the Church of Rome would gladly enough have obeyed the dead hero's behest and have buried him in quicklime, as it had buried his Egeria, Adrienne Lecouvreur, no man save Napoleon has ever had so magnificent a funeral in France. After lying in state at Chambord from

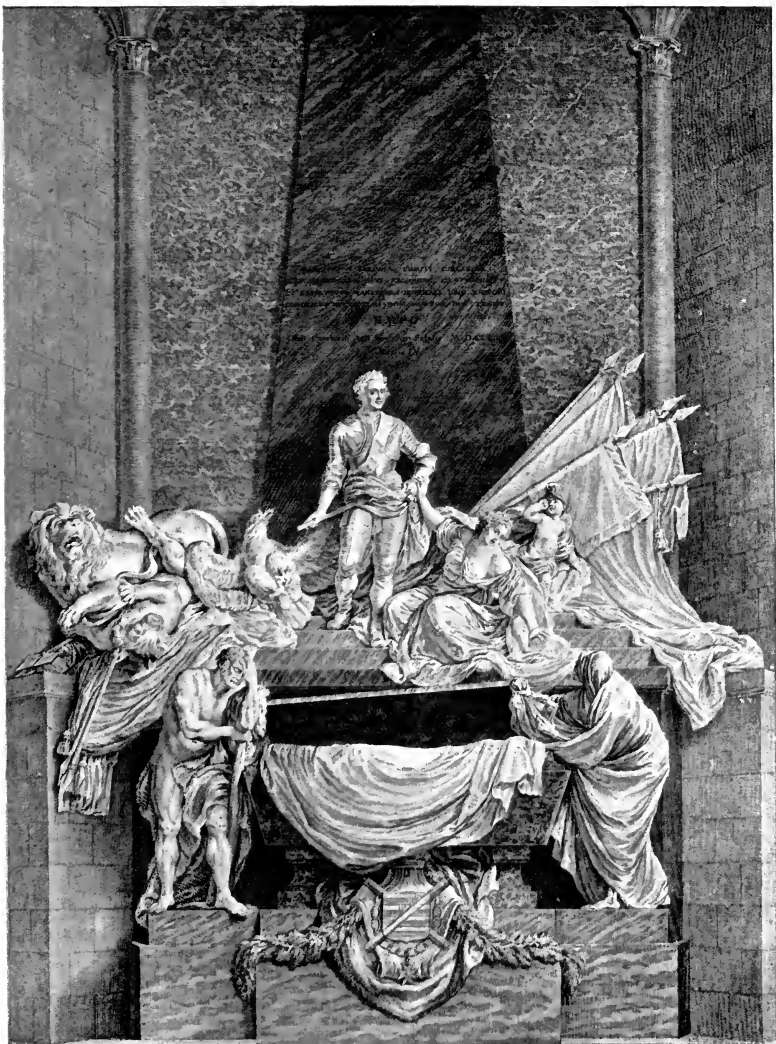
November 30th till January 8th, Saxe's corpse was conducted with great pomp to Strasburg for interment. The *cortège*, which was one month in crossing France, was everywhere treated with the greatest respect by immense multitudes who flocked from far and near to witness the last journey of the man whose name was to them a household word.

The mausoleum which Louis XV. ordered the sculptor Pigalle to erect over his tomb in the Church of St. Thomas took twenty-six years to complete. It is one of the treasures of Strasburg.

In appearance the Maréchal de Saxe was tall and imposing. Black hair, which he seldom powdered in accordance with the prevailing custom, a swarthy complexion, and very expressive blue eyes, with beetling brows, gave his face a rather fierce aspect, the effect of which, however, was softened by his smile. "It was," says d'Espagnac, "irresistible."

Like all striking figures of intense individuality, Maurice de Saxe has been diversely judged. Some dazzled by his glory have made his virtues atone for his vices. Others, like Carlyle, see in him only a blackguard and "the favourite child of the devil." According to the opinion of his own times, which seems to me the only standard to judge him by, he was, if I may so phrase it, better than many less vicious. In his relations with women he was selfish rather than brutal. At his worst in this respect he was never lacking in a curious coarse

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THE TOMB OF THE MARÉCHAL DE SAXE IN THE CHURCH OF ST. THOMAS
AT STRASBURG.

(From an old print.)

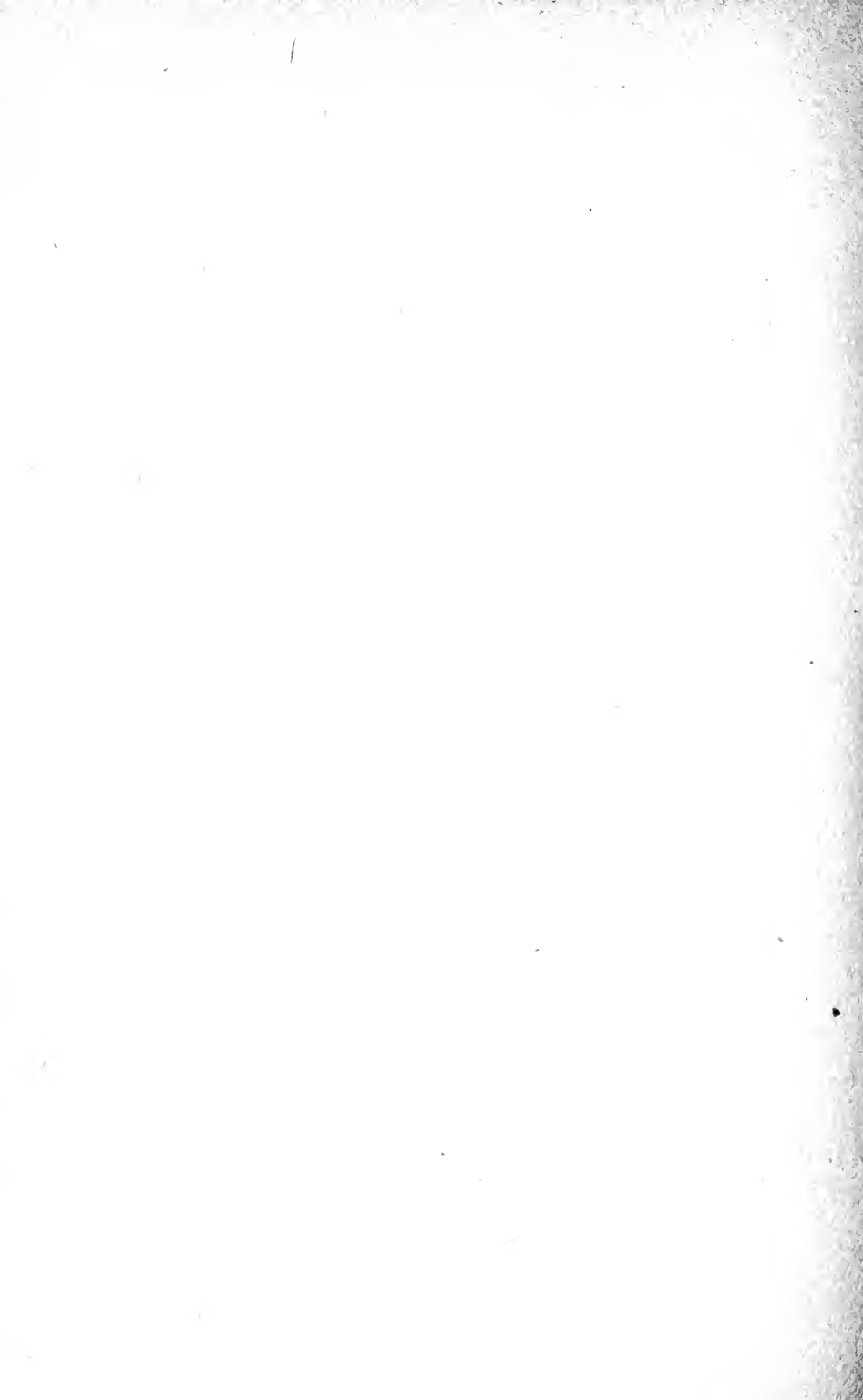
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chivalry. His reputed persecution of Madame Favart is, I believe, from a careful survey of the facts, a malicious invention of his enemies.

By his soldiers he was idolised. Nothing pleased him so much as to be praised by them. Save Napoleon no general ever so completely understood his men as the Maréchal de Saxe. The sympathy he evoked was at once the secret of his popularity and success in war.

After the Napoleonic wars eclipsed the fame of the theatre in which he displayed his genius, his reputation as a general of the first rank has been questioned. It is true he had great luck in war, and the capacity of the generals opposed to him was beneath contempt. Frederick the Great, however, who was no mean critic, had the highest opinion of his abilities.

But it is rather as a romantic personality than as a great soldier that he will probably live in history.

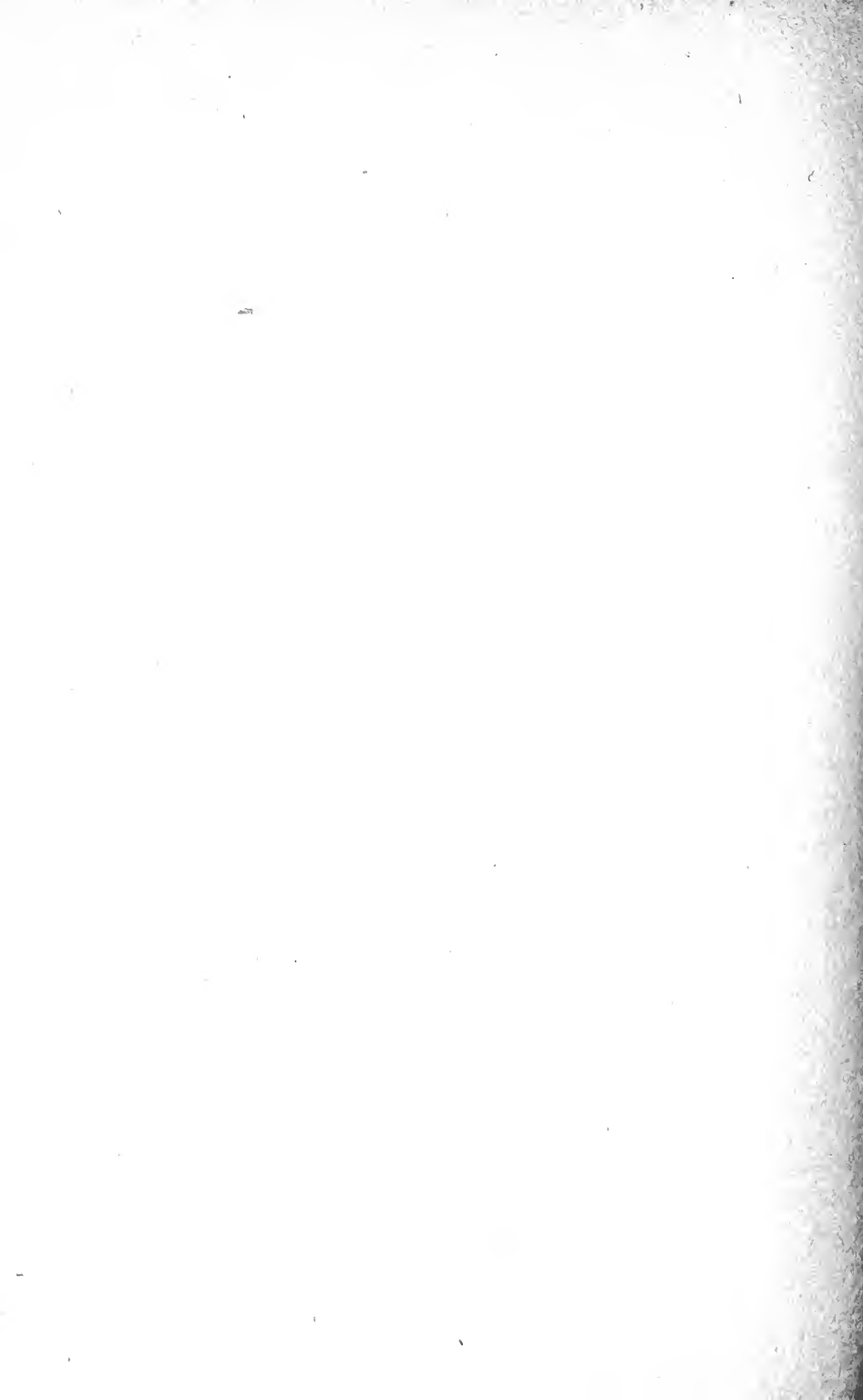


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