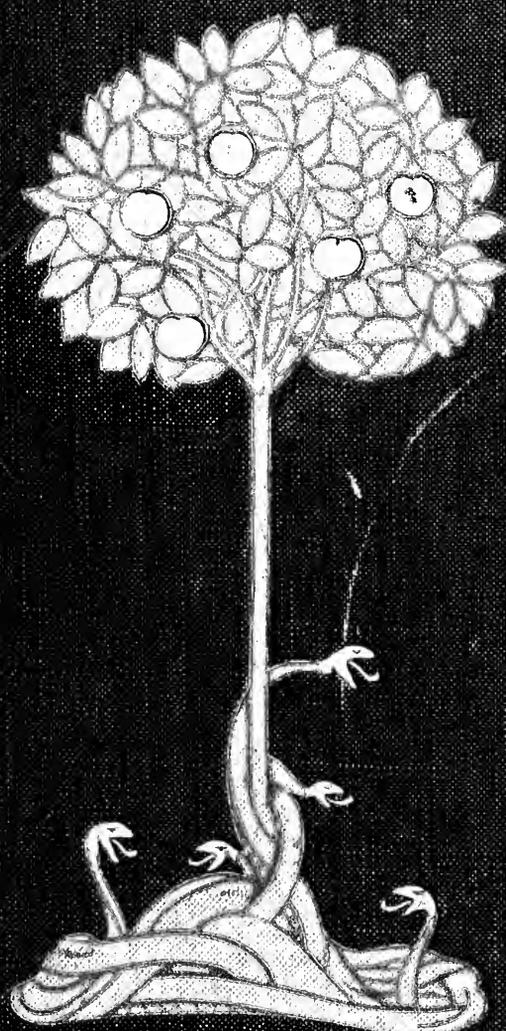


DAUGHTERS OF EVE



W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE



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DAUGHTERS OF EVE



APOLLINE HÉLÈNE MASSALSKA, COUNTESS POTOCKA

(After the pastel in the Berlin Museum)

[Frontispiece

BY

AUTHOR OF "SEVEN SPLENDID SINNERS," "CAGLIOSTRO," ETC.

"Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old."
ROBERT BROWNING: "A Toccata of Galuppi's."

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW YORK

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PREFACE

WITH the exception of Charlotte Corday, that personification of the Marseillaise—who had the whole stage to herself for one sublime moment—none of the women whose strangely contrasted lives are recorded in this book can be said to occupy a conspicuous niche in the history of their times. Nevertheless, what they lack in public importance, which too often possesses only a political significance, they make up in private or human interest.

It is as the merry magdalen with the heart of gold rather than as a brilliant and accomplished actress that Peg Woffington appeals to the imagination. The Duchesse de Choiseul deserves to be rescued from oblivion as the most devoted of wives and most loyal of friends in an age in which fidelity was held up to ridicule. Always true to herself, she knew how to command the respect of the *sans-culottes* of the Revolution in the day of her adversity, as in the period of her splendour she had cast the spell of her purity over the cynical and frivolous society of the old régime. Domestic happiness, which was her ideal, was the aim also of the Countess Potocka's feverish existence, but she sought it in a very different way. She was the woman of impulse *par excellence*—passionate, ardent, reckless, and warm-hearted, with a career as stormy and romantic as a page

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in the history of her native Poland. While the Countess Potocka is familiar to all by reason of her lovely portrait, the Princess Tarakanof is not even so much as a name to the general reader. But the story of this mysterious adventuress, whose daring aspirations and brutal abduction form one of the most dramatic episodes in the reign of the Empress Catherine, is none the less amazing.

In the case of each it is her personality that is her chief claim to distinction. It is a claim that seldom fails to obtain recognition, and one which it is the object of this book to attempt to make good.

.

Concerning the frontispiece, a word of explanation is necessary. The original of this celebrated picture—a pastel in the Berlin Museum which frequent reproductions have rendered familiar to all—has afforded much speculation both as regards the identity of the artist and the person whom it represents. Attributed variously to Vestier, Antoine Graff, Angelica Kauffmann, Kucharski, and Madame Vigée Lebrun, it was long supposed to be the portrait of the Countess Sophie Potocka de Witt, known as *La belle Grecque*. On the other hand, the late Madame Lucien Perey, the accomplished biographer of the Countess Vincent Potocka, *née* Héléne Massalska, claimed it to be the portrait of the latter as a girl, on the strength of information she received from the family of de Ligne, into which Héléne Massalska originally married. It is this opinion, as the inscription on the frontispiece indicates, with which I am inclined to agree. As the proofs, however, on which it is based are not accepted

Preface

as conclusive by those who would claim the portrait for the Countess Sophie Potocka, I have reproduced other portraits of both the ladies in question, painted at a later period in their lives and of unquestioned authenticity, in order that readers, by comparing them with the frontispiece, may judge for themselves as to which of the two the portrait in dispute is the more likely to be attributed.

For the rest, I am greatly indebted to the Prince de Ligne, Sir Henry Bellingham, and Count Mycielski, for their kindness in allowing me to publish the various portraits in their possession, now reproduced for the first time, and a description of which will be found on the pages they illustrate.

W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE.

August 1911.

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LOUISE HONORINE CROZAT DU CHÂTEL,
DUCHESSÉ DE CHOISEUL

1734-1801





THE DUCHESSE DE CHOISEUL

(After Carmontelle)

Reproduced by the courtesy of the Director of the Musée Condé.

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“There lived a singer in France of old
By the tideless dolorous midland sea.
In a land of sand and ruin and gold
There shone one woman, and none but she.”
SWINBURNE: “The Triumph of Time.”

LOUISE HONORINE CROZAT DU CHÂTEL,
DUCHESS DE CHOISEUL

1734-1801

I

Attar de Choiseul! Parfum de la vieille cour!
How faint and faded is the memory of its once incomparable charm. Yet it is as fresh as ever in the witty memoirs and brilliant letters in which the beautiful, proud, old-world name is preserved. Turn the pages, shake the leaves, and you will still find clinging to them the fascination of “*cette belle, cette délicieuse, cette séduisante duchesse.*”

But it is too subtle an essence for its full effect to be perceptible at once. Charming in little things, sublime in great, Madame de Choiseul, like a picture of Rembrandt, a sonnet of Ronsard, or an opera of Mozart, requires to be studied to be appreciated.

She was not, strictly speaking, beautiful, yet the charm of her expression, the gentleness of her manners, the captivating sweetness of her voice and the

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matchless grace of her *petite* figure combined to produce that impression. In speaking of her, all her contemporaries are unanimous in expressing admiration; there is not one dissentient voice. Horace Walpole, most fastidious and critical of men, thought her "the most perfect being of either sex" he knew. "Nothing," he says in one of his letters, "that I ever saw anywhere was like the Duchess of Choiseul, who has more parts, reason and agreeableness than I ever met in such a delicate little creature. Her face is pretty, though not very pretty; her person a little model. You would take her for the queen of an allegory. Oh, it is the gentlest, most amiable and civil little creature that ever came out of a fairy egg!"

Madame Du Deffand, who was even harder to please than Walpole, is equally rapturous. "What a pity that she is an angel!" she writes. "I would rather she were a woman, but she has only virtues, not a weakness, not a fault."

Speaking of her health, which was always delicate, the Abbé Barthélemy declared that "if he were her master he would deprive her of half her virtues, it would make her twice as strong, and she would still remain the best woman in the world, without any longer being the most frail."

Some one has described her as one of the moral assets of the eighteenth century. But this very imperfectly explains her charm, for a blameless life and a spotless reputation are not necessarily attractive in themselves. How many good people only succeed in boring, antagonizing or repelling us, while others without a stitch of morality to their backs contrive somehow to awaken our sympathy! To be adored, virtue must

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possess a heart as well as a conscience. The Duchesse de Choiseul was one of the rare instances of a good woman with both—rare, for however familiar the type may be in ordinary life, it is unfortunately not one that has been particularly conspicuous in history. In the eighteenth century, that age of loose morals and corrupt refinement, the type is so rare that you can count the number on the fingers of one hand.

Goodness in her was an instinct, she had no need to cultivate it. Nevertheless, although she had so little in common with her times that she remained virtuous when it was the fashion to be vicious, she did not altogether escape their influence. If she lived like a saint, she was as sceptical as a philosopher. She thought like Montesquieu and wrote like Madame Du Deffand. But though exquisitely sensitive, tender, and sympathetic, she did not weep like Rousseau. Her nature was essentially cheerful and practical. In following her through the various stages of her strangely chequered career we shall find her, whether at the dazzling height of her good fortune or in the slough of adversity, always equal to herself, enduring every change with imperturbable serenity.

As a child she was left entirely in the hands of servants. "My child," said her mother to her once, "have no likes or dislikes." It was the only advice or instruction she could remember ever to have received from her mother. Precocity made her old before her time. "I never knew youth," she said; "of the illusions of childhood, I was early and cruelly bereft."

Gifted with great good sense, tact, wit, and quick perception, she evaded the guillotine as she had

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passed unscathed through the corrupt society of the old Court—apparently without giving the least thought to her safety in either case. The *ancien régime* and the Revolution alike respected her. Indeed, the esteem in which she was held was so universal that in the midst of the Terror, aristocrat though she was, she procured life and liberty for more than one of her intimate friends threatened with death by simply begging for them.

But while the sublimity of her friendship was only put to the test on great and rare occasions, her unswerving fidelity to a faithless and dissolute husband—which is the dominant feature of her character—was tried every day for years in a hundred secret and ignominious ways. It is true she adored him, but it is this very fact which constitutes her fame and her charm.

In spite of all the talk of love in the eighteenth century, true love was so rare that only Mademoiselle Aissé was capable of dying for it, and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse of it. But rarer still was respect for the marriage tie—only the Duchesse de Choiseul was capable of glorifying it when it galled.

II

It is rather curious to note that she, in whom all the graces for which the aristocracy of the old régime was so conspicuous were displayed in their most perfect development, was herself of plebeian origin. In 1734, when Madame de Choiseul was born, her grandfather, who had started life as a merchant's clerk, if not as a lacquey as Saint-Simon maliciously asserts,

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was still living. Antoine Crozat, however, had brains, and turned them to such good account that he amassed an immense fortune, whereupon he promptly sought, with the usual modesty of the *parvenu*, to divert attention from his great abilities by changing his name.

As he was worth more than twenty millions, Louis XIV was easily persuaded to make him a marquis, and he accordingly selected du Châtel as his title, which was the name of the estate he had bought in Brittany. But the world always persisted in calling him, behind his back *bien entendu*, Crozat as before—Crozat le Pauvre to distinguish him from his brother, Crozat le Riche, whose fortune was still greater.

By the humble partner of his early struggles, the new marquis had three sons and a daughter, through whom he sought the noble kindred he lacked. For a millionaire this was just as easy under the old régime, when, according to the Princesse de Lamballe, nobody was worthy of the name of *man* under the rank of *baron*, as it is to-day. Honest old Crozat, as may be imagined, never did things by halves. A dowry of 500,000 crowns bought the Comte d'Évreux, the youngest son of the Duc de Bouillon, the head of one of the most historic houses in France, for his daughter. But the old family, as is often the case, got the best of the bargain, and the Comtesse d'Évreux shortly after her marriage was glad to return to the parental roof. It was with her *dot* that her husband built, in what was then open country, the palace, afterwards bought by Madame de Pompadour, now known as the Élysée.

Old Crozat, however, had better luck with his sons.

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The youngest married a Montmorency, and spent his time collecting pictures, like his uncle Crozat le Riche, who left him his own superb collection, which his daughters on his death sold to the Empress Catherine, who placed it in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg, where it is still to be seen. For his eldest son old Crozat purchased Mademoiselle de Gouffier, whose mother was a member of the ducal house of Luynes. Thus did the multi-millionaire, who had once been "a clerk at Parmantier's in Toulouse," ally himself to the best families in the kingdom.

His eldest son, the second Marquis du Châtel—and the last, for the title became extinct for lack of male heirs to perpetuate it—had two daughters. Antoinette Eustache married the Duc de Gontaut-Biron; while Louise Honorine found a husband in the Comte de Stainville, afterwards Duc de Choiseul.

In the present shoddy age when the vulgar are courted in society, and the ignorant belauded in politics, it is the fashion to deride such a thing as a pedigree. All the same it is the only privilege of the aristocracy that legislation is incapable of suppressing, and the sole one, if there be any virtue in heredity, that really matters. When the Comte de Stainville began life it was the only fortune he possessed, and he managed to exist on it very handsomely till he married old Crozat's granddaughter.

The Choiseuls, of which family the Stainvilles were a branch, traced their descent to the tenth century, or more than a hundred years before William the Conqueror invaded England. Under the old régime, a pedigree of such antiquity had a special claim to the protection of the State, and the Comte de Stainville

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had been provided with a commission in the French army at an early age. As wars were frequent in the eighteenth century, he saw a great deal of active service, in the course of which he acquired a reputation for valour. During the Maréchal de Belle-Isle's heroic retreat from Prague, which was almost the last and by far the most glorious achievement of French arms under the old régime, he had covered himself with glory. But his notoriety was chiefly confined to mess-rooms. In society where blue blood is debased and bravery eclipsed by poverty, he was merely a needy officer of good family, on whom old Crozat's granddaughter with her 120,000 a year was considered to have thrown herself away.

But though of so little consequence at the time of his marriage, there was no man in France better qualified to give his wife a more splendid position—if that was what she wanted—than the Comte de Stainville. He was one of those men who are predestined to "arrive." His wife's fortune undoubtedly hastened his success, but was not essential to it. Had he married any one else or remained single his career would have been precisely the same. Fortune had bestowed on him the most valuable of all her gifts—personality. The very defects of his appearance predisposed one at first sight in his favour. In spite of his insignificant figure, pale face, red hair, and sarcastic manner, it was impossible to refrain from liking him. His little eyes sparkled with intelligence, his snub nose gave him a comical look, and his sensual mouth, round the corners of which there always lurked a smile, suggested merriment.

His high spirits infected all who came in contact

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with him. "When he entered a room," says Gleichen, "the very manner in which he put his hands in his pockets seemed to suggest that they were filled with an inexhaustible store of gaiety and wit. I never met a man who created such an atmosphere of good-humour and contentment around him as he. Amiable, noble, frank, generous, gallant, magnificent, liberal, proud, daring and passionate, he was like some French knight of the olden times."

As a conversationalist, in a period when conversation was cultivated as an art, the Comte de Stainville—or Duc de Choiseul, to give him the name by which he is best known—was unrivalled. He was a past-master in the difficult art of pleasing. "Grace, good company, and gaiety are no longer to be found in any one but him," wrote Madame Du Deffand; "every one else is dull, ridiculous or pedantic." In his early days the mordant persiflage for which he was noted caused him to be regarded contemptuously by those whom it wounded—and they were not a few—as "a brainless coxcomb who had some brimstone in his wit." But when he was once fairly launched on his dazzling career he quickly made his abilities respected, though history, judging them by the levity and frivolity in which he wrapped them, has not done them the justice they deserve.

His character was so full of inconsistencies as to be well-nigh inexplicable. Goncourt, struck by its amazing contrasts, aptly declares that one can only judge him by "the profile of his personality, for the full face has always been hidden from the historian." Even this profile, he might have added, was masked. What the real Choiseul was like nobody ever knew, save, perhaps,



THE DUC DE CHOISEUL
(From the portrait at Versailles)

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his sister, who inspired him, and his wife, who loved him.

The most frivolous of Cabinet ministers, he worked eight hours a day without turning a hair. The instinct of pleasure was so strong in him that he never checked it, even in the Council Chamber. In Choiseul's day the gravest affairs of state were discussed with a jest. Never was minister more indiscreet or more audacious. Honour, apart from a sort of etiquette of birth, he did not understand. If it suited his purpose, he never hesitated to break his word, or to ruin a man, or betray a secret. Yet, though full of malice, which he vented even on his intimates, no one was less vindictive. He took a delight in converting enemies into friends. Once, incensed by a foul lampoon directed against his private life, he offered a reward to discover the author. The latter, tempted by the bait, had the hardihood to claim it in person. Choiseul was for a moment speechless with amazement, then offering the fellow his hand he said lightly, "Yes, it is true I promised a reward. If my friendship is of any use to you, accept it and grant me yours in return." Whether his frankness was studied or not, it served him well. But his unalterable good-nature, which was his chief virtue, prevented him from hating any one. He regarded those whom he ruined merely as obstacles in his path that it was incumbent on him to remove. To his friends he was always loyal.

The only part of his nature that he did not trouble to hide was its sensuality. Judged by his vices he was probably more representative of his age than any of his contemporaries. From the point of view of immorality, Choiseul was the eighteenth century incarnate.

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The rôle he aspired to play, and to the study of which he devoted more pains than to the government of the country, was that of Lothario. "He made his début in the world," says Goncourt, "as a squire of dames, a merciless worker of evil, a consummate rake, marching onward to his goal with heedless gait, never moving a step or uttering a single word without having some design on a woman."

So perfectly had he studied the rôle of seducer, that he might have served as the model of Valmont in Laclos' diabolically clever novel *Les liaisons dangereuses*. It was as Valmont that Choiseul began and finished his career, and nothing ever interrupted or prevented his performance of the part—least of all his marriage.

The manner in which this event was "arranged" casts a lurid light on the morality of the man and his times.

Between Choiseul and his wife's brother-in-law, the Duc de Gontaut, there existed one of those friendships that stand any test to which they are put. To outvie one another in manifestations of their mutual regard seemed to be the object of their lives. As a graceful proof of his devotion Choiseul had fallen in love with the Duchesse de Gontaut, who promptly, and with the full approbation of her husband, returned the compliment. But these marks of their esteem by no means ended the friendly contest. Threatened with extinction by Gontaut's lack of offspring, the great family of Biron were in despair. To the devoted Choiseul a reproach so injurious to the honour of his friend was not to be borne, and to lift it he resolved to be the father of Gontaut's child as he had been the lover of his wife.

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But, alas ! in giving the Birons the heir¹ for which they longed, Choiseul robbed Gontaut altogether of his wife. For the Duchesse de Gontaut, in fulfilling her part of the bargain, was unexpectedly summoned to the next world. Before her departure, however, she had time to give her lover a last and substantial proof of her attachment. Aware that he had no fortune—at the time of his marriage his worldly possessions were said to consist of 2,000 francs—Madame de Gontaut determined to provide him with one on her death-bed. She accordingly sent for her sister, then only twelve years old, and extorted from her a promise, which the child faithfully kept, that she would marry the Comte de Stainville.

III

In the sphere to which the Choiseuls belonged, marriage, *sous Louis Quinze*, was generally a domestic disaster. In nine cases out of ten a couple whose characters and tastes were so different would very soon have agreed to live apart. But neither Choiseul nor his child-wife—she was but fifteen at the time of her marriage, he thirty-one—were like the ordinary run of people. It was not in the nature of either to quarrel or bicker ; and as for separating, he had no motive for leaving her had he been so disposed, while she was the last woman in the world to dream of such a thing. On the contrary, though obliged to live at

¹ The Duc de Lauzun, afterwards Duc de Biron. Under both titles he was one of the most conspicuous figures in the social world of his time. That he was the son of Choiseul, Talleyrand declared nobody doubted.

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first with Madame de Choiseul's mother—with whom also Gontaut made his home—a condition well calculated to try the temper of a newly married couple at any time, and especially so in this instance, owing to the lack of sympathy between the mother and daughter—they contrived to live harmoniously.

Such a miracle, in such an age, as the maintenance of perfect amity, exposed as it was perpetually to all sorts of mortifications between a husband and a wife so dissimilar, could only be worked by great love on the part of one or the other. And the love of Madame de Choiseul for her faithless and fascinating husband was not only great, but unreasoning.

With the passage of time, moreover, it increased rather than diminished. As the years went by, the worship of her husband became a cult with her. The friendly notice he had taken of the precocious, lonely, neglected little creature, with whom his intimacy with the Gontauts constantly brought him in contact, had won her heart long before she promised her sister to marry him. His wit, his gaiety, and his bravery in battle, of which she had heard many tales, had dazzled her youthful imagination; and the disparity in their ages had assisted the process of idealization. She had looked forward to marrying him as the realization of some wonderful dream. When on her father's death her uncles brought an action against her and the Duc de Gontaut, as her sister's heir, to dispossess her of her fortune, his willingness to marry her without a dowry had completed his conquest of her heart. The fact that his poverty had tempted him to run the risk of her uncles' losing the suit—as they did—was nothing to her. She regarded the act as a supreme

Duchesse de Choiseul

proof of his good-nature and kindness of heart. So deep was her passion that, had she not been his wife, she must have been his mistress, for all her virtue. It was the thought that he had saved her from this degradation by marrying her that made her look up to him. She felt she owed him a debt she could never pay.

But the flame he had kindled failed to warm him, and the delicacy of her health, which was always feeble, was not conducive to love. To his credit, however, be it said, Choiseul was not ungrateful for the affection he was unable to return. To please her he was ready at any time to do anything save interrupt an intrigue or sacrifice a mistress of whom he had not yet tired. During the long illness with which his wife was afflicted shortly after her marriage, though most assiduous in the attention he paid her, he did not for a moment dream of breaking with the beautiful and notorious Princesse de Robecq, who at the time possessed his fickle heart.

Naturally, loving him as she did, the Duchesse de Choiseul suffered much from the flaunted infidelities of her husband. But such things were too much a matter of course in the eighteenth century to outrage the dignity, or shock the susceptibilities of any woman. The wound they inflicted on her feelings was of quite another character. She blamed herself and not her husband for all she suffered. The knowledge that she had won his respect, but was incapable of winning his love, was the real source of her mortification.

But though she endured his follies and infidelities without complaint, the luxurious idleness in which Choiseul lived was the despair of the Duc de Gontaut.

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“With your wealth, your rank, and your abilities,” he was continually saying, “you ought to have a great career.” And to prove to his friend the gratitude he felt for having saved the family of Biron from extinction, though devoid of ambition himself he endeavoured to awaken it in Choiseul by dangling before his eyes the immense influence he possessed over Madame de Pompadour.

This, Gontaut had acquired by the faculty of making himself indispensable to those to whom he attached himself. Of Fortune, all he desired was the privilege of dancing attendance on the mighty. Having been the fast friend of the Duchesse de Châteauroux when she was *maitresse en titre*, he had found the means after her death of making himself equally agreeable to her successor. Madame de Pompadour was seldom seen anywhere without her “White Eunuch,” as he was nicknamed. It was the Duc de Gontaut who accompanied her on the mysterious visits she paid to fortune-tellers, in whose predictions she placed the greatest faith, ever since one had foretold that she would become the King’s mistress at a time when such a contingency seemed utterly out of the question.

“He is,” says Madame du Hausset, “a useful piece of furniture for a favourite ; he makes her laugh, never causes jealousy or interferes, and never asks for anything either for himself or for others.”

He was ready enough, however, to make an exception in favour of Choiseul had his brother-in-law permitted him. But Choiseul’s aversion to court the Pompadour, of whom he had made an enemy by a mordant jest at her expense, was as great as his

Duchesse de Choiseul

ambition was difficult to awaken. Nevertheless, Gontaut was too devoted to his friend to abandon the hope of surmounting either of these difficulties, and the manner in which he eventually overcame them is an admirable instance of Court intrigue in the days of Louis Quinze.

The position of a king's mistress is never secure. Madame de Pompadour, whose consummate craft enabled her to hold the post even when the King's passion had cooled, lived in such constant dread of being supplanted that she declared her life was "like that of a Christian, a perpetual fight." It was in a particularly disturbing royal "infidelity," as she termed the feeble efforts Louis made from time to time to break her spell, that the Duc de Gontaut found his opportunity. The captor of the King's fancy was a certain Comtesse de Choiseul-Romanet, the young and charming wife of a cousin of Choiseul. Intoxicated by the passion she inspired, and egged on by a powerful cabal composed of all the enemies of the Pompadour, she ventured to make the dismissal of the *maîtresse en titre* the *sine qua non* of her favours. An order to that effect, it was rumoured, was actually signed, and Madame de Pompadour was so convinced of the futility of any attempt to regain her ascendancy that she determined to make her fall as light as possible by going before she was compelled.

But her rival was a fool. While Madame de Pompadour was packing her trunks, Madame de Romanet was so indiscreet as to boast of her victory, which she declared she was certain of from the tone of the King's letters to her. Such news travelled

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like wild-fire at Versailles, and Gontaut, most harmless and insignificant of men, no sooner heard of these royal love-letters than he bethought himself of a scheme to get possession of them and save Madame de Pompadour, which proved him not to be such a fool as he seemed. It was diabolical enough to have originated with Choiseul himself.

Going to his friend, he said, "You are Madame de Romanet's relation, you must also be her lover. With your reputation and powers of seduction that will not be difficult. Madame de Romanet has had love-letters from the King. You must get possession of them that I may give them to Madame de Pompadour, who will thus be able to save herself by proving Madame de Romanet to have been faithless to the King."

"But I have no desire to save Madame de Pompadour," replied Choiseul, who has himself described the whole intrigue in detail.

"Nonsense! As my friend you must save her to save me. If she falls I am ruined. That I am sure *you* cannot contemplate with indifference."

"This," says Cheverney, "was enough to persuade M. de Stainville. He exerted all his powers of attraction, and Madame de Choiseul-Romanet was won. He then affected jealousy, and by skilful by-play obtained possession of the King's letters, which he at once sent to the Marquise de Pompadour, who made such good use of them that Louis XV was convinced, and gave up his new caprice."

Tricked thus out of the victory in her hands, Madame de Romanet, who had neither brains nor friends capable of advising her, was banished from

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Court. On her death shortly afterwards, Choiseul was said by his enemies to have poisoned her as well as betrayed her. It was, however, only one of many equally atrocious calumnies with which people who lived in the limelight were continually assailed under the old régime. Choiseul never noticed it by so much as a shrug.

Madame de Pompadour was too clever a woman to suffer the slightest service rendered her to pass unrecognized. She requested the honour of an interview with Choiseul. He could not refuse, and these two persons, who had detested one another without having met, found themselves on first acquaintance in the most perfect accord.

The interview was the beginning, in fact, of a lifelong friendship, which Choiseul valued quite apart from the benefits that accrued from it. These, Gontaut no longer had occasion to worry about, for the all-powerful mistress heaped them upon his friend with lavish hand. As they were of the sort that makes a "career" necessary, it was only a question of persuading Choiseul to accept them. Madame de Pompadour's tact, however, overcame all obstacles. To awaken his ambition, which friendship and a perception of the great talents hid under his levity made her desire as much as Gontaut, she cunningly employed the Maréchal de Noailles, who, being his commander-in-chief, would, she rightly conjectured, be more likely to influence him than any one.

Noailles executed his commission so successfully that Choiseul was tempted to leave the army and enter politics. Airy and flippant though he was, he never did anything by halves. He liked to excel in

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all he undertook ; it was vanity, however, rather than ambition that inspired him ; and the same motive was the basis of all the success he won either as soldier, Lothario, diplomatist, or Prime Minister. Aware that nothing was to be gained by ignoring the favours he had formerly disdained, the favourite of the favourite desired to be loaded with honours and dignities. Madame de Pompadour was no sooner informed of his willingness to be employed in affairs of state than she procured him the post of French ambassador at Rome. A year later she got him transferred to Vienna, whence she recalled him on the fall of Cardinal de Bernis to be Minister of Foreign Affairs. Under Louis XV, this was the chief post in the Cabinet.

But the *protégé* of Madame de Pompadour did not halt on this fine road. The ancient dukedom of Choiseul was revived for his benefit, and, to maintain it with the fitting dignity, he was appointed Colonel-General of the Swiss Guards, Governor of Touraine, Grand Bailli of Hagenau, Superintendent of the Royal Mails, etc. To all of these posts large revenues were attached. The command of the Swiss Guards alone was worth 100,000 livres a year. At the zenith of his career it was estimated that the annual income Choiseul derived from the State was upwards of 800,000 livres.

IV

It was in Rome, where her husband made his début in politics, that the Duchesse de Choiseul likewise made hers as a queen of society. Since her

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marriage, she had been known merely as the wife of the most notorious trifler and *flaneur* in Paris. Ill-health, extreme youth, and a preference for a quiet life had kept her withdrawn from the public view. But the appointment of Choiseul as French ambassador to the Papal Court naturally brought his wife into evidence, and served as an excellent preparation for the great position she was subsequently to fill at Versailles with such charm and dignity.

In the eighteenth century, society, in the sense in which the word was understood in Paris, London, and Vienna, was unknown in Rome. Such society as existed was very formal, very dull, and very exclusive. The Roman aristocracy was divided into three classes—the great patrician families, the lesser nobility, and the untitled gentry whose birth alone distinguished them from the *bourgeois*. These different classes never mixed. The houses of such families as the Borghese or the Colonna were seldom open to foreigners. The nearest approach to entertaining was a function known as a “conversation,” at which very light refreshments were served, and of which gambling was the distinctive feature. The Duquesa Corsini had acquired a reputation as the leader of fashion because she gave these tedious affairs more frequently than any one else in Rome.

“Each lady,” wrote Madame de Nivernais, the wife of Choiseul’s predecessor, to a friend in Paris, “has her special male attendant, or *cicisbeo*, as he is called. They arrive shortly after one another. As each couple sits together and talks in whispers no one dares to interrupt them. Later they gamble, which is the chief amusement of these parties. Supper in

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the French sense is unknown. The rôle of husband is bizarre, but they do not appear to mind it or to think that the attention paid their wives by the *cicisbeo* is excessive. Indeed, I have heard them declare that their wives are infinitely less coquettish than Frenchwomen since they only seek to please one man. Be this as it may, the constancy of these *liaisons* is surprising. A woman who changes her lover, or a man his mistress, would be beyond the pale of society. So a wife passes her life very tranquilly between her husband and her *cicisbeo*, all three living together on the best of terms.”¹

For the foreigner, diplomatic society offered even still fewer attractions. According to Choiseul, the foreign representatives were “either *espèces* or impossible.” For the rest there was the daily promenade or drive in the Corso, where, in spite of the dust, the heat and the crowds, fashionable Rome spent the afternoons; while at night there was the theatre or the opera, where people passed the evening visiting one another’s boxes, and paid no attention to the performance.

Choiseul had no sooner arrived in Rome and taken its measure than he set himself to revolutionize it. Like all reformers, he encountered a great deal of hostility, which he ignored in his customary airy way. If he did not exactly succeed in converting a wilderness into a garden, he at least reclaimed enough to render the French Embassy a very agreeable oasis in the desert. It was as much as he desired.

From the start he sought to dazzle the Romans,

¹ The *cicisbeo* was often, indeed, provided for in the marriage contract.

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and give them a great idea of the grandeur of the sovereign he represented. His "state entry" is celebrated. This function was incumbent on all ambassadors, and frequently crippled them during the remainder of their stay in the Holy City. But expense was of no more account to Choiseul than silver to King Solomon. The splendour of the pageant he gave Rome struck the imagination, and created a reputation of magnificence for him which followed him throughout his career. Attracted by the novelty of the hospitality he dispensed on a scale equally sumptuous, all Rome flocked to the French Embassy. His wonderful gift of pleasing and amusing all with whom he came in contact, and the exquisite manners of his wife, soon did the rest.

Called upon by the exigencies of her position to play the *grande dame* to her husband's *grand seigneur*, her love for him and her own dignity alike made Madame de Choiseul anxious to do credit to the rôle. In spite of her extreme youth and inexperience she proved equal to the occasion. Among the antiquaries, savants, artists, generals and cardinals who thronged her *salon*, the young ambassadress held her own with infinite grace and spirit. "Well read," said the Duc de Nivernais, "very sensible, and, better still, possessing a character that only permitted her to say, to think and to do what was good, she was exceedingly popular in Rome."

Everything about her inspired the most lively interest. "She evoked the sympathy of all," says Abbé Barthélemy, "by her age—then scarcely eighteen—her looks, the delicacy of her health, the vivacity she gave to all she said or did, by the desire

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of pleasing everybody which it was so easy for her to gratify, by an extreme sensibility for the feelings of others, in fine, by that purity of heart which prevented her from even suspecting evil. At the same time," adds the enthusiastic Abbé, "it was extraordinary to see so much intelligence combined with such simplicity and modesty. She reflected at an age when others have scarcely begun to think." Needless to say, such a woman was not to be spoiled by any amount of success or admiration.

The giving of splendid entertainments, however, by no means constituted the sole or the chief distraction of the Choiseuls. To the ambassador they were merely a means to an end. He used the great popularity they gave him to recover for France the influence she had formerly held at the Papal Court, and which he found at a very low ebb on his arrival. Consummately crafty under his husk of frivolity and superficiality, he never for one moment lost sight of the future. His greatest delight, even when he returned to govern France, was in the society of brilliant and accomplished people who possessed intellectual and artistic tastes similar to his. With this end in view he and the duchess, whose love of literature and art was even greater than her husband's, gathered round them a small inner circle of congenial spirits to whom the pleasures of the intellect were the chief consideration.

In a city like Rome, to which literary and artistic people of all countries were constantly being drawn by the relics of her mighty past, this was not difficult. French students, in particular, found powerful and appreciative patrons in the Choiseuls. It was im-

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possible to possess talent without having a claim to their protection. To encourage the struggling Greuze, whose work she especially admired, the duchess commissioned him to paint the portrait of herself and her husband, and purchased several of his pictures as well. The hitherto obscure Guiard was equally fortunate. "*Madame,*" stammered the poor sculptor, intoxicated by the kindness and encouragement she bestowed on him, "*vous me mettez le feu dans le corps !*"

It was from this period, and through her craze for the antique, that the lifelong friendship of the Duchesse de Choiseul and the Abbé Barthélemy dates. Born in Provence of well-to-do *bourgeois* parents, he was destined at an early age for the Church, and to this end educated at the Oratory in Marseilles. Manifesting a decided taste for the classics, he made a special study of the history and literature of the ancients, particularly of the Greeks, whose world as it existed in the days of their greatest glory he was afterwards to re-create in his *Voyage du jeune Anarcharsis en Grèce*. It is on this book, the idea of which was first suggested to him by Madame de Choiseul in Rome, and which took him thirty years to write, that the fame of the Abbé Barthélemy rests.

The study of Greek and Latin induced him to turn his attention to Arabic and Hebrew as well. The aptitude he manifested for these various languages caused him, he says with characteristic modesty, to pass for being much more learned than he was. An amusing instance of both his modesty and his talent occurs in his memoirs.

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“One day,” he says, “a beggar appeared at the school. He declared that he was a converted Jew and professed to be acquainted with several Oriental languages. To convince us of the truth of this assertion, on which he counted to obtain the charity he sought, he offered to be examined in Hebrew by any one acquainted with that idiom. I was accordingly called upon to perform this task. The bare suggestion flung me into a cold sweat, and I endeavoured to prove that I had not learnt the language with a view of speaking it, when the fellow suddenly began to attack me with an intrepidity which at first still further embarrassed me.

“Fortunately, I perceived that he was reciting the first psalm of David, which I knew by heart. I let him repeat the first verse, when I replied by a phrase from an Arabic dialogue I had recently learnt. We continued in this manner, he reciting the following verse of the psalm and I the next phrase in my dialogue. The conversation became animated. We spoke at the same time and with equal rapidity. When he had finished the last verse of the psalm, I declared that both on account of his learning and his misfortunes he was deserving of our charity. Hereupon, speaking in an execrable jargon, he asserted that he had travelled through Spain, Portugal, Germany, Italy, and Turkey, and that nowhere had he ever met so learned a man as the young Abbé. I was then twenty-one.”

On finishing his studies, he conceived a distaste for an ecclesiastical life. Nevertheless, like so many others, to retain the title of abbé, which did not necessarily impose on the bearer the observance of

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religious duties, he received the tonsure, and set out for Paris to seek a living in accordance with his tastes. Thanks to his reputation, which he quickly justified, and the influence of friends, he obtained a post in the Académie des Inscriptions, and, later on, the still more lucrative one of Curator of the Cabinet of Medals.

This appointment he owed to the recommendation of Choiseul, who, without knowing him, had been induced to exert his influence in the Abbé's favour. Desiring to express his thanks in person to the man to whose kind offices he was so deeply indebted, Barthélemy called on Choiseul prior to his departure for Rome. The good-natured ambassador received him with his usual cordiality, and, taking a liking to him on the spot, asked with characteristic impulsiveness whether a trip to Italy would not be compatible with his duties. The Abbé, enchanted at the idea of realizing the dream of his life, replied in the affirmative. Whereupon Choiseul won his eternal gratitude by inviting him to visit him in Rome, and offering to pay all the expenses of the journey.

The Choiseuls had been some months in Rome when Barthélemy, joyous as a school-boy on a holiday, came to pay his visit. The refreshing interest he displayed in everything, and his agreeable conversation, made him a very welcome acquisition to the little circle of congenial people whom the ambassador had formed around him. "His solid judgment, great integrity and mild disposition," says Dutens, "joined to the merit of a man of letters and the agreeable exterior of a man of the world, rendered him the most amiable and the most estimable man I ever met."

To the duchess, his archæological researches, which

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he commenced at once and in which she was equally interested, contributed the chief diversion of her daily life. On her arrival in Rome she had begun "a course in antiquity" under the Abbé Venutti, an eminent antiquarian, and the knowledge she had acquired of the ancient monuments and ruins was so extensive that no detail of their history was unknown to her. She accompanied the Abbé in all his excursions, and proved, to his great surprise and delight, a collaborator as instructed as himself. Their explorations and discussions on antiquity rapidly led to intimacy. Barthélemy, who was as old as Choiseul and much more staid and serious, charmed to find in so young a woman so much knowledge and sympathy, manifested for her a lively friendship which eventually became a deep platonic attachment that was beyond suspicion and endured to the end of his life. Of all the friends of the Choiseuls—he was as devoted to the husband as he was to the wife—the Abbé was the most faithful and unselfish.

In his zeal, he began to collect antiquities, and this hobby led him into predicaments which were a perpetual source of amusement to the duchess, who extricated him from them with the tact and kindness of heart characteristic of her. In those days, as now, the manufacture of antiquities was a lucrative business. In Rome all sorts of relics supposed to have been discovered in the excavations of Herculaneum were sold to amateurs at enormous prices. But, though frequently victimized, Barthélemy's passion did not cool.

In spite of the remonstrances of the duchess, he continued to risk his health rushing about in the blazing sun and spending all his money. When the



BARON GLEICHEN

(After Carmontelli)

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Choiseuls went to Frascati, where they spent the summer with their intimate friends, "in a villa with a vast garden filled with fountains and plane trees," the Abbé was in ecstasies. Here antiquities were to be found at every step. One day some workmen unearthed a marble tomb containing twelve terra-cotta figures. The Abbé was no sooner informed of this discovery than he flew to the spot to purchase the treasure. But the price demanded was beyond his purse. At dinner he mentioned the incident, and sighed over his bad luck. The next day, to his surprise, he found the twelve terra-cottas on a table in his room. "It was such graceful attentions," he says, "that Madame de Choiseul constantly paid to all who surrounded her."

Needless to say, the sentiments she inspired were not always as purely platonic as the honest Abbé's, though they never dared express themselves openly. So great was the dread of losing her esteem that even the boldest sought to disguise their passion under the respectable name of friendship.

Among these discreet lovers, no one, with the exception of the Abbé, was ever so unselfishly devoted to her as a certain Baron Gleichen, who was visiting Rome in the suite of the Margrave and Margravine of Bayreuth. "A quarrel," he says, "instead of breaking our acquaintance at the start, cemented it into a friendship that lasted thirty years." He had been invited to Frascati, and the episode to which he refers took place on the day of his arrival. At dinner the conversation turned on the Margravine of Bayreuth, the Princess of Prussia and the favourite sister of Frederick the Great. Choiseul, "who loved to be daring," regardless of the

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presence of his guest, expressed his opinion in so disrespectful a manner that Gleichen, who was under the greatest obligations to the Margravine, resented it "with the romantic folly of a young man of twenty." He became so heated that Choiseul threw down his napkin and left the table in anger. Whereupon Gleichen, too, rose with the intention of returning to Rome, the execution of which was only prevented by the tact of the duchess. Choiseul apologized, and, far from cherishing the least resentment, conceived the greatest respect for the young German.

The efforts of the charming duchess to obliterate the memory of this contretemps from the mind of her guest were more than successful. Both were of the same age, both had the same tastes, the same temperament. Gleichen, impressionable and sentimental, was soon madly, hopelessly in love. The duchess, loving only her husband, did not, because she could not, prevent herself from being admired and adored. But always calm and serene, always kind and sympathetic to all, she pretended not to be aware of the passion she had aroused. Nor did Gleichen dare to inform her, lest the declaration should prevent him from being her friend as well as her lover. His self-restraint had its reward.

"That year (1756)," he says, "was the happiest of my life. Overwhelmed with all that Italy has to offer, I lived at Rome in the lap of the Fine Arts with the Choiseuls in the intimacy of a society which surpassed that of any other I have ever known."

To the duchess, likewise, the pleasure of her life in Rome was, perhaps, the most unalloyed she ever knew. But to Choiseul, Rome was but the first stage on the

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fine road along which his ambition had begun to march. At the end of the two years Madame de Pompadour, ever mindful of his interests, got him transferred to Vienna, then the chief post in the French diplomatic service. The news of Damiens' attempt on the life of Louis XV caused him to depart hurriedly for Paris, leaving Madame de Choiseul, whose health was delicate, to follow leisurely under the care of Barthélemy.

V

The offensive and defensive alliance which France and Austria had recently formed after centuries of mutual jealousy and enmity, rendered the French ambassador at Vienna a person of great importance. Thanks, moreover, to the old intimacy that existed between the Marquis de Stainville—Choiseul's father—and the Emperor, the new ambassador was a *persona grata* at Court. But neither Choiseul nor his wife cared for Vienna. Stately Court functions were never at any time to the taste of the duchess, and these were all that Viennese society had to offer her.

To Choiseul, Vienna was even more distasteful than to his wife. His position was rendered exceedingly difficult from the start by the attempt of Maria Theresa to recapture Silesia from her mortal enemy, Frederick the Great. The rupture of the peace between Austria and Prussia, with which the Seven Years' War began, was anything but agreeable to France, which was bound by treaty to assist Austria. Urged, on the one hand, from Versailles to mollify the bellicose passions of the Empress, by whom, on the

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other, he was pressed to keep his government to the letter of their obligations, Choiseul had need of all his craft and powers of persuasion to maintain the alliance of the two countries. Between two such fires he had little opportunity to think of dazzling Vienna as he had Rome. Such time as he could snatch from the cares of state he devoted to the society of his latest mistress, the Countess Kinsky.

But, irksome though the sojourn of the Choiseuls in the Austrian capital was, it did not last long. At the end of a year they returned to Paris, where, within a month of his arrival, the ambassador succeeded Cardinal de Bernis as Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was with this appointment that Choiseul began his career as chief adviser to the King—a position that he was destined to hold for twelve years, during which he was the virtual master of France.

His rise to power naturally had the effect of increasing the intimacy between the new minister and the mistress to whose influence he owed his elevation. But Choiseul was far too independent by nature to suffer his conduct in this respect to be guided by purely selfish considerations. Loyalty in friendship was Choiseul's great virtue. In his devotion to Madame de Pompadour he was thoroughly sincere. Not a day passed without his seeing her, and to prove his devotion he took her into his confidence in all that he did or proposed doing. No detail in state affairs was deemed too insignificant to be withheld from her.

She, on her part, no longer treated him as her *protégé*, but as an equal and even a superior. Her opinion of his abilities was so great that she saw everything through his eyes. He ruled her completely.

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She admitted as much to Gontaut one day. "They talk of my great influence," she said, "but I can assure you that without the friendship of M. de Choiseul I should not be able to obtain for any one so much as a Cross of St. Louis."

His ascendancy over the all-powerful favourite was so marked as to give rise to the report that he was her lover. It was, however, a *canard* of their enemies. Never was woman less inclined by nature to play the part of king's mistress than the Pompadour. Cold to excess, she never had a lover but Louis, and he soon ceased to be even that in the ordinary acceptance of the term. The spell she exercised was over his mind rather than his heart. It was the secret of her supremacy, which threatened daily not only by her would-be rivals, but by the overwhelming disasters attributed to her intrigues, survived till her death, and has no parallel in the annals of such unions. Madame de Maintenon, the only other woman to be compared to Madame de Pompadour, if not the wife was never the mistress of Louis XIV, and the youth of both had long since departed when they formed their strange intimacy.

The Duchesse de Choiseul, moreover, was no less attached to Madame de Pompadour than her husband. Such a circumstance, far from casting a reflection on the reputation of the duchess, is, on the contrary, rather to the credit of the favourite. Though it may seem inexplicable, according to twentieth-century ideas, that such a woman as Madame de Choiseul should be willing to associate with a king's mistress, it should not be forgotten that Madame de Pompadour was held in high esteem by others equally irreproachable. Maria

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Theresa did not disdain to address her as "my cousin" in the voluminous letters she was wont to write her; while the pious queen of Louis XV, who, if any one, might have been expected to despise her, even "missed her when she died."

Louis, at all events, paid no heed to the slanderous reports that were circulated about his minister and his mistress. However much he may have disliked the man to whom, it is said, much against his will he had been induced to entrust the highest office in his gift, he changed his opinion when he got to know him. For Choiseul, needless to say, soon wormed his way by his attractive manners into the King's confidence. Charmed to have a minister who made light of all difficulties, and relieved him of the boredom and care of state business, Louis loaded him with favours of his own accord.

Nor was Choiseul the man to forget his friends and relations in the day of his power. Though the merest suspicion of nepotism would be sufficient to discredit a minister to-day, it was regarded as a virtue rather than otherwise in the eighteenth century. It was certainly not by his contemporaries that Choiseul was ever reproached for conferring benefits upon his kindred. Of his two brothers he made the younger, who was an abbé without a benefice, Bishop of Évreux, and, later, Archbishop of Albi. For the other, a colonel in the Hungarian army, he obtained a commission in the French military service, in which he was quickly promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general. Though a fool, Choiseul would not have hesitated to make him a Maréchal of France had he been an amiable fool. But he had the misfortune to be so cross-grained and



THE DUCHESSE DE GRAMONT

(After Carmontelle)

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quarrelsome that his brother was disgusted with him, and, having married him to a rich and charming woman, whom he treated shamefully, gave him up as a bad job.

His relations had only to ask to receive. One of the first favours he conferred on his penniless kindred was to appoint a cousin to the embassy in Vienna that he had vacated. As he proved himself both able and devoted, he was created Duc de Choiseul-Praslin, and given a place in the ministry. Indeed, so great was their friendship, that when Choiseul got tired of being Minister of Foreign Affairs, or of War, or of Marine, he would exchange portfolios with Praslin. Between them they held in the course of twelve years every office of any account in the Cabinet with the exception of that of Controller-General.

“For God’s sake,” wrote Voltaire to a friend, “don’t let Choiseul have the Treasury; within two years he would fritter it all away in presents, pensions and luxury. His liberality is incurable.”

His sister was the one of the family to benefit most by his elevation. While he ruled the King, Madame de Pompadour and the country, she ruled him. In her vices and abilities Beatrix de Stainville was the double of her brother, but here the resemblance ceased. She was a tall, ungainly woman, with the shrill, harsh voice and the rough, imperious manners of a virago. She could, however, make herself “exceedingly agreeable when she pleased,” says Walpole. It must have been in one of these moods that she captivated Hénault, the life-long friend of Madame Du Deffand, who “found it difficult to prevent himself from falling in love with her.” But to most people, according to a contemporary,

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“she was utterly disagreeable, and as spiteful as the devil.”

One of Choiseul's first acts on becoming minister was to bring her to Paris from the convent of Remiremont, where having no *dot* to secure a husband, and no wish to renounce the world, she was vegetating on a small stipend in irritating obscurity. She was at the time past twenty-eight. At first, on being presented at Versailles, she behaved modestly enough, but as soon as she felt sure of her footing her natural arrogance asserted itself, and she did not hesitate to treat the greatest personages with disdain.

To play this rôle successfully, however, it was necessary to have a suitable position, and she had none. So Choiseul found the means to persuade the Duc de Gramont to provide her with it. He was a widower, a drunkard, and “looked as if nature had intended him for a barber.” But as he had a pedigree as old as the hills and a fortune to match, Beatrix de Stainville did not hesitate to marry him. Their marriage, needless to say, was not happy, and three months later the Duchesse de Gramont, retaining her ducal title and a large income, left her husband and returned to live with the Choiseuls. Ambitious and intriguing, she soon manifested an interest in politics, and to the despair of Madame de Choiseul, whom she bullied and snubbed, gained complete ascendancy over her brother.

The intimacy between them, however, was the least of Madame de Choiseul's grievances. She had a soul above such things. But to have this overbearing and arrogant woman relegate her to a subordinate position in her own house was more than she could

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put up with, and she resolved to assert her right to be treated as the mistress of her own house. It was the only time in her life that her wonderful serenity was ever ruffled. But Madame de Gramont was too strongly entrenched to be ousted, and as it was not in the duchess's nature to quarrel, she gave up the contest and accepted with good grace the secondary rôle. The result was a covert hostility between the two women which lasted to the end of their lives.

VI

But Madame de Choiseul was not the woman to suffer the mortification to which she was subjected to spoil her existence. Having resigned herself to support without complaint ills she could not avoid, she sought to make their burden as light as possible by forgetting them in the intellectual pursuits of which she was so fond. Her mind being now fully developed by varied experience of the world, she was able to discriminate between culture that was real and that which was fictitious. She looked at pictures, which she collected, with the eye of a connoisseur, and had an equally fine taste in music. It was, however, in philosophy, which then enjoyed so great a vogue in French society, that her mental gifts were most noticeable.

The splendid style in which Choiseul lived—at his daily dinners alone there were never less than thirty-five and sometimes as many as eighty guests—though little to her taste brought her into contact with congenial people. To be admitted to this charmed sphere, where “vice lost half its evil by losing all its

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grossness" it was not enough to be well-born or rich. Intellect was absolutely essential. In such a world the qualities that had enabled the little inexperienced duchess of eighteen to "keep her end up" so well in Rome could not fail to be recognized and appreciated. Endowed as she was with enormous wealth, unlimited influence, exceptional charm of manner, great common-sense and an accomplished mind, any other woman in her place would have been driven by the sheer force of circumstances, if not by vanity or ambition, to form a *salon*. But Madame de Choiseul was restrained by an innate modesty that led her to seek to efface herself where others court publicity. It was in correspondence rather than in conversation that she showed to the greatest advantage. This talent, always rare and never more esteemed than in the last years of the old régime, was not one to be concealed. The pleasure of "conversing by post" with the Duchesse de Choiseul was soon eagerly sought by four persons who had acquired the art to perfection—Voltaire, Horace Walpole, the Marquis de Mirabeau and Madame Du Deffand.

Among the friendships the duchess thus formed as a means of forgetting the secret unhappiness of her domestic relations, none afforded her greater consolation than that of Madame Du Deffand. This "debauchee of wit," as Walpole calls her, had had wide experience of life, in the course of which she had lost all her illusions. A member of the noble family of Vichy-Chamrond, she had been married *faute de mieux* to a man who was her inferior in everything but his rank. Beautiful and brilliant, she had found many to console her, among whom was the Regent. Later,

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she made what she termed "a decent arrangement" with Hénault, the President of the Parlement of Burgundy, which lasted for forty years. Neither blindness nor old age impaired the buoyancy of her spirits.

"I have become quite a reformed character," she wrote to a friend, "I have given up cards and go to Mass. As to rouge and the President, I shall not do them so much honour as to renounce them."

When she was sixty-four she and Horace Walpole, who was ten years younger, formed their famous—and on her part not altogether platonic—friendship which was only to end with her death twenty years later. It is by Walpole that the character of this singular woman is perhaps best described.

"Madame Du Deffand," he wrote to Thomas Gray, the poet, "was for a short time the mistress of the Regent, is now very old and stone-blind, but retains all her vivacity, wit, memory, judgment, passions and agreeableness. She goes to operas, plays, suppers, and Versailles; gives suppers twice a week, has everything new read to her, makes new songs and epigrams, ay, admirably, and remembers every one that has been made these fourscore years. She corresponds with Voltaire, dictates charming letters to him, is no bigot to him or anybody, and laughs both at the clergy and the philosophers. In a dispute, into which she easily falls, she is very warm, and yet scarce ever in the wrong; her judgment on every subject is as just as possible; for she is all love and hatred, passionate to her friends to enthusiasm, still anxious to be loved—I don't mean by lovers—and a vehement enemy, but openly. As she can have no

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amusement but conversation, the least solitude and *ennui* are insupportable to her."

Possessed of small means—Choiseul with his characteristic generosity afterwards obtained a pension for her—she had, on losing her sight, taken up her abode in the Convent of St. Joseph, which had likewise sheltered Madame de Montespan in her adversity. It was in this sacred retreat that Madame Du Deffand held her famous *salon* which was for years the rendezvous of all that was most distinguished in the social and intellectual life of Paris.

At first sight nothing appears more inexplicable than the intimacy of the fresh, pure-minded Madame de Choiseul and this Voltaire in petticoats forty years her senior. The young duchess, however, with her quick intuition, like Walpole, had detected under the cynicism and hardness of the old woman a heart that none believed existed. Attracted in the first instance by the brilliant, mordant wit with which the blind marquise masked the bitterness, discontent, and melancholy of her lot, the duchess had been drawn by the secret grief of her own life to sympathize with hers. Misjudged and often betrayed, Madame Du Deffand, perceiving that she was understood, returned the friendship of the duchess with interest.

Having had a grandmother who had married a Choiseul, the old lady was wont to call her young friend "Grandmamma," a pleasantry to which the duchess responded by addressing her as "Granddaughter." These nicknames were soon adopted by their mutual friends, and Choiseul, who stood only second to his wife in the good graces of the witty old marquise, was known as "Grandpapa."



THE DUCHESSE DE CHOISEUL AND THE MARQUISE DU DEFFAND
(After Carmontelle)

[To face p. 41]

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To correspond with her "Granddaughter," whom she saw every day when in Paris, was, when absent, one of the most agreeable occupations of "Grand-mamma." Their correspondence, in which the Abbé Barthélemy was included, lasted for many years, and, like Madame de Sévigné's, to which it is a worthy sequel, presents a picture of the social life of the times of great literary charm and historical interest. Some idea of the duchess's epistolary style may be gathered from the following letter, in which it will be seen how little to her taste was the grand ceremonial life of Versailles.

"I have just dragged myself out of bed," she writes to Madame Du Deffand, "in order that a *frisure*, begun yesterday, may be finished. My poor head is at the mercy of four heavy hands, and, what is worse, my ears are deafened with the hiss and click of curling-tongs. Now they are too hot, now not hot enough. . . . 'What cap will Madame wear to-day? This goes with such or such a dress. Here, Angélique, this will do. Quick, Marianne, fasten on the *panier!*' It is, needless to say, the great Tintin [the duchess's principal maid] who gives these orders, being in the meantime hard at work herself cleaning my watch with an old glove.

"Nor is the making of my toilette all that I am suffering. While it proceeds an equerry is making a speech on the expulsion of the Jesuits, two doctors are talking to me, and an archbishop is showing me some architectural designs, seeking to catch my eye to obtain attention while the others endeavour to occupy my thoughts. You alone fill my heart.

"Now they are calling me from the other room :

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‘Madame, it is a quarter to the hour; the King is on his way to Mass.’ ‘Quick, quick! My bonnet, my shawl, my handkerchief, my fan, my prayer-book! Be sure that I have everything, or I am ruined in the sight of the Court. Ah! at last I am ready. Porters, my chair!’

“The moment I return from Mass, a friend calls. Dressed in the height of fashion, she fills my tiny room with her enormous *panier*. She insists that I am to go on with my letter. ‘I shall not be in your way, Madame, I would not be so much my own enemy as to deprive myself of the pleasure of seeing and talking to you.’ At last she goes. I would give up my letter in despair, but they have come to tell me that the post is about to close for Paris. Have I any letters? Yes, indeed. I am writing to my dear granddaughter, the post must wait!

“*Mon Dieu!* more visitors! A young Irishwoman comes to solicit a favour which I shall not grant her, and a merchant of Tours to thank me for one I have not procured him. Another calls to recommend his brother, whom I shall not see. In fine, it seems as if all the world had been to see me save Mademoiselle Fels [a notorious actress].

“There goes the drum! You would think all the chairs in my ante-chamber had been overturned. The guards are hurrying into the court-yard. The *maitre d’hôtel* is inquiring if I am ready for dinner. He says that the *salon* is full of people and that monsieur is impatient. So then, I must finish my letter another day after all!

“There you have an exact account of all that I have experienced yesterday and to-day in writing you,

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and almost all at the same time. Judge, then, how weary I am of society, and whether it is worth while giving yourself so much trouble to procure it for me. Judge, also, how much your poor hurried, harassed grandmamma must love you to bother about you. Pity her and love her, and you will console her for everything."

VII

The official position, however, of Choiseul by no means necessitated a permanent residence at Versailles. In 1763 he purchased the Château of Chanteloup, situated on the Loire, near Amboise. Fond as he was of luxury and splendour, he spent enormous sums on improvements, till he made it, according to Dutens, who had a wide experience in such matters, the most superb residence possessed by any nobleman in Europe. Considering the magnificence of the establishment he maintained here, one would think that with large and frequent house-parties to entertain, for one who disliked so much "the idle turmoil" of society, there was not much to choose between Versailles and Chanteloup. The house-parties, however, were, till Choiseul's fall, composed principally of intimate friends, Lauzun and his wife, Gleichen, Gatti and the Abbé Barthélemy.

The last was practically one of the family. The duchess had furnished his rooms herself in a manner to make them an ideal retreat for a scholar. "It is a fairy's boudoir!" exclaimed the delighted Abbé when shown them for the first time. Choiseul was himself equally attentive. "I have loaded him with favours,

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I mean to crush him with them," he said, quoting a line from Corneille, when the duchess sought to obtain some post for her friend.

The first time he met Barthélemy after his elevation to the ministry, he said, in the presence of his wife, "Now that it is in my power, I mean to occupy myself with making your fortune. But you must tell me what I am to do. Let me know what you want."

The good Abbé was too modest to desire anything, but neither Choiseul nor the duchess was content with such an answer, and at last to satisfy them he was persuaded to request "a pension of 6,000 livres, chargeable on a benefice, with which he would be perfectly happy." It was at once obtained for him. But it was not Choiseul's idea of a favour, and he forced upon the Abbé the treasurership of St. Martin of Tours when it fell vacant, and the secretaryship of the Swiss Guards, of which he was the Colonel, and which was worth 20,000 livres a year.

The Abbé's great devotion to his benefactors, however, did not prevent him from regretting the name he might otherwise have striven to make for himself.

"You know how deeply conscious I am of all their kindness," he wrote to a friend, "but you do not know that by devoting to them my time, my obscurity, my zeal, and, above all, the reputation I might have made, I have made for their sakes the greatest sacrifices of which I am capable. Sometimes the memory of them comes to haunt me, and then I suffer cruelly. But do not pity me, I know so well the value of what I have that I would give my life rather than lose it."

At Chanteloup the duchess went in for breeding

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sheep and cattle. The farm buildings were famous for their luxury. "She had sixty cows and two bulls, kept in marble stalls." She rose at ten and devoted the rest of the morning to a tour of inspection of the estate, which consisted of endless conferences with the shepherds, cowherds, gardeners and bailiffs. Dinner was served at two, afterwards, if the weather was fine, she went for a drive or payed calls in the neighbourhood. After supper she played backgammon, to which she was devoted, for sou points. When guests were staying at Chanteloup there was a concert every evening given by the band of the Swiss Guards.

The pleasing monotony of this simple rural existence was broken daily by various incidents. A wolf is taken in a snare, to the intense excitement of the Château; the sheep are shorn, and their wool is so fine that it is supposed to be unique, or the big bull is very vicious and the little one very dull. Sometimes visitors call, and the duchess shows them over the estate. Her pet sheep, a magnificent ram named Cathédrale, is admitted to the *salon*, where it slips and slides on the polished floor; or the blue and red macaws are brought in, which she calls "the French and the Swiss Guards of Chanteloup"; or the pet monkey dressed as a grenadier, a sword by his side, a gun on his shoulder and a little cocked hat. "He walks on two legs like a man," reports the Abbé to Madame Du Deffand, "and is as spiteful as the devil."

One season, the terrible condition of the peasants, whose harvests had been completely ruined by heavy and prolonged rains, was the sole topic of conversation. Madame de Choiseul, "who could not," says the Abbé,

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“ bear the idea of anybody being unhappy, scoured the neighbourhood from morning to night to find practical means of relieving their distress. She gave them all she had, even to the farthings she won at backgammon.”

Never were masters more adored by their servants. The post of lodge-keeper having fallen vacant, Choiseul offered it to a valet, but nothing would induce him to accept it, though it was a sinecure. “ As valet, monsieur le duc,” he said, “ I see you fifty times a day, but as lodge-keeper I should scarcely ever see you. I wish to be near my master.” The duchess’s harpsichord player, a child of twelve, became so attached to her as to be unable to control his tears when he saw her “ because he did not know how to prove to her his devotion.”

The retrenchments necessitated in later years by Choiseul’s extravagant mode of life proved how much he and the duchess had endeared themselves to all who had served under them. The *maître d’hôtel*, informed that his services would no longer be required, begged to be retained as kitchen-boy. “ It is a post,” he told the duke, “ you will not be able to abolish.”

VIII

In 1764 this brilliant and enjoyable existence was clouded by the death of Madame de Pompadour, who had done so much to render it possible. This event was a blow to the prestige of Choiseul.

Nobody doubted that the King would take a new mistress, and the Court was full of women only too eager to pick up the royal glove the moment it was

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thrown down. In reality it was a great Court office that had fallen vacant which was sought—the duties attached to which, like that of all other posts at Versailles, existed in name only. The King had his seraglio at the Parc aux Cerfs, and no one hoped to break him of habits that Madame de Pompadour had encouraged him to form.

Among those who desired this enviable sinecure the Duchesse de Gramont even made so bold, it is said, to ask for it. Being a self-willed, domineering woman, she was prepared to govern Louis as she governed her brother. But her tactless and arrogant conduct only served to discredit her, and furnished the enemies of her brother with a new weapon with which he was very nearly destroyed.

One of the signs of the times was the manner in which the philosophers had usurped the supremacy formerly held by the Church. It was they who first gave expression to the popular disrespect for the old worn-out conventions which hung like an Old Man of the Sea round the neck of civilization. Intellectual, cynical, and conscious of their superiority, the accomplished people who composed the *salons* were not to be subjected to the stupid and despotic authority of a creed they had ceased to believe in. Revolutions always begin at the top and work downwards; the mobs, by whom the crumbling walls of a discredited political and social system are finally pulled down, only begin the work of destruction when the ideas and opinions that once inhabited the edifice have been ejected. This is the task of the educated or upper classes. In France, where they did their work most effectually, they begin by declaring war on the Jesuits, who, having

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got possession of the Papacy, sought to impose their arbitrary will on Europe generally.

In the decline of belief, for which they were largely responsible by their arrogant and absurd pretensions, the basis of their power became undermined. The blunders they made in the attempt to recover it gave a handle to the hostility of the intellectuals, of whom Madame de Pompadour and Choiseul, if not the most inveterate of their enemies, were at least the most powerful. Perceiving that the Jesuits were scoffed at and ridiculed by the *salons* and execrated by the masses, Choiseul determined to give them their *coup de grâce*, in France at all events. The mind of the King having been skilfully prepared by Madame de Pompadour, he issued an edict requiring all Jesuits to take an oath which practically robbed them of all their prestige.

At Court, however, where the Queen and the Dauphin were completely controlled by the Jesuits, this high-handed movement raised a terrible storm against Choiseul, of which his enemies sought to take advantage. Their intrigues were defeated by the deaths of the Queen and the Dauphin, but they did not despair. Five years later, when Du Barry became mistress, they obtained a fresh and more favourable opportunity of attacking him. The elevation of this woman of the people to the place of *maîtresse en titre* was the final stage in the process of the moral degeneration of Louis XV which was eating like a cancer into the vitals of the monarchy and into the whole fabric of society. Never before had a woman of so low an origin and so depraved a past appeared at Versailles, much less in so intimate a connection

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with the sovereign. The noblesse were outraged, and the King found the greatest difficulty in getting any one to present her at Court.

By none was this outrage resented more bitterly than Choiseul, his wife and sister. The Duchesse de Gramont, as became one of her rough, outspoken, virago nature, was particularly vehement. Urged by her, Choiseul declared war on the Du Barry. He tried to hinder her presentation, stirred up the Parlements against her—the only opinion for which Louis cared—rained epigrams, libels and pasquinades of all sorts on her; caused her to be hissed in public, insulted everywhere, as well as the few *grandes dames* who had been bribed to associate with her, and ridiculed her under the very eyes of the King. The public who watched his resistance attributed it to the highest motives, and it is probable that Choiseul, who was fully aware of the danger to which such conduct exposed him, courted it for the sake of the popularity it won him.

His enemies, needless to say, were not slow to turn his rashness to account. Nevertheless, in spite of the intrigues of the powerful cabal that was endeavouring to bring about his fall, he might have saved himself had he listened to the advice of disinterested friends.

“The Du Barry,” wrote Madame Du Deffand, “is nothing but a stick, which may be used as a prop or as a defensive or offensive weapon. Grandpapa has it in his power to make what he will of her. His pride is injudicious. He is very badly advised.”

The Duc de Gontaut, who had been the friend of two mistresses, sought to be the friend of the new one to save him. Even the King, who hated new faces

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and regarded Choiseul as indispensable, recommended him to make his peace with the Du Barry.

“You manage my affairs very well,” he told him, “I am satisfied with you. Madame Du Barry does not hate you. She knows you to be clever and bears you no grudge.”

At first she herself was anxious to come to terms with him, and several times sent him word that she would willingly meet him half-way, “reminding him that it was the part of a mistress to choose ministers and not that of ministers to choose mistresses in France.”

But even had he wished to make his peace, Madame de Gramont, who ruled him completely, would not have let him. In her hatred of Madame Du Barry she did not even respect the King. There was no end to which she was not prepared to go. Aware that it was entirely owing to Choiseul's efforts that the hostility of the Parlements, of which the King was afraid, was held in check, she urged him to threaten Louis with a popular rising. But in this matter she overstepped the mark. Louis, to his credit be it said, was not a coward. Fully alive to the republican sympathies of the masses, he was not the man to yield to threats. Having escaped from the thralldom of Cardinal Fleury in the early part of his reign, he dreaded nothing so much as falling under that of another minister. The moment he perceived that Choiseul's victory meant *his* subjection to his will, he determined to break his power before it was too late.

The hints of the exasperated Madame Du Barry, who was never tired of painting Choiseul as the soul of the Parlements, a usurper capable of repeating in

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France the tragedy of Charles I in England, helped to confirm him in this decision. One day she informed "France," as she called Louis, that she had dismissed her Choiseul, meaning her cook who was said to resemble the minister. Another day she seized an orange from the King's plate at dinner and cried as she tossed it into the air, "Saute Choiseul! Saute Praslin!"

It was soon evident that she would have her way. Madame de Gramont became so upset that she was obliged to go to Barèges to take the waters.

But it is truly an ill wind that blows no one any good. The absence of her sister-in-law allowed the duchess at last to be mistress in her own house. "Her departure," she wrote to Madame Du Deffand, "has done me a world of good, it is impossible for me not to appreciate it."

Although he admitted that "the harlot caused him a great deal of trouble," Choiseul showed not the least trace of anxiety. His passion for the witty and beautiful Comtesse de Brionne occupied all his thoughts. Up to the last moment he maintained his wonderful gaiety and serenity.

"He is like Charles VII," said Madame Du Deffand, "no one could lose a kingdom more blithely."

The blow, as all Louis XV's blows, came suddenly, and at the last unexpectedly. The day before Christmas 1770 the Duc de la Vrillière handed the following letter to Choiseul—

"MY COUSIN,

"The dissatisfaction that your conduct causes me compels me to exile you to Chanteloup, for which

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you will leave in twenty-four hours. I should have sent you much farther but for the great respect I have for Madame la Duchesse de Choiseul, for whose health I am much concerned. Take care that you do not act in a way that shall force me to adopt other measures.

“Trusting, my cousin, that God may keep you in his holy care,

“LOUIS.”

The Duc de Choiseul-Praslin, Minister of Marine, was exiled at the same time. He was in bed when the order was brought him, he read it, closed the curtains and slept tranquilly till he was awakened to enter his carriage. Thus fell Choiseul, without the chance of justifying himself, after a ministry of twelve years, during which he had been the veritable King of France.

The ministers who succeeded him, in rapid succession till the Revolution, were only makeshifts. Choiseul's was the last long ministry, the last to have a definite policy, and, in spite of its errors, due chiefly to ill-luck rather than to inability, not unworthy to close the era of the grandeur of France and the monarchy inaugurated by Richelieu.

IX

Some idea of the strength of Choiseul's position may be gathered from the fact that his struggle with Madame Du Barry, which was the eventual cause of his fall, lasted two years. Having succeeded in maintaining himself so long against such odds, the news of his disgrace came in the end as a surprise both to himself and to the public.

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The sensation it created throughout France was immense. Hitherto the people had regarded the ministers with indifference when they did not execrate them. Such a thing as a popular minister according to modern ideas was unknown. Choiseul was the first minister who had ever paid attention to public opinion or shown any sympathy for the people. "It is," says Soltau, "no exaggeration to say that he had the spirit of a Constitutional minister to whom the will of the people is the supreme law." Choiseul was the first in whom the public had taken anything approaching a sympathetic interest. Against the background of the Seven Years' War, with its misery and disgrace, stood out in bold relief his expulsion of the Jesuits and defence of the Parlements—the sole means the nation had of expressing its will. The moment he fell, this interest, made up at once of jealousy, suspicion and admiration, was changed as if by magic into a popularity unheard of before. At once he became the idol of the people. Verses were written in his favour as well as epigrams against his enemies. One pasquinade reflecting on Louis was even sung in the streets of Versailles. His portrait was displayed everywhere—in windows, on snuff-boxes and fans. Opinion emancipated by the scepticism, mockery and reasoning of the philosophers resented his fall as a wanton act of despotism. It was intolerable that a mistress—and such a mistress!—should have the power to disgrace a minister. The popular manifestations in favour of Choiseul were the first expression of the public indignation that, becoming bolder, more violent and more frequent, was to end twenty-five years later in the Revolution.

Nor was this indignation manifested by the people

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alone. The upper classes were equally affronted. Aristocracy, enslaved under Louis XIV, had regained its freedom under Louis XV. The disgrace of the minister was an insult to its pride of birth and its intelligence. His departure resembled a triumphal progress. During the twenty-four hours allotted Choiseul before setting out for Chanteloup the house in which he lived when in Paris was inundated with sympathizers. The streets through which his carriage was to pass were thronged; the windows and even the roofs of the houses were crowded with people who hailed the exile and his wife with acclamation as they appeared. At the Barrière de l'Enfer, the Duc de Chartres—so celebrated in the Revolution as Philippe Égalité—forced his way through the guards and embraced Choiseul for the last time.

But the minister appeared as unmoved by his popularity as by his disgrace. He took his dismissal apparently without a vestige of regret or vexation. He did not even seek an interview with Louis, whom he was never to see again. As for the duchess, she displayed the most perfect firmness of mind, sweetness and tranquillity.

No sooner had the exiles arrived at Chanteloup than there was a rush to visit them, regardless of the consequences of the royal anger. "One saw," says Henri Martin, "what had never been seen before, the Court faithful to a fallen minister."

This pilgrimage was not confined to the personal friends and partisans of Choiseul. "Many persons of both sexes, ladies whom he had loved and others who had detested him, were equally ready to affront the King rather than not be in the fashion." Not to have

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gone to Chanteloup was to lay one open to the charge of not being in society. The Princes of the Blood were among the first to set the example, and the young Dauphiness, Marie Antoinette herself, who owed her marriage to Choiseul, cut the Du Barry as a sign of her sympathy with her victim. Versailles became a desert. The cabal which had overthrown him tried to induce the King to punish those who continued to court him. But Louis merely shrugged his shoulders. He even asked for news from Chanteloup.

Choiseul out of vanity encouraged this concourse of visitors, who continued coming till the end of the reign. His life in exile was even more brilliant than in his heyday. To commemorate this, he erected in the grounds a sort of Chinese pagoda, on the walls of which were placed marble tablets inscribed with the names of those who visited him. Of the former splendours of Chanteloup this costly "toy," as he called it, alone exists to-day. The number was so great that the duchess sometimes forgot those she had seen, and welcomed them twice. "I feel," wrote the Abbé, who of course lived in the house, "as if I were at the mouth of a harbour where a stream of vessels of all nations is constantly coming and going."

The first person to arrive at Chanteloup, after the Choiseuls reached there, was the Duchesse de Gramont, who travelled post from Barèges on receipt of the news. At such a moment the appearance of this arrogant woman, who had snubbed and effaced her in her own house, was more than the amiable duchess could stand, and, plucking up her courage, she determined to assert her independence.

"I have had a talk with Madame de Gramont,"

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she wrote Madame Du Deffand, who frankly hated the duchess, "in the presence of M. de Choiseul, which has eased my mind and preserved my dignity. I was very polite to her and full of consideration for my husband's feelings. I declared that I wished to be mistress in my own house, that everybody could do as they pleased in it, and that I would do all in my power to please them. But I should not bind myself to anybody as a friend. As for Madame de Gramont, I should treat her with the utmost respect, but as for friendship, I neither craved it nor would give it, but for my husband's sake I hoped we might live together on the best of terms."

Madame de Gramont was so taken aback that she began to stammer apologies. The duchess's blood, however, was up, and she cut her short by saying "it was unnecessary to recall things that could only cause bitterness, and that enough had been said."

Madame de Gramont looked at her brother for support, but his disgrace, to which her advice had largely contributed, had weakened her influence. He was silent, and Madame de Gramont was obliged to accept her defeat with the best grace possible.

The victory she had gained over her redoubtable sister-in-law no doubt helped Madame de Choiseul to bear the mortification of having to receive the Comtesse de Brionne, who was also among those who came to Chanteloup. As it had been the object of her life to please her husband, in the hope that her devotion might at last awake in him the affection she craved, she was not the woman, after vindicating her rights in regard to Madame de Gramont, to run the risk of losing what she had gained. Though perfectly

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well aware of her husband's infatuation, she welcomed Madame de Brionne, outwardly at least, with the utmost cordiality. She went to the length of furnishing the room assigned to her with the choicest furniture and pictures at Chanteloup—"a room which it was understood should always be set apart for the countess whenever she cared to repeat her visit, and which no one in the interval should be allowed to occupy."

As compensation, however, the duchess had a visit from Madame Du Deffand, who, in spite of her age and infirmities, was induced to make the fashionable pilgrimage. The joy of the duchess was very great, and no pains were spared to make her "granddaughter" welcome and comfortable. "I can say with truth," the marquise wrote to Horace Walpole, "this visit has been the most agreeable time of my life." She stayed five weeks.

Gleichen also came frequently, though his silent and sombre manner did not add to the gaiety. And the indispensable, devoted Abbé was always there.

To Choiseul, accustomed as he had been for so many years to the glitter and turmoil of the great world, exile under such conditions was but another triumph. His enemies, however, did not rest. Though the *lettre de cachet* that had sent him into exile had likewise stripped him of his offices and the revenues attaching to them, that of Colonel-General of the Swiss Guards, the most valuable of them all, he had still retained. When it had been offered to him he had accepted it on the express understanding that he should retain it in the event of his ceasing to be minister.

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Pride, perhaps, rather than a presage of future adversity, had led him to stipulate for this condition. Louis XV, however, continually urged by the cabal, of which Madame Du Barry was the mouthpiece, was finally provoked into depriving him of it.

To Choiseul the loss of this lucrative post was a serious matter. Naturally extravagant, he had spent money regardless of the future. To continue to maintain his sumptuous mode of life it was necessary to retrench. He was obliged to sell his fine collection of pictures, which, thanks to his popularity, fetched four times what was expected. "This sale," says Grimm, "is the most singular in the history of art." But the sacrifice was not enough, and the duchess parted with her diamonds. To her this privation was nothing compared to the necessity of cutting down the establishment, which entailed the dismissal of many old retainers whose services were useless sinecures. "This reform," she wrote Madame Du Deffand, "breaks my heart." But it was necessary to retain the Hôtel de Choiseul in Paris and Chanteloup itself.

Great, however, though the anxiety of all these financial worries was, neither showed it. Visitors continued to come as before, and life was pretty much what it had been in the past. There were generally eighteen or twenty persons staying in the house. At eight the company assembled in the grand *salon* before supper, which was served at nine. After supper the guests played cards, the duchess clinging to her favourite backgammon. After cards, Choiseul, "seated at a frame for worsted work, held a court till three in the morning, while he stitched,

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dazzling all by his sparkling spirits and droll anecdotes and reminiscences of his ministerial career."

Those who had the privilege of listening to him were astonished at his light-hearted and cheerful manner. "Grandpapa is wonderful!" wrote Madame Du Deffand. "He has discovered new tastes to take the place of his former official occupations. I am firmly convinced that he has no regrets and is perfectly happy." Cheerfulness was indeed cultivated by all. Even Madame de Gramont softened, and said "only pleasant things." "Time does not pass, but flows away without our perceiving it," wrote the Abbé. "We are always inventing new amusements."

When Choiseul, during a slight indisposition, amuses himself with reading fairy stories, all Chanteloup follows his example, "surprised to find how much they resemble real life." Now the guests take to flying kites. Again, acting is the rage. While this lasts nothing is talked of but rehearsals, reading parts, and trying on costumes. The Château is turned upside down, the library ransacked, solitary people are to be found in the gardens, passages, and all sorts of places, book in hand, declaiming their parts in an undertone. "All acted well," wrote the Abbé, "but Madame de Choiseul bore away the palm. She looked no more than twelve on the stage, and was so little embarrassed that she might have been acting there fifteen or twenty years."

During the day there were excursions on the Loire, ending, when the weather was fine, in a dance in the open air, veritable *fêtes champêtres*, for which the old régime was famous. Then, too, there was coursing, or hunting in the park, though the latter

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was a failure as there was nothing to hunt. Yet the parties were very merry all the same, and the Abbé, seated on a pony with his legs almost touching the ground, created no end of laughter, till one day he had a fall and broke his collar-bone. The anxiety of the duchess was extreme till the Abbé was pronounced out of danger. "I passed horrible hours," she wrote Madame Du Deffand, "a prey to ceaseless suspense." He recovered, however, and all went as gaily as before till Louis XV died, and the exile was over.

With the accession of the new king, Choiseul at once returned to Paris. "He was received like our Lord at Jerusalem," says Madame Cramer; "people mounted on the house-tops to see him pass by." The poets celebrated his return, and the *salons* fêted him and the duchess.

Every one imagined, in fact, that the King would give him the government, and the Queen, who owed her crown to his policy, worked in his favour. But Louis XVI was not to be persuaded to recall him to power.

"You've grown fat, M. de Choiseul," was all he said when Marie Antoinette herself presented the ex-minister to him; "you're losing your hair and growing bald." After this, to dream any longer of returning to office would have been the height of folly, and Choiseul wisely decided to return to Chanteloup, and resume the magnificent idleness of life there, for which he had secretly a much greater predilection than for the splendour of power with its ceaseless cares and responsibilities.

To the duchess the years that followed were perhaps as happy as any in her life. Her husband had

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at last begun to appreciate the full value of the woman he had married, and gave her a proof of this late-born affection during an illness that nearly proved fatal to her.

“On the point of being buried alive,” says Dutens, who had the story from the duchess herself, “she heard every word that was said by those about her without being able to show the smallest sign of life. M. de Choiseul, who had been forced from the room, was informed that she was no more. They prepared to have the last duties performed. It is impossible to conceive the affliction of her husband. He had never before experienced the fear of losing her. Suddenly, while his friends were trying to calm him, he ran out of the room crying that he must see his wife for the last time, and, rushing into her chamber, threw himself by her side, exclaiming, ‘My dear wife! My dear wife!’ Madame de Choiseul told me herself that these piercing cries recalled her to life. She was in a profound catalepsy. ‘The cries of that man whom you know I adore,’ she said, ‘were alone able to bring me to life.’ She presently came to herself and found she had strength enough to throw her arms around his neck.”

In failing to return to power, Fortune was perhaps kinder to Choiseul than he or his wife dreamt. For as it is not likely that with all the will in the world he would, in the pass to which things had come, have been able to please both the Court and the nation, it was fortunate for his reputation that he was not permitted to try. Fortune favoured him, too, in dying before his popularity had waned. During his brief illness many were the marks of attachment and respect

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he received. The great friends who had come to Chanteloup were constantly at his bedside, Paris was agog with excitement. It was felt that with him one of the last links of the great past was broken. "Four secretaries," says Bachaumont, "were kept occupied in writing bulletins; the crowds were immense. The Queen sent a page several times a day to ask for news. Up to the last he was faithful to his character, his courage, and his egotistical display. To his dying moment, he had the air of granting audiences, and made a fine end."

His death occurred on May the 8th of 1785. The same day a memorial service was held at St. Eustache at which all that was distinguished in Paris assisted. Afterwards the body was transported to Amboise, where it was buried in the new cemetery that Choiseul had given to the town.

In his will he remembered all his servants, mentioning them by name and thanking them for all their services. More than fifty of them received legacies. To Madame de Brionne, his last inamorata and the only one he mentioned, he left the diamond in his order of the Golden Fleece. Madame de Gramont was residuary legatee. The duchess, who on his advice years before had obtained a legal separation of property to save what remained of her fortune from the creditors, nobly undertook to pay all his debts, which amounted to six millions, and to guarantee the legacies. The day after his death she retired to the Convent of the Récollettes with a single servant and Choiseul's dog Chanteloup. For her the world's greatness was over.

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X

The wonderful self-control which the duchess had displayed during her husband's illness completely deserted her when all was over. Her grief was terrible to witness. But it was not long before painful questions as to the means of subsistence, all the cares and worries which accompany ruin, forced themselves with brutal and sordid insistence into the sacred precincts of her sorrow, giving her an opportunity to put into practice those maxims of philosophy she was so fond of quoting in her letters, and which it is so much easier to profess when one lives in the lap of luxury than to apply in the day of adversity.

To make the effort of subordinating the immense loss she had sustained to her sense of duty the harder, she was afflicted with a painful illness which necessitated an operation, from the effects of which she never fully recovered. Any other woman would have been crushed by the triple burdens of grief, physical suffering and the debts she had undertaken to discharge. The privations to which she was subjected filled the devoted Abbé with "a feeling of consternation." He could not get accustomed to see her reduced to two little rooms in a convent, without air or comfort. "It makes me feel," he wrote to a friend, "as if I were paying with usury for the delightful past at Chanteloup." But her courage never faltered.

She had managed to reduce her husband's enormous debts by some two millions of livres, when the Revolution cut short her heroic task. On the suppression of the convents she was obliged to seek another shelter, and after moving from one lodging to

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another, finally took up her abode on the third floor of a house in the Rue St. Dominique behind the Palais de Bourbon. Of her former friends the Abbé was almost the only one she had left. His daily visits were to both their sole pleasure, and that they might not be deprived of it, as he was now old and infirm the duchess preserved a small room for him in case he should be too tired or ill to return home when he called. It was a timely forethought, for one day the honest old fellow slipped on the stairs and was so badly injured that six months elapsed before he could be moved.

Thus, clinging to one another for mutual protection and comfort, these two simple and loyal souls, the last of the dazzling company of the triumphant existence at Chanteloup, entered the maelstrom of the Revolution in which the world, as they had known it, was engulfed. How bitter must have been their reflections as they contrasted the General Overthrow, as they had conceived it in the elegant refinement of the *salons* of those palmy days when Choiseul was prime minister, and all the world was expecting and working for the golden age, with the real form in which it arrived, with its "law of the suspect" and its September massacres, the suspense of the tocsin and the horrors of the tumbrils!

Each day had some fresh disaster, some new regret for them. The decrees of the Convention, daily abrogating the old laws and obligations, gradually reduced them to the verge of ruin. The spirits of the Abbé, who had been stripped of everything but the Curatorship of the Cabinet of Medals, were all but crushed.



ABBÉ BARTHÉLEMY
(From an old print)

(To face p. 65)

Duchesse de Choiseul

“Life is only a succession of evils,” he wrote to a friend. “If Fortune till now treated me with too much kindness, she is cruelly revenging herself for it.”

Nevertheless, the old man made a brave effort to bear up for the sake of his “divine citoyenne,” as he playfully called the duchess. Inured by suffering, she had learnt to bear it, and it had less dismay for her than for him. The shafts that struck her which she felt the most were those that were indirect.

Both had been so long overlooked in the furious persecution of all who recalled the life of the old Court, that they might have expected to continue so—she by virtue of her complete seclusion from the world for years, he by his age, his claim to fame, and his irreproachable conduct, which had kept him outside the pale of political hatred. But the blow fell suddenly when least expected.

The Abbé was denounced as a suspect and carried off one morning to the prison of the Madelonnettes. In this hour of danger and despair the duchess, in whose lodging he had been apprehended, displayed the greatest courage and coolness. Accompanied by a representative of the people, whom she induced to support her, she went to the Committee of Public Safety, and vehemently protested against the Abbé’s arrest on the ground that “imprisonment in his condition of health and at his age was equivalent to death.” She never gave a thought to the fact that in doing so she risked her own head to save his. Her nature, like that of a Roman matron, was above such considerations.

The members of the Committee, usually proof against pity, were taken by surprise, and showed a

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disposition to grant her prayer. One alone resisted on the ground that the Abbé's famous work the *Voyage du jeune Anarcharsis en Grèce* "breathed the very spirit of aristocracy." But Madame de Choiseul, who had charmed the society of the old régime, the correspondent on equal terms with a Voltaire or a Madame Du Deffand, was not a woman to be at a loss for an answer. She prevailed by her wit, her energy, and the heroism of her conduct, and after a day of the greatest agitation succeeded at 10.30 at night in carrying the Abbé herself home from prison.

One can imagine the feelings of the two after the agitating experience of that day. Once more they picked up the threads of a painful existence, sorrowfully dragging out through the winter lives that had become a burden to both. But such peace as they found was not of long duration. Paris—all France—was *en pleine terreur*. The duchess's dauntless indifference to the danger she ran in risking her head to save the Abbé's was sufficient to render her suspect. With the odour of noble and royal blood in their nostrils and its savour on their tongue, the Apaches of anarchy, to whom the infamous "law of the suspect" had given a sinister power, the stoicism of the noblesse was gall and wormwood.

One morning in the spring of 1794, two officials, armed with an order for the duchess's arrest, appeared at her lodging and carried her off. Fortunately the prison in which she was incarcerated was Les Oiseaux, the healthiest and most cheerful in Paris. Formerly the property of the Marquis du Lau, it owed its name to an immense aviary in the garden, which was visible

Duchesse de Choiseul

from the street. At the beginning of the Revolution the "patriots" of the section showed at once the value of their humanitarian ideals and their utter incapacity for self-government by scaling the walls and restoring the birds to liberty, with the result that all that did not die of hunger were devoured by the cats of the section!

Here she found Madame de Gramont, whom she had not seen since Choiseul's death. Time had taken the sting from their old hostility, and in the presence of a common peril the two women became reconciled. Unlike the Duchesse de Choiseul, Madame de Gramont had spent the intervening years since her brother's death in the world she loved so much. Rich, high-born and clever, she had continued up to the end to hold a prominent place in society. With her haughty nature she was not to be induced to emigrate like so many others, and had remained in Paris to brave the Revolution, growing more arrogant and contemptuous with each excess of the mob. To escape suspicion for such a woman was impossible, she did not even put herself to the trouble of attempting it. She was arrested for harbouring her friend the Marquise du Châtelet, the wife of Voltaire's "divine Émilie's" son, who after emigrating had foolishly returned to Paris.

After being detained a few days at Les Oiseaux, both were removed to the private asylum of the ferocious Belhomme, whose conduct leads one to suppose that he was himself afflicted with the malady he professed to treat. Here as long as they had money to pay their board they were comparatively safe, for Belhomme was a friend of those in power.

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But the time came when their money ran short, and, unable to obtain credit, they were transferred at Belhomme's request to the Conciergerie. This was the gate to the guillotine. Summoned before the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Duchesse de Gramont presented a striking contrast to her old enemy Madame Du Barry, who was arrested at the same time, and, alone of the women of the old Court, died frantic with terror. The courage with which she confronted the redoubtable Fouquier-Tinville was unparalleled.

When asked whether she had sent money to various *émigrés* she haughtily replied, "I was going to say no, but my life is not worth a lie." After that she only thought of saving her friend. "That you should kill me," she cried with inexpressible contempt, "me—who despise and detest you, and who would have stirred up all Europe against you—nothing can be more natural. But what has Madame du Châtelet, who has never taken the least part in political affairs, and to whom not the least suspicion can attach, done to harm you?"

This chivalrous plea, however, availed nothing.

Madame du Châtelet was offered her life if she would reveal the secret of her young son's whereabouts. "Never!" she replied, with a spirit to match the Gramont's. "Denouncing is a civic virtue too new for me to acquire it." Both went to the scaffold "treating their judges like valets."

At the same time Madame de Choiseul lost another relation in the Princesse de Monaco, *née* Choiseul-Stainville, whose husband had been one of the frequent visitors at Chanteloup. It was said of this young and lovely woman that she was so unpractical

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and giddy that she believed "diamonds grew in rings and fruit in baskets." Yet when it came to the guillotine, not even Madame de Gramont mounted it more courageously. Sentenced to death by Fouquier-Tinville, the "Monaco woman" obtained a day's reprieve, on the ground that she was *enceinte*, to cut her magnificent hair, which she did with a piece of broken glass, so that "the executioner's hand might not soil it." She also rouged her cheeks before entering the tumbril "to conceal the paleness, which might otherwise be mistaken for fear, should she feel a momentary faintness."

The duchess daily expected the same fate, seeing that neither age nor infirmity was respected. But the seeds of her goodness, it is pleasing to the credit of human nature to relate, had fallen on fertile soil. After the fall of Robespierre, the people of her section petitioned for and obtained her release. She had been in prison six months when she was once more permitted to return to her home. During this period not a day passed but that she believed it to be her last; yet she never betrayed the least sign of weakness, and left the prison with as serene a front as she had entered it.

XI

The state of mind of the poor Abbé during this terrible interval may be imagined. The anxiety he had suffered, added to his own troubles and infirmities, had completely broken him. The joy of meeting his adored duchess, of knowing that she was safe from further molestation, was too much for him. He died

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shortly after her release. His only regret in leaving the world was the thought of the pain his death would cause his friend. Aware that his end was at hand, he entreated those around him to conceal his condition from her, in order to save her the pang of watching him die. Noblest of *cicisbeos*, most unselfish of friends, his conduct throughout his life was based on his motto : "Hate your enemies as if they would some day be your friends."

Shortly after the Abbé's death, the Duc de Gontaut followed him to the grave at the age of ninety. Blind and ruined, he had by a miracle escaped the guillotine, on which all those nearest and dearest to him had perished. After his death the duchess no longer went abroad. Paris was to her a desert filled with bitter memories. The scaffold or emigration had carried off all her friends. Nevertheless she did not remain inactive. Obligated to abandon the task of paying off her husband's debts, she set herself to obtain the release of her nephew, an *émigré* who, shipwrecked on the coast of Normandy, had been imprisoned as a traitor. She succeeded, only to learn that instead of being permitted to return to Paris, he had been again expelled the country. Informed that he was destitute, slender though her own resources were, she reduced herself to actual want to relieve his distress.

Her efforts in behalf of her nephew had revived the memory of a name which had once been one to conjure with in France. The political principles associated with it saved it from the disrespect into which most of the other reputations of the old régime had fallen. People who had forgotten Madame de Choiseul were surprised to learn that she was still

Duchesse de Choiseul

living, and the rumours that floated about concerning her misfortunes excited a general feeling of pity.

“One day when she was alone in the attic to which she was now reduced,” says Grasset, “there was a knock at the door. She went to answer it, and found a stranger on the threshold. At the sight of her he seemed embarrassed, then, as she asked him in her gentle voice what he wanted, he exclaimed in agonized accents: ‘Oh, Madame la Duchesse, have you forgotten the little Pierre who used to keep the paths clean in the grounds of Chanteloup, and to whom you used to say, “Well, little Pierre, what is your idea of perfect happiness? If you had a wish, what would it be?”’ “An ass and a cart,” I used to reply, and one day you gave them to me. It was the beginning of my fortune. I am rich, very rich indeed now. And you—oh, Madame la Duchesse, can it really be true what they say, that you are not so any more? Oh, but, indeed, you are, for all that I have is yours. It was you who gave me the ass and the cart, and I have only come to pay you back what I owe. I shall never be happy, Madame la Duchesse, if you refuse.’”

Sobs broke his voice, he could say no more for the grief that choked him. For a moment it seemed to the duchess as if the attic, by the touch of a magician’s wand, was converted into the Château of Chanteloup. “She saw herself once more light-hearted, happy and idolized, near him she had loved the best in the place she had loved the most.”

But Madame de Choiseul was not a woman whose distress is easy to relieve. The griefs that afflicted her were spiritual rather than material. What mattered

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it now where she lived, or what she was? No palace, not even Chanteloup itself, no luxury with which she could be surrounded would make life for her anything but the abomination of desolation. The gratitude of the noble peasant whom she had befriended thirty years before was worth more to her than his charity. She thanked him with tears streaming down her cheeks for his devotion, but she would not accept his offer. It should never be said that the widow of Choiseul was dependent on the alms of servants.

It was not for herself that she was proud, but for the honour of her husband's memory. Of this she was very jealous. The publication of the Marquis de Bouillé's memoirs, in which Choiseul was bitterly attacked, stung her to the quick. In a letter to Bouillé demanding a public refutation of his accusations, she taunted him with having "assassinated a widow on the tomb of her husband." His refusal to oblige her she treated as a deliberate insult.

So great was the respect her dignity in misfortune inspired, that one man who did not even know her, learning that she refused to solicit aid from the government, wrote anonymously to Bonaparte to acquaint him with her condition and recommend her to his notice. Bonaparte, to his credit be it said, though constantly inundated with such appeals, seldom failed to respond to them, and it was only such noble families as scorned assistance at his hand that failed to obtain repatriation or the restitution of their property.

But the favours that Madame de Choiseul would not seek for herself she was ready to demand for others. At the same time her anonymous sympathizer appealed to Bonaparte on her behalf, she herself wrote

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him to obtain the favour of having her nephew's name struck off the list of *émigrés*. This letter was conveyed to Josephine, who in sending it to her husband wrote on the margin recommending him to grant the prayers of the "*ci-devant* Duchesse de Choiseul, a woman loved and respected by all who know her, and who has supported all her misfortunes with unparalleled fortitude."

The same night Bonaparte granted her request in a letter of the "greatest politeness, in which he thanked her for reminding him of it," and offered to oblige her at any time to the utmost of his ability. But death rendered all further assistance superfluous. Her nephew only reached her in time to close her eyes. Without him she would have died as deserted as she was destitute. Death, it is easy to understand, could have no terror for her; she looked on it as a release. "The day of her death," wrote her nephew, "was the same to her as any other day. Up to the last she displayed that fortitude, that strength of character, that nobility of mind, that clearness of intellect and superiority of judgment which from her youth had caused her to be regarded as an honour to her sex and a glory to her family."

Before dying she dictated a letter to Bonaparte in which she thanked him for having permitted her nephew to return to France and be with her at the last.

It was her wish to be buried beside Choiseul under the superb mausoleum she had erected to his memory at Amboise. But as her nephew had not the means to execute this request, he had her body interred in the cemetery of the Convent of St. Joseph, where

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Madame Du Deffand had been buried, till such time as Fortune should smile on him again. Alas! before that happened, the Convent of St. Joseph was razed and the bodies buried there were removed to the Cemetery of Picpus, where, failing any one to claim them, they were placed in the *fosse commune*!

PRINCESS TARAKANOF

1752 (?)—1775 (?)



PRINCESS TARAkanOF
(After Flavitzy)

[To face p. 77

“ In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree

* * * *

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves ;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice ! ”

COLERIDGE : “ Kubla Khan.”

PRINCESS TARAKANOF

1752 (?)—1775 (?)

I

AMONG the kings and the cardinals, the ministers, the generals and the philosophers, the *grandes dames* and the *grandes amoureuses*, the poets, the painters, and the musicians enshrined in the eighteenth century Valhalla, the adventurers and the adventuresses are scarcely less numerous and attract scarcely less attention. As was fitting in an age of adventure, of which the climax was the discovery of the New World of the Revolution, it was by the adventurers that some of the chief rôles were acted on that stage, so charmingly decorated by Watteau and Boucher, when to the music of an orchestra conducted by Pope or Florian, Marivaux and Metastasio, the scene of the picturesque comedy constantly shifted from a *fête champêtre* to a

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battle-field, or from the boudoir of a king's mistress to the *oubliettes* of Giant Despair.

It is by a Maurice de Saxe, *bâtard*, broken, *brulé*, that France is saved from invasion. *Chapeau bas*, *grandees* of Spain! tremble, Europe! whilst Ripperda, Dutch charlatan and adventurer, basks in the smile of fickle Fortune. A Comtesse de Lamotte, shiftiest and shadiest of swindlers, shakes the throne of France to its foundations. Cagliostro, coming no one knows whence and living no one knows how, obtains a page in history on which to write his name when scarce a minister in Europe on the eve of the Revolution is given the space of a line. The memoirs of Casanova, *chevalier d'industrie*, are read and re-read by a posterity that has never so much as turned the leaves of the masterpieces of Voltaire or Rousseau.

But these are the princes of vagrancy, the Knights Commander of the Order of Industry. In the vagabond army that followed in their wake there was a vast peripatetic horde belonging to the rank and file who won no decoration, but who, had they been given the opportunity, would have displayed equal, and perhaps even greater, talents. They were to be found everywhere, blown like locusts over Europe, creeping into palaces and prisons alike, ready for any job that offered, from mounting a throne like Theodore, King of Corsica, to picking pockets like Joseph Balsamo, impostors and swindlers not because of any natural bent that way, but impelled by the most powerful of all instincts—the instinct of self-preservation.

Russia was the happiest of all happy hunting-grounds for them. With a little luck anything was possible there. Had not the peasant wife of Peter

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the Great reigned after him? To what heights had not the pastry-cook Mensikof attained? Was it luck or brains that made Biron, the groom-lover of the Czarina Anne, Duke of Courland? Had not Razumovski, a choir-boy, actually married the Czarina Elizabeth?

A desire to mount the Alps of life is characteristic of almost all adventurers; but it was only in Russia that they dreamt of scaling the throne. This dazzling peak had been conquered too often for the difficulties of the ascent to act as a deterrent. Providing the season, or opportunity, was favourable, there was no reason why any one should not make the attempt to reach the summit—and succeed, too, as so many had done.

It was this fact that caused so much importance to be attached to the pitiful effort of poor little Princess Tarakanof.

II

The first recorded appearance of this pathetic adventuress, whose career from the beginning to the end was surrounded with mystery, took place in Paris in 1772. Coming from England or Holland—but whence or why matters not—she calls herself the Princess Aly Émettée de Vlodomir. She is young—twenty-five at the most—blonde and beautiful, with the hectic flush of the *poitrinaire*. Her eyes are her most remarkable features—they are large and lustrous and possess the strange quality of changing colour, now blue, now black, which gives to their dreamy expression a peculiar, mysterious air. She has very fascinating

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and dignified manners, speaks or understands several languages, and has all the accomplishments of a high-born and well-educated woman.

With her are two Germans, or men with German names—one, a young man of good appearance, calls himself Baron von Embs, and, though without any resemblance to her whatever, claims to be a relation. The other, an elderly man known as Baron von Schenk, appears to combine the functions of *maître d'hôtel* with those of a confidential adviser.

The princess refuses to satisfy completely the curiosity she arouses, but she lets it be understood that her principality of Vlodomir is in Circassia and that she is the heroine of a tragic romance. The mystery which surrounds her adds to her charm. In Paris, to be a Circassian is a recommendation. It suggests the slave-mart and the harem. The rumour runs that the Princess Aly Émettée is a fugitive odalisque.

As she lives in a luxurious style she soon has a large circle of acquaintances. In the *salon* of her fine house in the Île Saint Louis, then one of the most fashionable quarters of Paris, one meets many illustrious Polish refugees, notably Oginski and Massalski, the Bishop of Wilna, late chiefs of the Confederation of Bar. Prince Oginski, in particular, manifests a very lively though purely platonic interest in the fair Circassian, who plays almost as well as himself on the harp, pedals for which instrument he has lately invented.

The Comte de Rochefort-Velcourt, who has the honour—a very sterile one—of representing the Duke of Limburg at the French Court, is another and more ardent admirer. In fact, all the habitués of the

Princess Tarakanof

princess's *salon* adore her ; but while Oginski's adoration is confined to harp-playing, and Rochefort-Velcourt's to talking of love and marriage, a certain M. de Marine, an old beau and *brûle-pavé*, rich and vain, manifests his in a much more practical fashion by lending the charmer large sums of money.

Suddenly a catastrophe occurs. The princess's putative relation, the young Baron von Embs, is arrested for debt ; and one learns that he is no baron at all, but the renegade son of a rich merchant of Ghent, named Vantoers, by whom he has been expelled from the paternal roof for I know not what discreditable conduct. The reputation of the princess, however, weathers the storm. Her admirers accept her serene assurance that there are " certain mysterious reasons " for her mode of life. Marine even advances the money necessary to obtain the release of the equivocal Vantoers. The suspicions of the police, however, are not so easily silenced, and to escape from their espionage the princess and her two barons suddenly decamp, to the utter dismay of Marine, who realizes that he has been duped of 52,000 livres. Old men always pay dear for the privilege of adoring young and charming women.

A few days later the princess and her two companions arrive at Frankfort, and proceed to live in the same luxurious style as before. " It is understood that she is expecting to receive money every day from Persia." After a time the creditors, regardless of the difficulties of communicating with the East, once again imprison Vantoers, and the princess is forced to leave the hotel in which she has been living. Fortunately at this juncture the Comte de Rochefort-Velcourt

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happens to arrive in Frankfort to meet his master the Duke of Limburg. His admiration of the lovely Circassian and his faith in the principality of Vlodomir still survive. Though unable himself to give substance to the imaginary bills of exchange she is daily expecting from Persia, he draws such a touching picture of the sad situation in which he has found the brilliant princess that His Serenity desires to see her and, as in romances, falls in love with her at sight.

Philip Ferdinand, Duke regnant of Limburg and Styrum, Prince of the Empire, Count of Oberstein, and possessor of several fiefs in Lorraine and elsewhere, was one of those petty potentates, formerly as numerous in Germany as leaves are thick in Vallombrosa, whose dominions were so small that a stag could have leapt them all at a bound. Like the majority of his kind, however, he gave himself the airs of a sovereign. He had a court, but, alas! no courtiers; an army, but no men—he was himself the only officer; a treasury, but no funds. He kept, however, his representatives at Versailles and Vienna, whom he seldom or never paid, conferred titles of nobility, distributed decorations, and laid claim to the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. It was on business in regard to this subject, over which he had been at law for fifteen years, that he had come to Frankfort. Excessively vain, he was also exceptionally credulous. Though over forty, he was as unsophisticated as a school-boy. Of “an amorous complexion,” like M. de Porceaugnac in Molière’s comedy, he had been vainly seeking all his life for a companion according to his heart when it was ravished by the seductive Circassian.

Though deeply in debt himself, he pays her most

Princess Tarakanof

pressing creditors, appeases the others—taking care, however, to leave Vantoers in prison—and gallantly puts his castle of Oberstein at the disposal of the princess pending the arrival of her Persian funds, an offer she at once accepts.

Installed at Oberstein, the Princess Aly Émettée's empire over the duke daily increases. He would fain have some return for his devotion, but she knows how to restrain it within the bounds of propriety whilst encouraging it. To prove her gratitude, she promises to pay off the mortgages on his estates—when she receives the millions from her bankers in Ispahan. Moreover, as she pretends to know intimately all the most influential personages in Europe, she undertakes to exert her own influence in his behalf in Copenhagen and St. Petersburg to obtain a favourable termination to his long and costly law-suit over his claim to the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. Infatuation gives a free rein to his credulity. Doubt her? Has he not seen scraps of letters and petitions that she has addressed to ministers and kings?

One day he finds her in tears. In response to his tender inquiries as to the cause of her sadness, she tells him that she has received a letter from Prince Galitzin, Grand Chancellor of Russia, that she is about to be recalled to Persia to be married. Carried away by his passion, the infatuated duke immediately offers to marry her himself, threatening if she refuses “to shut himself up in a cloister.” The princess appears to be surprised at his offer, but she lets him understand that it is anything but distasteful to her, and asks for time to communicate with Galitzin. The delay this necessitates only serves to inflame still more the

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passion of the duke. He becomes insanely jealous of Rochefort-Velcourt, who also aspires to her hand, and has him imprisoned. The affair causes a scandal. The subjects of the duke cease to conceal their doubts as to the origin and fortune of the princess, and openly style her "the adventuress." His Serenity, however, like Louis XV, is impervious to public opinion, and when at last the princess has the pleasure of informing him that Galitzin "authorizes" her to marry him he is overwhelmed with joy.

At this stage Hornstein, the duke's representative at Vienna and the most sensible of his advisers, informed of the indignation of the good people of Limburg, arrives on the scene. He is a profound theologian and very ardent Catholic, with a passion for making converts. The princess takes his measure at a glance. She speaks modestly of her great wealth, manifests a desire to be instructed in the tenets of the Catholic religion, asks him to be her mentor. Hornstein, with whom money is as scarce as with his master, is inclined to believe in this colossal fortune which is to replenish the empty treasury of Limburg, but he wants some proof of its existence "to silence scandal and above all to prove to Germany that a Duke of Limburg makes no *mésalliance*."

Far from being disconcerted by such an exigency, the princess "finds it quite natural," and whilst waiting for the proofs to arrive she condescends to give more details of her past. She is really the Princess of Azov, a principality in Asia under the suzerainty of the Empress of Russia, and the sole heiress of the House of Vlodomir. Become an orphan at the age of four, she had been brought up at the Court of the Shah of



ELISABETH PETROWNA
Fille de Pierre I.^{er} Impératrice de
Moscovie, Née le 29. Décembre 1710.

CZARINA ELIZABETH
(From an old print)

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Persia by her uncle, who, some two years ago, at a period of great political agitation, had sent her to Europe for safety. The estates to which she is heiress had been sequestered in 1749 for twenty years, but the term of the sequestration has expired, and she has only to obtain the sanction of the Czarina to enter into full possession of the revenues of her principality. To suggest that the Czarina might raise obstacles is absurd, for the Shah has taken up her cause, having, she lets it be understood mysteriously, a special reason for supporting her.

If in our own times, with the telegraph and the *Almanach de Gotha* to facilitate inquiries, bogus barons and *soi-disant* countesses still manage to flourish, how much easier must it have been in the eighteenth century for a fair, fascinating Princess of Azov to obtain credence? In 1772 the means of communication were so slow, and geographical and ethnological knowledge so imperfect, that the existence of a principality of Azov under the suzerainty of Russia was not easy to inquire into. The infatuated Duke of Limburg, bewitched by a pair of wonderful eyes that "changed colour, now blue, now black," does not even make the attempt, while Hornstein, rigid mentor though he is, dazzled by these glimpses of the Golconda he wants to believe in, sees in the princess a brilliant conquest for the Church, and manifests an indulgence more than paternal for the folly of his master, who, with a right royal disdain of scandal, shows himself everywhere in public with the Circassian as if he wished to call the whole of his tiny duchy to witness the engagement he had contracted.

Confident of marrying him, she at last consents to

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lower the barrier she has raised against his desire, whereby she entangles him the tighter in her toils. But in spite of her triumph, the Princess of Azov cannot help feeling considerable anxiety at the difficulty and uncertainty of obtaining any news from Ispahan. She sees herself surrounded by pitfalls and perils of all sorts. Vantoers, left to languish in prison in Frankfort, complains that he is forgotten, and threatens to make trouble. The duke, notwithstanding her boasted influence at Copenhagen and St. Petersburg, loses his law-suit and finds himself reduced to a state of distress that insensibly leads to suspicion. His subjects boldly express their discontent. The princess is hissed in public. Finally Hornstein receives an anonymous letter depicting the princess in the blackest colours, speaking of the dupes she has made in Berlin, London and Paris as a fact beyond dispute.

Time was when the duke had treated such rumours with disdain. After listening to them one day when related to him at a hunt by a person whom he honoured with his confidence, he had struck the fellow with the butt of his gun for answer. But now, overwhelmed with debts, without credit or influence, at the end of his resources, the idea that he should be the dupe of an adventuress as well is the last straw. He demands an immediate explanation of the charges in Hornstein's letter, and without waiting for it bursts into violent reproaches of her conduct.

She listens to him with scornful tranquillity, and when he is breathless, replies that she was prepared for such treatment from a man who is the plaything of false friends, the miserable slave of a prejudiced public opinion, and in a voice broken with emotion pities the

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weakness which, seeing she will soon be a mother, has led her to dishonour herself for love of him.

This unexpected revelation—a fiction, by the way—quite extinguishes the duke's indignation. She has scarcely finished when he implores her pardon and bursts into piteous apologies. In a word, he loves her and will always love her, be she poor, low-born, even guilty ; and only asks that she tell him the whole truth about herself.

The truth ! At the mention of this magic word whose secret has perplexed the minds of the deepest thinkers and tormented the hearts of the most earnest believers, the princess or adventuress, what you will, becomes sublime.

“ You ask me for the truth ? ” she replies, after a moment's silence. “ You would not believe it, if I told it to you. What is truth ? What is falsehood ? In this strange comedy, called life, that we are condemned to play, and in which we are not permitted to choose our rôles, tell me if you are able to distinguish the masks from the faces. Each one deceives himself and deceives the others. All lie, but some lie without effect and are ruined ; others understand how to influence the future. They lie, if you will, but systematically ; and it is among them that I wished to be classed. Condemn me, make it a crime, if you dare, to love you and to be willing, in saving myself, to save you with me.”

The Duke of Limburg was too much a child of his century not to be caught by an avowal so typical of it. It brings him to her feet and keeps him there. His conduct henceforth is that of a man bewitched. Once more she pretends to be able to mend his broken

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fortunes, and to serve him the more completely, makes him an accomplice without initiating him into all her secrets. In his letters to her, which have been preserved, he speaks of "the system" as horrible, but he lends himself to it, nevertheless, without resistance.

It is at this stage that the romance of the mysterious princess, who has till now been merely an ordinary adventuress like hundreds of others, suddenly takes a new turn, and passes out of the region of the commonplace into the domain of history.

III

Of the Polish exiles who in those days were to be found in such numbers all over Europe, many, attracted by the cheapness of living and the sympathy of the inhabitants, had sought a temporary asylum in Limburg and the neighbouring petty principalities. The wealthiest lived at Mannheim, near Oberstein; the rest were scattered about in small towns and villages along the Rhine. In one of these, Mosbach, a very intelligent and good-looking young fellow named Domanski had taken up his abode. Intensely patriotic, he had been one of the first to join the Confederation of Bar, which had as its object the expulsion of the Russians from Polish territory.

The disastrous termination of this adventure, in which he had conducted himself with the reckless courage and impetuosity characteristic of the Poles, had failed to damp his enthusiasm for a cause that was lost. Ever dreaming of Poland, which he loved as a man loves a mistress, he passed his time in exile plotting and scheming to redress the wrongs of his

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country, ready for any deed, however daring, however impossible.

In his retreat at Mosbach, in the neighbourhood of Mannheim, he had heard—as who had not?—of the mysterious sorceress who bewitched the Duke of Limburg at Oberstein. He had a servant, one Joseph Richter, who had formerly been in the service of Prince Oginski in Paris, which he had exchanged for that of the heiress of the House of Vlodomir, whom he had subsequently followed to Frankfort. That Richter should talk to Domanski of his former mistress, whose presence at the Castle of Oberstein had given rise to so much scandal, was but natural. Adventurous himself by temperament, and with a mind teeming with schemes and intrigues, Domanski was just the man to become interested in such a woman. One day, hearing that she was in Mannheim—whither she had come for a few days during the absence of the duke from Oberstein—he called upon her. As a Pole and ex-Confederate of Bar, intimately acquainted with Prince Oginski, whose esteem the Princess Aly Émettée, clever actress that she was, managed to retain in spite of the cloud under which she left Paris, Domanski could not fail to be well received. Like most men of his imaginative and ardent nature, he was extremely impressionable, and as the princess was a woman whose charm, from all accounts, was felt by all who came in contact with her, he was fascinated from the start.

Compared with the Duke of Limburg, who, impoverished though he was, nevertheless wielded a sceptre, Domanski, apart from such personal attractions as he possessed, was, one would think, of too little importance for his conquest to appeal to an adventuress.

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But adventuresses are essentially creatures of circumstance, and Fortune appeared to be on the eve of deserting the Princess of Azov when she met Domanski. Living in daily fear of exposure, unable to prove either the identity she sought to establish, or the existence of the fortune she claimed, she had the worst to dread, once the suspicions of the besotted duke were thoroughly aroused. He, for all his infatuation, still delayed to make her his wife; and without this hold over his weak nature she might at any moment be forced to return to the misery from which he had rescued her, lucky enough if she managed to retain her freedom and perhaps her life.

At such a crisis, a devoted Domanski, though only a poor exile, is a protector not to be despised. Whether she returns his passion or not, she encourages it, and shortly after her return to Oberstein he follows her. To avoid exciting the jealousy of the duke, the consequences of which they have every reason to dread, the greatest precautions are necessary to conceal his presence. But though the duke does not discover the intrigue till long afterwards, when his vengeance is powerless to injure them, the good people of Oberstein have their suspicions of the "stranger from Mosbach" who lives so quietly in their village. The gossips observe that he knows nobody, and only goes out at dusk, when "the postman often sees him on the road leading to the castle, talking in a shadow with some one enveloped in a long black cloak with a hood, whom he once thought he recognized as the princess."

That love was not the only topic discussed at these mysterious interviews is evident from their sequel.



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About this time new rumours suddenly arise concerning the princess. She is no longer the Princess of Azov, or heiress of the House of Vlodomir. She has merely assumed these titles to hide the secret of her birth, which is so lofty that she has not dared to whisper it, from fear of the peril attaching to it. Confined in a convent in Siberia, where attempts have been made to poison her, she had escaped by the aid of her guardian and fled to Persia, whence she had come to Europe. As proof of this remarkable story, it is rumoured that she possesses a document, certificate at once of her origin and her fortune, which she has preserved in all her wanderings. It is worth an empire, for it is nothing less than the will of the Czarina Elizabeth, bequeathing to her, as the sole issue of her secret marriage with Razumovski, the throne of Russia!

The very audacity of these rumours strengthens them. People recall the marvellous career of Razumovski, the peasant lad with a wonderful voice, whom some nobleman had discovered in a village of Little Russia and brought to St. Petersburg to sing in the choir of the Imperial chapel, where his handsome face had attracted the notice of the amorous Czarina, who, to the dazzling dignities she had heaped upon him, had, it was always believed, added her hand as well as her heart. It is true the report of their marriage had never been confirmed, but the world is ever ready to believe anything that is said of the illustrious, the more especially when, as in this case, the lack of any official denial to a rumour at once so important and so persistent is practically tantamount to its confirmation. Still more credible, because still more natural, was

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the report that children had been born of this romantic union—the fact that Elizabeth had never acknowledged them being attributed, like her marriage, to reasons of state. The very mystery concerning their fate added to the belief in their existence. The new rumours, therefore, concerning the unknown lady at Oberstein were well calculated to obtain credence. A Princess of Azov with a fortune in Persia might well appear, and very probably was, an impostor; but a Princess Tarakanof, daughter of Elizabeth and Razumovski, was sure to find many to believe in her.

In Limburg, where her presence had caused so much scandal, the opinion regarding her completely changed. The duke, who heard the rumours for the first time during a visit to his sister, the Countess Hohenlohe-Bartenstein, writes to the princess at Oberstein that “everybody there believes her to be the daughter of Elizabeth and Razumovski.” He puts entire faith in it himself, and, realizing that in a country like Russia, where the cards are constantly being shuffled in the strangest fashion, she may very possibly some day herself be holding the winning trumps, he is now more than ever eager to marry her—in spite of the extraordinary slowness of her conversion, which, though designed, no doubt, to make the change of faith, when it occurred, the more sincere, has hitherto been the chief obstacle to matrimony.

But the princess, who has cunningly left it to rumour to confirm as well as to discover her identity, no longer aspires to be Duchess of Limburg. A future Czarina of All the Russias cannot descend so low. She is very grateful, however, for the hospitality she has received, which as soon as she mounts her throne

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it will be one of her first tasks to repay. In the meantime she graciously continues to honour Oberstein with her presence till the projects of her partisans in Russia are ripe for execution. These, or as much of them as it is fitting he should know, she confides to him, for to an exiled and penniless Czarina even a Duke of Limburg can still be of use. He, victim at once of passion and ambition, is obliged to accept with resignation the conditions on which his only hope of future fortune and favour is based, and to realize them the more rapidly he assists her to the best of his ability to complete the vast edifice of invention she has raised.

IV

Having thus finished, so to speak, the drama his passion and patriotism have inspired, Domanski now seeks to get it produced. With this object the first person whom he approaches is Prince Charles Radziwill, the most influential of the Confederates of Bar.

This great Polish noble, who had formerly reigned like a king over his vast estates, on which he had maintained at his own expense an army of 12,000 men, was now living in exile at Mannheim on the proceeds of twelve life-size statues of the Apostles in solid gold which he had managed to carry off with him when compelled to flee from his castle at Nieswicz. Like Domanski, he was passionately devoted to his country, and though he had not seen the mysterious Princess Tarakanof and probably did not believe in her, he was quick enough to perceive the advantage to which she could be turned.

In Russia, which he knew well, the political

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situation was such as to justify the maddest schemes. The country, little sensible of the benefits which the Empress Catherine had despotically conferred upon it, seethed with discontent. Frequent revolts among the peasants, pitilessly repressed, only led to fresh outbreaks. Impostors claiming to be the Empress's mysteriously murdered husband Peter III, sprang up like mushrooms. Of these, Pugatchef, ex-soldier, ex-monk, ex-bandit, was the most successful. With an army of 100,000 serfs, who regarded him as a liberator, he marched on Moscow, which was prepared to welcome him, burning castles, massacring nobles. For a moment it seemed as if the sceptre Catherine had torn from her unfortunate husband's hands would in turn be wrenched from hers. But destiny was on the side of the "She-Louis-Quatorze." Pugatchef was captured and executed. The discontent, however, to which he had given such loud expression, survived; and where he had failed, it was possible another might succeed.

Domanski, moreover, had chosen a particularly favourable moment to confide the secret of the Princess Tarakanof to Radziwill, who was on his own account actively intriguing to recover the liberty of his country with the aid of Turkey, which for six years had been at war with Russia. To prolong this war had been the policy of the Confederates of Bar, who hoped by this means to complicate affairs in Russia still further. But the Turks, discouraged by the defeat and total destruction of their fleet at Tchesmé, now appeared to be disposed for peace. To prevent this the Polish exiles, secretly backed by France, who permitted numbers of French officers to serve in the Turkish army,

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had represented to the Grand Vizier that Russia was exhausted, that the insurrection of Pugatchef proved how much the government of Catherine was detested, and that a little patience was all that was necessary to assure the triumph of the Porte and the recovery of Poland's partitioned provinces. To give greater force to the argument, Radziwill was actually on the point of starting for Constantinople in person when Domanski approached him. Consequently, whether he was persuaded or not of the truth of the Princess Tarakanof's origin, her appearance on the scene at such a moment was too valuable a reinforcement to be despised. What a bomb to hurl at Catherine, whose nerves were still shaken by the shock Pugatchef had given her!

But Radziwill is too experienced a hand to compromise himself needlessly in so doubtful a cause as that of the enigmatic creature who claims to be the daughter of Elizabeth and Razumovski. "I regard your Highness's affair," he writes her, "as a miracle of Providence, which proves that it has not deserted my unhappy country, by sending it so great a heroine." He would fly to her at once, but the situation is one that demands the greatest circumspection. A thousand obstacles prevent their meeting, but he hopes soon to pay her his court. In a word, whilst circulating the rumours concerning her, he wishes to see how the cat jumps.

Later, having gone to Venice, which is more favourably located for intriguing with Turkey than Mannheim, Radziwill, who is careful to correspond with her indirectly through Domanski, suggests that she might also find it more advantageous to her plans

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to come to that city. The Princess of All the Russias desires nothing better ; and the Duke of Limburg, though in despair at her departure, in spite of his own poverty provides her with a train worthy of her rank. At Zweibruck, where they part, for ever, as it turns out, she takes an affectionate though condescending leave of him, promising him, in the fascinating convincing way she has, that “when she has invaded Russia with the help of Sweden, and Austria with the help of Turkey, she will compel the Imperial Diet to rescind the decree depriving him of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein.”

Travelling under the name of the Countess of Pinneberg, a title which the duke has conferred upon her, and accompanied by Domanski and a numerous suite, she reaches Venice the end of May 1774, and, thanks to Radziwill's intrigues, takes up her residence at the French embassy. The next day, Prince Radziwill, attended by his Polish followers in gorgeous uniforms, pays her a visit of ceremony, which she promptly returns in like fashion. The pretence of incognito is kept up, but her name and her plans are now known to everybody.

Radziwill has long interviews with her each day at which Domanski is present. The Poles openly talk in the cafés of what “her Highness” has promised to do for their country. The young French officers, who had been induced by the love of adventure to join the Polish contingent Radziwill intended to offer the Sultan, are equally loud in their admiration of her beauty and intelligence. Edward Wortley Montagu, the eccentric son of the famous Lady Mary, who happened to be in Venice at the time, is most



PRINCE CHARLES RADZIWILL

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assiduous in his attentions. He did not believe in her, but, an adventurer himself by instinct, anything that smacked of adventure appealed to his imagination, and beautiful young women who dared to dream of disputing the throne of Russia with the Empress Catherine were not to be met with every day.

Nor does the princess fail to do full justice to the difficult rôle she plays. But convincingly though she acts, and flattering as was the applause, the box-office receipts, so to speak, are very small. The bankers politely but firmly refuse to honour her drafts, though "she offers as security the Castle of Oberstein and certain agate mines belonging to the Duke of Limburg."

The attitude of the Venetian Government, which the presence of so many adventurers rendered uneasy, is even more threatening. At the end of a fortnight it becomes necessary for Radziwill and his Poles, as well as the princess, to seek a more hospitable country. They accordingly go to Ragusa on the Dalmatian coast, to await the arrival of the firman that Radziwill has demanded of the Sultan, and without which it is impossible to go to Constantinople.

At Ragusa, as in Venice, the French Government, which encouraged the adventure, instructs its representative, Descriveau, to place his house at the disposal of the princess. Installed in this residence, delightfully situated on the outskirts of Ragusa, the Countess of Pinneberg now openly discards all further pretence of concealing her identity. Treated by Radziwill as the daughter of Elizabeth and Razumovski, she calls herself Princess of All the Russias, and having solemnly renewed the promises she has made to the

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Polish exiles at Oberstein, is hailed by them as the legitimate sovereign of that empire. She holds a court, issues manifestoes and proclamations. To give consistency to her claims, she produces the will of the Empress Elizabeth bequeathing her the crown, and, intoxicated by the grandeur of her rôle, in playing which she has acquired such prestige, she conceives the idea—which was the ultimate cause of her ruin—of sending a copy of this document to Alexis Orlof, the victor of the Turks at Tchesmé, “with a ukase, signed Elizabeth II, instructing him to communicate its contents to the fleet under his command.”

Unfortunately, while engaged in composing manifestoes and issuing proclamations, the Princess of All the Russias deigns to indulge in the Imperial luxury of an amorous intrigue, which, owing to an awkward accident, does grave harm to her reputation. One night a man is seen climbing over the wall of the house the princess inhabits. The guard, taking him for a robber, fires and wounds him. The next morning Domanski—for it is he—is found lying unconscious in the garden. There is a scandal which Radziwill endeavours in vain to hush. Domanski’s explanations convince no one. People recall the warmth of the admiration he has always manifested for the princess, and a thousand little things which had till then seemed perfectly natural in their intercourse now appear suspicious. No one doubts that he is her lover, and as gallantry is always a great fault in a female pretender to a throne, the loss in respect which this incident induces gives rise to all sorts of injurious rumours. The proud Polish nobles and the French officers who have been addressing her as “Highness,”

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and "bowing so low in her presence that they almost seemed to be kneeling," now speak of her as an adventuress, and treat Domanski as her accomplice.

To crown all, the firman that Radziwill has been daily expecting from Constantinople, like the millions that the Princess of Azov expected from Ispahan, never came. Instead, there arrives the news that Turkey has made peace with Russia. This event effectually upsets all Radziwill's plans. To continue to intrigue with a questionable Princess Tarakanof, concerning whom strange stories reach him from Paris, is to court ridicule as well as danger. Disgusted at the turn affairs have taken, he makes haste to wash his hands of her altogether, and returns to Germany.

Under such circumstances there is nothing left for the princess but to take herself off also as quickly and as gracefully as possible. Accordingly, accompanied by Domanski and a couple of Poles, who still believe in her, or pretend to, she crosses over to Italy to continue her adventurous career as best she can.

Thus ended the first act of the drama.

V

However discouraged Domanski may have been on the fall of the curtain at Ragusa, the faith, at all events, of his heroine in the part she has played so cleverly is unshaken. If, as seemed only too probable, the Princess Tarakanof would never mount the throne of Peter the Great, there is, at least, nothing to prevent her from eking out a comfortable existence as the unrecognized and unfortunate daughter of the Czarina Elizabeth and her peasant husband. Moreover, as an

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adventuress, to whom a title is essential, the rôle is congenial to her temperament; and its glamour and *éclat* appeal to her quite apart from mere mercenary motives of imposture. These, indeed, had she wished to, want would have prevented her from ignoring.

That her companions looked to her for guidance on disembarking at Barletta from the little Tunisian felucca in which they hastily left Ragusa, is evident from the tactics adopted to make two ends meet. They are the tactics of a Princess Aly Émettée, of the mysterious Persian heiress, rather than those of a Domanski—of the experienced adventuress accustomed to turn the present to account rather than of the exiled patriot whose schemes and intrigues are the foundations of future dreams.

As the election of a successor to Pope Clement XIV, who had just died, was attracting immense numbers to Rome, it is in the direction of the capital of the Christian world, as a stage well adapted to the display of the talents of adventurers of all descriptions, that the steps of the wandering Princess Tarakanof naturally turn. Passing through Naples on her way to Rome, the accomplished adventuress, whose business it is to be *au courant* with the names of the most prominent persons in the various cities and countries through which she passes, makes the acquaintance of the English ambassador, the famous Sir William Hamilton, either on the strength of a genuine letter of introduction—or a forged one—procured in Venice from Edward Wortley Montagu, or merely by the use of his name.

Hamilton, who has heard of her exploit with Prince Radziwill in Ragusa, is sufficiently interested

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to receive her when she calls. A door once opened to the Princess Tarakanof is afterwards seldom or never closed to her. Her intelligence, her exquisite manners, her beauty, and above all her birth, to which so much mystery attaches, produce their usual effect. "For several days she reigns like a queen in the *salon* of the ambassador, out of whose *penchant* for beautiful women she has no difficulty in wiling a passport that enables her to enter Rome and reside there without exciting the suspicion of the authorities."

Here she finds a stage on which the personal charms that have served her so successfully before are no longer of any avail. But she is equal to the occasion. Aware that in Rome, where it is a question of exploiting cardinals and priests, piety and good works rather than beauty and wit are the winning cards, she achieves the necessary transformation with wonderful dexterity. Instead of courting publicity, as in Paris and Frankfort, she installs herself with her companions in a lonely palace in a secluded quarter of the city, where the contrast between the very modest scale on which her establishment is conducted and the excessive generosity she displays to the poor of the neighbourhood, while exciting the liveliest curiosity, win her the good opinion she desires to cultivate. In this way, aided, no doubt, by Domanski and the Poles in her suite, one of whom is an ex-Jesuit, the attention of Cardinal Albani, the protector of the Poles, and *doyen* of the Sacred College, is drawn to her. Informed that she is "the Princess Elizabeth of Muscovy and has come to Rome on a subject of great importance to the Church," he sends his secretary, the Abbé Roccatani, to call on her.

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But consumption, with which Prince Oginski had believed she was threatened two years before in Paris, had now unquestionably laid its blighting hand upon her. In the wake of the hectic flush in her cheeks had come a dry, hacking cough. She appeared so ill when Roccatani was admitted to her presence that he made as if to postpone the interview. But the moment she learns who he is she seems to acquire fresh strength ; the hopes he personifies banish fatigue and reanimate her flagging faculties.

“It is true she is very ill,” she says with that grace and dignity which always give such an irresistible charm to her words, “but it is imperative that the Cardinal should be informed of the passions which are fermenting in Poland, which, if she lives six months, will recover its former frontiers. Catherine will be fortunate if she keeps St. Petersburg and the Baltic Provinces.”

Although unfavourably prepossessed against the “foreign lady” whose charities he believes mask some design on the Cardinal’s purse, Roccatani is much impressed by her grand air ; perceiving which she speaks of her correspondence with Orlof, and the Sultan, and professes to have numerous partisans in Russia, and even at the Imperial Court. To hear her, “Panine was a creature of her mother’s and attached to her at bottom, though her position rendered it difficult for him to declare himself at present.” And to support what she says, she once more produces the will of the Czarina Elizabeth. Nor does she fail, realizing it is a Jesuit with whom she has to deal, to give him to understand that she desires to be converted, “that once on the throne she may do the Church a service

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which she regards as her mission in life and the glory of her reign."

As for the money that Roccatani expects her to ask him for, she tells him that "My Lord Montagu is raising a loan for her in Venice which she expects to receive any day." With such a trout as a Cardinal Albani nibbling round her hook a Princess of Muscovy cannot angle too carefully.

Roccatani leaves her in astonishment. If she is not what she claims to be, she must at least be some great lady in distress. He is confirmed in this impression by a certain Père Linday, formerly a soldier in the Russian army, who assures him "that he had seen the princess of whom he spoke, and recognized her as the wife of the Grand Duke of Oldenburg, whom he had often seen in St. Petersburg during the reign of the late Czar Peter III." But Roccatani is very cautious, and, acting on his advice, Cardinal Albani only sends her a polite letter in which he "wishes her enterprise success, if right is on her side."

The princess, however, is not the woman to be discouraged by such coldness. If the Cardinal is not to be caught, Roccatani may still serve to put her in contact with others more easily exploited.

She continues to communicate with him, and succeeds by his means in making the acquaintance of the Marquis d'Antici, the Polish ambassador in Rome, with whom she has "a secret interview in a church." Antici, believing he has to do with "a natural daughter of Elizabeth, tries to convince her that she has no chance of mounting the throne of Russia, and offers to provide her with the means of finding an asylum in Germany."

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As long as it is only a question of finding benevolent listeners to a romantic story, the false princess is heard with interest, but her powers of persuasion fail when she asks for assistance. Accustomed hitherto to spend money without counting the cost, she is now reduced to practise the strictest economy. The luxury of giving alms to the poor by which she had attracted attention has to be abandoned. To raise the money she so badly needs she has recourse to the expedient of selling diplomas of Limburg titles, of which she had obtained a stock from the duke with an eye to future needs.

But in a city where Papal titles are cheap, purchasers are scarce. The wolf howls daily at the door. Creditors become threatening, and the servants insolently demand their wages. The poor Poles who have followed her fortunes desert her; only Domanski, whom she has drained of all he possessed, remains, more infatuated than ever, tortured by her hacking cough and hectic flush and the suffering they denote which he is powerless to alleviate. But though desperately ill and broken, the brilliant and accomplished creature, mere girl that she is, does not lose courage. Through it all she still wears the same proud and majestic air that has commanded so much admiration, imposed on so much credulity, and is now all that is left of the high pretensions to which she lays claim.

Occasionally she hints tentatively to Roccatani of a loan—for a Princess of All the Russias cannot descend so low as to ask for alms—but the Abbé, who has observed her increasing distress and is greatly impressed by her pride, takes fright at the mere suggestion. At last, confronted with starvation, she



ALEXIS ORLOF
(From an old print)

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bethinks herself of appealing to the generosity of Sir William Hamilton. But even now the actress is true to her art. She writes him a letter as if she were conferring a favour instead of asking one. She is, she says, about to go to Turkey, and desires to contract a loan, offering as security the revenues of her estate at Oberstein, and requesting at the same time an introduction to the English ambassador at Constantinople.

Hamilton, who had fallen under her spell, does not hesitate to render her the service she asks ; but as the sum she names is a large one he sends her letter to one of his friends, John Dick, the English consul at Leghorn and also a banker in that city, to arrange the matter. This act, though kindly meant, gives the unfortunate creature her *coup de grâce*.

VI

That the Empress Catherine should remain ignorant of the existence of a woman who was plotting to usurp her throne was of course impossible. It was not, however, until after the suppression of the Pugatchef rebellion that she gave much thought to the matter. Hitherto, the numerous pretenders who sprang up and disappeared like mushrooms had only excited her contempt, but after the fright Pugatchef had given her she was determined to treat any attempt to imitate him with the most rigorous severity. Consequently, when Alexis Orlof sent to inform her of the letter he had received from a woman who claimed to be the daughter of the Czarina Elizabeth and of her intrigues with Prince Radziwill and the Porte,

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Catherine ordered him to proceed to Ragusa with some vessels of his fleet to demand her extradition, and “to throw two or three bombs into the town if the senate of the little republic dared to refuse.” In fine, the Empress considered no price too great to pay for the discovery and capture of the person who claimed to be the daughter of Elizabeth Petrowna.

To execute such an order no man was better fitted than Alexis Orlof. It was to him, more than to any one, that Catherine owed her throne. He it was who instructed her what to do on the morning of the revolution that proclaimed her Empress of All the Russias, and who afterwards, with her consent if not by her orders, with his own hands, “which could bend a horse-shoe or tie a poker in a knot,” strangled her miserable husband, Peter III, in the dungeon at Ropscha in which she had confined him. Like all the Orlofs, he was a man of heroic build and superb looks, the primitive beauty of which an enormous scar running from the corner of the mouth to the ear, the result of a quarrel in his youth, failed to efface. As a reward for his services Catherine had covered him with honours and riches. In 1768, on the outbreak of the war with Turkey, she gave him the command of the Russian fleet in the Archipelago. Orlof had neither evinced, nor did he ever develop, a talent to justify such a promotion; but he had the good sense to be guided entirely by Elphinstone and Gregg, two English naval officers who had joined the Russian service. It was to them that he owed the great naval victory at Tchesmé, of which he won all the glory, when the entire Turkish fleet was destroyed. This event still further increased his importance. On his

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return to St. Petersburg he entirely eclipsed all others at Court. Catherine gave him the most marked proofs of her esteem, and conferred on him, by an Imperial ukase, the additional surname of Tchesmenski. "The Tshernishofs," wrote a Frenchman who often saw him at this time at the Winter Palace, "scarcely dare lift their heads. . . . Catherine venerates, loves, and fears him. . . . In fine, Alexis Orlof may be looked upon as the master of Russia."

His undisciplined character was, however, unable to support the weight of a fortune of such magnitude. Intoxicated by the rapidity and ease with which it had been acquired, he gave the rein to his passions, which were primitive and uncultured. He loved pomp. At reviews and parades he appeared covered with gold, diamonds and decorations. In his palace at Moscow he gave fabulous feasts at which more than three hundred people would sit down. When he travelled it was like a satrap, astonishing everybody with his Asiatic luxury. Extravagance was the hallmark, so to speak, of all his actions. To furnish an artist, whom the Empress had commissioned to paint some pictures representing the victory of the Russians at Tchesmé, with the means of depicting with greater truth the destruction of the Turkish fleet, Orlof did not hesitate to blow up a ship for his benefit, regardless of the risk of firing all the vessels in the harbour of Leghorn, which was the scene of this amazing spectacle.

To his audacity there was no limit. In his quarrels with Catherine, who suffered him, perhaps because of the secret part she had played in her husband's murder, to treat her with outrageous licence, "his thundering

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voice made the palace windows rattle." Once at a supper-party at the Russian ambassador's in Vienna, he even turned the conversation on the revolution that had cost Peter III his throne and life; and when no one dared to put the least question concerning the death of the unfortunate Czar, Orlof related it of his own accord. Perceiving the shudder of horror he excited, he was base enough to seek to excuse himself of the crime he had committed by implying that it was the Empress by whom "he was forced to do what he had been commanded." That his conscience was not easily alarmed is proved by his conduct on the exhumation thirty-four years later of the body of Peter III. Ordered by the Emperor Paul "to remain the whole night with the corpse in the church of the Citadel of Petersburg, Alexis went through this function and likewise assisted at the funeral with perfect composure."

Given over to debauchery and utterly devoid of scruple, there was no infamy, no perfidy, of which he was incapable. For him, women existed only to be seduced. Many, fascinated by his gigantic figure, his martial air, heightened by the scar across his handsome face, which was popularly supposed to have been gained in battle, and by his insinuating manners, had been the victims of his brutal lust. In fine, as the Princess Dashkof told Diderot, "the Orlof who is known as "le Balafré" [from the scar on his cheek] "is one of the biggest scoundrels on the face of the earth."

As the recent fall from favour of his brother Gregory, the celebrated lover of Catherine, had robbed Alexis of his former importance, the violence

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of his nature led many to believe that he might be induced to conspire against the Empress. It was on the strength of these rumours that the Princess Tarakanof had appealed to him at Ragusa. But Alexis Orlof, like his brother, had sense enough to realize that the day of his supremacy in Russia was over. Interest, if not gratitude for all the favours Catherine had heaped upon him and still permitted him to enjoy, made him more anxious than ever to serve her.

As commanded by the Empress, he proceeded at once to Ragusa, but the bird had already flown. He was told that she was at Paros "spending much money, and having a ship of war at her disposal." But the lady he took for the pretender turned out to be a "*marchande de modes* to the harem of the Sultan." Information received from other quarters proved on investigation to be equally deceptive. In spite of the agents he had searching for her in all quarters, no trace of her was to be found anywhere. She had vanished as completely as if she were a ghost, and Orlof had begun to despair of finding her, when he suddenly received from John Dick at Leghorn the letter of Sir William Hamilton.

Having found her, it now became a question of getting possession of her. This, it was evident at once, was only to be effected by kidnapping, for Rome was not Ragusa, into which one could "throw two or three bombs." In the eighteenth century kidnapping was of such common occurrence that the practice developed into an art. Orlof was no novice at laying traps for women, and, as in the case of Madeleine Morelli, the ingenuous poetess whom he seduced after she had been crowned at the Capitol with the laurels

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of Petrarch and Tasso, the trap he laid for the Princess Tarakanof was a masterpiece of infamy.

Remaining at Pisa, where he was spending the winter, Orlof despatches one of his aides-de-camp, named Kristenek, to Rome to inform the princess that he has received the document she has sent him from Ragusa, and that he is anxious to pay homage to one whose fate and fortunes are of such importance to all her countrymen. The condition in which Kristenek finds her is pitiable. Disease and hunger between them have wasted her to a shadow. The room in which she receives him is cold and bare; its only furniture consists of "a leather sofa on which she lay in a high fever, coughing convulsively." Domanski, who attends her, is almost in rags. Both seem to have lost all confidence in themselves and all hope in the future.

The very despair, however, of the princess makes her suspicious of Kristenek. But he is persistent in his visits, and necessity having forced her to accept from him some assistance, it is not long before he appears "in the light of a saviour whom Heaven had sent to her deliverance." When he thinks he has sufficiently gained her confidence he declares that Orlof has commissioned him to offer her the throne that had been filled by her mother, and that the time is ripe for the revolution which Orlof, who can never forgive Catherine for her ingratitude to him and his brother, has prepared. He entreats her to go to Pisa, where the climate is much milder than at Rome, to take care of her health which is so precious to Russia and to confer with his master. And to give the greater weight to his words, he informs her that he

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is commanded to place at her disposal the sum of 11,000 ducats.

This offer, so unlooked for and so magnificent, completes the deception. The adventuress, whom experience should have taught to detect treachery, is the more easily deluded by her own deceit. She has identified herself so thoroughly with her part that she now actually imagines herself destined for the throne, and the very similarity between Kristenek's alluring proposals and her own opinions only serve to encourage the notion. In vain does Domanski, who suspects the trap, urge her not to go to Pisa. "If you are afraid, remain," she tells him; "as for me, I shall go where my destiny calls me."

With fortune, hope and health alike return. Before leaving Rome she pays her debts and revenges herself on the astonished Roccatani, who had beheld her distress without relieving it, by making him a handsome present. On February 11, 1775, she departs with great pomp, accompanied as in the past by a numerous suite, and distributing alms lavishly to the poor who flock round her carriage.

At Pisa, Orlof receives her as if she were already his sovereign. He refuses to be seated in her presence, gives numerous fêtes in her honour, permits none to approach her but persons on whose devotion he can rely, and accompanies her in public wherever she goes. He neglects nothing that is likely to fan her ambition or flatter her vanity. During the Carnival she receives mysterious letters in which she is addressed as "Empress of All the Russias." His attendants, following his example, also pay her court; and Kristenek entreats her to get Orlof to promote him to

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the grade of captain, a favour that is granted at her request.

Past-master in the art of seduction, Orlof tinges the respect with which he treats her with sentiment, and feigning to be dazzled by her charms, finally assumes the rôle of a passionate adorer. This semblance of passion, skilfully charged with bitter complaints of Catherine, whom he taxes with the grossest ingratitude, inspires in her a true one ; and when he entreats her to marry him, she willingly consents to share with him the empire he proposes to conquer for her. Domanski, whose suspicions, in spite of Orlof's efforts to dispel them, have been fostered by his jealousy, continues to warn her in vain. Intoxicated by the sudden and brilliant reappearance of fortune, the ill-starred adventuress pursues it recklessly down the fatal slope which leads to ruin.

At the very moment when the squadron, in obedience to Orlof's instructions, arrives at Leghorn to convey his victim to Russia, two of his accomplices, "disguised as priests of the Greek Church," perform the ceremony which unites her to him. To entice her to Leghorn, he proposes to celebrate his mock marriage with a sham-fight in her honour. At his request, Dick, the British consul, who was afterwards handsomely rewarded by Catherine for his share in this discreditable affair, puts his house at her disposal, and gives a banquet in her honour to which the chief people in Leghorn are invited. The next morning after breakfast, Mrs. Dick suggests a visit to the fleet. The princess readily consents. Nothing, she declares, will afford her greater pleasure than to see "her beautiful Russian ships."

The necessary orders are immediately given.

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Domanski warns her for the last time, but she silences him with a look of disdain. She embarks in the Admiral's launch with Mrs. Dick, Orlof, and Domanski, who will not leave her, in sight of an immense concourse of people who have lined the shore to witness the sham-fight. As the boat approaches the flag-ship *The Three Hierarchs*, it is received with music, a salvo of artillery and cries of "Long live the Empress!" which she believes meant for her. A splendid chair is let down from the yard-arm in which she is hoisted on deck, where the veil is rudely torn from her eyes. Instead of the homage she expects to receive she is instantly handcuffed and confined in a cabin, while Domanski, who has drawn his sword, is disarmed and likewise made a prisoner.

In vain she implores the pity of the man she still believes to be her husband. He has disappeared and she never sees him again. To calm her they tell her he, too, is a prisoner, whereupon she faints away. The next day, her papers and maid having been put on board, the ship sails for Cronstadt under the command of Sir Samuel Gregg. To extenuate as far as he can his share in this despicable business, the brilliant Englishman who had won for Russia the battle of Tchesmé, of which Orlof took the credit, treats his prisoner with every consideration. He gives up his cabin to her, allows her to be waited on by her maid, suffers her to come on deck, where she passes the weary days in silent and sombre contemplation of the sea. To cheer her, he even hints that Orlof will find some means to rescue her. When the ship approaches the English coast she seems to revive, but learning from a word dropped in her hearing how she has been

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duped and betrayed by Orlof she sinks into a swoon. On coming to her senses she makes an effort in a fit of despair to fling herself overboard, only to be stopped by those who watch her. Gregg, who had little taste for the part of gaoler, afterwards wrote to Orlof that "he had never had a more painful task."

Finally, on May 11, 1775, after a voyage of two months, *The Three Hierarchs* arrives at Cronstadt, and the prisoner is immediately conveyed under a strong guard to St. Petersburg, where, from a barred window in the gloomy fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, she looks for the first time upon the capital of the empire over which she had dared to dream of reigning.

VII

The next day Prince Galitzin, the Grand Chancellor, in obedience to the instructions he has received from Catherine, who has been kept *au courant* with all the details of the plot to entrap the pretender, examines the prisoner. When she sees him she asks him haughtily "by what right and for what crime" she had been deprived of her liberty, and, manifesting the liveliest indignation at the manner in which she is treated, she tells, without waiting to be questioned, the story of her life. It is the same as that already related, coloured cleverly to make her appear a martyr.

Of her origin, the most important detail of all, she professes total ignorance, though the character of the mystery in which it is shrouded induces her to believe that she was born in Russia of illustrious parents. Prince Radziwill had assured her that she was the



THE EMPRESS CATHERINE
(After Kosselin)

[To face p. 115]

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daughter of the Czarina Elizabeth. As to the will of the Empress, she had received it at Ragusa without knowing where it came from, and it was merely in the hope of learning something definite of her birth that she had sent a copy to Orlof, who had confirmed all that Radziwill had told her. She denies that she ever attempted to foment disturbance in Russia, or entertained any of the pretensions imputed to her, from which she concludes that she has been the involuntary tool of some political intrigue.

Galitzin is so impressed by the tone of conviction with which she speaks that he consents to attach to his report a letter in which she demands an audience of the Empress. She is able, she says, to be of great service to Russia, and to dispel at the same time the misunderstanding of which she is the victim. She even dares to sign the letter "Elizabeth," as if she were addressing an equal.

But such effrontery only serves to exasperate Catherine against her the more. "The impudence of the wretch," she replies to Galitzin, "is beyond all bounds. She must be mad. Tell her if she wishes any amelioration of her lot to cease the comedy she is playing."

To force her to confess she is an impostor, Galitzin is ordered to treat her with the utmost rigour if necessary. He questions her again, but she persists in the mystery of her birth and refuses to brand herself as an impostor. She is deprived of her maid, stripped of her clothing, surrounded night and day by warders who watch her without speaking, and finally placed in a cell underground with bread and water for diet. There are some natures whose resolve is only strengthened

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by punishment. The prisoner treats her tormentors with unutterable disdain.

The Empress, more and more irritated by such stubborn resistance, goes to the length of drawing up with her own hand a list of questions calculated to trap her victim into the confession she desires. The result is the same. In the meantime she has agents scouring Europe for traces of the adventuress. The English ambassador in St. Petersburg informs her that "the unknown is the daughter of an innkeeper at Prague." But when Galitzin tries to confound his prisoner with this information, "she indignantly denies ever having been in Prague in her life, and swears if she knew who slandered her she would scratch out his eyes."

Nor is the secret to be torn from Domanski, though offered his liberty if he will reveal her origin and designs. He declares that he knows nothing of either. Galitzin, who has "remarked his passionate attachment to the prisoner," tempts him with the hope of marrying her. This, too, fails. Domanski knows nothing, and is even willing to spend the rest of his life in prison if permitted to marry her. His sentiments, however, are not shared by the unfortunate object of his devotion. "She smiled strangely when I repeated what he said," reports Galitzin, "and declared that the fellow was a fool."

The despotism of Catherine is not more inflexible than the will of the frail creature whose secret not even the promise of pardon can extort from her. But though her will is not to be broken, her health completely gives way. In this bullying business the only progress that is made is in the disease of the lungs from which she has always suffered. In the damp under-

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ground dungeon in which she is imprisoned its stride is rapid. The doctors sent to examine her—for the Empress does not wish her to die while there is a chance of her confessing the secret she guards so jealously—declare that she has but a few days to live if the severity with which she is treated continues. This obtains for her some slight relaxation of a confinement which Galitzin himself declares is “rigorous beyond a doubt.”

But her days are numbered. At the end of summer, worn out by incessant coughing, repeated hæmorrhages, and mental anguish, she begins to fade rapidly. There are days when her gaolers expect her to die at any moment. In this feeble condition she once more begs permission to write to Catherine. On this occasion her letter is couched in the most humble and pathetic language. Her condition, she declares, “makes Nature shudder,” and she implores the Empress to examine her in person. But to this pitiful appeal no reply is vouchsafed.

On November 30 she begs that a priest of the Greek Church may be sent to her. She feels she is dying and wishes to confess. The Empress herself chooses the priest; and “has an interview with him beforehand that lasts a whole hour.”

He is received meekly at first, but his attempts to extricate the mysterious secret of the pretender’s origin are at once cut short. “Say the prayers for the dead,” moaned the dying girl, “that is all there is for you to do here.” Finally, on December 4, 1775, Galitzin reports to the Empress that “the woman confined since May 12 is dead.”

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And this secret which she carried with her to the grave, what was it? That there *was* a secret, it seems impossible to doubt; from her accomplishments, her education, her manners, it is evident that she was no vulgar adventuress, no Prague innkeeper's daughter. It is quite possible that she told the truth when she declared that she did not know her origin. Whatever the motives that led her to pass as the daughter of Elizabeth and Razumovski, she had been so accustomed to think of herself as a princess that at last she actually believed she was one. If, as Prosper Mérimée imagines, her persistency in refusing to confess herself an impostor, by which she would probably have obtained kind treatment in prison, is to be attributed to a mind deranged by all she had suffered at the hands of Orlof, the immense importance the Empress evidently attached to her confession would only have served to foster her delusion.

But what is still more remarkable, Catherine herself in the end seems to have come to the same conclusion. Aware as she was of Elizabeth's rumoured offspring, the spectacle of this weak creature, whose will no torture or hardship could break, might easily have created the impression that she was, perhaps, after all, the person she supposed herself. Even Pugatchef had confessed he was an impostor before he died. Eight years after her death, when the French ambassador, on behalf of Marine, who, it will be remembered, had lent the Princess of Vlodomir 52,000 livres in Paris in 1772, made inquiries concerning her, "he was stopped at the first word." The princess in question, he was told, was dead, and her creditors paid, and Marine had only to send in his account for it to be

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settled. At the same time Catherine was refusing to pay the debts her son by Gregory Orlof had contracted, likewise in Paris!

The same secrecy, too, was manifested in the official reports dealing with the imprisonment of the Princess Tarakanof, which were discovered after Catherine's death in the Imperial archives. According to them she was buried "deeply" in the courtyard of the keep in which she had been confined; the soldiers who dug her grave were sworn to secrecy, as well as the governor of the fortress, the gaolers, judges, doctors and priests—all, in fact, who had approached her during her imprisonment.

This secrecy, however, only served to deepen the mystery of both her origin and her fate. The year following her reported death rumours were current in Moscow that "a very important and mysterious personage had been brought from St. Petersburg and confined in the Novo Speski convent under the name of Sister Dosithée." It was openly said that she was the Princess Tarakanof. A portrait, said to be hers, was discovered in the convent half a century later.

Another rumour, which has developed with time into a sort of legend that has often inspired poets, novelists and artists in Russia, is that to which Flavitzky has given expression in his famous canvas, reproduced at the beginning of this article, depicting a young and beautiful woman being drowned in the dungeon of a fortress in which she is imprisoned by the sudden inundation of the Neva that occurred in 1777.

That she paid dearly for her dream is undeniable. The cruelty of which she was the victim was purely gratuitous. Had she attempted to proclaim her right

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to the throne of Russia, she undoubtedly deserved to be punished. But when Orlof entrapped her she was living in obscurity in Rome, too poor and helpless for her claims or existence to be worth notice. In Leghorn, where Orlof's treacherous conduct was at once discovered, the indignation it aroused was such that he informed Catherine "his life was no longer in safety." But if the Grand Duke of Tuscany, as reported, complained to Catherine of the outrage he certainly got no reply.

Catherine was not naturally cruel or revengeful, but she was utterly without mercy to all who in any way dared to threaten the stability of the throne she had mounted over the body of her husband. The crimes that sullied her reputation were very few, but they were monstrous. It was not for nothing that Catherine the Great was also sometimes styled the Messalina of the North.

PEG WOFFINGTON

1720-1760



PEG WOFFINGTON
(After Van Bleek)

[To face p. 123

“For the Colonel’s lady an’ Judy O’Grady
Are sisters under their skins!”

RUDYARD KIPLING: “The Ladies.”

PEG WOFFINGTON

1720-1760

I

NATURE, in her supreme indifference to man and his pretensions, is constantly upsetting his most elaborate calculations and overriding his most cherished conventions. A favourite way of expressing this colossal contempt is to endow members of one class of society with the attributes popularly supposed to belong exclusively to another. Thus, in defiance of the so-called laws of eugenics and heredity, to which certain people attach so much importance, we often see aristocrats of long descent moulded of the commonest clay, while genius, beauty, chivalry, and charm, all of the highest order, are as frequently discovered among the poorest, the most illiterate, and most degraded.

Peg Woffington is a case in point. Like the Empress Theodora, Madame Du Barry, and Lady Hamilton—to name three of a countless number—this most adorable of magdalens and most lovable of actresses, who gave to the *grandes dames* she impersonated a *bel air* that was at once the envy and despair of real *grandes dames* who sought in vain to imitate it, sprang from the dregs of humanity.

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Her origin was such as would puzzle a herald or antiquarian to trace. The date of her birth is equally uncertain; it took place somewhere about 1720 in Dublin, probably in George's Court, Dame Street, one of the most squalid slums of the city. It has even been stated that her real name was Murphy, and that that of Woffington was adopted later by the actress for stage purposes. This statement, though based apparently on nothing more substantial than supposition, is by no means improbable. There is at least no record of the name of Woffington in this form having been borne before or since.

According to all accounts, which under the circumstances are naturally very meagre, her father was a journeyman bricklayer, whose steady and industrious habits, coupled with his wife's frugality, enabled him during his life to maintain his family in some degree of comfort and decency. The fact that "he sent Peg when she was five to a school kept by an old woman in the neighbourhood" suggests that he was fairly prosperous in his humble sphere. Whatever money he managed to save, however, was consumed during a long illness, to which he succumbed when Peg was about nine or ten years of age, and the poverty in which he died was so great that he was buried at the expense of the parish.

To support herself and her two children, the youngest of whom was "a babe at the breast," his widow turned washerwoman, "being by her make and constitution well fitted for that business," in pursuing which she was assisted by Peg, who used to fetch and carry back the linen given her mother to wash. Whether out of compassion for the poor

Peg Woffington

woman or the interest her little handmaiden excited in the students of Trinity College, who were among her patrons, Mrs. Woffington was enabled after a short time to start a small huckster's shop on Ormond Quay. But this new venture, either owing to bad management, or hard times, proved a failure. In spite of all her efforts she was more than once evicted from her home for non-payment of rent, and finally forced to sell watercress in the streets. In this, too, she was assisted by her daughter, and years later, when the latter was a famous actress, there were many in Dublin who remembered to have seen the "lovely Peggy with a dish upon her head and without shoes on her delicate feet crying through College Green: "All these fine young salads for a ha'penny, all for a ha'penny."

It was at this juncture, when her mother's fortunes were at their lowest, that the child met with an adventure that was destined to prove the hinge on which her whole future career turned.

II

In the early part of the eighteenth century, the Irish stage was regarded as scarcely second in importance to the English. Many of the best actors and actresses were of Irish birth, and it was in Ireland that some of the most successful plays were first produced. To acquire a reputation in Dublin was a guarantee of a triumph in London.

The principal theatres in the Irish capital were the Theatre Royal in Aungier Street, and the Smock Alley Theatre in Smock Alley. The former was

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patronized chiefly by "Castle" and fashionable society, while the latter catered to the cruder taste of the middle classes. In addition to these two play-houses there were several small places of entertainment, of which Violante's Booth situated in Fownes Court, near College Green, was for a time the most popular. It derived its name from a certain Madame Violante, as she called herself, a dancer on the tight-rope of French or Italian origin, who after a successful season in London arrived in Dublin about 1728 with a troupe of acrobats, of which she was herself the most conspicuous member. Among the feats of daring with which she delighted the lovers of the dangerous she was accustomed to cross the stage of her booth, from one end to the other, on a tight-rope, with a basket containing an infant attached to each foot. Peg Woffington is reported to have been one of these infants whose life was thus imperilled; but as Madame Violante's first appearance in Dublin was not earlier than 1728, when Peg would have been at least eight years old, if either of the "infants" appended to the feet of the rope-dancer was a Woffington it must have been Peg's sister Mary, who was at this time not yet a year old.¹

This form of amusement did not, however, prove a success, and Madame Violante, being as enterprising as she was acrobatic, conceived the idea of training a company of children to perform pieces in which singing and dancing would be the principal features.

¹ On her death in 1811, Mary Woffington, afterwards the Honourable Mrs. Cholmondeley, was said to be eighty-three. She must, therefore, have been born some time in 1728, the year in which Violante is reported to have arrived in Dublin.

Peg Woffington

Among the children she selected for this purpose was Peg Woffington, who is said to have attracted her attention one day as she was fetching water from the Liffey for her mother. The fact that all the other members of her juvenile troupe subsequently made their mark on the stage, speaks as much for her powers of discernment as for the pains she took to train them.

She was equally fortunate in the piece she selected for the opening performance. This was *The Beggar's Opera*, which was then the rage in London. Though its fame had crossed the Channel, it had not yet, strange to say, been seen in Dublin. Peg, whom the discerning Violante had cast for the rôle of Polly Peachum, the heroine of the piece, more than justified the choice. Mere child though she was, she was fully alive to the importance of the part assigned to her, and, notwithstanding the nervousness she displayed when the curtain rose, the little creature's sense of responsibility came to her rescue and enabled her to realize all that was expected of her. The applause she received, far from turning her head, only stimulated her desire to please; and did not prevent her when the performance was over from helping her mother, who was permitted to sell oranges to the audience, to carry home the empty baskets or any fruit that remained. Indeed, throughout her entire career Peg Woffington was entirely free from the vanity to which the members of the theatrical profession are so prone.

Thanks to the great pains she had taken in the training of her company, Madame Violante's venture was an immediate success. "The novelty of the

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sight," says Hitchcock, "the uncommon abilities of the little performers, and the great merit of the piece attracted the notice of the town to an extraordinary degree." All Dublin came to the booth in Fownes Court to see the juvenile actors, including the Viceroy. Other plays were acted with equal success, and, emboldened by the encouragement she received, Madame Violante transformed her booth into a regular theatre. But the popularity of her little troupe excited the jealousy of the Smock Alley company, whose audiences fell off as Violante's increased, and they eventually succeeded in procuring from the mayor an order compelling her to close her theatre, on the ground that it infringed some ancient privilege that had been granted them. The suppression, however, of the Lilliputians, as they were termed, was of short duration. The public, incensed at the injunction which deprived them of so popular a form of entertainment, subscribed the money to erect a special theatre for their favourites in Rainsford Street, beyond the pale of the mayor's jurisdiction, where Madame Violante and her troupe entered on a fresh career of prosperity.

After a couple of years of popularity, however, the Rainsford Street audiences fell off. Madame Violante held out as long as she could, but finding the luck against her she was finally obliged to relinquish the management of the theatre altogether. Her former pupils then endeavoured to run it on their own account, but their efforts were doomed to failure, and, after a short struggle to keep their heads above water, the juvenile company was obliged to disband.

It is an ill wind, however, that blows nobody any good, as little Peg soon discovered. Thanks to the

Peg Woffington

great interest Madame Violante had taken in her, she had acquired an excellent knowledge of French, which was of great use to her in after life, and above all an ease of deportment that, coupled with the native grace and symmetry of her figure, gave such an air of distinction to her movements as to strike all who beheld her with admiration, and a certain Charles Coffey in particular. Originally a schoolmaster with a passion for the stage, from which he was debarred by physical deformity, he had turned playwright. Two of his pieces, *The Beggar's Wedding*, an imitation of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, and *The Devil to Pay*, had been produced in London with great success. In the latter the famous Kitty Clive—then known as Miss Raftor—had won her first triumph in the part of Nell. The success his work had met with in England made Coffey anxious to repeat it in his own country, where he was still a prophet without honour. As Madame Violante's efforts were limited to the reproduction of such pieces as had previously acquired popularity, Coffey had no difficulty in persuading her to perform *The Devil to Pay*. Peg, as usual, was given the principal part, in which Miss Raftor—destined to be her greatest enemy and rival—had made her hit. Trained by Coffey, who was eager that his piece should be a success in his native town, the conscientious child applied herself with a right good will to help him to win the triumph he desired. Coffey was so delighted at the sensation she created that he regarded her as a prodigy, and assisted her to the best of his ability to develop her talent. This, by the time the Lilliputians were disbanded, was so well recognized in the theatrical world of Dublin that

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Thomas Elrington, manager of the Theatre Royal, engaged her to sing and dance between the acts—a custom observed in all theatres in those days—in company with two Frenchmen.

But Peg's previous training and triumphs had awakened her ambition. She wished to do something more than dance, and pleaded hard to be given a part, no matter how small. Elrington, however, long refused to gratify her; he feared she was too young, for one thing, for an audience to take seriously, and unkindest cut of all, with a brogue so pronounced as hers, he doubted whether there was a future for her on the stage at all! Deeply mortified, but not discouraged, the child studied harder than ever to assimilate all that she could pick up from Madame Violante and Coffey, but try as she would she fortunately could not quite conquer the brogue which, in spite of Elrington, proved one of her most alluring attractions in the days to come.

Opportunities, however, always come sooner or later to the ambitious, and Peg's came in true stage fashion. Two days before the production of *Hamlet* at the Theatre Royal, the actress who was to play Ophelia was taken seriously ill. For some reason or other the part had not been understudied, and Elrington, at a loss to find any one to take her place at such short notice, was on the point of announcing the postponement of the tragedy when Peg, who saw her chance, volunteered to step into the breach. She must, no doubt, have convinced him that willingness was not the only qualification she possessed, but as the bookings for the performance, which had been well advertised, were unusually heavy, Elrington on this

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occasion probably did not require much pressing. His consent obtained, Peg set to work with energy to study her rôle. As she had an excellent memory, she quickly learnt her lines, but she was greatly concerned about her appearance, the dress she was obliged to wear being much too big for her. On recalling the event afterwards she was wont to say in her lively way that when the curtain rose she "felt Ophelia all over." However, the consciousness that her future depended on the use she made of her opportunity acted as a spur, and her interpretation of the rôle was greatly applauded.

Henceforth she ceased to dance between the acts, for Elrington, as pleased as he was astonished at her reception, at once gave her a tangible proof of his esteem by enrolling her in his company at a salary of thirty shillings a week. She was at this time about sixteen. At first she was given old women's parts, but the talent she displayed as Mrs. Peachum in *The Beggar's Opera* and Mother Midnight in Farquhar's *Twin Rivals*, induced Elrington to cast her for the principal rôle in every play he produced. As Polly, she had the satisfaction of repeating in the chief theatre of Dublin the triumph she had scored as a child in Violante's Booth, while her success as Sir Harry Wildair in Farquhar's *Constant Couple* was the talk of the town.

"It was now," says Hitchcock, "that she first began to unveil those beauties and display those graces and accomplishments which for so many years afterwards charmed mankind." In Ireland, which has ever been famous for the beauty of its women, she was regarded in her day from first to last by common

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consent as the loveliest of her race. The celebrated Miss Gunnings had not more perfect figures or more dazzling complexions. Her small, well-shaped head was crowned with a "forest of true blue-black Irish hair," her eyes were "large and black as jet with long lashes and exquisitely pencilled eyebrows." One writer declared that "her mouth with its matchless teeth and coral lips would thaw the very bosom of an anchorite." Another thought that "for beauty, shape, wit, and vivacity, she was equal to any theatrical female in any time."

But physically beautiful though Peg Woffington undoubtedly was, her appeal was by no means a purely plastic one. Like all the most beautiful of Eve's daughters, she possessed in a rare degree the subtle and elusive charm of personality. Even as a child her bewitching manners had won her many admirers; the students of Trinity College, in particular, being her devoted slaves.

Needless to say, the admirers were not long in turning into lovers. Nor did the voluptuous, impulsive girl resent the change. Accustomed from her earliest years to the loose habits of the stage, which was never so profligate as in the eighteenth century, she never dreamt of attaching any value to virtue. To have done so would have been ridiculous. Everybody, to the very characters in the plays in which she acted, regarded gallantry as the most natural thing in the world; least of all was the undisciplined daughter of a bricklayer and a washerwoman, who had run about the streets barefoot and danced between the acts of plays for a living, one to pretend to scruples that the greatest ladies of rank and fashion flouted.

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In Peg's case, immorality was too much a thing to be taken for granted to have any effect on her character. If she lost her morals, she kept her heart, and, magdalen though she was, remained to the last gay, kind-hearted, ever willing and ready to oblige.

Or, as Murphy charitably puts it, "apart from one female error, it might fairly be said of her, that she was adorned with every virtue; honour, truth, benevolence and charity were her distinguishing qualities."

Of the many more or less trustworthy legends with which contemporary gossip decorated her early career, the most romantic is that of her first love. It was by no means her first *affaire*, but the first one in which her heart was engaged. The object of her affection was a young gentleman of good family but small fortune, named Taaffe. He had seen her in the part of Sir Harry Wildair, and fallen a victim to her charm. It was, perhaps, the striking resemblance of his character to that of the fashionable and fascinating rake she impersonated herself with such success that made her take a deeper interest in him than in the others whose heads she had turned. Sir Harry, under all his dissolute flippancy and frivolity, had a heart capable of being "fixed" in the end. The experiment is one that few women refuse to try when given a chance, and almost always with fatal results. In any case, whether Peg maliciously attempted to rivet the fickle heart of her new adorer, or whether she was merely content to accept his attention by way of an agreeable pastime, she completely lost her heart to him, and, after having lived with him as his mistress in Dublin, suffered herself to be lured to London by his promise of marriage.

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If the rake had any intention of keeping his promise, it was diverted after reaching London. No sooner had they arrived there than his passion began to cool, and, instead of being led to the altar, the inimitable impersonator of Sir Harry Wildair found herself deserted altogether. Taaffe, who apparently had not the courage to break with her openly, left her suddenly on the plea that urgent business affairs called him back to Ireland immediately. He went off with many protestations of affection and the promise of a speedy return ; but he had not long been gone when Peg discovered that, instead of going to Ireland, as she imagined, he was on the point of being married to an heiress, whose heart, in true Sir Harry Wildair fashion, he had succeeded in capturing.

At this news the fury of the passionate Irish girl knew no bounds. Her love turned to hate, and she panted for revenge. The manner in which she got it is vividly described by Molloy in his memoir of Peg. Assuming male attire, she so successfully disguised herself as "Mr. Adair, a young Irishman of family and fortune," that no one could recognize her, and patrolled the town to get sight of the heiress, "attired in silken hose and satin breeches, with broidered waistcoat and wide-flapped coat, powdered, painted and bewigged, a perfect specimen of the impertinent, dainty, and effeminate coxcomb of the day."

Everywhere the heiress went "Mr. Adair" was, if possible, present. "In the park before dinner, where the lady was sure to take the air ; in the theatre at night, where the lady sat in her box ; and to such assemblies as were open to the public for payment, where the lady was most likely to attend." Finally,

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after having attracted the notice and excited the curiosity of the heiress, "Mr. Adair" managed to make her acquaintance at "a public ridotto in Vauxhall Gardens," and, without disclosing her own identity, exposed Taaffe's profligacy and dishonour so successfully that the rich marriage he contemplated was rendered impossible.

But if Peg hoped by such desperate means to recover the heart she had lost, she was disappointed. "Breaking from her arms," says an old pamphlet, "where she was detaining him with the most soothing words and blandishing caresses, he swore never to see her more." Luckily for her he was as good as his word, for, having been turned out of White's Club, to which he belonged, apparently as the result of this escapade, he went to Paris, where, after being "arrested for robbing a Jew in company with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's son," he seems to have gone to the devil altogether.

III

As may be imagined, Peg Woffington was not the woman to sit down and break her heart because the man she loved was faithless. The idea of appearing on the English stage, perhaps even more than the promise of marriage, had induced her to accompany him to London. Accordingly, cast upon her own resources, she set to work to seek an engagement. Though without a single acquaintance in the theatrical world of London, she was gifted with plenty of assurance. Believing that her success as Polly Peachum in Dublin must have reached the ears of John Rich, the

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manager of Covent Garden Theatre, by whom *The Beggar's Opera* had first been produced, she went to him.

Rich, in spite of his eccentricities and illiteracy, which rendered him, as a patron of the drama, an admirable target for ridicule, was the shrewdest theatrical manager of his day. He had made his name by introducing the pantomime into England, or rather, by being the first to make it respectable as a form of entertainment, and his fortune by the production of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, which, as was wittily said, "made Gay rich, and Rich gay." Success, however, had somewhat turned Rich's head, and he was seldom at home to anybody under a baronet. Peg Woffington is said to have called at his house nineteen times before she was admitted.

Her reception was in keeping with his reputation for eccentricity. "The great manager," says Augustin Daly in his monograph on the actress, now very rare, "as Woffington first saw him, was lolling in ungraceful ease on a sofa, holding a play in one hand, and in the other a tea-cup, from which he frequently sipped. Around about him were seven and twenty cats of all sizes, colours, and kinds. Toms and Tabbies, old cats and kittens, tortoise-shells, Maltese, brindles, white, black and yellow cats of every description. Some were frisking over the floor, others asleep on the rug; one was licking the buttered toast on his breakfast plate, another was engaged in drinking the cream for his tea; two cats lay on his knee, one was asleep on his shoulder, and another sat demurely on his head."

Peg Woffington was astounded at the sight. Rich, to her mind for years, had been the greatest man in

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the world. The menagerie of grimalkins amid which he lay so carelessly was so different an environment from her conception of the Covent Garden Theatre manager, that she was embarrassed into silence. Rich, in his turn, was equally confused by the beauty of his visitor, and lay staring at her a long time before he recollected his courtesy and offered her a chair. Standing before him was a woman whom he afterwards declared to be the loveliest creature he had ever seen. She was taller than the ordinary standard of height, faultless in form, dignified even to majesty, yet, withal, winsome and piquant. Her dark hair, unstained by powder, fell in luxuriant masses over her neck and shoulders.

“It was a fortunate thing for my wife,” said Rich, describing the scene to Sir Joshua Reynolds, “that I am not of a susceptible temperament. Had it been otherwise, I should have found it difficult to retain my equanimity enough to arrange business negotiations with the amalgamated Calypso, Circe, and Armida who dazzled my eyes. A more fascinating daughter of Eve never presented herself to a manager in search of rare commodities. She was as majestic as Juno, as lovely as Venus, and as fresh and charming as Hebe!”

Such an impression was worth all the introductions and recommendations in the world. Rich straightway offered her a salary of nine pounds a week for the season, “in spite of her brogue.” The offer was as eagerly accepted, and on November 6, 1740, Peg Woffington made her first appearance on the London stage as Sylvia in Farquhar’s *Recruiting Officer*.

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The selection of the piece was a wise one, as the experienced Rich well knew, for the part of Sylvia was admirably adapted to display the charms and abilities of the new star. In the opening scenes Sylvia is one of those fascinating hoydens whose fondness for masculine sports does not in the least detract from her essentially feminine character. She delights in galloping all the morning after the hunting-horn, and all the evening after the fiddle, is ready to imitate her father in everything but his drinking, and though thoroughly tired of her own sex, loves to distract the other. Then later, by way of contrast, in the guise of a rakish young officer—a part she could play to perfection—she gives all the fops and rakes in the theatre a chance to admire the exquisite turn of her leg and fit of her clothes.

The play was a favourite with the public, and the new actress was so enthusiastically received by a crowded audience, which included the Prince and Princess of Wales, that Rich was obliged to repeat the performance several times during the same month. It is worth remarking that “Miss Woffington,” as she was described on the programme on the night of her first appearance, styled herself “Mrs. Woffington” on the second evening and ever after. She had not, needless to say, been married in the interval. It was merely the custom of the time, “Mrs.” being applied to all females on the stage who were no longer children. In Peg’s case, as Daly says, “Miss” was the last relic of her Lilliputian career.

A fortnight later the actress appeared as Sir Harry Wildair in Farquhar’s famous comedy *The Constant Couple, or A Trip to the Jubilee*, and immediately

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established her reputation as a *comédienne* of the first order. Sir Harry is a rich and fashionable young rake, who, though utterly depraved, is so brave, witty, and light-hearted a fellow that it is impossible not to like him. The love adventures of which he is the hero constitute the comedy, and skilfully portray his humorous gaiety, and the airy, yet honourable freedom of his conduct. This rôle, the sprightliest and most brilliant created by Farquhar, had first been played by Robert Wilks, whose impersonation was so clever that, during his lifetime, no other actor could compete with him in the part; a fact that caused Farquhar to say that "when the stage had the misfortune to lose him, Sir Harry might go to the d——d Jubilee." Indeed, the part (which depended for success on personal charm, even more than on acting) was considered so difficult that since Wilks's death, some ten years before, the play had seldom been performed.

The announcement, therefore, that a woman was to play Sir Harry Wildair, excited a great deal of curiosity. Whatever apprehensions, however, Peg's admirers may have felt as to her capacity for the part, they were dispelled the moment she appeared. In the handsome young rake of quality, humming a gay air as she tripped lightly across the stage followed by two footmen, she was Sir Harry to the life. "So infinitely did she surpass expectations," says Tate Wilkinson, "that the applause she received was beyond any at that time ever known. Her success became the conversation of every polite circle, as well as in every tavern and coffee-house in the town from St. Paul's to St. James's."

The critics were for once unanimous in their

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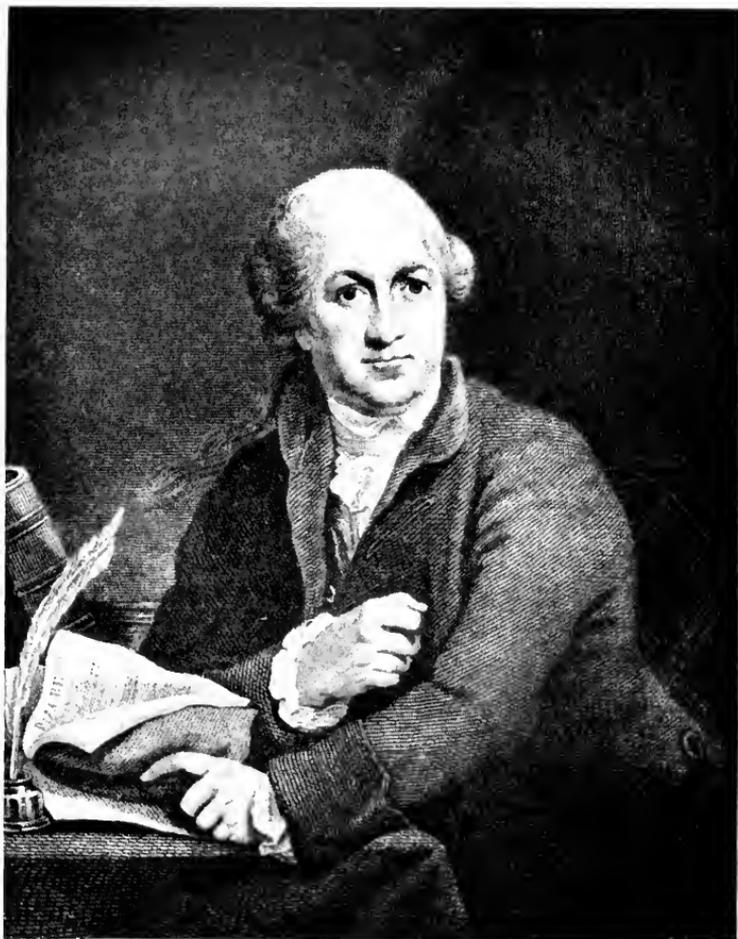
commendations, and Victor voiced the general opinion when he said, "it must be confessed to her praise as an actress that the ease, manner of address, vivacity, and figure of a young man of fashion were never more happily exhibited." Prints of the new star were on sale everywhere, and all the wits and rhymsters of the town vied with one another in singing her praises. The following verses inspired by her impersonation of Polly Peachum, and Sir Harry Wildair in particular, had a great vogue—

"Peggy, the darling of the town!
In Polly won each heart;
But now she captivates again,
And all must feel the smart.

"Her charm, resistless, conquers all—
Both sexes vanquished lie.
And who to *Polly* scorned to fall
By *Wildair*, ravaged, die."

One susceptible damsel is said to have been so enraptured that, believing her really to be a man, she made her an offer of marriage. But there are always to be found certain persons more ready to scoff than to praise. Horace Walpole, whose vanity made him seize every occasion to draw attention to himself, thought her "a bad actress," though he admitted she had "life." His friend Conway, for the same reason, professed to see in her "only an impudent Irish-faced girl." While Garrick—after he essayed the rôle himself and was a complete failure in it—declared that Sir Harry Wildair should always be played by a man.

The general verdict, however, was overwhelmingly in her favour. From the moment she appeared as



DAVID GARRICK
(After Pine)

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Wildair she became a favourite with the public, a position she retained for the remainder of her bright, brief career.

Rich was obliged to repeat the play for twenty consecutive nights—an unheard-of run in those days. Sir Harry Wildair, indeed, continued to be the chief rôle in her repertoire, and never failed to draw crowded audiences for the next twenty years.

IV

The following season (1741) owing to some dispute with Rich over her salary, Peg severed her connection with Covent Garden Theatre and appeared at Drury Lane. About the same time David Garrick made his first appearance at the little out-of-the-way Goodman's Fields Theatre in *Richard III*, and, like Peg Woffington the year before, took the town by storm from the very start. At the end of the season Duval, the manager of the Smock Alley Theatre, in Dublin, engaged them for three months as a counter attraction to Quin and Mrs. Cibber, who were carrying all before them at the Theatre Royal.

Needless to say, during the two years she had been absent from her native town, Peg Woffington had not been forgotten. The fame of her triumphs in London had crossed the Channel, and on her re-appearance all Dublin was ready to welcome her back as a citizen to be proud of. Sylvia was the part she chose to open in, to the delight of an enthusiastic audience, which was amazed beyond expression at the polish and finish her acting had acquired. Nor was Garrick less applauded. There was no longer

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any question of Quin and Mrs. Cibber. They were forced to cut short their season and return to England.

Dublin went stage-mad over the new-comers. In Smock Alley the crowds were so great that it was almost impossible to get into the theatre. "Those who succeeded in gaining admittance," says Daly, "held audience next day to recount the marvels of these performances." When Garrick died as Richard III, "women shrieked; went into hysterics over the sorrows of his King Lear, and sobbed aloud at Peg Woffington's Ophelia."

To add to the sensation of this season in Dublin, the weather was "the hottest ever recorded in Ireland up to that time." It did not, however, cause any diminution in the crowds that flocked to the Smock Alley Theatre, where the atmosphere was so stifling as to breed a sort of epidemic, known popularly as "Garrick fever," which "carried away numbers from the playhouse to the grave."

But Peg Woffington's triumphs were by no means confined to the stage. After the play, when the green-room, as was the custom in those days, was thronged with a motley crowd of fops, rakes, wits, and critics, the admiration she excited took a tenderer and freer form. The more timid or subtle slipped verses and *billets doux* into her hands, the bolder and coarser showered presents and proposals upon her, in a manner which left no doubt as to their intentions and desires. And the brilliant, beautiful creature, radiant with youth, health and success, in the reckless impulsiveness of her over-generous and wayward nature, encouraged them all, the richest and the poorest alike, leaving none to sigh in vain.

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But in this intoxication of *verve*, in this riot of non-morality, she had her preference, and he who considered himself honoured by it was Garrick. He was madly in love with her, had been ever since the night she had appeared as Sylvia in Covent Garden Theatre, and leapt at a bound into fame. He had not then gone on the stage himself, and night after night he haunted the theatre in which she played. Peg, who met him in the green-room to which he had the *entrée*, soon became very fond of him. It was the most natural thing in the world that two such beings should attract one another, matched as they were in youth, beauty and talent, being of the same profession, and having the same desire to be famous.

The extraordinary success each scored on the same stage in Dublin, during the summer of 1742, drew them still closer together, and on their return to London the pair set up a joint establishment. Such a partnership did not occasion the least surprise, and far from being ostracized, their society was courted by persons of the highest rank. The young actor in particular, thanks to his good looks, polished manners, and growing fame, was inundated with invitations by ladies of fashion. But Peg, needless to say, owing to her utter disregard of propriety, apart from actresses, numbered few women among her acquaintances. She was, however, too much of a Bohemian to care for that. She had little in common with her own sex. "Women," she was wont to say, "only talked of silks and satins."

Naturally witty and intelligent, she made the most of such advantages as came in her way. Her tastes,

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improved by good company, were of the intellectual sort. She read much and with discrimination, and spoke French admirably. As "she dearly loved," says Davies, "to pursue the bagatelle of vivacity and humour," she was never happier than when entertaining the first wits of the day, who "felt honoured by her acquaintance." Apart from the rakes and lords, who were always dangling at her heels, such men as Dr. Johnson, Boswell, Henry Fielding, and Samuel Foote, whose wit and satire gained him the name of the English Aristophanes, delighted to gather round her festive board, where she held her own in repartee with the best of them. In particular did she blarney the heart out of old Colley Cibber, who had been in his day a good actor and a better playwright, and was now an execrable laureate and an antiquated beau.

Garrick was quite as fond as Peg of entertaining such people, but he grudged the cost of it. On setting up housekeeping it was agreed they should defray the monthly expenses alternately, but it soon became a joke among their friends that "the fare was better when it was Mrs. Woffington's turn to pay." Dr. Johnson relates that one night during her month of catering, Garrick scolded Peg roundly for making the tea too strong.

"It is no stronger than I have made it before, Davy," she replied, good-humouredly.

"No stronger than usual!" he cried, thumping angrily on the table. "It is, madam. All last month it would have hurt nobody's stomach. But this tea, madam, this tea is as red as blood!"

Many are the stories told of Garrick's parsimony. "In talk," says Macklin, "he was a very generous



SIR CHARLES HANBURY WILLIAMS
(From an old print)

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man, a very humane man, and all that, and I believe he was no hypocrite in his immediate feelings, but the very first ghost of a farthing would melt all his fine sentiments into the air."

Once when walking with Foote, he dropped a guinea for which he searched in vain. "Where on earth can it have gone?" said Foote.

"To the devil, I think," replied Garrick irritably.

"Ah, Davy," replied the wit, who had a weakness for repeating his witticisms at the expense of others, "let you alone for making a guinea go further than anybody else."

It goes without saying, that between a man so close and calculating as David Garrick, and a woman so impulsive and extravagant as Peg Woffington, no connection could be permanent. At the beginning of their intrigue, each had agreed to allow the other full liberty of action. But Peg's idea of liberty was not Garrick's, and though he bore with her inconstancy he did so grudgingly. He especially objected to Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, one of her most devoted and favoured admirers. A prettier fellow never cracked a bottle at White's than this "plenipotentiary of fashion." He could tell the wittiest, if not the decenter of stories, pen a pasquinade in the twinkling of an eye; ridicule a political enemy in a scathing lampoon; write poetry of considerable merit; and gamble from sunset to sunrise—like a rake of the first water. He was, moreover, an able diplomatist, and the friend of all the most distinguished people of the day. The world to which Sir Charles belonged was the world in which Garrick particularly wished to move, for "the little-great man dearly loved a lord,"

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and was a snob for all his talents. But Garrick was none the less extremely jealous of Sir Charles, not only because he was a favourite lover of Peg, but because of the verses he addressed to her. All London talked of the baronet's poem *Lovely Peggy*, while Garrick's lines passed unnoticed.

That Peg gave him reason to complain of her conduct there can be no doubt; but though her love for him was not very deep, as her abuse of the terms of their agreement proves, it is equally certain that she cared more for him than for any one else. Much as she loved her freedom she would gladly have married him.

"Ah, Peggy," he is said to have exclaimed rapturously one night as she came off the stage radiant with the applause of the audience, "you are queen of all hearts!"

"Ay," she replied, with a sudden sadness, "queen of all hearts, but not legal mistress of one."

Under the circumstances what lover, worthy of the name, could refuse to take the hint? Garrick went as far as to "purchase the wedding-ring, which fitted her finger perfectly."

But their marriage, fortunately for both, was never destined to take place. As the novelty of Garrick's passion wore off and his fame increased, his ambition, constantly fed by the flattery of the great, rendered him more and more prudent, economical, and politic. At last his love, which had been a raging fire, burnt itself out. Even then he did not dare to break with her. He hoped she would perceive the alteration in his feelings and release him of her own accord. Her failure to do so made him morose and irritable. But

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his complaints of her infidelity, her extravagance, and even of her popularity on the stage, were of no effect. Finally driven to desperation, he confessed, says Macklin, that "he was wearing the shirt of Dejanira, whereupon she told him with spirit to throw it off, and declared she would never see him more except in the course of business or in the presence of a third person."

All the presents he had given her were promptly returned. But in sending back those he had received from her Garrick kept a pair of diamond shoe-buckles of considerable value. Recollecting them, she sent him a polite note to remind him he still had them. He replied that "the buckles were all he had to recall his many happy hours with her, and trusted on that account she would allow him to retain them." She was too proud to ask again, and he wore them till he left the stage. But suspecting that the association he attached to them was due to their intrinsic value rather than to sentiment, Peg maliciously related the affair to others by whom it was made much of. A caricature ridiculing Garrick's conduct was exposed in the print-shops, to the intense mortification of the actor and the equal delight of Peg, who, knowing his sensitiveness to ridicule, felt she had her revenge.

V

The pride, begotten of success, which had extinguished the fire of Garrick's love for his bewitching mistress and made him dread to humiliate himself by marrying her, was totally foreign to Peg Woffington's nature. She had her pride, too, but there was nothing

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mean or cringing in it. She was not ashamed of her humble origin and never attempted, like so many others of her profession, to pose off the stage as the *grande dame* which she impersonated so wonderfully on. With the world of fashion at her feet, she never forgot that she was the daughter of a bricklayer or dreamt of shirking the duty she owed to her poor old mother.

As a child in Violante's Booth, and later when she danced between the acts at the Theatre Royal, she had not only given her mother the money she earned, but even the coins flung on the stage in appreciation of her juvenile talents. Later, when she began to command the salary of a popular actress, her first care had been to place her mother beyond the reach of poverty. Before leaving Dublin with Garrick, she had settled on her an annuity of forty pounds—an ample allowance in those days for one of her mother's station and requirements—particularly as she did not have to pay for her clothing, which Peg gave her in addition to the annuity. For years the honest soul—"a respectable-looking old lady in her short black velvet cloak, with deep rich fringe, a diamond ring, and small agate snuff-box"—who had had such a struggle in her early days, was a familiar figure in the streets of Dublin. "She had nothing to mind," says O'Keeffe, "but going the rounds of Catholic chapels and chatting with her neighbours"—of her daughters, doubtless, how Peg was a famous actress, and Polly a great lady in society.

The improved condition of the latter, like her own, the happy mother also, no doubt, attributed to the rightful source. For Peg had been as good to her

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sister, to whom she was devoted, as to her mother, and had left nothing undone to give her the best possible education. Brought up in a foreign convent like the daughter of a nobleman, Polly Woffington made the most of her opportunities. On her return to England there were many who considered her more beautiful than Peg. But if her features were more regular and her manners more refined, she lacked Peg's charm and wit.

Peg's pride in her was touching. Far from being jealous of Polly's beauty, she was never tired of admiring it. But above all was she careful to protect her from the temptations to which she herself yielded so light-heartedly. Polly's honour was to Peg as the apple of her eye. To shield her from the dangers to which she perceived the girl's innocence and beauty would expose her among her own corrupt associates, on Polly's arrival Peg left the lodgings in which she was living after her rupture with Garrick and moved to Teddington. But to be cut off indefinitely from the world was little to the captivating Polly's taste. She wanted to go on the stage like her sister, and Peg finally consented to gratify her.

Polly Woffington's first appearance, however, proved such an utter failure that she gave up all further idea of becoming an actress. But though she failed behind the footlights she was successful enough on the wider stage of the world. On the night of her theatrical début the Hon. Captain Cholmondeley happened to be among the audience, and was so fascinated by her beauty that he sought her acquaintance. He was soon head over heels in love, and, as his intentions were honourable, Peg threw no obstacles in

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the way of his courtship of her sister, whom he in due course married.

The aristocratic relations of the Captain, whose mother, the Countess of Cholmondeley, was the only legitimate daughter of Sir Robert Walpole, as may be imagined were highly indignant at such a *mésalliance*. The Countess's brother, Horace Walpole, whose maternal grandfather was a timber-merchant, considered the family as good as disgraced by his nephew's marriage with "a player's sister," though he subsequently got over his mortification, as did the bridegroom's noble father the Earl of Cholmondeley.

This nobleman, whose indignation was increased by the equally undesirable union his heir had contracted, was driven to call on Peg to give her a piece of his mind. But like Balaam, coming to curse he remained to bless—and what was more to the point, to withdraw all his objections and to accept "the player's sister" as his daughter-in-law. After a fascinating hour in Peg's drawing-room at Teddington, he was even condescending enough to confess to his "dear Mrs. Woffington that he was happy at his son's choice in spite of being so very much offended previously." Whereupon Peg, who was aware of the Earl's financial distress, with much spirit retorted: "Offended previously, my lord! It is I who have the more reason to be offended. Previously I had one beggar to support, and now I shall have two!"

The marriage proved a very happy one. Mrs. Cholmondeley, who had a great deal of the vivacity and tact for which the Irish are famous, was soon a prominent figure in society. Like Peg she had a preference for intellectual company, and posed as a blue-



Photo. Lafayette, Dublin

THE HONOURABLE MRS. CHOLMONDELEY

(Polly Woffington)

Reproduced by the courtesy of Sir Henry Bellingham, Bart., from the pastel by Cotes
at Castle Bellingham.

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stocking. She was on terms of friendship with all the celebrities of the day. Sir Joshua Reynolds thought her parties more entertaining than those of Mrs. Vesey, Mrs. Montague or Mrs. Thrale; while Fanny Burney, whose novel, *Evelina*, she praised to the skies, regarded her as an "authority." Her husband, soon after his marriage, sold out of the army and took holy orders. He was a colourless, insignificant individual, "nothing shining," says Miss Burney, "either in person or manners, but rather grim in the first and glum in the last." He was, however, a devoted husband and father.

The daughters his wife bore him, with the exception of one who was killed in a carriage accident when in attendance on the Princess of Wales, made brilliant matches, by which a strain of Woffington blood is perpetuated to this day in many of the noblest families in England.

VI

Peg's generosity was by no means confined to conferring benefits on her mother and sister. A quick and ready sympathy was the distinguishing trait of her character. The memoirs of her day are full of anecdotes of her spontaneous kindness of heart. Milward, who caught a cold while acting in the same company with her, which developed into consumption, "repeatedly declared that her heart was as gentle as her face was lovely." Peg, though slightly acquainted with him, was so touched by his unfortunate condition that throughout his illness she looked after him personally, and when he died got up a benefit for his widow and

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children. In no instance, indeed, was she ever known to refuse her gratuitous services at a benefit in aid of any one belonging to the theatrical profession. She was ever ready, moreover, to lend a helping hand to those who sought her assistance on the stage, though often—notably in the case of Miss Bellamy, whose first appearance was due to her interest—she got no gratitude for her pains.

Her willingness to appear in minor rôles in plays in which the leading character might be said to be hers by right of creation was due less, perhaps, to her good-nature than to her sense of duty to the public as a performer. If her manager fancied his interests were best served that way, she would cheerfully act parts which others in her position would have considered as insults if offered them. On one occasion she yielded Portia to her rival and enemy, Kitty Clive, with the best grace in the world; and on another consented to “paint her lovely face with wrinkles” to act the part of an old woman. She was so anxious to please her audiences that for three seasons she never once disappointed them, either by real or affected illness, though Victor declares that he had “often seen her on the stage when she ought to have been in her bed.”

Such conscientiousness was all the more creditable from the fact that actors at this period were in the habit of availing themselves of the slightest pretext to sacrifice work for play. They had fallen into indifferent and careless habits; managers were continually being requested to excuse them from acting; or receiving messages, sent often late in the day, to say they were ill. At these times Peg Woffington was the

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prop of the theatre, and if too late to learn the part herself she would good-naturedly consent to the substitution of some comedy in which she was the attraction.

But there was a limit even to her good-nature. On one occasion, when acting under the management of Rich, perceiving that her willingness to sacrifice herself to the interests of the theatre was being maliciously taken advantage of, she informed him that the next time he attempted to treat her as a stop-gap she would not play. If Rich had any doubts as to her determination to keep her word they were speedily and roughly dispelled. The very next day Mrs. Cibber, who had been billed to act *Jane Shore*, had one of her periodic attacks of "the spasms" and sent word to say she could not play. Rich immediately withdrew the announcement and substituted *The Constant Couple* with Mrs. Woffington as Sir Harry Wildair, whereupon Peg, on being informed of the change, sent back word that she, too, was ill, and that nothing would induce her to play. And she kept her word.

Unfortunately she chose the wrong moment. The public had become thoroughly tired of the disappointments to which they were subjected by the frequency of these "illnesses." They took it into their heads that they were being victimized, and resolved to resent the next change of bill at the theatre. It chanced to be at this moment that Peg refused to oblige Rich, and on her appearance a few days later as Lady Jane Grey she was "hissed, pelted with orange-peel, and ordered by the audience to beg pardon." Such treatment, unjustly deserved from the public which she had

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studied so conscientiously to please, was calculated to cover any player in her position with confusion. But Peg Woffington was equal to any occasion.

“Whoever is living,” says Tate Wilkinson in his *Memoirs*, “and saw her that night will own that they never beheld any figure half so beautiful since. Her anger gave a glow to her complexion and even added lustre to her charming eyes. She behaved with great resolution, and treated their rudeness with glorious contempt. She left the stage, was called for, and with infinite persuasion was prevailed upon to return. However, she did ; walked forward and told them she was there ready and willing to perform her character if they chose to permit her ; that the decision was theirs—on or off, just as they pleased, it was a matter of indifference to her. The ‘ons’ had it, and all went smoothly afterwards.”

A character endowed with such independence, and the jealousy common to the profession of which she was so conspicuous and popular a member, naturally created many enemies for Peg. Moreover, kind-hearted and good-natured though she was, she had a quick temper, and was ever ready, though not eager, for a contest with any one who provoked it. At no period in the history of the stage has theatrical jealousy been so open and unashamed as in the eighteenth century. In the green-room of Covent Garden or Drury Lane scarce a night passed without a quarrel between the stars of the profession. The violent scenes that were witnessed by the rakes and the fops, the wits and the critics, who had the run of the green-room, the insults that were hurled, the sneers, the jibes, and often the blows that were exchanged, became



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topics of general conversation in tap-room and *salon* alike. The public, then as now, intensely interested in the private doings of stage celebrities, took sides in these quarrels, and signified in no uncertain way their approval or disapproval.

Peg's contempt for the society of her own sex was due chiefly to the pin-pricking to which she was subjected by actresses jealous of her beauty and popularity. In Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Pritchard, who belonged to the Covent Garden company when she joined it on her first appearance in London, she had two petty and irritating enemies. They never lost a chance of venting their dislike before the visitors in the green-room, but as Peg's tongue was much sharper than theirs the discomfiture they sought to inflict on her generally rebounded on themselves.

In Kitty Clive she had a much more aggravating and formidable antagonist. For the jealousy of Mrs. Cibber there was some excuse, as she had made her name in rôles in which Peg aspired to fame. But Kitty's special gifts ran no danger whatever of a comparison with Peg's. She was a soubrette—the best, perhaps, that ever trod the British stage—and Peg Woffington's talents and inclinations were of a totally different kind. Nevertheless, Kitty was pleased to regard Peg as a rival.

Born of a good Irish family that had been ruined in supporting the cause of the Stuarts, Kitty Raftor, as she was first known, made her first appearance on the stage in her seventeenth year as a page in *Mithradates, King of Pontus*, at Drury Lane, about the same time that the ten-year-old Peg Woffington made her first bow to the public in Madame Violante's Booth in

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Dublin. Though coarse and vulgar by nature, she was a woman of the strictest virtue. Married at twenty-one to a gentleman of the name of Clive, from whom she had soon parted, no breath of scandal then or afterwards ever sullied her name. Plain of face, but not without charm, she had gradually and with difficulty worked her way to the front. For several years prior to Peg Woffington's arrival in London she had been, says Macklin, "the joy of her audience when she kept clear of anything serious or genteel." But popularity on such terms was by no means to her taste. Not satisfied with winning popularity as a chambermaid, a hoyden, or a vulgar fine lady, she aspired to win renown in the nobler sphere of tragedy, only to reduce such rôles as Desdemona or Portia, when she attempted them, to burlesque.

It was, therefore, with anything but equanimity that Kitty beheld Peg, younger and more beautiful, win with ease the position it had taken her years to attain, and in the parts she longed, but had not the ability, to perform. Both being naturally quick-tempered, friction between them was inevitable. Neither tried to avoid it. "No two women in high life," says Davies, "ever hated each other more unreservedly than these two great dames of the theatre; but though the passion of each was as lofty as those of a duchess, yet they wanted the courtly art of concealing them. Woffington was well-bred, seemingly very calm, and at all times mistress of herself. Clive was arrogant, high-tempered, and impetuous. What came uppermost in her mind she spoke without reserve. Woffington blunted Clive's sharp speeches by her apparently civil but ever keen and sarcastic replies. Thus she

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often threw Kitty off her guard by an arch severity which the other could not easily parry."

But though, as Macklin says, Peg "made battle with a better grace," she was not always "mistress of herself." Once, indeed, the quarrels of the two, we are told, "exceeded the limits of language." Peg, with her customary good-nature, had consented to act the minor rôle of Lady Percy in *Henry IV*. Kitty, though not acting herself in the drama, was highly pleased at the small chance it afforded Peg, and at the fall of the curtain sneeringly condoled with her. This produced a sharp retort from Peg that made Kitty furious, and she immediately began to abuse her in a torrent of vituperation of which she was a perfect mistress. Peg happened to be feeling anything but good-humoured at the time, and instantly kindling into a rage in which words were no longer serviceable weapons, she struck Kitty. The blow was at once returned with a right good-will, and the two "fought like Amazons." To render this contest of fisticuffs, in which Peg is said to have been vanquished, the more grotesque, those who witnessed it, instead of trying to separate or appease the pair, took sides and came to blows themselves.

Such an affair, needless to say, could not be kept a secret. The wits seized upon it with zest, and, to the huge delight of the town, caricatures of *The Green-room Scuffle* were exposed in all print-sellers' windows.

After her rupture with Garrick, life at Drury Lane was made, according to Daly, "a perfect Hades" for her. Garrick, who had become joint manager of the theatre with Lacy, regardless of her feelings, persuaded Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Pritchard, her old enemies at

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Covent Garden, to join his company at Drury Lane, where they united with Kitty Clive in subjecting her to every conceivable annoyance. Her name was printed in the announcement bills in smaller type than theirs ; her favourite rôles were given to them ; and she was frequently even left out of the cast altogether.

To crown all, Garrick himself, who had once extolled her in verse, had the baseness to revile her coarsely through the same medium. But this was more than Peg's proud spirit could endure, and she withdrew from the company.

After a prolonged holiday in Paris she returned once more to Covent Garden, only to find in "blue-eyed Bellamy" an enemy more aggravating than Mrs. Cibber or Mrs. Pritchard, and more dangerous than Kitty Clive. The illegitimate daughter of an Irish peer, who, after bringing her up in luxury, had in a moment of pique cast her adrift, George Ann Bellamy had the most sensational career of any actress that ever appeared on the English stage. Among her numerous adventures, after declining all proposals except "marriage and a coach," she had been abducted and rescued in a manner worthy of a heroine in a melodrama. For a time she counted her admirers by the thousand. But her triumph on the stage was of short duration. Having lost her looks and her suitors, she was finally hissed off the boards, and disappearing into obscurity ended her days pathetically enough.

When Peg Woffington rejoined the Covent Garden company, however, "blue-eyed Bellamy," as she was called by the habitués of the green-room, was a great favourite with the public. Irish, like Peg, though

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without her wit, she had the advantage of being ten years her junior—a fact that the pretty, spiteful little creature was fond of rubbing into her more talented rival in the most aggravating fashion. Conscious of her beauty and puffed up with her success, she was, according to one of her admirers, “as cold as ice and as conceited as the devil.” Having reigned supreme at Covent Garden till the advent of Peg, she objected to share her supremacy with her more gifted colleague. But George Ann’s methods of manifesting her animosity were totally different from the vituperative Kitty’s.

Infinitely crafty, she quickly detected Peg’s weaknesses and turned them to account. As leading lady, Peg had a natural desire to appear before her audience in costumes worthy of the superior parts she acted. Rich, however was notoriously parsimonious, and Peg, to her great disgust, was obliged to be content with such finery as the wardrobe at Covent Garden, which was barely sufficient to the needs of the theatre, afforded. Miss Bellamy had an equally expensive taste in dress, and as she was fortunate enough to have friends willing to gratify it, it was her amiable practice to out-dazzle her rival by unexpectedly appearing on the stage in a costume calculated to cause her discomfiture.

A revival of Nat Lee’s once famous and long popular tragedy, *The Rival Queens*, is a notorious instance of “little Bellamy’s” capacity in this respect. Peg, who was to play the part of Roxana, was determined for once to have a costume worthy of the character. The due pressure was accordingly brought to bear on Rich, who, to flatter her vanity and at the same time curtail the expense as much as possible,

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purchased for her a dress reputed to have been worn by no less a personage than the Princess of Wales. Miss Bellamy, on the other hand, had recourse as usual to the generosity of one of her admirers, and secretly sent over to Paris for two superb costumes. The effect she produced on the unsuspecting Peg when "accoutred in all her magnificence she made her *entrée* into the green-room as the Persian Princess Statira" is thus characteristically and amusingly related by Miss Bellamy herself—

"As soon as she saw me, almost bursting with rage, she drew herself up, and with a haughty air thus addressed me: 'I desire, madam, you will never more upon any account wear those clothes in the piece we are to perform to-night.'

"You are too well acquainted with my disposition to suppose this envious lady took the proper way to have her request granted. I replied: 'I know not, madam, by what right you take upon yourself to dictate to me what I shall wear. And I assure you, madam, you must ask it in a very different manner before you obtain my compliance.' She now found it necessary to solicit in a softer strain. And I readily gave my consent. The piece consequently went through without any murmuring upon her part, whatever might be her sensations.

"However, the next night I sported my other suit, which was much more splendid than the former. This rekindled Mrs. Woffington's rage, so that it nearly bordered on madness. When, oh! dire to tell! she drove me off the carpet, and gave me the *coup de grâce* almost behind the scenes. The audience who, I believe, preferred hearing my last dying speech to



GEORGE ANNE BELLAMY
(From an old print)

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seeing her beauty and fine attitude, could not avoid perceiving her violence, and testified their displeasure at it.

“Though I despise revenge, I do not dislike retaliation. I therefore put on my yellow and purple once more. As soon as I appeared in the green-room, she imperiously questioned me, how I dared to dress again in the manner she so strictly prohibited. The only return I made to this insolent interrogation was by a smile of contempt.” Hereupon Peg’s Irish wit was used as a weapon of defence with such effect that her rival “recollecting the well-known distich that

He who fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day,

made as quick an exit as possible, notwithstanding she wore the regalia of a queen.”

Peg’s rage, however, would appear to have got the better of her. For, adds Miss Bellamy in her feline way, “I was obliged in some measure to the Comte” (the adorer who had supplied her with the dresses) “for my safety; otherwise I should have stood a chance of appearing in the next scene with black eyes instead of the blue ones which Nature had given me.”

The recollection of the favours she had solicited and received from Peg when she arrived in London from Dublin, a few years before, in an almost destitute condition, seems never to have crossed the mind of this airy creature. On another occasion, she brought the Duchess of Queensberry, whose well-known devotion to the drama caused her patronage to be much sought after in the theatrical world, into the green-room

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at a moment designed to destroy whatever illusions she might have entertained of the charms of Peg. As they entered, the first thing the duchess saw "was the Fair, the Egyptian Queen with a pot of porter in her hand, crying: "Here's confusion to all order! Let liberty thrive!"—a spectacle that caused her Grace to withdraw hastily, "wondering if hell were let loose."

Peg's mortification, however, was shared by all the other members of the company as well, and to quiet them, Rich was obliged to publish an order, "excluding every one from the stage and green-room except those absolutely attached to the theatre."

But Miss Bellamy, whose admirers had been wont to monopolize the green-room, and who consequently was the one most affected by this order of exclusion, was not the only thorn in the flesh of Peg. Quin, who regarded himself as the head of the company, a position in which he displayed an insufferable arrogance, was extremely jealous of her popularity. He never forgave her for having prompted him once when he forgot his lines, and never missed a chance of insulting her. On one occasion, after she had been more enthusiastically applauded than usual in her rôle of Sir Harry Wildair, she exclaimed as she came off the stage flushed with excitement, "I really believe half the town take me for a man!" Whereupon Quin in his coarse way had retorted, "The other half, at any rate, have had tangible proof of the contrary."

Mrs. Cibber, too, returned to Covent Garden to annoy her in a hundred different petty ways. It was now that she was hissed in *Jane Shore*, as already related, for refusing to be treated as a stop-gap when Mrs. Cibber chose to fancy she was too ill to act. This

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was the limit of her endurance, and being convinced that Rich, whom the whole company cordially disliked, was responsible for the indignity, she refused to remain at Covent Garden after the end of the season.

The two principal theatres in London being thus closed to her, Peg decided to go back to Dublin, where she was engaged by Richard Brinsley Sheridan's father, Thomas Sheridan, who was at the time manager of several theatres.

VII

Dublin society was never more brilliant than in the autumn of 1751 when Peg Woffington made her *rentrée* at the Smock Alley Theatre as Lady Townley in Colley Cibber's sparkling comedy, *The Provoked Husband*. It was the beginning of the Duke of Dorset's second Viceroyalty, one of the most popular in Irish history ; and the three years it lasted, during which Peg remained in her native city, was likewise the period of her greatest fame.

She had been engaged rather reluctantly by Sheridan for the season at a salary of four hundred pounds, but as in ten performances of four of her rôles she brought the theatre the colossal sum of four thousand pounds, he was glad enough to engage her at double the sum for the following season. Her acting, which had now reached its highest development, was the only topic in or out of the theatre. An anonymous critic, speaking of her, says, "she first steals your heart, and then laughs at you as secure of your applause. There is such a prepossession arises from her form, such a witchcraft in her beauty, and, to

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those who are personally acquainted with her, such an absolute command from the sweetness of her disposition, that it is almost impossible to criticize upon her."

She was always fond of "breeches" parts, in which all her contemporaries agree "she cut an elegant figure." As Rosalind, from all accounts she must have been inimitable. But it was something more than the "mere grace of her gestures" which made her rendering of Sir Harry Wildair "not only a sensuous but an intellectual delight." Never, perhaps, with the exception of Eleanora Duse's, have such true *grandes dames* as Peg Woffington's been seen on the stage. Those who beheld her as Lady Townley, Lady Betty Modish, or Maria, in old Colley Cibber's brilliant comedies of intrigue, found it difficult to believe that she was the daughter of a bricklayer and a washerwoman. "From the distinction of her bearing," says one writer, "it seemed as if her family tree should bristle with peers, and, perhaps, two or three of those wicked old Plantagenet kings."

But if in Murphy's stilted language "genteel comedy was her province," like her enemy Kitty Clive, she also desired to excel in tragedy. To this end, during her visit to Paris she made a special study of the method of Mademoiselle Dumesnil, who after winning fame in soubrette parts had become the most accomplished tragic actress of her day. In comedy, which gives the freest scope to a vivacious personality, her extreme unconventionality and scorn of stage traditions contributed largely to her success; but in spite, or perhaps on account, of the great pains she took to master a medium of expression so foreign to her nature as tragedy, her acting of serious parts was

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conventional and stilted after the fashion then in vogue.

The peculiar *timbre* of her voice, moreover, was not suited to the recitation of blank verse, in which most of the tragedies of the day were written. Even in comedy, where she reigned supreme and alone, the "dissonant notes" of her voice seem to have offended sensitive ears. One critic speaks of her "barking as Lady Townley; another of her "croaking." But the fact that she still managed to please in spite of this defect proves that her powers of fascination must indeed have been wonderful. It is possible, however, that the exception taken to her voice was due to her brogue rather than to any defect in the voice itself, for none of her Irish critics refer to it.

But if her "tragic utterances were the bane of tender ears," she seems to have pleased the public, for she appeared as frequently in tragedy as in comedy. Victor, who was no mean judge, greatly admired her in tragic rôles. Another of her contemporaries declared that "her Hermione was an instance there was scarce anything she could not do in tragedy." Even the envious Miss Bellamy says that "when dressed for Cleopatra, Woffington's beauty beggared description," and is reported to have been so overcome by her acting of Jocasta in *Ædipus* that she once fainted on the stage when playing with her. This has been set down to affectation, but as Dr. Doran observes, George Ann was not a lady likely to swoon for the sake of complimenting a rival actress.

Though not received at the "Castle" or seen in the drawing-rooms of women of rank, Peg was too sensible to feel slighted. She never had the least

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ambition to win a position in society. Her chief pleasure was the companionship of clever men, and in Dublin, as previously in London, she gathered about her the most brilliant and distinguished of their sex. It was not altogether the seductive actress they courted, but the woman whose intellect, sharpened and refined by constant association since girlhood with wits, poets, and statesmen, made her, as Victor says, "such a jovial bottle companion."

Nor did the flattery with which they perpetually censed her turn her head. "To Mrs. Woffington's honour," says Hitchcock, "be it ever remembered that whilst thus in the zenith of her glory, courted and caressed by all ranks and degrees, it made no alteration in her behaviour; she remained the same gay, affable, obliging, good-natured Woffington to every one around her."

Needless to say, with such a reputation there were many who sought to turn it to account, like the famous Miss Gunnings. The daughters of a poor Irish squireen, whose noble connections "remained inflexible to repeated solicitations," for pecuniary assistance they had been brought to Dublin by their mother, who saw in their wonderful beauty the family's last resource. The first step to its proper exploitation was naturally to be presented at Dublin Castle. But this, which a pedigree renders the simplest thing in the world, poverty makes the hardest. Without a suitable dress no woman, no matter how beautiful, can go to Court, and the Gunnings had no money to purchase the requisite attire. But they did not despair. Finding the tradesmen as deaf to their appeals as their grand relations they suddenly bethought themselves of Peg Woffington.

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She lived opposite the house in which they lodged ; they had often seen her driving about the town in her fine coach, and remembering the stories they had heard of her good-nature, which was proverbial in Dublin, they wrote beseeching her to lend them the dresses they lacked. Peg at once replied, bidding them come and select whatever they needed from her wardrobe. They did not require a second invitation, and, thanks to the borrowed finery of an actress, the sensation they created was such that one subsequently caught a duke, and the other an earl.

“It was,” says Macklin, “at this era that Woffington might be said to have reached the came of her fame. She was then in the bloom of her person, accomplishments and profession ; highly distinguished for her wit and vivacity ; with a charm of conversation that at once attracted the admiration of the men and the envy of the women. Her company was sought off the stage, as well as on it ; and though she did not much admire the frivolity of her own sex, and consequently did not mix much with them, she was the delight of some of the gravest and most scientific characters in Church and State.”

Indeed, her popularity with the audiences who flocked to see and applaud her was such that she might have remained indefinitely in Dublin, for she was as fond of her native city as it was proud of her. But in an evil hour she suffered herself to be elected president of the Beefsteak Club, and through that distinction, which she was the only woman to share, came to grief along with her manager and his theatre. This club had been founded by Sheridan “with the object of allowing the followers of the Sock and

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Buskin to have some hours of social mirth and relaxation." The original project, however, had been completely altered in its execution. Of its fifty or sixty members recruited from the "Castle" set, Sheridan and Peg Woffington were the only actors. As a social club it soon became remarkably fashionable, and stories of the jollity that reigned there under the presidency of "the gay, the lovely, the volatile Woffington," gave it great notoriety. It was reported among other things that at the weekly dinners toasts were drunk to the Government, which was then very unpopular, and that the Irish were held up to ridicule. As a result of these stories, Sheridan and Peg, who were both Irish, were denounced as traitors by the excited populace, which only wanted an opportunity to make its displeasure felt.

This occurred when Voltaire's *Mahomet* was produced. Certain lines were considered by the public, already familiar with the play, to be peculiarly applicable to those in the "Castle" set. On the first performance the audience had received Sheridan and Peg in stony silence, and loudly applauded the actor whose part it was to utter these lines. But instead of being warned by this danger and withdrawing the piece altogether, Sheridan was foolish enough to repeat it, whereupon there was a scene of wild disorder. For being requested to repeat the fatal lines, the actor, who either wished to ingratiate himself with the public or to pay off some old scores against his manager, begged to be excused, as "his compliance would be greatly injurious to him." Such an insinuation naturally fired the indignation of the audience, which gave vent to it in calls for Sheridan.

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He, however, ordered the curtain to be lowered, and informed the audience, through the prompter, that the play would only proceed if suffered to do so without interruption ; if not, all persons were at liberty to take their money back. This message only inflamed the audience still more, and when it learnt that Sheridan, alarmed for his personal safety, had sneaked out of the theatre, it demanded he should return. His refusal to do this filled the house with a howling mob which amused itself with calls for the manager, shouts for vengeance on all the " Castle " set, and threats of firing the theatre.

The appearance of Peg, who bravely came forward in the hope of quieting the tumult, only added fuel to the flame. As president of the obnoxious club her patriotism was suspect. She was greeted with a storm of hisses, and forced to beat an undignified retreat. Sheridan was given an hour to return and apologize, and when the hour expired without his appearance the rioters proceeded to demolish the house. In a few minutes the whole of the interior of the Smock Alley Theatre was wrecked, and an attempt to set fire to the building was only stopped by the timely arrival of a company of Guards.

This put an end to all further performance. Sheridan was forced to retire from the management of the theatre and leave Dublin. He went to London with his leading lady, who, having made her peace with Rich, returned to Covent Garden, where on her reappearance on October 22, 1754, after three years' absence, she received an ovation from a crowded house.

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VIII

“I will never,” said Peg once, “destroy my own reputation by clinging to the shadow after the substance has gone. When I can no longer bound on the boards with at least some show of my youthful vigour, and when the enthusiasm of the public begins to show signs of decay, that will be the last appearance of Margaret Woffington.”

This resolve, which others have so often made and found so hard to keep, was never put to the test. Fate intervened instead, and put an end to her brilliant career with truly tragic suddenness. It is true in 1757, when the blow which was to rob the stage of her for ever fell upon her, the bloom of her old charm had somewhat faded. It was observed that a change had come over her—the vim seemed to have gone out of her vivacity, and there were times when she looked old and haggard. She was aware of the change herself; and for the first time in her life began to complain of indispositions which rendered it impossible for her to act. She attributed the cause, however, to overwork, and, believing that a period of much-needed rest at the end of the season would speedily put her to rights, she struggled gallantly to keep up. The idea that the time had come for her to retire never occurred to her, for though people might whisper that “Woffington was on the wane,” her Rosalind and Sir Harry Wildair continued to delight as of old.

It was in the former of these rôles that she was seen on the night of May 17, 1757, when the blow fell. She ought to have been in her bed,

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but with her usual kindheartedness she had promised to act Rosalind for the benefit of two minor actors and a dancer, and she would not disappoint them. For the first four acts all went well. "Among the audience," says a writer, "one frequently overheard observations on her delightful playing. Nothing could have been more fascinating than the scene where, as the youthful Ganymede, she made Orlando swear everlasting love. Even the critics actually forgot to ask, as they had done of late, who was to be Woffington's successor."

But to those behind the scenes it was evident that she was acting under a terrible strain, and during the fifth act, as the play neared its end, she was heard to complain, on leaving the stage to change her costume, that she felt ill. Tate Wilkinson, who chanced to be standing in the wings, offered her his arm. He was an impudent and forward youth with a remarkable talent for mimicry which he had once displayed at her expense. Particularly sensitive to ridicule, Peg had never forgiven him, and in her resentment had ever since vainly attempted to drive him out of the theatrical profession, which was his sole means of livelihood—"almost the only unkind action that can be laid to her charge." But whether his readiness to come to her assistance in spite of her vindictive treatment softened her, or whether she was feeling too ill to remember the grudge she had against him, she graciously accepted the proffered arm in the spirit in which it was offered. Admittedly ill though she now was, she managed to return to the stage to finish her part. But suddenly, on uttering the lines of the epilogue, "If I were among you, I would kiss as many

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of you as had beards that pleased me," her voice faltered. She tried to continue, but could not proceed, then, with a scream of terror, she tottered to the wings, and was caught before she fell.

"The audience," says Wilkinson, "sunk into awful looks of astonishment, both young and old, before and behind the curtain, to see one of the most handsome women of the age, a favourite principal actress, who had for several seasons given high entertainment, struck so suddenly by the hand of death in such a situation, and in her prime, she being then in her thirty-eighth year."

That night and for weeks afterwards her life was despaired of, but she recovered to linger for three years more—"no longer recognizable as the once lovely Peggy."

Though her body, whose once faultless shape had been the object of so much admiration, was paralysed, her mind was still unimpaired. But its vivacity and wit, which had won her the friendship of so many brilliant men, had vanished. Stricken as she was in the heyday of her triumphant career, life lost for her all its old allurements. As she lay in her villa at Teddington, tenderly cared for by the grateful wife of Barrington, with whom she had acted as a child in Violante's Booth, and who owed such fortune as he won on the London stage to her interest, her whole outlook on the world from which she was slowly making her exit changed.

During these three last years her conduct is spoken of by all as something like a phenomenon. "Simple,

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graceful and pious," says Galt, "it partook of all that was blameless in her previous life." She had been born a Roman Catholic, but as she did not hesitate to renounce this creed to inherit an annuity of two hundred pounds bequeathed to her for life by one of her admirers, on condition she became a Protestant, her religious opinions would appear to have been as light as her life. The change of creed certainly produced no change in her conduct, which till her tragic exit from the stage had been typical of an actress of the Restoration period. Even the eloquence of John Wesley, whom she once went to hear preach out of curiosity, failed to exert any influence on her emotional nature; and it was not till she lay in the shadow of death that she turned to religion for consolation.

Conversion under such circumstances is apt to be of very questionable value, and there were not wanting many to charge the repentant magdalen with hypocrisy. But this reproach, of which she was fully conscious, only served to add fervour to her new-found faith, and inspired her with a loathing of her past life. The stage in particular, the scene of her worldly triumphs, source of her meretricious joys, inspired her with a veritable horror. She sought to awaken the consciences of her former theatrical acquaintances to its dangers. "There is no position," she said to one of them, "so full of temptation. At the bottom of my heart I always loved and honoured virtue, but the stage for years made me a worthless woman."

But actions speak louder than words, and Peg Woffington's repentance was by no means confined to

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lip-service. Her heart was too brimful of sympathy and loving-kindness for the austerity of the Puritan to find room there. She was no saint, but an impulsive sinner whose frailty obtains forgiveness from admiration of her virtues. Zealous in the performance of good works, full of sorrow for the past and hope in the future—all the Magdalen was there in that beautiful wreck. One of the last-recorded acts of her life was to send for her old enemy and rival, Miss Bellamy, and beg her forgiveness for whatever humiliation she may have caused her.

After the first shock of Death's terrible and imperative summons had passed, Peg answered it bravely enough. At her request she was buried in the churchyard at Teddington, where a tablet erected to her memory may still be seen in the parish church.

In spite of her extravagance, to which Garrick had so strongly objected when they kept house together in the old glad days of her early triumphs, she left a considerable fortune, over which there was much heart-burning. Colonel Cæsar of the Guards, her latest lover, expected to inherit it, and with this end in view, according to Kitty Clive, had actually married her after her seizure. Peg did, indeed, make a will in his favour, but her sister, in whose house she died, persuaded her at the last to destroy it and name her sole heir of all she possessed. In this way Mrs. Cholmondeley also defrauded Mrs. Barrington, who had nursed her sister during her illness, of Peg's jewels which had been promised her.

It was, no doubt, also due to Mrs. Cholmondeley that the dying woman failed to provide for the endow-

Peg Woffington

ment of the almshouses which O'Keeffe declares she built at her own cost for the poor of Teddington. As a result, this charity, in which Peg had taken great interest, ceased at her death.

“ The Margaret Woffington cottages,” as they are called, however, still exist—a low range of vine-covered old-world dwellings, with quaint little gardens in front, such as one sees in the pictures of Constable—and help, in a charming fashion that would have pleased her, to keep alive the memory of one who was a lovely woman, a rare actress, a merry companion, and a generous friend.

APOLLINE HÉLÈNE MASSALSKA
COUNTESS POTOCKA

1763-1815



HELENE MASSALSKA, PRINCESSE CHARLES DE LIGNE
(After Leclerc)

[To face p. 179

“Où sont-ils, vierge Souveraine ?—
Mais où sont les neiges d’antan ?”

FRANÇOIS VILLON :
Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis.

APOLLINE HÉLÈNE MASSALSKA
COUNTESS POTOCKA

1763-1815

I

“THOSE whom the gods wish to destroy they first drive mad,” is an aphorism applicable to nations as well as to individuals.

Poland is a case in point. Her regrettable obliteration from the map of Europe, over which so much futile blood and ink have been spilt, is the more tragic from the fact that it was the direct consequence of her own folly. It was her misfortune, perhaps, rather than her fault that she could only produce soldiers when she needed statesmen. Had King Stephen Bathory or King John Sobieski—her two most famous warriors—been a little less sublime and a little more subtle, Poland might still be an independent state. But as no Louis XI arose to curb the insolence of the nobles, or no Richelieu to centralize and strengthen such authority as existed, Poland never outgrew, so to speak, the anarchy of her turbulent youth.

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Without any clearly-defined boundaries, government, or policy, the "Republic," as she termed herself, was really, even at her zenith, nothing more than a convenient term to designate a confederation of absolutely independent feudal lords, whose sole bond of union consisted in strict adherence to the principle that the mere protest of one was sufficient to invalidate any decree upon which the others might agree. When to the disruptive tendencies of the *liberum veto*, as this ridiculous prerogative was called, were added the perpetual suspicion of the Polish nobles towards each other, and their perpetual mutiny towards their king, whose office, bereft of all power, was sold whenever vacant to the highest bidder, extinction could naturally be but a question of time.

Poland, however, like Charles II, was an "unconscionable time in dying."

For a moment it seemed as if she had expired with King John Sobieski, in 1696, but she lingered for another hundred years, gradually becoming weaker and weaker. France and Saxony fought for her throne in her territories, which Charles XII and Peter the Great alike used as their battle-ground. Peace or war, it was just the same. When her rowdy neighbours patched up their quarrels, they treated her as a sort of "public inn," and were continually dropping in to be entertained at her expense. As the Empress Catherine expressed it, "one can always pick up something worth having in Poland for the mere trouble of stooping for it."

The year 1763, in which Hélène Massalska was born, was one of the most impudent of these cavalier visitations. The Empress dropped in and picked up

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the Polish crown, which as it did not quite fit her own head she gave to one of her lovers, Stanislas Poniatowski, who was destined to be the last to wear it.

Having thus set the country ablaze, as she had craftily designed, Catherine determined to drop in again and pick up something more. Accordingly, under pretext of supporting her *protégé*, she sent a Russian army to his aid, which, after occupying several fortresses, exacted of the unhappy king, in return for its services, a treaty granting to all Jews, Protestants, and members of the Greek Church in Poland the privileges which had till then belonged exclusively to the Roman Catholics.

In taking the Dissidents, as they were termed, under her protection, Catherine, needless to say, was utterly devoid of any sympathy for them. Like Frederick the Great, and the French philosophers, whom they both so much admired, religion in any form was to her merely a ridiculous superstition. Her object was to exasperate the Poles to some act of resentment, which would give her an excuse for picking up the whole country, or as much as her neighbours would let her carry off. Poland, as she had planned, rushed headlong into the trap. Conspiracies were formed all over the country to drive out the Russians, of which the most important was known as the Confederation of Bar.

Among the leaders of this belated patriotic movement, the first genuine attempt of the Poles to maintain their independence, was Prince Ignace Massalski, Bishop of Wilna. Descended from one of the oldest and richest families of Lithuania—Poland's most

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important province—Massalski possessed considerable influence, which he was ready to sell to the highest bidder. As a noble, indeed, he was typical of his class—violent and corrupt, fickle and irresolute. As a prelate he lived the luxurious life of a prince of the Church of the eighteenth century. As a man he was very handsome, very intelligent, and, according to his contemporaries, very learned.

His chief vice was gambling. In three years he lost more than a hundred thousand ducats, and in spite of his vast estates and notorious speculations, he was continually in debt.

His chief virtue lay in the love he bore to his orphaned niece and nephew—Hélène and her brother Xavier—who had been left to his care.

Though related to the Radziwills, who had violently opposed Poniatowski's elevation to the throne, he had decided to support the king. This conduct had very nearly cost him his life. For Prince Radziwill, hearing of it, hastened to Wilna with two hundred noblemen, broke into the episcopal palace, and, brandishing his sword in the face of Massalski, who was taken completely by surprise, he recited the names of former bishops whom the princes of his house had put to death, ending with these words: "Next time you are subjected to a similar temptation, remember that I have a hundred thousand ducats in reserve with which to obtain my absolution at Rome!"

In this critical situation Massalski acted with consummate guile. He pretended to submit, but Radziwill had no sooner departed than he barricaded the palace and the cathedral, sounded the tocsin, armed the populace, and chased Radziwill out of Wilna.

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This spirited conduct, however, by no means prevented the Bishop of Wilna from abandoning King Stanislas, and throwing in his lot with the patriots of Bar, the moment he found it to his interest to do so. But Catherine was a very different adversary from Radziwill. She quickly and ruthlessly stamped out the resistance she had invited. The Confederates of Bar, routed in their first battle with the Russians, fled the country to escape a worse fate. Massalski, whose bishopric was pillaged and property confiscated, found a refuge in Paris with his little nephew and niece, whom he nobly refused to leave behind without protection in such perilous times.

This flight amidst a thousand dangers, from "a country where she saw nothing but fierce-looking soldiers, whose appearance alone frightened her," was the first memorable episode in *Hélène Massalska's* life.

It does not seem, however, to have made a very vivid or lasting impression upon her mind. In a short time all she could recollect of this thrilling journey was that "she quite forgot her French on the way, and that the driver on the coach blew his horn all the time." Of her life in Poland she soon ceased to have any recollection at all, which is not singular, considering she was only seven when its trend was so abruptly changed. Nevertheless, something of the turbulent atmosphere in which she was born always clung to her. It was particularly noticeable in her temperament. In spite of her French education, and preference for everything French, she remained essentially Polish to the end—impulsive, rebellious, undisciplined.

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II

The Bishop of Wilna, as has been stated, was a highly-educated and accomplished man, and he was anxious that his little nephew and niece should receive an education worthy of their rank and fortune. To this end, immediately after his arrival in Paris, he placed H el ene in the convent of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, where he wisely decided to let her remain till her education was complete.

This institution, which had been recommended to the Bishop by the celebrated Madame Geoffrin, with whom he was very intimate, was admirably suited for the purpose he had in view.

From the time of its foundation in the Regency till it was closed in the Revolution, the school conducted by the nuns of the Abbaye-aux-Bois enjoyed the distinction of being the most fashionable and select of all the schools for girls in Paris. The nuns, who were all of noble birth, received as pupils none but the daughters of the greatest families. The head mistress was Madame de Rochechouart, a member of the historic house of Mortemart. After Madame de Chabrilan, the Lady Abbess, she was the most important person in the convent. When H el ene was placed under her charge she was a tall, stately woman of twenty-seven, "handsome and witty like all her family, with a pretty foot, delicate white hands, a proud and serious expression, and a bewitching smile." An aristocrat to her finger tips, and fully conscious of the fact, she never let an occasion slip of impressing on her pupils the grandeur of their birth and the dignity attaching to rank. Her efforts in this direction were quite need-

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less, for the *pensionnaires* of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, young though they were, required no one to instruct them as to the importance of such things.

They had learnt their pedigrees before they had been taught their catechism. From their earliest infancy not a day passed without their being reminded in a hundred ways of the value of ancient lineage. The manner in which they lived, moreover, at the Abbaye-aux-Bois was on a par with these traditions. The convent was run on the most expensive and luxurious scale. The "welcome," as it was called, consisting of a "collation with ices," that it was customary for each new arrival to give the school, cost twenty-five louis. The elder girls had their own maids. Hélène, who was only seven when admitted to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, had a nurse, a maid, and a maid for the nurse, a room to herself, and four louis a month spending-money. When her uncle returned to Poland after an exile of two years, he gave orders to his banker in Paris to supply her with thirty thousand livres a year (£1,200) if necessary. As the other girls had similar provision made for them, some idea may be gathered of the cost of educating a nobleman's daughter in a fashionable boarding-school under the old régime.

The price, according to modern ideas, was far in excess of the value received. As the education provided by the Abbaye-aux-Bois was principally concerned with preparing the girls to adorn as brilliantly as possible the lofty position they were destined to fill in society, more attention was paid to the teaching of fashionable accomplishments than to more useful knowledge. The prize for dancing, for instance, was

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equivalent to that for history. Music and painting were scarcely less important than dancing. Elocution—the art of reading aloud and acting, accomplishments considered absolutely essential to good breeding in the eighteenth century—received the greatest care. The instructors were the best that could be procured. The first dancers at the opera directed the dancing classes; and actors, from the Comédie Française, were engaged to teach elocution and to arrange and produce the plays that were given at the convent in the fine theatre which had been specially built and equipped for the purpose. The nuns merely superintended the studies of their pupils and were present during the lessons. They, however, took complete charge of the more practical subjects the girls were taught, such as cooking, sewing, and chemistry.

The school was divided into three classes—the Blue, the White, and the Red—so named from the colour of their respective uniforms. The Blue class, which Héléne joined, was composed of children from five—the earliest age at which they were received by the nuns—to ten years. The White class was the one in which they were prepared for their first communion; after which they entered the Red, where they remained till they left the school.

A more frivolous and superficial system of education it would, perhaps, be hard to conceive; nevertheless, it was not so barren as it seems. To it the high-born women of the eighteenth century owed the exquisite grace and distinction for which they were noted. If it taught them how to shine in the *salons* and to render Versailles to the last the Court *par*

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excellence of Europe, it also taught them how to mount the scaffold in the Revolution with matchless courage and dignity.

It taught them how to live, too, as well as to die. In the terrible years to come not a few of Héléne's school companions turned their elegant, frivolous accomplishments to very practical account. Fallen from that lofty and dazzling sphere in which she had believed herself entrenched as in some impregnable fortress, Madame la Marquise could always support herself, if necessary, by teaching some vulgar little *bourgeoise* in London or Hamburg how to dance or recite like a *grande dame*.

Under the rule of Madame de Rochechouart, who commanded the respect of all her pupils by her tact and discriminating judgment, the convent was a home as well as a school. Its atmosphere was so cheerful and its discipline so gentle, that Héléne, spoiled by her uncle, who allowed her to have her way in everything, and as "stubborn as the Pope's uncle" into the bargain, adapted herself quickly to her new surroundings.

Sister Bathilde, one of the nuns in charge of the younger members of the Blue class, who found it easy to keep them quiet by telling them stories, in which she took as much pleasure as they did, found in the little Pole her most attentive and intelligent listener.

"I remembered," says Héléne, in her delightful account of her life at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, "every word she uttered, so that when she left us I could repeat her stories without omitting a single syllable."

These tales had the effect of stimulating her imagination as well as her memory. When Sister

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Bathilde, as frequently happened, exhausted her powers of invention, Hélène would take her place, and "relate endless stories of her grandmother, a notable woman of her day, who had fired a cannon at the siege of Dantzic and defended the place when the garrison thought only of surrendering." In a place where rank and birth were regarded with such reverence as in the Abbaye-aux-Bois, Hélène's ancestral reminiscences were so popular that when she related them "the whole Blue class clustered round her on their knees in order not to lose a word, and even some of the White young ladies would occasionally listen too."

Unfortunately, Sister Bathilde, whose prestige was impaired by the popularity of Hélène, attempted to recover it by frightening her pupils with tales of ghosts and goblins. The skill with which she played upon their credulity gave rise to a rumour that the convent was haunted—the ghostly visitant being a daughter of the Regent—known as the "Wicked Abbess," who had formerly presided over the Abbaye-aux-Bois. The fact that the apartments she had occupied were only opened twice a year to be cleaned fostered the belief in her shade, which it was whispered came back there to expiate all the evil she had done during her lifetime. The terror these rooms, in which "shrieks and the rattle of chains could be heard," inspired in the pupils finally infected the nuns themselves, and when one of them "who had gone in to sweep, found marks of blood in the bedroom and was nearly suffocated by a strong smell of sulphur," the matter became so serious that Madame de Rochechouart was obliged to interfere.

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Sister Bathilde, who had more than once been reprimanded for frightening the children, was dismissed from the class, and story-telling was forbidden altogether. But though Madame de Rochechouart's rigorous measures quickly allayed the fears these tales had created, the impression they had produced on Hélène's excitable imagination was never wholly obliterated. Her belief in the supernatural remained unshaken, and rendered her in later life, on occasions of extreme agitation, prone to morbid presentiments and hallucinations.

As a child, however, Hélène was far too healthy to indulge in such fancies. She and her companions were up to all sorts of mischief. To pour ink into the holy water stoup, to blow out the lamps, to unfasten the bell-ropes and to cause the novices, who were scarcely older than themselves, to break the rules by creeping into their cells in the dead of night to chatter and eat sweets, afforded them the greatest amusement. Quarrels, too, between the girls were of frequent occurrence. A beating that one of the big girls gave Hélène for refusing to fetch her gloves, led to open conflict between the Reds and the Blues, in which "the Reds had all their things torn up or thrown down the well and the Blues were beaten to plaster."

The exalted opinion they possessed of their station in life made the task of keeping them in order a difficult one. Punishment and reproof they alike resented. It was related of Mademoiselle de Montmorency when she was eight or nine, she one day behaved with such obstinacy that Madame de Richelieu, who at the time was Lady Abbess, said to her, "When I see you like that, I could kill you." To which the child haughtily

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rejoined, "It would not be the first time that the Richelieus had been the murderers of the Montmorencys." The sarcasms of Madame de Rochechouart, however, seldom failed to act as a restraining influence on these spirited young sprigs of nobility.

Once while the girls were playing in the convent garden they heard the sound of a boy's voice, which they discovered issued from a hole in the wall of the house adjoining. They determined to attract his attention, and whilst some proceeded to talk to the boy the others formed a line to hide what they were doing from the nuns. In this way they discovered that the boy's name was "Jacquot," and that he had the honour of serving in the kitchen of the Comte de Beaumanoir.

They then told him their names, and, as they returned each day at the same time, Jacquot soon knew several of them by the sound of their voices and would call out when they approached: "Hullo, Choiseul, Massalska, Mortemart!" At last, one day as they were engaged in extracting from the hole some "dainty morsels" he had brought them from his kitchen, one of the nuns approached without their noticing it. Inexpressibly shocked at conduct so unbecoming, she at once reported the "flirtation" to Madame de Rochechouart, who merely gave orders that the hole should be stopped up that very day.

"To come down to the school-room about such an adventure," says Hélène, "would, she thought, be to attach too much importance to it. But in the evening, at roll-call, she made some sarcastic jests about the delightful conquest we had made, and added that we must have very refined tastes and noble feelings to set

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such store by a scullion's conversation, and she trusted that at some future date he would take advantage of our familiarity, which would naturally be extremely pleasant for our families. In this way she humbled without scolding us."

It was an intuitive conviction that Madame de Rochechouart understood the innocent motives of these mischievous pranks and secretly sympathized with them that gave such effect to her sarcasms. The intense devotion this conviction inspired in her pupils did not, however, necessarily act as a check upon their mettlesome natures. On one occasion, indeed, it actually incited them to mutiny. Aware that Madame de Rochechouart had in vain endeavoured to persuade the Lady Abbess to dispense with the services of Madame de Saint-Jérôme, who was "hated without being feared by the Red and White young ladies and ridiculed even by the little Blues," the girls formed a conspiracy to compel her to resign.

"A quarrel," says Héléne, who was one of the heads of the conspiracy, "that ended in fisticuffs between de Lastic and de Saint-Simon, two little girls of the Blue class, afforded us the opportunity we sought to put our plans into execution. Without inquiring which of them was right or wrong, Madame de Saint-Jérôme flew into a dreadful rage and, seizing Mademoiselle de Lastic by the neck, threw her down so violently that she fell on her nose, which began to bleed. When we saw the blood we gathered round Madame de Saint-Jérôme and threatened to throw her out of the window. At this she lost her head, and went off in a great fright to complain to Madame de Rochechouart, leaving the class without a mistress.

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As soon as she had gone, Mortemart, a niece of Madame de Rochechouart, got on a table and persuaded all the girls to withdraw from the school-room till we obtained the condition we desired.

“It was decided that we should go through the garden, secure the kitchens and larders and reduce the nuns by famine. Accordingly we crossed the gardens and went to the buildings containing the kitchens. In the store-room we found Madame de Saint-Isidore and Sister Martha, who were so frightened when they saw us that they went away at once. We next proceeded to the kitchens, leaving one of our party in charge of the store-room. Madame de Saint-Amélie, head of the kitchen department, tried to turn us out, but we turned her out instead, keeping Madame de Saint-Sulpice, who was only sixteen, as a witness that we did not waste the provisions of the establishment. Then we bolted the doors opening into the refectory and left those of the garden open with about thirty of the pupils to guard them.

“Our next move was to address a petition to Madame de Rochechouart, in which we entreated her forgiveness for the measures which the cruelty and incapacity of Madame de Saint-Jérôme had forced us to take, requesting a general amnesty for the past, that Madame de Saint-Jérôme should not be allowed to put her foot again inside the school-room, and that we should have a week's holiday to enable our bodies and minds to recover from the fatigue we had endured. A postscript was further added to the effect that if the bearers of the petition did not return we should consider it as a sign that it was rejected, in which case we should go in force to fetch Madame de Saint-

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Jérôme and whip her round the four corners of the convent.

“Mademoiselle de Choiseul and I offered to carry the petition.

“When we entered Madame de Rochechouart’s cell, she looked at us with an air of such severity that I turned quite pale, and Choiseul, bold as she was, trembled. Madame de Rochechouart hereupon refused to consider the petition, and lectured us on the enormity of our conduct, which still further confused me. But Choiseul courageously declared it was an affair of honour, and that we would die sooner than seem to betray or abandon our companions.

“At this, Madame de Rochechouart turned her back on us and said, ‘Well, carry your petition to whom you will, I have ceased to be your mistress.’ We then went to the Lady Abbess. She read the petition but refused to grant it, whereupon we returned to the kitchen. As soon as our companions learnt the result of our mission, it was decided to prepare for hostilities. We made Madame de Saint-Sulpice give out provisions, and, breaking open the door of the bakery, forced Sister Clothilde, who was in charge of it, to give us supper, which was very merry.

“As we were in high spirits, we did a thousand foolish things, and toasted Madame de Rochechouart. The great affection we all had for her is proved by the fact that our only fear was that she would keep her word and leave the class. The best joke was that Saint-Sulpice, who considered herself as a hostage, was quite reconciled at being forcibly detained. She was as merry as any, and after supper played all sorts of games with us.

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“When bed-time came, we made a sort of couch with some straw, which we took from the back-yard. It was decided that this couch should be for Madame de Saint-Sulpice, but she refused it, and said we must give it up to the youngest girls, who were the most delicate. We therefore settled on it several children of five or six years of age. We wrapped up their heads in napkins and clean kitchen cloths, so that they should not catch cold. About thirty of the older girls posted themselves in the garden before the door, for fear of a surprise. And so we spent the night, partly in sleeping, partly in talking, as best we could. Next morning we prepared to spend the day in the same way, and we felt as if this state of things was to last all our lives.

“Madame de Rochechouart, however, had sent for the mothers of the pupils who were supposed to be the ringleaders. They accordingly came to our camp and called their daughters, who, not daring to resist, were carried off. Then a lay-sister came to tell the rest of us that the school-room was open, that it was ten o'clock, and that all those who should be back in class by twelve would have a full pardon. The principal mutineers being gone, after a general consultation, we accepted these terms. When we returned to our places we found all the mistresses assembled, even Madame de Saint-Jérôme, who seemed rather embarrassed. Madame de Saint-Antoine said we deserved to be punished, but, however, it was the return of the prodigal child. This mistress, who was the head of the Red class, belonged to the Talleyrand family, and was much beloved and respected. Madame de Saint-Jean was delighted to see us back. She said she had

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felt very dull during our absence ; in fact, they were all most indulgent.

“As for Madame de Rochechouart, she did not say one word about what had happened. In the evening at roll-call, when my turn came she looked at me with a smile and chucked me under the chin, and I kissed her hands. The next day everything resumed its normal course. A month later Madame de Saint-Jérôme was removed.”

Madame de Rochechouart's affection for the “little wild thing from Poland,” who in return “quite worshipped her,” was shared by the whole convent. So thoroughly had she endeared herself to all, that her promotion to the White class, which had been considerably retarded by her mischievous conduct, was as much a source of regret to the pupils and nuns of the Blue class as of joy to those of the White. Madame de Saint-Delphine even went so far as to say that “she hoped she would never become steady.”

Touched by the spontaneous tokens of affection she received, the emotional child impulsively begged the pardon of the mistresses of the Blue class for all the trouble she had caused them, and thanked them for the indulgence with which they had treated her faults. The sincerity of her regret moved the simple nuns to tears, and old Madame de Montluc, who was irreverently nicknamed “Mother Quatre Temps,” the strictest of all, declared that although she “had occasionally maddened her, there had been moments which compensated for all.”

Hélène's love of mischief, however, by no means prevented her from being a credit to those who had

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the task of educating her. While in the Blue class she won prizes in history and dancing. During the carnival, Madame de Rochechouart gave parties for her pupils, which were much talked about in society. Invitations to them were eagerly sought, "especially by young married ladies, who, not being able to go out alone, preferred them to those of the fashionable world, at which they were obliged to remain seated all the time next to their mothers-in-law." Madame la Duchesse de Bourbon, a princess of the blood, and her daughter, Mademoiselle de Bourbon-Condé, came regularly to these parties, and never failed to request Hélène to dance the *farlâne* and the *montférine* (old French dances), which she executed to perfection.

As an actress she surpassed all her companions. In the classic dramas of the French stage, which were performed in the convent theatre before an audience composed of the relations and friends of the pupils, Hélène was always assigned the leading part. After seeing her act Esther "in a dress embroidered with diamonds and pearls worth a hundred thousand crowns" lent her for the occasion by some great ladies, the Duchesse de Montemart begged Madame de Rochechouart, as a great favour, that she might be allowed to act the part of Joas in *Athalie* that was to be given at her house. The favour was granted, to the intense delight of Hélène, who scored a great triumph in the part. Even Molé, whom the duchess had engaged to train her company, "was obliged to admit that she acted Joas better than the child at the Comédie Française."

Most children would have been spoilt by all this flattery and attention. On Hélène, however, they had not the slightest effect.

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At the close of the performance of *Esther*, which was given on Madame de Rochechouart's birthday, H el ene was called upon to recite some lines in honour of the occasion. Touched by the sentiment they contained, she could not restrain her tears. At this Madame de Rochechouart began to cry too, whereupon the emotional child, who "had an utter incapacity to control first impulses," rushed into the arms of the head mistress, "which were held out to receive her."

One of the most singular features of this aristocratic education was the manner in which it was frequently interrupted temporarily by the marriage of the pupils. In the fashionable society of the eighteenth century, where matrimonial alliances were almost always a question of family interest, parents were by no means deterred from concluding these bargains by such a trifle as the infancy of the contracting parties. Often a child who was not destined, as many portionless ones were, to take the veil, was taken from the convent in which she was being educated to be married to some one she had never seen—whether of her own age or fifty years her senior, it mattered not—and sent back again as soon as the ceremony was over. There were many of these "brides" among Madame de Rochechouart's pupils, and they exercised considerable influence upon the impressionable minds of their less experienced companions, not only by reason of the glimpse they had had of the world the others were burning to enter, but from the maturing effect that the ordeal, mere formality though it was, through which they had passed had upon them.

When Mademoiselle de Bourbonne left the convent to be married to the Count d'Avaux, she was

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only twelve. "She returned the same day," says H  l  ne, "having received magnificent wedding presents, but what pleased her most was that we all called her Madame d'Avaux. Every one gathered round her and asked her a hundred questions. She told us frankly that her husband was very ugly and very old, and that he was coming to see her the next day. We had a glimpse of him from the windows when he arrived, and thought him horrible."

Incompatibility of age and temperament, however, were not always the rule in these alliances. There were occasional exceptions. One of these was the marriage of little Mademoiselle de Choiseul, H  l  ne's most intimate friend at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, to her good-looking cousin of seventeen. H  l  ne naturally took the greatest interest in this event, which she has described in detail in her Memoir-diary. On this occasion the bride, who was married with great magnificence at Chanteloup, the seat of her famous uncle, the Duc de Choiseul, was absent from the convent a fortnight. On her return she gave H  l  ne a graphic description of the festivities given in her honour, which her mother-in-law contrived to rob of all pleasure by not letting "a single day pass without scolding her." This did not, however, prevent her from falling madly in love with her husband, who, although they were never left alone together for a moment, nevertheless managed to say a great many agreeable things to her, "which," adds H  l  ne, "she had scruples about repeating to me, as I was not married."

To the girls at the Abbaye-aux-Bois an existence in which dances, theatrical performances and marriages



THE COMTESSE DE BRIONNE

(After Carmontelle)

Reproduced by the courtesy of the Director of the Musée Condé.

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were of such frequent occurrence, was naturally enjoyable. Till the sudden death of Madame de Rochechouart "reduced her to utter despair," H el ene, in particular, was "so happy that she would have been glad if her school-days could have lasted for ever." But this event, which caused the girl the first real anguish she had ever known, completely robbed the convent life of its old charm, and she longed to get away from a place in which she was perpetually reminded of the loss she had sustained. Fortunately, she had now reached an age at which the realization of this desire could not long be deferred.

III

Though H el ene herself had given little thought to the subject, her marriage had long been a favourite topic of discussion in society, where more than one mother, aware of her great fortune, had thought of her as a desirable match for their sons. The Comtesse de Brionne had even made overtures on the subject to the Bishop of Wilna, who was immensely flattered by them. Of the great ladies of the Court of Louis XVI, none were more justly celebrated for their wit and beauty than Madame de Brionne, of whom the Marquis de Mirabeau declared that, "if he went into society, he should prefer talking to her at her dullest to any other women at her wittiest." A Rohan by birth and a Lorraine by marriage, she was, moreover, apart from her social attractions, a personage of the greatest consequence. The family of Lorraine, of which her husband was a cadet, was semi-royal, and the Comtesse de Brionne never forgot the fact.

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She considered that she honoured the Bishop of Wilna by asking for his niece's hand and fortune for her youngest son. He thought so too, and would willingly have consented to oblige her. But H el ene's head had been turned by a certain Prince Frederick de Salm, who had chanced to come to one of the convent parties, and she refused to hear of the Comtesse de Brionne or her son. Though the likes and dislikes of boys and girls were insignificant factors in the marriages of the eighteenth century, Massalski was much too fond of his niece to urge her to marry any one against her will. Nevertheless he drew a line at the Prince de Salm, whose high birth and good looks were no compensation at all in the opinion of respectable society for the stigma of dishonour that blighted his reputation.

Captivated by the undeniable fascinations of his appearance, to which the rumours of his dissipations lent a meretricious attraction, and accustomed to have her own way, H el ene would, no doubt, have overcome her uncle's opposition to the Prince de Salm in the end but for the intrigues of a certain Madame de Pailly, who, according to the great Mirabeau, was "as clever as five hundred thousand devils, or angels, if you prefer." Fascinating, as well as clever, it was the ambition of this "nobody from Switzerland" to be received in the most exclusive circles in Paris. With this end in view, she was always ready to place her questionable talents at the disposal of any man or woman willing to take them at her valuation.

Aware of the great influence she exercised over the crabbed Marquis de Mirabeau, for whom the Bishop of Wilna had the highest esteem, Madame de Brionne,

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Rohan and Lorraine though she was, in her anxiety to secure H el ene's hand and fortune for her son, had condescended to employ her as a go-between in the negotiations with the Bishop. Madame de Pailly's failure to bring off the match made her dread Madame de Brionne's resentment, and, anxious to recover the prestige she had lost, on which her position in society depended, she offered her services to the Princesse de Ligne-Luxembourg, who had also thought of H el ene as a suitable wife for her nephew, Prince Charles de Ligne.

The Princesse de Ligne-Luxembourg, who "had a chin of three stories and a fat, shiny face that dripped like a tallow-candle," hailed the offer with delight. It was accordingly agreed that she should win over the Lignes while Madame de Pailly undertook the conversion of H el ene and her uncle.

As fortunes like H el ene's never go a-begging, the Princesse de Ligne-Luxembourg had no difficulty in accomplishing her part of this contract. It is true Prince Charles himself had little inclination for the match, his affections being already and hopelessly pledged elsewhere ; but his mother, by whom he was completely ruled, was not the woman to let such considerations interfere with any plans she chose to make for his future, and she was all for the Massalski alliance.

The Bishop of Wilna, as much flattered at the idea of his niece marrying into the family of Ligne as into that of Lorraine, jumped at the suggestion. But Madame de Pailly had her work cut out, so to speak, to bring H el ene to the scratch. She did it, however, in a manner worthy of the reputation she was piqued to defend.

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Feigning to ignore the preference the girl openly avowed for the Prince de Salm, she skilfully fired her imagination with accounts of the illustrious lineage of the Lignes, of the splendours of Belœil, their ancestral home in Flanders, of the almost royal state in which they lived in Brussels and Vienna, where they had palaces, and of their lofty position at the Imperial Court. Nor did Madame de Pailly fail to talk of Prince Charles's fascinating and famous father, the Prince de Ligne, who through his fondness for Versailles, where he was in the highest favour, might easily be induced to obtain an establishment in Paris for his son, whom he adored. While dropping these hints of a residence in Paris, which she discovered was the dream of Héléne's life—and the chief attraction in her eyes of the Prince de Salm, who possessed a splendid house in Paris—Madame de Pailly went on to describe the wonderful beauty of the historic family jewels of the Lignes, among which were “certain enormous diamond earring, known as *girandoles*, that Prince Charles's wife would wear on state occasions.”

Héléne was duly impressed by the clever manner in which Madame de Pailly enlarged on the brilliancy of the alliance she advocated. But obstacles arose which more than once nearly broke off the negotiations. Prince Charles's mother, who had strong views on the subject of economy, was not at all disposed to hear of the establishment in Paris. Madame de Pailly endeavoured to make light of her opposition to Héléne by insisting more than ever on the Prince de Ligne's preference for Versailles and the ease with which she would find an ally in him. But scarcely were Héléne's

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objections conquered, than a gloomy account of life in Brussels which she received from an old school-fellow who had married and settled there created fresh difficulties for Madame de Pailly. Nevertheless she did not despair, and after exercising diplomacy that would have made the fame of a minister of state she accomplished her task, and obtained the reward she desired in the compliments she received from the *grandes dames* whose society she coveted.

Hélène's consent having been obtained principally by the thought of the *girandoles*, on which she had set her heart, Madame de Pailly shrewdly advised the Lignes and the Bishop of Wilna to celebrate the marriage without delay. They accordingly set out for Paris immediately, where shortly after their arrival they were joined by the Prince de Ligne, "whose head was completely turned by his future daughter-in-law," a fact on which Hélène, remembering Madame de Pailly's hints, at once began to build hopes of a house in Paris.

Prince Charles, too, whose affections were already otherwise engaged and who was consequently indifferent as to whom he led to the altar, was sufficiently attracted to admit that she was "very pretty," though she was wearing her convent uniform when he came to see her in which she considered that she "looked like a fright." On returning to the school-room after his visit, Hélène told the girls who gathered around her that "there was something German about him, but on the whole her impressions were favourable." She was, however, much more interested in the *girandoles* which he brought with him than in himself.

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As became persons of such consequence, their wedding was a grand one. In the marriage contract to which it was customary in the eighteenth century to attach far more importance than to the vows made by the contracting parties at the altar, H el ene's dowry consisted of estates in Poland valued at 1,800,000 roubles. The Bishop of Wilna, whose present to H el ene was a trousseau which cost him 100,000 crowns, also guaranteed her 60,000 roubles a year, and promised to pay her expenses whenever she resided in Paris. Prince Charles, on his side, received from his father an income of 30,000 livres, which was to be doubled if he had any children. In addition, the Prince de Ligne undertook to maintain his son and daughter-in-law free of charge in any of his palaces in which they chose to reside. The ceremony of signing the marriage contract took place at Versailles on July 25, 1779, in the presence of the King and Queen. The ages of the bride and bridegroom at the time were respectively sixteen and twenty-one.

As neither the Lignes nor the Massalskis had a residence in Paris, the religious ceremony, which took place four days later, was celebrated at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, to the delight of the pupils, who each received a souvenir from H el ene, and were treated by the Bishop to a "collation with ices." H el ene, needless to say, made a lovely bride. Being one of those rare people whom flattery never spoils, she attributed the admiration she excited to the *girandoles*.

On returning to the convent parlour, after changing into her travelling-dress, she was very pale and there were tears in her eyes. At such a time such signs of emotion were too natural to attract any serious



THE PRINCE DE LIGNE
(After Leclerc)

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notice ; yet they denoted something more than nerves overstrung by the excitement of the occasion. At the sight of her travelling-dress, she had been suddenly impressed with the seriousness of the step she had just taken, and before stepping into the coach-and-six, with its postilions in the pink and silver livery of the Lignes, that was waiting to bear her from the home in which she had been so happy, the emotional girl "went quickly to the choir-chapel where Madame de Rochechouart was buried, to offer up a prayer on her tomb."

IV

As Madame de Pailly had informed H el ene, the Lignes were one of the most illustrious families in Flanders, where they had been settled since the tenth century. Among their various claims to distinction was their descent through a former Princesse de Ligne from Mary Queen of Scots—a fact of which they were very proud. The titles and dignities they had acquired in the course of their history were as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. Charles Joseph, Prince de Ligne, the father of Prince Charles and the head of the house, was a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, a Knight of the Golden Fleece, a grandee of Spain of the first class, a Field-marshal of the Austrian Army, Chamberlain to their Imperial Majesties, Seigneur of Fagnolles, Baron of Fauquemberghe and Wershin, Vicomte of Baudour, Bel eil, and Valincourt, and Marquis of Roubaix and Dormans.

In addition to this dazzling array of honours, the Prince de Ligne was one of the most fascinating

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personalities of his time. Handsome, generous, and chivalrous, he was also a brave soldier, an excellent tactician, a brilliant writer and conversationalist, an amiable courtier, a clever diplomatist and the gayest of companions. His wit, on which his fame principally rests, was unrivalled, except perhaps by that of Sophie Arnould, the famous actress of the Comédie Française. As some one has justly said of him, "he was the wittiest man in an epoch in which all the world was witty."

Notwithstanding all these advantages, so well calculated to spoil a man, he was the most unaffected of men, an opinion on which all his contemporaries are agreed. "If you are astonished," wrote Madame de Staël, "at what I say of him, how much more so would you be if you knew him!"

He had been brought up by his father in the strictest fashion. "My father," he says in his Memoirs, "did not care for me. I know not why, for we hardly knew each other. It was not the custom at that time for a man to be either a good father or a good husband. My mother was terribly afraid of him. So strict was he as to his appearance and formalities, that she gave birth to me dressed in her farthingale, and even died in the same dress a few days later." He entered the army at a very early age. In those days promotion was rapid for the soldier of noble birth. At twenty the Emperor gave him the colonelcy of the regiment of dragoons which the Lignes maintained at their own expense, much to the vexation of his father, "who declared that it was bad enough to have him as a son, without having him for his superior officer." His subsequent military career, however, fully justified

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the appointment. He had a veritable passion for war ; a battle was to him "like an ode of Pindar."

His marriage to a princess of the House of Lichtenstein was one of convenience. He was too much a man of his time to dream of being faithful to his wife, who ruled his household if not his heart, but he was full of consideration for her in other ways, and always treated her with deference. He had suffered too severely from his father's harshness to imitate it, and all his children were brought up with the greatest affection. He had his preferences, however. His eldest daughter Christine, Countess Clary, whom he called his "masterpiece," and Prince Charles, his eldest son, were his favourites. The latter he fairly worshipped, and taught him what he knew so well himself: "to fight like a gentleman." When still a boy he took him with him on one of his campaigns, to give him his baptism of fire. And this is how he did it—

"At some small affair of outposts," he says, "jumping into the saddle with him I took his little hand in mine, and, as we galloped away, I said, as I gave the order to fire, 'What fun it would be, Charlotte, if we received a little wound together.' And he laughed and swore and became excited, and behaved quite as I desired."

Popular wherever he went—and he went everywhere—the Prince de Ligne won for himself a unique position in the courts of Europe by his gaiety and wit. At St. Petersburg or Berlin, Versailles or Vienna, he was as much at home as in his superb Château of Belœil, on which he had spent millions. The moment he arrived at a court he became the life and soul of it. He said whatever came into his head, but although he

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was too shrewd a courtier to abuse this privilege, he would occasionally under cover of a joke utter many a serious and disconcerting truth. Indeed, from the licence he enjoyed by reason of his gaiety and wit, the rôle he played at the courts he frequented was not unlike that of the jesters and fools of an earlier and ruder period.

“What did you suppose I would be like?” asked the Empress Catherine of him.

“Tall and stiff as a poker, with a large hoop and eyes like stars. I thought also I should only have to admire, and constant admiration is most fatiguing. But I find it is necessary to have all one’s wits about one.” And the Empress laughed heartily at this clever mingling of frankness and flattery.

He accompanied her on her famous visit to the Crimea, which had for its secret object a meeting with the Emperor Joseph to discuss the partition of Poland.

“I felt as if dreaming,” he says in one of his brilliant letters, “when I found myself in the depths of an enormous coach, seated between these two personages, the heat of whose august shoulders nearly stifled me, and heard, as in a dream, one say to the other, ‘They tell me I have thirty millions of subjects, counting males only,’ and the other reply, ‘And I have twenty-two millions, all included.’ Then they fell to work disposing, in the course of their conversation, of towns, cities, and even provinces, changing them about without seeming to consider it anything at all, till at last I said, ‘Your Majesties will never get anything but trifles and troubles,’ whereupon the Emperor replied, ‘Madame, we are spoiling him. He has not

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the least respect for either of us. I must tell you that he has been in love with one of my father's mistresses, and at the time of my *début* in society he outwitted me in the affections of a marchioness who was as beautiful as an angel.'"

If the Prince de Ligne was fascinating to the crowned heads who honoured him with their friendship, they were equally so to him. Frederick the Great "completely conquered him," and "he based his claim to immortality" on the strength of his acquaintance with that monarch, "who would converse on anything and everything for hours at a time, but in so inexpressibly charming a voice that if, like Homer's heroes, he was something of a babbler, he was at least a sublime one."

For Marie Antoinette the Prince de Ligne had a *vrai culte*. "No one could see her without adoring her," he wrote; "I never saw anything in her society that did not bear the impress of grace, kindness and good taste." To him she was always "noble, sublime, beautiful, adorable," etc. His description of the charm of her personality is the most vivid portrait ever penned of the hapless Queen.

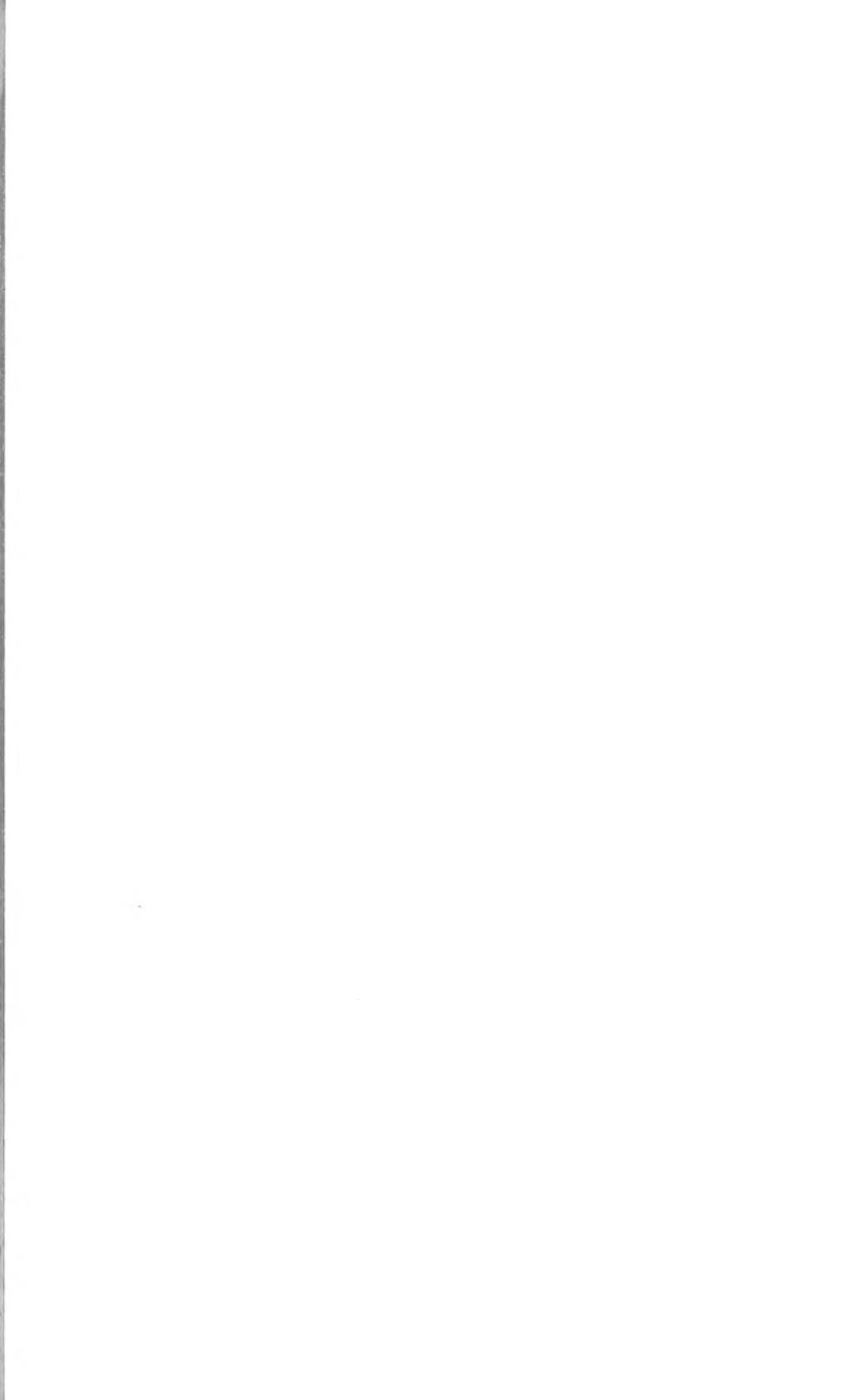
Men accustomed to bask in the smiles of royalty are generally intolerable in their own homes. It was, however, in the bosom of his family that the Prince de Ligne was most charming. It is true he quickly tired of domesticity, and his absences were frequent and prolonged; nevertheless, when absent he was wont to sigh for "his beautiful life at his beloved Belœil." His return home was eagerly welcomed by the entire household, and even his severe and unsympathetic wife, who spent her time when he was away scraping

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and paring to the discomfort of everybody, under the magic of his good humour suffered him to resume his favourite pastime of "flinging millions out of the windows" without a reproach.

The marriage of his eldest son afforded him an excellent excuse to gratify his taste for display. In accordance with his instructions, a splendid welcome was prepared for Prince Charles and his bride at Belœil, whither they went immediately after their wedding, accompanied by all the members of their respective families who were present at the ceremony. Their arrival was celebrated by a fête in the beautiful grounds of the Château, in which the tenants of the estate took part dressed as shepherds and shepherdesses *à la Watteau*. During the week the festivities lasted, the park was thrown open to the public, for whose amusement the Prince de Ligne provided dancing, puppet-shows, concerts by the fine band of his regiment of dragoons, and fireworks; while the Château itself was filled with guests from Brussels and the neighbourhood.

To the bride of sixteen, fresh from her convent, it seemed "as if she had stepped into fairy-land." Enjoyment added to her beauty and charm, and in her impulsive way she was grateful to her husband to whom she owed so much happiness. Prince Charles took very little part in the amusements to which his volatile father and wife were addicted. His was an essentially serious nature. A passionate lover of pictures, he had found time, in spite of his arduous military duties, to make a fine collection of pictures and drawings of the old masters. He was also an excellent draughtsman himself, and had made a study





THE PRINCESSE DE LIGNE, *née* LICHTENSTEIN

Reproduced for the first time by the courtesy of the Prince de Ligne from the portrait at Belœil.

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of the art of engraving with a view to reproducing the gems of his collection. To please him, H el ene manifested an interest in his hobby and volunteered to catalogue his drawings, of which there were more than six thousand. The offer was accepted in the spirit in which it was made ; and, irksome though the task was when it interfered, as it frequently did, with her own enjoyment, the reputation she gained for amiability by it compensated for the occasional sacrifice it entailed. Everybody was delighted with her, and the Princesse de Ligne wrote to the Princesse de Ligne-Luxembourg "that she was all that one could desire in a daughter-in-law."

As long as the Prince de Ligne was at home to keep the ball of pleasure rolling merrily, H el ene was in perfect harmony with her surroundings. But at the end of six months he flitted off again to Versailles and Vienna. At the same time Prince Charles rejoined his regiment, and the Princesse de Ligne, who never did any entertaining in their absence, at once set to work to repair the ravages that her husband's extravagance had made in his fortune. The discomfort the process entailed heightened the monotony that now reigned at Bel eil.

Perceiving that H el ene chafed at the curtailment of her pleasures, her mother-in-law undertook "to form" her. To be "formed" by the Princesse de Ligne was anything but an agreeable ordeal. The dominant influence in her family by reason of the rigidity of her morals and opinions and her skill in the management of his property, which her husband left entirely in her care, she inspired fear rather than affection. Her children trembled in her presence. H el ene, on the

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contrary, accustomed to be petted and spoilt, resented reproof in any shape. Least of all was she inclined to submit to being ruled by her mother-in-law, whose despotic nature revived the antipathy she had formed at school to mothers-in-law in general from the stories she had heard of their "tyranny" from all her married school-mates. Naturally headstrong, she determined to assert her independence in an unmistakable manner, to the amazement of the Princesse de Ligne, who, judging from her previous "docility," believed she was "without a will of her own."

Under such circumstances life at Belœil became unendurable to Hélène. To escape from her mother-in-law's exasperating tutelage, she demanded the establishment in Paris which she had been vaguely promised on her marriage. The Princesse de Ligne, who had never been in favour of the proposal, was now more than ever opposed to it. She thoroughly disliked her daughter-in-law, but to get rid of her, much as she wanted to, on her own terms, would have seemed like a defeat. But Hélène was "as stubborn as the Pope's mule"; she resolved to have that establishment in Paris, and in the end she had her way.

To lead the life she desired, it was necessary to have her *tabouret* at Versailles. As this coveted distinction was granted only to the wives of dukes and grandees of Spain, for Hélène to obtain it seemed on the face of it tantamount to crying for the moon. But she remembered that her father-in-law was a grandee of Spain, and as his wife never came to France, she saw no reason why he should not transfer his privilege to his son. It was no slight matter to get Prince Charles to make the request, but backed up by the

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Princesse de Ligne-Luxembourg, who wanted the credit of presenting her at Court, H el ene finally forced him to do as she wished. The Prince de Ligne was easily persuaded to grant his son the favour, and H el ene returned to Paris in triumph.

Never had the Court of Versailles been more brilliant. It is true, the rumblings of the approaching Revolution could already be heard by those who had ears to hear them, but the butterflies of fashion fluttered from pleasure to pleasure, utterly heedless of the impending storm. Young, rich, beautiful and witty, H el ene was pre-eminently fitted to shine in the dazzling circle that revolved around the lovely and light-hearted Queen. But Prince Charles was utterly out of place in this vortex of pleasure and frivolity. Thrown into the shade by his brilliant father and captivating wife, his position was a trying one. Among the giddy triflers who fluttered round H el ene he was voted a bore; and she, conscious of the ridicule his German manners and serious tastes excited, soon began to despise him herself.

She was not, however, unmindful of his honour, and in return for the complete liberty he accorded her, she was careful to avoid giving him just cause to curtail it. The birth of their first and only child—a daughter, who received the name of Sidonie—for a while effected a sort of reconciliation between the ill-mated couple. Prince Charles, whose dislike of Paris had increased every month, took advantage of this *rapprochement* to persuade his wife to return to Belc eil—a plan to which the impulsive creature, softened by the joy of being a mother, readily consented. Shortly after their arrival, however, a serious

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insurrection occurred in Flanders, which rendered the country so unsafe that, on the advice of the Prince de Ligne, who was at the time absent in Russia, his whole family removed to Vienna.

Here it was Hélène who appeared at a disadvantage. The Imperial Court presented a great contrast to that of Versailles. Under the strait-laced Maria Theresa it had been more like a convent than a court; under Joseph II, whose tastes were as plain as his mother's, it resembled a barrack; yet he could, when he chose, impart to it an air of pomp and dignity. These occasions, however, were very rare, and when Hélène arrived in Vienna the Court had never been duller. As a Pole, moreover, whose country had been recently partitioned by Austria, she received but scant consideration. This she would have overlooked on personal grounds, for fond though she was of admiration, she was not vain. But to be slighted on account of her nationality was humiliating, and, cordially disliking the Austrians, whom she regarded as boors, she did not even take the trouble to conceal her contempt.

Prince Charles, on the contrary, who had been intimate from childhood with all the chief families at Court, to many of whom he was related, was at his best in Vienna. Aware of the fact, he could not resist the temptation of showing his volatile wife that whereas in Paris he had been neglected and despised, he was a person of importance in Vienna. The comparison was not one of which Hélène cared to be reminded, and the manner in which it was emphasized by her husband's devotion to the celebrated Countess Kinsky only served to embitter her resentment.

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This beautiful and accomplished woman, who was regarded as the chief ornament of the Imperial Court, had a curious history. Her husband, whom she saw for the first and last time on the day of her wedding, had left her at the church door, "to rejoin the woman" he told her, "without whom it would be impossible to support life." The quiet dignity displayed by the unfortunate Countess in this equivocal position had won for her universal sympathy. Outwardly at least her conduct was above reproach. But though she and the Prince observed the strictest propriety in their intercourse, H el ene, with a wife's quick instinct, guessed the real nature of the tie that united them, and, though she might not love her husband, she could be jealous of him. To make matters worse, the Princesse de Ligne was at hand, ever ready to find fault and give advice on the management of the baby, on which she had very decided views.

With so many causes of mutual discontent and irritation the good understanding which had been effected by the birth of little Sidonie could not last, and the couple drifted wider apart than ever. By the end of the winter, when order was re-established in Flanders and the question of returning there arose, the tension between the husband and wife had reached the snapping-point.

H el ene, however, reckless though she was, took care to avoid coming to open conflict. She had no desire to be confined in a convent like many another refractory wife, and the law, as she well knew, gave her husband that power over her, if he cared to exercise it. She was also equally unwilling to return to Bel eil with her mother-in-law. Accordingly, to

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avoid this contingency or its possible alternative, she had recourse to strategy, and requested permission before returning to Flanders to pay a visit to her uncle, in order to expedite the payment of the revenues of her estates, which owing to the unsettled state of affairs in Poland had been long overdue.

Prince Charles could not very well refuse to grant such a request, but he insisted that Sidonie should remain behind in his mother's care. To this condition Hélène readily consented, for she had no fixed intention of deserting her husband and child. In her overwrought and excited state she thought only of the present—it was unendurable, and she was fleeing from it, that was all. But the step was to have consequences of which she little dreamed.

V

Since the flight of the Bishop of Wilna seventeen years before, in the Confederation of Bar days, things had steadily gone from bad to worse in Poland. Yet in spite of the shock of the two terrible surgical operations she had undergone at the hands of the partitioning powers, the dying nation still lived, and, though her days were now numbered, still hoped to live. Deceived by the comparative peace in which she was temporarily left by the internal troubles of her neighbours, she had begun to believe that she was recovering from her deadly malady, and like an expiring consumptive who mistakes the last flicker of the flame of life for a sign of returning health, on the brink of the grave was making plans for the future.

When Hélène arrived in Warsaw in 1788 the foolish Diet had assembled to reform the Constitution

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—a task which should have engaged the attention of the Poles at least a hundred years earlier, and to the execution of which they now set themselves with all their characteristic distrust, intrigue, and incapacity. The capital, crowded with people from all over the country, presented an unusually animated appearance, and the Polish Court, to whose half-Oriental splendour King Stanislas had given the tone of the best French society in which he had moved in his youth, was never more brilliant.

Preceded by a reputation for beauty, wit, and fascination, Hélène at once became a prominent figure on this dazzling stage by reason of her nationality and the evident pride she took in it, as well as by her refinement and grace. Enchanted with her liberty, she forgot the past and all that tied her to it, and gave herself up without restraint to enjoyment. The Princesse Charles de Ligne no longer existed, she was once more only Hélène Massalska.

Her uncle, who had always spoilt her, was as ready as ever to gratify her every wish. The old Massalski Palace in Warsaw, which had long been untenanted, was redeccorated, and became under her clever management the centre of the world of fashion. The months flew by on wings. Her husband, offended by her long absence, disdainfully forebore to urge her to return to him. Utterly indifferent to his opinion, she asked no better than to have her present life continue for ever. An impulse, as sudden as it was powerful, had taken possession of her. For the first time in her life she, who was made for love, was in the thrall of a great passion, and she abandoned herself to it without scruple, unrestrainedly, after her impetuous fashion.

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He who had kindled this flame which only death could quench was the Grand Chamberlain of the King, Count Vincent Potocki. Like Radziwill and Czartoriski, Potocki was a name to conjure with in Poland. As a family, it was the most numerous and the richest of the Polish nobility. On the death, in 1805, of Count Felix Potocki, the head of this historic house, according to the Comte de Lagarde "his property was estimated at 165,000 available individuals, besides petty nobles, Jews, and women, who altogether amounted to twice that number, all of whom were practically his subjects, for with a yearly revenue of nine millions of florins (£700,000) he not only lived like a king on his estates, but exercised an almost kingly authority in the administration of them."

His widow was the famous Countess Sophie Potocka, whose peerless beauty and romantic adventures rendered her one of the most conspicuous figures of her time. As historians are constantly confounding her with Hélène, who subsequently became one of the many Countesses of the same name as herself, her history is worth relating.

The child of Greek parents who had been reduced to beggary, she had been discovered in the streets of Constantinople by the Marquis de Vauban, French ambassador to Turkey, who, attracted by her remarkable beauty, had her taken care of and educated. On his return to France, accompanied by his Oriental treasure, he chanced to stop at Kaminiecz, one of the fortresses Russia had "picked up" on one of her visits to the "public inn," as the Empress Catherine described Poland. General de Witt—a descendant of the famous Grand Pensionary of Holland—who was Governor of



COUNTESS SOPHIE POTOCKA,
LA BELLE GRECQUE

*(From a miniature by Vincent de Lesueur in the
collection of Comte Tarnowski)*

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Ancien et Moderne.

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Kaminiecz, treated Vauban with the greatest hospitality, and became so enamoured of the fair Greek, with whom he had fallen in love at first sight, that he made her an offer of marriage. As he was under thirty, handsome, and high in the favour of the Empress, the former beggar-maid quickly made up her mind that it was better to be the wife of young General de Witt than the mistress of old Marquis de Vauban, and accepted the offer of her lover without hesitation.

Foreseeing, however, that Vauban might naturally object to such an arrangement, to escape the charge of violating the laws of hospitality de Witt had recourse to stratagem. He accordingly arranged a hunting-party in honour of his guest, which was to meet at some distance from the fortress. At the last moment he invented some excuse to remain behind, and married Sophie the moment Vauban was out of sight, who, being informed on his return of what had taken place, philosophically accepted a situation which it was useless to contend against. But General de Witt's happiness was not of long duration, and two years later Count Felix Potocki won his "magnificent Greek," from him in a precisely similar fashion.

To H el ene, Count Vincent's life appeared scarcely less romantic than that of his beautiful cousin. At thirty-seven he still possessed the extraordinary good looks and personal attractions for which he had been noted at the outset of his career, when he married the King's niece, Countess Ursula Zamoiska, whom he quickly divorced to marry the Countess Anna Mycielska. He had two sons by the second marriage, the youngest of whom was but a few weeks old when H el ene crossed his path.

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He had been attracted to her from the start, but greatly as he admired her, his passion was by no means so violent as to be unreasoning. It flattered his vanity to be loved by one so beautiful and admired as H el ene ; nor was her great wealth without weight as well. Fascinating though he appeared, he was really unworthy of the various passions he had inspired. There are many men like that, and it was H el ene's curse to understand the fickleness and selfishness of his character, and to be as unwilling as she was unable to escape from the thralldom of his spell. Her one desire was to be loved in return, and for his sake she altered her mode of life, and even dropped out of society.

At the beginning of their acquaintance, Count Vincent behaved with prudence. Drawn to H el ene, he still continued to love his second wife, who was recovering from her recent confinement at Kowalowka, his estate in the Ukraine. Countess Anna, however, had an enemy in her predecessor, the Countess Ursula, who, in spite of her divorce, remained on the best terms with her former husband. The Countess Mniseck, as she had now become, was anxious that Count Vincent should be faithless to his second wife, who had robbed her of him and who was known to be madly in love with him. Perceiving H el ene's infatuation, she accordingly sought her friendship, and offered to aid her in conquering the Count's fickle heart.

This campaign, in which, it goes without saying, H el ene won the declaration of love she so much desired, was conducted at first with due regard to propriety. But the Countess Mniseck had no intention of letting it continue in this circumspect fashion.

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Wishing to make trouble, she took care to let a rumour of the *liaison* reach the ears of the Countess Anna at Kowalowka, who at once returned to Warsaw and had a "scene" with her husband. This led to another between H el ene and the Count. Mortally wounded by the Countess Anna's refusal to receive her when she called, H el ene violently demanded her lover to compel his wife to admit her, "in order that she might not be dishonoured in the eyes of the world." In vain did Count Vincent seek to pacify both women, but neither would listen to reason, and to escape from a situation, as inconvenient as it was ridiculous, he abruptly disappeared.

H el ene had parted from him in a fury, but as with all ardent and undisciplined natures, the reaction was swift and violent. She wrote him a heart-broken letter, in which she abandoned all claim to his affections, while "swearing that he should be the eternal object of hers." This letter was returned to her a few minutes later, unopened, by the Countess Anna, who had received it, and who briefly informed her on the envelope of the Count's departure, foolishly adding, in her elation at the dismay she knew the news would cause her rival, his destination—Kowalowka.

But the knowledge that her weak lover, in his anxiety to escape from an embarrassing situation, had left her to bear the world's censure alone, infuriated H el ene. She was not a woman to submit tamely to such treatment. With her, to think and act were identical, and within half-an-hour of the return of the letter she set out for Kowalowka, accompanied only by a maid.

At the sight of her, Count Vincent, who had barely

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arrived himself, was "completely unnerved," but under the spell of H  l  ne's beauty and charm, which the rashness of her conduct heightened, he soon recovered and was re-enslaved. But H  l  ne was no longer content to be the mistress of the man she loved so recklessly. Dreading lest he should abandon her again, and alarmed for her reputation, she proposed that they should each obtain a divorce to enable them to marry.¹ Count Vincent, accordingly, wrote to the Countess Anna to obtain her consent to the annulment of their marriage; while H  l  ne demanded her "freedom, her daughter, and her fortune" of Prince Charles, and implored her uncle for assistance.

As divorce was an every-day affair in Poland, they took it for granted that no objections would be raised to their proposals. But the replies they received speedily disabused them of this idea. The Countess Anna, who had only been married four years, and whose blameless character merited the love she craved from her husband, sent him a touching appeal for pity. Prince Charles dryly and formally refused to consent to his wife's requests. The Bishop's reply was evasive; he desired "time to give the matter his careful consideration."

The position in which these letters placed H  l  ne was extremely painful. She saw herself discredited with her relations, compromised in the eyes of the world, and even pinched for ready money, for, heiress to millions though she was, by the terms of her marriage contract the revenues of her estates were paid to her

¹ "Divorces were very easily obtained in Poland. The granting of decrees was a source of considerable revenue to the Court of Rome."—Ferrand, *D  membrement de la Pologne*.



PRINCE CHARLES DE LIGNE

Reproduced for the first time by the courtesy of the Prince de Ligne from the portrait at Belœil.

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husband. Aware that she had burnt her bridges and that her only security lay in the loyalty of the man for whom she had sacrificed herself, and on whom she felt she could not rely, she was keenly alive to the shame of her situation, for she never for a moment contemplated being his mistress. She was, moreover, quite alone, for to save appearances as far as possible she was not actually living with the Count at Kowalowka, but in a small house in the neighbourhood. With the easy optimism of her nature she had persuaded herself that all would go well, and the dashing of her hopes was harder to bear for being entirely unexpected.

The climax was reached when the Count fell ill of a putrid fever, and for three months lay between life and death. Though prevented from nursing him, she went in disguise from time to time to see that he was being properly cared for. But these furtive visits only served to deepen her humiliation and increase her anxiety.

It was exactly at this period of depression, when her hopes were at their lowest ebb, that the news of her husband's death arrived. Serving in the Austrian army, which the Emperor had sent under the command of the Duke of Brunswick to the relief of the French royal family after the fall of the monarchy, Prince Charles had been killed in an engagement near Mons. Regretted by the entire army as a brave and capable officer it could ill afford to lose, his death cast a gloom over Viennese society in which he had been so popular.

His father, in particular, never recovered from the blow, and for a time no one dared to tell him the fatal news. The Prince de Ligne, whose life had hitherto

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been one long gala, was to suffer greatly in the troublous times that the French Revolution brought upon Europe, but worldly and sceptical though he was, he bore his misfortunes philosophically. Asked once how he managed to rise above circumstances under the weight of which others would have succumbed, he replied, "At the cost of a great grief. When the soul has been wounded by the loss of all that one holds dearest, I defy minor misfortunes to touch it; loss of wealth, total ruin, persecution, injustice, everything sinks into insignificance."

To Hélène, however, the death that spoilt existence for her father-in-law brought a sense of relief. Absorbed in the selfishness of her *grande passion* and its humiliating entanglements, she did not feel an atom of pity. "A cannon ball has carried off Prince Charles," she wrote her lover: "I am free, free at last. It is an act of Providence. As Madame de Sévigné said on hearing of the death of Turenne, 'That cannon was loaded from all eternity!'"

A few days later her brother Xavier died, and she inherited his fortune—600,000 livres a year. Like herself, he had been educated in France. When the Bishop of Wilna returned to Poland after his exile, he had left his nephew, a very delicate child, in the care of a tutor. This man, who had been highly recommended, shamefully neglected the trust reposed in him, for which he had received in the course of seven years the enormous sum of 230,000 livres. The boy had returned to Poland at the age of fourteen half crazy, to the horror of his uncle, who had never since let him out of his sight. His death, merciful though it was, greatly affected the Bishop, and caused him to

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relent to H el ene, whose mad infatuation for the Count he had highly disapproved of.

At the same time, as if death had received a mission from heaven to remove all the obstacles to H el ene's happiness, the Countess Anna Potocka's youngest boy died. A threat to deprive her of the care of her only remaining child brought the stricken mother to give her consent to a divorce, which she had hitherto withheld in the hope of regaining her husband's love. The road to the goal of H el ene's desire being thus cleared of all obstructions, she implored her uncle to use his influence at Rome to facilitate the formalities necessary for Count Potocki's marriage. This naturally took some time, and patience was not one of H el ene's virtues. Living in daily fear that the project on which all her future happiness depended should fall through, and assured that the Count's decree of divorce was coming from Rome, she saw no reason why she should wait till its arrival to be married, and to persuade her easy-going uncle to view the matter in the same light was not difficult. But it required all his influence to find a priest to marry the couple under such conditions.

The marriage took place with great secrecy at midnight, in a chapel on the outskirts of Wilna. This circumstance, with its suggestion of mystery and unlawfulness, was well calculated to create morbid fancies in a mind like H el ene's, prone to superstition, and still agitated by the memory of past tribulations. On entering the chapel she suddenly stopped short, a prey to a fearful hallucination. In the dim and flickering light of the tapers, she fancied she saw three coffins in the aisle between her and the altar. The Count,

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appalled by her fixed and terrified gaze, inquired the cause of her alarm. At the sound of his voice the sinister vision vanished, and, perceiving that the imaginary coffins were, in reality, only three steps of black marble leading to the altar, she mounted them resolutely.

Thus, within three months of the death of Prince Charles, did Héléne finally succeed in becoming Countess Potocka.

VI

After a short tour of inspection round his wife's Lithuanian estates, which had contributed not a little to the realization of her hopes, the Count brought his wife home to Kowalowka. Lying in a valley of the Ukraine, by far the most picturesque part of Poland, Kowalowka was a delightful abode. It was surrounded with undulating meadows and wheat-fields, where in summer the peasants, in red smocks, chanting the plaintive melodies of the country, presented a charming picture as they stacked the golden sheaves. A river, in the midst of which was an island planted with poplars and oaks, flowed through the well-trimmed park. The garden was laid out in a manner to harmonize with the architecture of the château, from which a flight of steps descended to a terrace ornamented with citron and orange trees that testified to the mildness of the climate.

Héléne, delighted to cast anchor in such a port after her stormy voyage, set herself with all her old ardour to enjoy the happiness she had won so dearly. Her sole occupation was to please the man she loved.

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In the world, which she had been so fond of, she had been noted for the elegance of her toilettes, and this taste is the only one she still retained. Aware that her husband admired her most in the bizarre costumes of her native land, which suited her piquant style of beauty to perfection, she appeared as the fancy took her, "to-day in a poppy-coloured dress of Turkish material, trimmed with silver *à la* Mameluke; the next day, in a polonaise of white Indian silk embroidered with pink flowers; another day, in a Cossack tunic of *dyftich* fringed with gold."

The Count, whose tastes she divined by instinct and gratified even before he expressed them, was anything but insensible to her attentions. He became so jealous that, whenever business compelled him to leave her for a day or two, "he refused to permit a single man, save the gardener, to set a foot in the house during his absence." But this tyranny, far from displeasing H el ene, only enchanted her the more, and caused her in after years to look back on this period as the happiest of her life.

"To-morrow," she wrote him on one of the rare occasions when he was absent, "I shall see you again, and find you still the same, for I would not have you change in the smallest degree. Your mind, nature, attractions, and even your faults, all are precious to me. If you were to become more perfect, you would no longer be the Vincent for whose sake I have been guilty of the greatest follies, which would have been unpardonable, if a kind Providence had not caused them to turn out for the best in the end."

But such happiness was too great to last. The blow that shattered it fell without the least warning

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just as the birth of a son, who received the name of Alexis, seemed to fill Héléne's cup of bliss to the brim.

So slowly did news travel in those days, that several months elapsed before the Countess Anna, who had gone to live in Paris with her child, learnt of her husband's marriage. As the decree of divorce had not been sent to her for her signature, she supposed that there had been some hitch in obtaining it, and her resentment at the manner in which she had been ignored was such that she wrote to the Bishop, "accusing him of having connived at the bigamy of the Count, and informing him that she was returning to Poland to take steps to break up the illegal union."

In the political agitation of the time, the Bishop of Wilna had quite forgotten the "irregularity" of which he was accused, or if he ever gave it a thought fancied, not unnaturally, that Count Potocki had complied with the necessary formalities attaching to the granting of the divorce. That Héléne should have allowed him to neglect them seems incomprehensible; but such was the case, and she now had to pay dearly for her folly. The Bishop, realizing the disastrous effect the exposure of his conduct would produce on the public, at a moment when the dangerous political game he was playing made him particularly anxious to divert attention from himself as much as possible, was greatly alarmed by the Countess Anna's threat. He gave vent to his feelings in a violent letter to Héléne, in which he accused the Count of deliberately neglecting to legalize his marriage, in order to enjoy her fortune untrammelled by any ties, and ended by washing his hands of her and her affairs.



COUNTESS ANNA MYCIELSKA

Re-produced by the courtesy of Count Mycielski.

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The Countess Anna was eventually persuaded to withdraw her threatened opposition to "the bigamy of her husband," but not till H el ene had passed many months in a state of miserable anxiety, in the course of which her second child, Vincent, was born, and her uncle, the Bishop, perished a victim to his passion for political intrigue. Having sided in turn with every party and faction in Poland, he had been detected intriguing with Russia. Accused of high treason along with several others, he was imprisoned in Warsaw. While waiting their trial, a mob, infuriated by the news that the Russians were marching on Warsaw, broke into the prison and massacred the traitors. After having been dragged alive through the streets for seven hours, the unhappy prelate was finally hung on a gibbet in front of the Cathedral.

Owing to the disturbed state of the country, fifteen days elapsed before this terrible news reached Kowalowka. H el ene, who lost in her uncle her nearest relation and most powerful friend—for she knew him too well to doubt that his anger would be appeased—was utterly prostrated by the blow.

Shortly after this event occurred the third and final partition of Poland, when to the unhappy nation, brutally divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria, it seemed as if—

"Hope for a season bade the world farewell,
And freedom shrieked as Kosciusko fell."

The province of Lithuania, in which the Massalski estates were situated, fell to the share of Russia, whose first step was to confiscate all the property of the Polish nobles. Considering that the Bishop of Wilna owed his assassination to his sympathy with

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Russia, Héléne had reason to hope that his property at least would be exempt. But the Prince de Ligne had at once written to the Empress Catherine on behalf of his granddaughter Sidonie, who, he declared, was in danger of being despoiled of her interest in the Bishop's fortune for the benefit of Héléne's children by her second marriage. Thus pressed by a man who stood high in her favour, the Empress seized the entire property of the Bishop, declaring it her intention to hold it in trust for Sidonie till she came of age.

This decision, which virtually deprived Héléne of her entire fortune, was followed by a new move on the part of the Countess Anna. Hard pressed herself for money by the ruin of her country, she was driven to set up a claim for her son to be the sole heir of his father, on the plea that, as the birth of Héléne's children antedated by several months the legal dissolution of the Count's marriage, they were illegitimate, and, therefore, in the eye of the law incapable of inheriting property. Héléne's only hope of evading this claim, by which she and her children, in the event of her husband's death, would be reduced to beggary, lay in the mercy of the Empress, who could, if she wished, have the date of the decree of the divorce altered so as to render the children legitimate.

Fortunately, the Count had a friend at Court in his uncle, Count Felix Potocki—the husband of the romantic Countess Sophie—to whose intrigues the second partition of Poland was due, as the third and last was due to the intrigues of the Bishop of Wilna. But, influential though Count Felix was in St. Petersburg, it took a great deal of time and money to obtain

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Catherine's consent, whose manner of safeguarding the rights of Sidonie and the Countess Anna's son François made it, as Héléne said, "very dear to make true Potockis of her children."

VII

Once more the sun of the old happiness shone out from the clouds which had darkened it, though not quite so brilliantly as of yore. A daughter, eagerly longed for, died six weeks after birth, and both Héléne's and the Count's fortunes were shattered and shackled. Nevertheless, she still had her husband, whom she regarded as the ideal of perfection, her two little boys, whom she adored, and her beautiful home.

Like the Huguenots after their expulsion from France one hundred years before, the French exiles of the Revolution were to be found in every quarter of Europe. Several of them had sought a temporary asylum in the neighbourhood of Kowalowka, whose doors, in spite of the seclusion in which she lived, Héléne felt tempted to throw open to them. One family, consisting of a father, mother, and two daughters, who had fled from their burning château in a state of destitution, she even provided with a home in her house, with the full approval of her husband; an act of kindness that did the more honour to her impulsive heart since it was entirely instigated by their misfortunes.

But Héléne, as may be imagined, was not always easy to get on with. Her guests, who, it must be owned, were unusually stupid, "frequently got on her nerves." "To-night at dinner," she wrote in her

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diary, "Madame de Badens complained that I had insulted her. It is true I had told her she played cards like a fool, and I repeated it." On another occasion, her loss of temper so flurried Madame de Badens that she accidentally "upset the tea-pot full of boiling tea over the Count's legs." He took it quite calmly, but "I," says H el ene, "gave her a glance that froze her."

These quarrels, however, were very quickly healed, and Madame de Badens and her family lived at Kowalowka for four years—in fact, till the Potockis themselves were forced to leave it.

The other French exiles were far from being as tiresome as those to whom Kowalowka was so stormy a refuge. The Marquise d'Aragon, a niece of the great Mirabeau and a former schoolmate of H el ene's at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, and the Comtesse Diane de Polignac had been noted at the Court of Versailles for their wit. Adversity had not extinguished the gaiety of their spirits, and the zest they displayed in forming a dramatic society to act plays, an amusement of which French society had been so fond, gave a great deal of animation to the life of the neighbourhood. Acting had been H el ene's favourite pastime in the days before the passion that enslaved her caused her to withdraw from the world, and she was delighted to repeat her old triumphs. The Count was flattered by her success, in spite of his extreme jealousy, which made him insist on selecting the r oles of her lovers himself.

But the periods of tranquillity in H el ene's existence were never of long duration. "Some fatality," as she wrote in one of her letters to her husband, "seems to

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attend all I do, and happiness always eludes me when I grasp it." Her second boy, Vincent, was suddenly taken ill with diphtheria, and died in a few days. She had scarcely got over the first shock of his death, when Alexis, the eldest, a very delicate and precocious child, her pride and her despair, succumbed to the same dread disease. Her grief on this occasion nearly cost her her life.

At his burial, as she stood by the side of the grave in which two of her children lay, and saw the little bier of the third lowered into it, the memory of the three coffins she had seen on her wedding night came back to her.

"Three! There are really three!" she shrieked, and fell insensible to the ground.

At the same time financial troubles arose, due to the dismemberment of her unfortunate country. Like the majority of Polish families, the Potockis possessed estates in each of the three provinces into which Poland had been divided by Austria, Prussia and Russia, and the differences in the laws, taxes, money, and customs of these various nations led to inextricable confusion. In the hope of obtaining redress from the extortions to which he was subjected by the Russian officials, the Count went to St. Petersburg, while H el ene remained to manage Kowalowka, which had been greatly neglected, and, owing to some unfortunate speculation of the Count, was heavily mortgaged.

She found the serfs on the estate, the condition of which she had been entirely unaware of, ground down

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by a despotic agent to the extreme of misery. In one of her letters to the Count she tells a pathetic story of a peasant, whom she found lying in despair beside his dying ox. "When I asked him why he did not take the animal home, he explained that it was the only day in the week he was permitted to work for himself, and if he refrained he and his family must die of hunger." Her compassion was at once aroused, and in her impulsive way she "immediately gave orders that no one shall be forced to work for us more than three days a week, and as I cannot see all the people myself, I have asked them to choose two representatives to bring complaints to me every Saturday. I am told," she adds, "that they all bless me."

In the midst of these efforts to improve things the Count sent for her. His mission to St. Petersburg had proved fruitless, and he wanted the assistance of her tact and charm. She arrived on the eve of the assassination of Czar Paul, whose insanity had created a veritable reign of terror. Alexander I, who succeeded him, was a friend of the persecuted Poles, and thanks to his clemency the Potockis recovered possession of their confiscated estates.

Kowalowka, however, was too deeply involved to be worth reclaiming. During H el ene's absence it had been seized by the creditors, and the contents of the ch ateau dispersed. Her portrait was sold for fifty florins.¹ She bore the news of the loss of her beautiful home, in which she had known the happiest and unhappiest moments of her life, calmly. Since the death of her children Kowalowka had become hateful

¹ Probably the one in Berlin, of which the frontispiece of this book is a reproduction.

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to her. The thought that she was never to see again the "poor little church" in which they were buried cost her a few tears, but they were quickly dried.

"Nothing matters any more," she told her husband. "I am indifferent to either the good or the evil that may befall me."

She was mistaken. Such a nature as hers is never resigned.

VIII

On their return from Russia the Potockis went to live at Brody in Galicia, which in the dismemberment of Poland had fallen to Austria. It was from the town of Brody, which belonged to him, and possessed considerable commercial importance, that the Count derived the greater portion of his income. The degradation of its down-trodden inhabitants, seven-eighths of whom were Jews, and the unspeakable squalor of its streets, "in which one sank to the knees in mud," rendered it anything but agreeable to reside in.

After Kowalowka, Brody was the abomination of desolation. The château was "situated in a swamp filled with frogs that croaked day and night." It had not been inhabited for years, and was in a state of utter dilapidation. Moisture dripped from the walls, the mirrors were spotted and blurred by the damp, the furniture was either tumbling to pieces or had already done so, and, "in every room there was the horrible stench of rats dead under the flooring." The wall that surrounded the château cut off all view of the country. In winter it was impossible to see even Brody for the fog or snow. The building, moreover,

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was so large that it was impossible to heat it. In the vast dining-hall the cold was so intense that "one froze at the table."

Fortunately, adjoining the château there was a small house which, as it was easier to heat and to furnish, Hélène and the Count decided to occupy. Mademoiselle Karwoska, a young and attractive girl of good family in reduced circumstances whom Hélène had taken as a companion, resided with them. The rest of the household, which consisted of the widow of a general related to the Count, his secretaries and agent, Hélène's man of affairs and his wife, formerly employed in the same capacity by her uncle, the curé, and the doctor, dwelt at the château. At night they all met for dinner, "when the men invariably drank themselves under the table, and the stupidity of the women was exasperating to the last degree."

The deadly monotony of such an existence produced irritation and discontent. By degrees differences arose between the husband and wife. Hélène, longing for children, which were denied her, accused her husband of not sharing her desire. He became sullen and avoided her; apparently absorbed in business, he passed the entire day shut up in his office with his secretaries. To her regret he had ceased to be jealous of her, "though the house was full of men, and the curé over a game of cards repeated all the filthy gossip of Brody." Each day her diary notes a quarrel. Now the Count "makes a scene because the soup is not to his liking, or the *salmis* is burnt." Again it is Hélène who is offended, because "he finds fault with her at whist, or goes to bed without saying good-night."



COUNT VINCENT POTOCKI

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At last the crisis is reached when she surprises him and Mademoiselle Karwoska in a compromising situation. A terrible scene follows. The guilty husband attempts an explanation and is petrified into silence. The Karwoska, dismissed on the spot, is not even given time to pack her things. "Within a quarter of an hour she is on her way to her sister's at Klekotow," and H el ene, "not knowing whether she suffered more from her husband's infidelity or his choice of such a rival," takes to her bed for a week.

During this time the Count, who regretted the effect his infidelity had produced on H el ene rather than his actual faithlessness, was very repentant. His passion had burnt itself out, but he still admired the beauty, the grace and talent of his wife. He desired above all things to be reconciled. Touched by his anxiety and devotion, H el ene forgave him, and the dull routine of life began again—duller than ever for the absence of the Karwoska, though H el ene would have died sooner than admit it.

The quarrels soon began again, and finally the situation became so intolerable that H el ene, in a fit of desperation, left the Count, convinced, though she had no proof of it, that he was in secret communication with the Karwoska. This step, which she regretted the moment she had taken it, was rendered the more critical by its suddenness. Beyond going to Lemberg, a few miles away, where the Princess Jablonowska, a friend of the old Warsaw days, on whom she knew she could count, resided, she had made no plans at all. As she took leave of her husband, who made no effort to detain her, and even escorted her to the carriage, "she could not realize that it was she, H el ene Massalska,

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who was leaving for ever the man she had so dearly loved and whom, she owned to herself, she still loved." Such a *dénouement* to the passion which had dominated her life completely overwhelmed her, and she was obliged to take to her bed as soon as she reached Lemberg.

The Princess Jablonowska, who had received her with the greatest sympathy, at a loss how to advise her, bethought herself of consulting the Prince de Ligne, who by chance happened at the time to be in Lemberg. Devoted to the memory of his son, he had just cause to resent the manner in which Héléne had treated him; but he was not one to cherish resentment, and he went at once to call upon her. At the sight of the gallant old gentleman, whom she greatly respected, and whose presence vividly recalled the glad and brilliant days she had known at Belœil and Versailles, she was profoundly agitated. Touched by her distress, the Prince de Ligne advised her to return to her husband. The only justification, he told her, of her past conduct lay in the passionate attachment she professed for the Count, and that if she abandoned him now, the world would for ever condemn her.

He spoke to her, too, of her daughter, Sidonie, descanting on her beauty and amiability, and the love she bore her mother, whom she had been brought up to respect, and whose history had been carefully kept from her. As he fully understood Héléne's emotional nature, he played upon her pulses as upon an instrument. Overwhelmed by his tenderness, which she so little deserved, she consented, with torrents of tears, to follow his advice. It was first necessary, however, to ascertain whether her husband would permit her to

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return. In reply to her letter pleading for forgiveness, the Count sent two lines: "A cordial welcome awaits you at Brody, where you are free to come and go as you please." Unfaithful though he was, he had missed her. If life at Brody was insufferable with her, it was impossible without her—and Karwoska, to boot.

When she arrived at the château he was waiting at the door to greet her. At the sight of him, "she felt her heart beat as if it would break." She leapt from the carriage and flung herself into his arms. "Oh, Vincent, how I love you!" she murmured brokenly, as he kissed her. Only five days had passed between her departure and return, but brief though the time was, it was sufficient to convince her that her heart was bound to him for ever.

IX

Shortly after this event—in 1796—having sold a portion of their Polish estates on very advantageous terms, the Potockis took up their abode in Paris. To see Paris again had been one of the dreams of Héléne's life. She had sighed for it perpetually at Belœil and Vienna, constantly talked of it at Warsaw and Kowalowka, and frequently wept over the recollection of it when contrasting the brilliant, gay life she had led there with the horrors of her existence at Brody. But the Paris she returned to after a twenty years' absence was very different from the Paris she had known. Its general appearance was pretty much the same, but the ravages of the Terror, the chaos of the Directory, and the wars of the Consulate had completely changed its

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character. Though the traces of the Revolution were all but effaced, enough remained to enable one to judge of its excesses.

The day after her arrival, on returning from a walk, Hélène was so depressed that she could not restrain her tears as she related her impressions to her husband. She had directed her steps first to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, only to find the convent closed and the nuns dispersed. The Lady Abbess alone remained, living in an attic in a neighbouring street with one of the sisters. Hélène, however, "obtained permission from the porter in charge of the convent to visit the deserted garden, where she had played the 'Massacre of the Innocents,' and a thousand other things, with Choiseul and Mortemart, and to view once more the chapel where her dear benefactress, Madame de Rochecouart, was buried."

It was in society that the havoc wrought by the guillotine and exile was most apparent. Very few of Hélène's former friends who had escaped the scaffold were in a position to entertain, and the world of fashion as reconstructed by Bonaparte, was very lugubrious and dull, in comparison with the days when Marie Antoinette queened it at Versailles and Trianon. In society, in fact, everything was changed—people, the hours of meals, of the theatre and of the opera, the very nature of social functions. The *petit souper* of the old régime was unknown, and wit and manners were all but extinct.

It was in the wreckage of the *noblesse* of the old Court rather than in the gaudy plebeian aristocracy that was crystallizing round General Bonaparte, that the Potockis sought their friends. The Count, who had

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always affected the air of a *grand seigneur*, desired to live like one, particularly as his fortune enabled him to do so, and Héléne, who at forty-four was still beautiful, attractive and as fond of pleasure as of old, was willing enough to assist him. Accordingly, with the reckless extravagance of the Polish nobility, they purchased a house in Paris and a château in the country, which they furnished at the cost of nearly a million francs. The style in which they lived was on a scale of equal magnificence. Their *chef* was considered one of the best in Paris, while not even the receptions of the wife of the First Consul were more *suivies* than those of Madame la Comtesse Potocka.

But Héléne's thoughts were dominated by another and greater interest than these ephemeral triumphs. It was no transient tenderness that the Prince de Ligne had awakened in her mind for the child she had abandoned twenty years before. Touched by his assurance that Sidonie loved and respected her, she had sent her a long letter accompanied by her miniature and a lock of her hair, which the young girl had acknowledged in the most affectionate manner. The correspondence thus begun continued, and brought the mother and daughter nearer and nearer to each other. In a short time Héléne, with the usual intensity of her nature, was completely obsessed with the longing to see this daughter—the only one of her children still living—from whom she was separated as the result of her own conduct. Her remorse was still further sharpened by the thought that in marrying the Count, she had failed to make any provision for Sidonie. In the event of the Count's death, his son, François, by the Countess Anna, would benefit at the expense of her daughter.

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Meditating long over this matter, H el ene came to the conclusion that it was only by the marriage of the two that the injustice of which she had been guilty could be rectified.

To this proposal the Count readily assented. He was proud of Fran ois, a fine young fellow of one-and-twenty, whom he had recently met for the first time since his marriage to H el ene. He wanted to see him married and settled, and where could he find a more suitable wife than in Sidonie de Ligne, an attractive girl from all accounts, whose claims to a share in her mother's fortune would, by such a match, be amicably adjusted? The affair, however, was not an easy one to negotiate. The stern old Princesse de Ligne, who had brought up Sidonie, objected to the proposal solely because H el ene advocated it; while the Countess Anna saw in it an attempt to rob her of the affection of her son.

Their opposition, however, was finally overcome, and the marriage of the two children was celebrated at T oplitz, in Austria, in 1807. H el ene, who had not yet seen Sidonie, wished above all things to be present at the wedding, but she tactfully gave up the idea on learning that the Countess Anna also intended to be present. She was determined that on the day she saw her child again, nothing should cloud the happiness of the reunion.

Sidonie looked forward to this event as eagerly as her mother. Growing up a lonely little girl, under the watchful eye of the Princesse de Ligne, her thoughts were ever turning to the beautiful mother she had never known and to whom some mystery clung. She loved her instinctively, and when after a short



SIDONIE DE LIGNE

Reproduced for the first time by the courtesy of the Prince de Ligne from the portrait at Belœil.

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honeymoon in Vienna she arrived in Paris, she was enchanted with Héléne.

Héléne in the meantime was a prey to the most morbid misgivings. "Suppose," she wrote in her diary, "she should reproach me with my long indifference! This thought overwhelms me, I am afraid of my child!" She passed the day on which the young couple were expected, at the window in a fever of anxiety. When, at last, their carriage drove up, her suspense was so great that she was at the door before they could alight.

A single glance was sufficient to reassure her that her fears were groundless.

"Oh, my child, my only child," she cried in a voice shaken with sobs as she clasped her in her arms, "you are all that I love most in the world!"—adding in a sudden fit of hysterical gaiety, "after my husband, *bien entendu*. I must set you a good example, you know."

She was scarcely less delighted with François, who at once fell under the spell of his fascinating mother-in-law; while the Count was equally captivated by Sidonie.

Rich and admired, living at last in Paris, the object of her dreams, with the husband she worshipped, and assured of the affection and devotion of her children, whose marriage was perfectly happy, it seemed to Héléne that life had nothing left to offer her. The even tenor of her existence was only broken by the Count's occasional visits to Poland on business. As these visits were often inexplicably long, Héléne, most of whose unhappiness, like that of her unfortunate country, was due to her own begetting, would work

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herself into a fever of suspicion and jealousy. More than once convinced that he was "under the spell of Karwoska," she set out for Poland on the spur of the moment, intent on surprising them. But somehow the Count and Karwoska, if indeed the *liaison* still continued, always managed to elude her. In the opinion of the doctors, these frantic journeys made in the depth of winter through countries bristling with war, shortened her life. But in no case is it probable that she would have reached old age. Natures like hers prematurely consume the body in which they are imprisoned.

Hélène was only fifty-two when she died. The end came very suddenly. She had just returned to Paris from her château in the country, where she had passed the autumn apparently in the best of health, when she was seized with terrible internal pains. Twelve hours later she breathed her last in the arms of her beloved daughter, without realizing that she was dying. Almost the last act of her life was to write to her husband, absent in Poland, a letter full of affection, as all her letters to him were.

The Count, who, in spite of his numerous infidelities, had loved her after his fashion, on being informed of her death, declared that "all his happiness had perished with her." But his despair, which expressed itself in the display of a morbid interest in anything that recalled her, was inspired by the suddenness of the blow, rather than the pain it occasioned him.

Hélène had often expressed the wish to be buried in the "poor little church at Kowalowka" beside her boys. In the first flush of his grief the Count, no doubt, intended to respect this wish; for according to

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the register of the Cemetery of Père-la-Chaise, her interment there three days after her death was only "temporary." But this was as near execution as his intention ever got. Some time later, he even contemplated remarrying the Countess Anna, who, in a letter accepting his offer, signed herself, "Your wife in the future as in the past." His death, however, defeated this project.

In 1840, twenty-five years after her death, the remains of "Hélène Massalska, wife of Potocki," were indeed removed from their temporary resting-place "beside the tomb of Marshal Ney" by order of the cemetery authorities—to be reinterred, not at Kowalowka, but along with scores of others equally neglected in the *fosse commune*!

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

1768-1793





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(After Marke)

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“Amour sacré de la Patrie,
Conduis, soutiens nos bras vengeurs !
Liberté, Liberté chérie,
Combats avec tes défenseurs !”

* * * * *

Aux armes, citoyens ! formez vos bataillons !

Marchons, marchons !

Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons !”

ROUGET DE L'ISLE : “La Marseillaise.”

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

1768-1793

I

MARIE ANNE CHARLOTTE DE CORDAY D'ARMONT, commonly called Charlotte Corday, was born on July 27, 1768, at Saint-Saturnin-des-Lignerics, a hamlet near the town of Argentan in Normandy. Though her birthplace was little better than a peasant's hovel, the blood that flowed in her veins was blue enough to have won the respect even of such an ultra-aristocrat as the Comtesse de Brionne. For the family of Mademoiselle de Corday's mother, which was held in high esteem in the duchy, claimed descent—and could prove it too—from John Baliol, King of Scotland, while her father, who derived his name from Corday,¹ an estate that his ancestors had owned in the time of

¹ Now *Cordey*—a village of 152 inhabitants near Falaise.

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William the Conqueror, belonged to the old nobility of Normandy. François de Corday, however, was much prouder of being the great-great-grandson of Corneille than of the antiquity of his pedigree.

But notwithstanding their illustrious origin, Charlotte's parents possessed little beyond the memory of the former splendour of their respective families. The de Cordays, in particular, had greatly come down in the world. M. de Corday's eldest brother, according to the law of primogeniture, had inherited all the property there was to inherit. It consisted of the Château de Glatigny, and some farm land near Argentan. Ronceraye, the dwelling in which M. de Corday himself lived at Saint-Saturnin-des-Lignerics, and in which Charlotte was born, was one of those little thatched cottages, still to be seen in Normandy, with a courtyard, some trees and a well, surrounded by a high wall covered with ivy.

At the time of his marriage he and his wife between them had scarce fifteen hundred livres a year. To add to their difficulties, their family was a large one—two sons and three daughters—of which Charlotte was the second. As a younger son, reduced almost to the condition of a peasant, M. de Corday was one of those who suffered most from the abuses of the feudal system. When the Revolution broke out he promptly embraced the new ideas. In 1790, the bitterness which, like many another, he had cherished in secret against a régime of which privilege was the basis, expressed itself in a violent brochure against the law of primogeniture, and in the parish council of which he was a member his voice was frequently raised in denunciation of the old abuses.

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That his views, with which Charlotte must have been familiar from childhood, had much to do with the development of hers there can be no doubt. The father and daughter were devoted to one another. But while Charlotte could state with truth at the Revolutionary Tribunal that she "was a republican before the Revolution," M. de Corday, in spite of his liberal views, remained a royalist. The horrors that followed in the wake of the new gospel of liberty, disgusted and alarmed him. He was a gentle, serious man, of the utmost integrity of character. So great was his love of honesty that he took it for granted that his children, to whom he was a most affectionate parent, valued it equally.

There is something touching in the simplicity, rectitude and tenderness of M. de Corday's character that reminds one of the fathers in the pictures of Greuze. His faith in his children was such that he let them have access to his money, which he kept lying loose in an open drawer. It is pleasant to know that this confidence was never betrayed. The children, aware of the slenderness of his purse, and the necessity of practising the strictest economy, would have cut off their hands sooner than have abstracted a farthing from that open drawer. Madame Loyer de Maromme, who knew the family intimately, says, "All the children also absolutely refused to have any money spent upon them beyond what was strictly necessary, and each of them strove in some way or other to be of assistance to so kind a father."

But M. de Corday's poverty made itself felt none the less cruelly. To a gentleman in reduced circumstances with sons to provide for, the army, in which

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only those of noble birth could hold commissions, was always a resource. At the time of Charlotte's birth, her eldest brother was already at the *École Militaire*, where the younger was to follow him when he reached the requisite age. But to maintain the one at this institution, and prepare the other to enter it, M. de Corday and his wife were obliged to subject themselves to many privations; not the least to bear being the necessity of confiding their daughters to such of their relations as were in a position and willing to receive them.

The revolutionary views that M. de Corday held on the subject of the law of primogeniture by no means caused any ill-feeling between himself and his eldest brother at the *Château de Glatigny*. On the contrary, the most cordial relations existed between the two brothers and their families. Both as a child, and subsequently, Charlotte was a frequent guest at *Glatigny*, where, according to M. Eugène Defrance, who has collected the minutest details of her early life, the room she occupied is still to be seen.

It was, however, with her father's youngest brother, the Abbé de Corday, who had a small living at *Vicques*, that Charlotte chiefly resided. Here, in the old presbytery in which he lived, and which still exists, the Abbé "taught her to read out of an old, precious copy of the works of their famous ancestor, Pierre Corneille," of whom, like her father, he was an enthusiastic admirer. These early lessons, in which Corneille, with his sublime sentiments, his heroic characters, and his relationship to her, always figured "great and illustrious," could not fail to produce a deep impression on the little girl, who was naturally

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of a dreamy nature, and left much to herself. Their effect on her was not unlike that which certain races of antiquity thought to produce in their children by feeding them on the heart of a lion, a diet which they believed made those who partook of it brave and noble-minded. If her father, by his example, taught her to treasure honesty, sincerity and purity as pearls beyond price, it was in reading *Polyeucte* and *Le Cid* that Charlotte Corday took her first lessons in heroism.

When she was about twelve her elder sister died, and she returned home to help her mother about the house. Shortly afterwards, however, Madame de Corday herself died, and M. de Corday, who had become involved in a law-suit with her relations, which rendered his affairs more critical than ever, was obliged once more to part with his children. Charlotte and her sister were placed in the convent of Sainte Trinité at Caen, familiarly known as the Abbaye-aux-Dames, and one of the finest Gothic edifices in Normandy.

This institution, which had been founded in 1066 by Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, did not make a speciality, like the Abbaye-aux-Bois in Paris, of educating girls. The nuns only received a limited number of pupils, of whom the King had the right of nominating five, belonging to the poor *noblesse* of Normandy. It was to his favour that the daughters of M. de Corday, on the recommendation of Madame de Belzunce, the Lady Abbess, who had been a friend of their mother's, owed their admission to the convent.

The years that Charlotte passed in the Abbaye-aux-Dames were the happiest of her life. Enthusiastic

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and impressionable, hers was the very nature to respond to the appeal of monastic life, with its intimate friendships and its sensuous mysticism. Thanks to the romantic friendship she formed with Alexandrine de Forbin, a niece of Madame de Belzunce, and with Mademoiselle de Faudoas, the daughter of one of the principal families in Caen, as well as to the uniform affection with which she was treated by the Lady Abbess and her coadjutrix Madame de Pontécoulant, she asked nothing more than to close her life, scarcely open, at the first page, and to entomb herself in this sepulchre in which she found so much happiness and kindness.

Madame Loyer de Maromme, who was educated at the Abbaye-aux-Dames at the same time, describes Charlotte as a model of piety, though she was capable on occasions of displaying a stubborn and intractable spirit, for which she was more than once severely reprimanded. Her pride, fostered by the reading of Corneille, engendered in her a courage proof against suffering. "The little one," said Madame de Pontécoulant, "is always hard upon herself. She never complains, I have to guess when she is ill, for she will never tell me."

This firmness increased as time went by, and prepared her for the deed which was to immortalize her name. But as she grew older her religious fervour cooled, or rather, as Lamartine wisely says, "without abandoning God or virtue, the two first passions of her soul, she gave them other names and other forms."

The need of intellectual and moral emancipation, which was the burning question of the age, had made itself felt in the convents as in every sphere of the

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social system of France. Philosophy invaded the cloister as well as the *salon*, and it was in the peaceful seclusion of the convent that it found its most ardent adepts. The Abbaye-aux-Dames was no exception to the rule. Here, as in most of the convents of the period, the greatest laxity prevailed. All sorts of social entertainments, at which the *pensionnaires* assisted, were of frequent occurrence. Men were even admitted to these functions, at which politics and philosophy were freely discussed, as well as all the scandals and frivolities of Caen and Paris.

The interior governance of the convent was equally lax. The inmates were subjected to few restrictions, for though Madame de Belzunce and Madame de Pontécoulant were themselves the most estimable of women, they were extremely easy-going. Nuns and pupils alike were allowed a free choice of books, and many that they read, studied, and admired, often without comprehending the reasoning of the author, were of very doubtful orthodoxy.

Charlotte was an omnivorous reader, skimming the meretricious novels of Louvet and Laclos, and puzzling her brains over the philosophic treatises of Raynal and Rousseau indiscriminately. But she was one of those who can be subjected with impunity to the temptations latent in books and opinions. She never lost the purity of her mind. Though she ceased to believe in the creed of her childhood, her thoughts were too lofty, her nature too loyal, to look back on it with contempt. To the last she manifested an outward respect for the Church in which she had been born and bred.

Her character, like Joan of Arc's, to whom she

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has often been compared, possessed the moral virginity of a child. This singular trait showed itself in her voice, which was almost infantile in its softness. One might forget, as many who knew her did, the colour of her hair and the outline of her features, but not her voice.

It was not long, however, before her mind began to rebel against the indiscriminate surfeiting to which she had subjected it. Her taste having been formed by reading Corneille, craved, by a sort of intellectual instinct, works which supplemented his heroic sentiments. Like a true child of the Revolution, her favourite author was Plutarch, her favourite hero Brutus. The great men of the pagan world who gave their lives to live for ever obsessed her imagination, till "she longed to join them in the Elysian fields," a sublime figure like themselves. From constantly musing over them, they became so real to her that she confused them with the heroes of her own exciting times, which bore so strange a resemblance to antiquity that the two finally became merged in her mind. It was Brutus, whom she saw in Barbaroux, and whom she invoked when she set out for Paris to free France of Marat. And it was a copy of Plutarch that she was to take with her on the journey for inspiration.

II

In 1790, when the Abbaye-aux-Dames was closed by order of the National Assembly, which had decreed the suppression of the convents and monasteries throughout France, Charlotte Corday and her sister once more returned to the parental roof. Since the

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death of his wife, M. de Corday had been living in Argentan, where fortune had treated him even worse than before. The Revolution, on which at its commencement he had built the highest hopes, had failed to improve his condition. It had, moreover, created differences of opinion in his family, of which the consequences were even harder for him to bear than the abuses from which he had suffered under the old régime. Both his sons had emigrated. The eldest perished at Quiberon in the Vendée, "struck by a republican bullet in a brave attempt to save the royalist flag." The youngest, who joined the Princes at Coblenz, also fell in battle against the republican forces. "Royalists to the marrow of their bones," both had strongly objected to the political opinions of their father.

But these opinions, which were too advanced for his sons, were not advanced enough for his daughter. Sighing as she did "for the *beaux jours* of Sparta and Rome," she had hailed the fall of the Bastille as a tocsin sounding the return of the Golden Age. A diligent reader of all the papers and pamphlets with which Paris inundated the provinces, she fancied she recognized the voice of antique liberty in the speeches of the Girondins. As the Revolution with its excesses advanced, it filled her with indignation to see individuals inferior to events. Her father's timorous liberalism got on her nerves. She missed the life she had been accustomed to at Caen, where at the social gatherings at the Abbaye-aux-Dames she had been in touch with the great world, and heard the great deeds that were agitating France discussed. Perceiving how she chafed, her father advised her to return to Caen and

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seek the protection of a certain Madame de Bretteville, an old relation to whom she was an entire stranger.

Madame de Bretteville was the only child of an old miser who had never been able to make up his mind to give her a *dot*. She was forty when she married M. de Bretteville, who had lost his fortune in gambling, and to recover it was willing to accept the chance of succeeding to the miser's. He waited, however, a long time, only to die three months after his father-in-law. At sixty, Madame de Bretteville found herself a widow with 40,000 livres a year. But she had become too habituated to the penury in which she had passed the best years of her life to make any change in her habits.

Easily alarmed, suspicious of strangers, close like her father, and living in perpetual dread of being victimized by designing persons, the arrival of Charlotte, who seemed to have fallen from the skies without the least warning, and whom, as she quaintly expressed it, she "didn't know from Eve or Adam," afforded her anything but pleasure. She received her, however, but the preoccupied air of her young relation, who "seldom spoke, and always seemed in a brown study," greatly perturbed her.

"I don't know why," she confessed to Madame Loyer de Maromme, "but she frightens me. She gives me the impression of one who is meditating some evil business."

Charlotte, however, quickly succeeded in inspiring the old lady with confidence. A mutual affection even sprang up between the two, and Madame de Bretteville became so attached to her singular relation that

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she invited her to make her home with her for the rest of her life.

The Grand Manoir, as the house she inhabited at Caen was known, was an old, gloomy, semi-Gothic building, in whose vast and lonely rooms there reigned a mournful silence, fit accompaniment to the sad, dim light that filtered through the heavy mullioned windows which looked upon a neglected garden with high, moss-grown walls, in the seclusion of which an old fountain plashed monotonously. On a nature so emotional and sensitive under its calm and phlegmatic exterior as Charlotte Corday's, the atmosphere of such a place was well calculated to develop a tendency to morbidity. According to Alphonse Esquiros, who visited the house in 1841, "its whole aspect was so peculiarly sinister that one understood after inspecting it how, under its moss-covered roof in some dimly lit room at a lonely window where no glimpse of the street ever distracted the thoughts, a morbid and long-meditated idea might ripen into a terrible resolve."

Absolutely free to do as she pleased, for Madame de Bretteville did not attempt to restrict or advise her in any way, the young girl passed most of her time in reading. But though she digested all she absorbed, she did not possess the critical faculty. Carried away by the false philosophy and plausible sophistry of Rousseau and Raynal, whose impassioned style gave them an immense popularity, her ardent and romantic imagination, which had long been fired by the lives of the heroes of antiquity, began to weave dreams of lofty devotion to the public weal and of services sublimely rendered to humanity. What wonder, then, in an age which resembled so

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closely that of antiquity's struggles for freedom, she should arrive, as Lamartine says, "at that desperate state of mind, which is the suicide of happiness, not for the profit of glory or ambition, like Madame Roland, but for the profit of liberty and humanity like Judith or Epicharsis?"

Unfortunately, the people with whom she came into contact only served to strengthen these morbid influences. From Caen, as from every town in France, most of the families whose rank and wealth exposed them to the vindictive hatred of the masses had emigrated. A few, however, remained, and the little group, staunch royalists all, and intimate friends of Madame de Bretteville, were wont to forgather in the gloomy rooms of the Grand Manoir, to discuss the changes that had taken place and bewail the degeneracy of the times. Charlotte, whose ideal of justice, liberty and humanity was concentrated in that of a republic, moved among these relics of the old régime with graceful tact, listening respectfully to their lamentations, and refraining from expressing her dissent from fear of hurting their susceptibilities. The habit of solitary meditation grew upon her. When addressed, she would start like one suddenly awakened.

There were times, however, when she suffered herself to be drawn into a discussion.

"On these occasions," says Madame de Maromme, "she gave the rein to herself and astonished us all by the sublimity of her ideals and her unbounded admiration for the great women of antiquity. The mothers of the Gracchi and Coriolanus were a sort of cult with her. She found in the history of the

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periods in which they lived, she said, a proof that the classic times of the ancient republics were preferable to the vulgar attempts to imitate them made by the men of the Revolution, which were calculated to disgust one for ever with that form of government which she considered the noblest of all. At these words my mother, of whom she was very fond, asked her in a tone of surprise if she wished it to be understood that she was a republican. She blushed at the warmth into which her feelings had betrayed her, and answered quietly, 'I should be, if the French were worthy of a republic.'

Sometimes her patriotism got the better of her discretion, and she expressed herself in a way which startled her hearers.

"Once at a dinner given by Madame de Bretteville," says Vatel, who was told the story by one who had been present, "after having expressed herself very freely on the events of the times, excited by the contradiction she met in a man next her, she told him that if he were the last of the republicans she would assassinate him, toying with her knife while she spoke in so sinister a fashion as to convey the impression that the words were no mere trivial utterance, but the expression of an idea upon which she had often meditated."

An incident, equally significant and much more dramatic, occurred at another dinner given by Madame de Bretteville as a farewell to some of her royalist friends, who, alarmed by the increasing insubordination of the populace, had decided to leave Caen. M. de Corday came from Argentan to attend this dinner, accompanied by his youngest son, who was on his

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way to Coblentz with a M. de Tournélis, a young cousin of Madame de Bretteville's, who was also of the party. Tournélis had been much attracted by Charlotte, and Madame de Bretteville had done her best to make a match between them. Her efforts, however, were unsuccessful. Instead of encouraging Tournélis' advances, Charlotte seemed to take pleasure in expressing in his presence opinions which were the opposite to his, and more freely than was her wont, perhaps because he attributed them to an error of judgment and refused to believe that much as she praised Rome and Sparta, she desired the overthrow of the monarchy.

"Never," says Madame de Maromme, "shall I forget that dinner. It was St. Michael's Day, 1791. Mademoiselle de Corday was dazzlingly beautiful in a lovely gown her old relation had given her. It was of pink taffeta with a white stripe, the skirt being of white silk. It fitted her fine figure to perfection. A pink ribbon bound her hair, and harmonized with her complexion, which was more brilliant than usual. She was, indeed, that day, an ideal creature.

"The dinner was at first very gay. Every one was in good spirits. Our future emigrants fancied they were only going on a little trip to the Rhine and expected to return to Paris for the winter when order would be fully re-established. Mademoiselle de Corday joked them on the rapidity of their tour and their early return. She compared them to Don Quixote: they expected to find Dulcineas and would only find kitchen wenches. All went well and merrily until some one proposed the King's health.

"Every one rose simultaneously, except Made-

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moiselle de Corday, who remained seated and left her glass untouched. 'To the health of the King!' repeated some one, but she paid not the least attention in spite of her father's visible annoyance. My mother tapped her gently on the arm to persuade her to rise, but she looked at her with her customary placidity and refused to budge.

"'Surely, my child,' said my mother, 'you will not refuse to drink the health of a king who is so good and so virtuous!'

"'I believe he is virtuous,' she replied in her melodious voice, 'but a weak king cannot be a good one, for he is powerless to prevent the misfortunes of his people.'

"An absolute silence followed this reply. I was furious. My mother could scarcely restrain her indignation. We drank our loyal toast all the same, but each of us sat down visibly dejected and disconcerted.

"Mademoiselle de Corday, I am sure, did not mean to be disobliging, but frank and incapable of feigning what she did not feel, she would have considered she had been guilty of apostasy had she done what was demanded of her. A few minutes later she was enabled to make ample amends for her seeming affront to the feelings of the company, without abandoning her principles.

"It chanced to be the day on which Fauchet, one of the bishops appointed by the Convention, made his official entry into Caen. In his progress he was attended by a paid mob which made the air resound with shouts of '*Vive la nation ! Vive l'évêque constitutionnel !*' These manifestations so exasperated M. de Tournéris and the young brother of

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Mademoiselle de Corday, who were already irritated by her incomprehensible conduct, that they rushed to the window under which the procession was just then passing, with the avowed intention of manifesting their contempt with counter-cheers of '*Vive le roi!*' Such an act was to expose us all to certain death. The mob would have strangled us, for in such times of popular effervescence and delirium, woe betide him who provokes its wrath without the means of quelling it! Accordingly we all attempted to restrain them by force from committing so unpardonable a folly.

"Whilst M. de Corday sternly silenced his son with all the authority of a father, his daughter seized M. de Tournéris by the arm and dragged him to the other end of the room.

"'Are you not afraid,' she said to the youth whose royalist fervour had more than once before placed him in grave danger, 'that such an untimely expression of your sentiments might prove fatal to those around you? If this is the way you expect to serve your cause, you might just as well not go to Coblenz.'

"'And had you no fear, mademoiselle,' he replied impulsively, 'of offending your friends when you refused just now to join your voice to a toast so dear to us all?'

"'Pshaw!' she said, with a smile, 'my refusal could only injure myself. But you, without serving any useful purpose, were about to endanger the lives of all around you. On which side, I ask, is there the most generosity of sentiment, the most common-sense?'

"M. de Tournéris hung his head in silence, and we were thus spared the terrible consequences of his folly."

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III

Beauty is, so to speak, the natural appanage of sublime natures. Lofty principles deeply cherished have a way of ennobling the plainest features, and those cast in an heroic mould seldom fail to ravish the sight of the beholder. All the portraits of Charlotte Corday represent her as an undeniably beautiful woman. She was tall and slender, and she carried herself with a dignity that was full of grace. Her features were Grecian—the chin, perhaps, rather too prominent. She had wonderful hair of a deep chestnut colour, a dazzlingly white, smooth skin, and the complexion of a rose. The problems that occupied her thoughts totally excluded the least suggestion of vanity. Beauty in her owed nothing whatever to artifice. Madame de Bretteville, proud of the attention paid her, would gladly have provided her with hats and frocks of the latest fashion. But her dress was simplicity itself, she spent little time over her toilette and never gave a second thought to her appearance. Yet the impression she produced on all occasions upon all who saw her was indescribable.

“She blushed very easily,” says Madame de Maromme, “and then became truly ravishing. Her eyes, a deep blue, veiled by long lashes, were very soft and lovely. The whole expression of her face, indeed, was one of ineffable sweetness, as was the sound of her voice. It would be impossible to conceive of an organ more melodious, more enchanting; or a purer, more angelic expression and a more attractive smile.”

It is, perhaps, not too much to say that it is to her great beauty that she, and Marat along with her,

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principally owe their fame. Unquestionably it opened the door to fame for both of them wider than their lives and deeds alone would have done. Had Marat died naturally, or even on the guillotine, it is probable that he would have fallen to the insignificant level of the minor actors in the Revolution. The part he played in that upheaval is not in itself particularly memorable. It is his death by the hand of Charlotte Corday that has given him his terrible immortality.

So likewise with her. Had she been a plain woman her assassination of Marat, for all its sublimity of purpose, would have been a very vulgar affair. It was the beauty of the murderess that, by giving her that nimbus of romance which always makes a powerful appeal to humanity, produced on her contemporaries an indelible impression of patriotism that has ever since been a source of inspiration to painters, sculptures, poets and musicians.

That such a woman should inspire passion it is easy to understand. Many men years after she had passed out of their lives are said to have trembled at the mention of her name. But the love she inspired never seems to have been returned.

“No man,” says Madame de Maromme, “made the least impression on her, her thoughts were elsewhere. I can affirm, moreover, that nothing was further from her thoughts than the idea of marriage. It was her firm intention to remain single. ‘Never,’ she wrote me once, ‘will I renounce my dear freedom, never will you have the opportunity of addressing me on a letter as Madame.’”

Rumour, however, for which a heroine without a lover loses half her interest, professed to have de-

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tected, as Lescure expresses it, "that corner of tenderness which every Roman nature possesses, that flaw in the stoical cuirass where the arrow penetrates by which the heroine becomes the woman." She admitted as much herself in one of her letters, in which she declared that she possessed "an imagination so lively, a heart so full of sensibility as to augur a stormy life." Legend, accordingly, has given her numerous lovers to whom she was not altogether unresponsive.

These little romances, however, based either on hypothesis or invention, all tumble to pieces like a house of cards on investigation. Fouquier-Tinville, who would fain have robbed the assassination of Marat of the sublimity of its motive, declared it to have been an act of revenge inspired by the fate of the Vicomte de Belzunce, a young, handsome, effeminate and incredibly foolish officer in the Bourbon regiment who had been massacred by an infuriated mob in the streets of Caen.

The story of his death is a gruesome one. An ultra-royalist, relying on his popularity in the regiment, he displayed his hatred of the new era by making fun of the public fêtes given in honour of the taking of the Bastille and sneering at the reviews of the National Guards. Having exasperated the citizens by his conduct, he finally went to the length on parade of promising rewards to those men who snatched from the soldiers of the Artois regiment, also in garrison at Caen, the medals of Necker and the Breton Union, given them by the city of Rennes. The affair caused an immense sensation, and a mob numbering more than 20,000 besieged the barracks. To restore order the Bourbon regiment was withdrawn from the town, and

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Belzunce volunteered to surrender himself to the authorities as hostage. The mob, however, burst into the Hôtel de Ville, where he was detained, and, dragging him out, massacred him in the streets. The most horrible atrocities, of a kind very common in France during the Revolution, were perpetrated on his corpse. His head was cut off and paraded on a pike, while "a female fury tore out his heart and cooked it over some live coals."

Charlotte, according to the story, was supposed to have fallen in love with him while at the Abbaye-aux-Dames, where she had met him at one of the parties given by his relation, Madame de Belzunce, the Lady Abbess. As a matter of fact, however, Madame de Belzunce died in 1787, and the supposed lover of Charlotte Corday did not arrive in Caen till 1789. Moreover, as to her murdering Marat to avenge him, it is extremely doubtful if she had ever heard the name of Marat when Belzunce was killed. It is certain that the *Ami du Peuple* which made Marat notorious did not make its appearance till *after* this tragic episode. "The whole assertion," says Madame de Maromme, "is absurd and false. Not only did she not love him, but she despised his conduct."

On the other hand, Lamartine, who could not conceive of a tragedy without love, pinned his faith in "that flaw in the stoical cuirass of the Roman maiden" to a much more ridiculous story. According to him, she reciprocated the passion of a mysterious "M. de Franquelin," who, after her execution, retired to the village of Vilraye in Normandy, where he died of a broken heart, carrying his secret with him to the tomb. But a packet of letters that had been buried with him betrayed it. For years later, during some exhumations

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in the cemetery, "the envelope of iron in which the burning pages had been sealed was opened, and the mystery revealed."

M. de Franquelin's existence, however, was even more problematical than his love. Not only was he never known to any of the friends or relations of the girl he adored, but the register of the cemetery at Vilraye, where he was said to have been buried, does not even contain his name. The whole story is based on the evidence of an old servant who, on seeing Ary Scheffer's imaginary portrait of Charlotte Corday, "declared it reminded her of a miniature she had often seen a young man of the name of Franquelin contemplate with tears in his eyes."

Bougon-Longrais, another of Charlotte's mythical lovers, at least has the merit of having existed; and the supposition of her affection for him rests on a more serious basis than that of the other candidates for her heart. He was one of the young men admitted to the entertainments at the Abbaye-aux-Dames. He was young, handsome, talented, and very eloquent. Both had the same opinions, the same ideals, the same temperaments. An intellectual, if not a sentimental, bond united them closely. It was from him that Charlotte borrowed the books on philosophy to the study of which she was so addicted. It was for him, too, that the letter she wrote Barbaroux in the last moments of her life was intended. "I do not address it to Bougon for several reasons," she declares. "In the first place, I am not sure where he is at the moment, furthermore, knowing the sensibility of his nature, I dread the pain I should inflict on him by informing him of my approaching end."

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Of Bougon-Longrais' love for *her*, at least, there is no doubt. He followed her to the scaffold shortly after her execution for the "crime of moderatism." In his farewell letter to his mother he said that he died gladly, as life had robbed him of all that he held dear. "O Charlotte Corday," he exclaimed in a passionate outburst, "whose memory unceasingly occupies my thoughts and heart, I am coming to rejoin thee! The desire to avenge thee alone enabled me till now to support life. It is, I trust, at last sufficiently realized. I die content and worthy of thee!"

The assertion of Madame de Maromme, however, that Charlotte Corday never loved any man, supported as it is by the utter lack of any real evidence to the contrary, does not necessarily prove that she was incapable of love. On the contrary, it is in such natures as hers that the deepest and most ardent passion burns. But at the first symptom of love, her reserve and her sense of dependence always caused her to repress the avowal of such feelings. Thus restrained, love in her changed, not its nature, but its ideal. The passion with which some one individual should have inspired her became a sublime devotion to a dream of public welfare. Love of country absorbed all her thoughts till she reached that enthusiastic state of mind in which patriotism begot the desire of self-immolation.

IV

The fall of the monarchy on August 10, 1792, put an end to such royalist society as was left in France. The few aristocrats who had remained in Caen, terrified by the constantly increasing lawlessness

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of the times, proceeded to leave the country before it was too late. Madame de Bretteville, too old and too timid to follow their example, no longer dared leave her house, over which the gloom now hung like a pall.

Bereft thus of all society, imprisoned, as it were, in herself, Charlotte, naturally reserved and prone to day-dreaming, became, as Michelet expresses it, "the victim of the demon of solitude." She seldom went beyond the old garden of the Grand Manoir. Here she would sit for hours brooding over the rumours that reached her from without; the papers she read were full of forebodings, lamentations, and discouragement—sad reading at any time, but doubly so in the gloomy solitude of the Grand Manoir, for an impressionable girl whose love of country was so great that "each of its throes sent a pang through her heart."

To one of her temperament, such an existence was fraught with the greatest danger. Its sinister influence is apparent in the letters she wrote to her absent friends, a few of which have been preserved. In following the tragic course of the events she describes, one can see, as it were, the gradual ripening of the morbid idea of sacrificing herself for her country which had taken possession of her mind.

Scarce a day passes but some fresh horror is recorded. Things seem to go from bad to worse. Insurrections in the streets of Caen are of almost daily occurrence. At Verson, a village in the neighbourhood, the refusal of the curé to take the civil oath prescribed by the Convention is the cause of a sanguinary riot, in which "fifty people were hung and beaten, and women outraged."

Avowed Republican though she is, the "frightful

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news of the King's death" makes her "tremble with indignation." Living and reigning she had refused to drink his health, but his death on the scaffold causes her to "shed tears of blood." "The greatest evils that one can imagine" she sees lurking "in a future ushered in by such an event."

"These men," she says in one of her letters, "who were to give us liberty have murdered it. They are nothing but assassins. Let us grieve for the fate of poor France. A fearful despotism awaits us, for if they succeed in chaining up the people again it is to fall from Charybdis into Scylla."

All her metaphors, be it said, Charlotte Corday borrowed from the ancients. In this respect, however, she was by no means singular. Pagan allusions were as common in France at this period as Biblical ones are in England. The application of Greek and Roman traditions in daily life was the most marked and curious feature of the times. Unfortunately, the sublimity of the ideals of antiquity, which so profoundly influenced great natures like Charlotte Corday, Madame Roland, and those magnificent visionaries the Girondins, had its *revers de médaille* of unbridled tyranny and self-aggrandizement which appealed with equal force to the base souls of the Jacobins and the mob to whose vilest passions they pandered.

Deist though she was, the suppression of the convents was something much worse to Charlotte than an act of impiety. She looked back with regret on the happy days she had passed at the Abbaye-aux-Dames, and shuddered at the cruelty of the law which drove the gentle, timid and inexperienced nuns out of their cloisters like frightened doves from a dovecote. The

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fate of Mademoiselle de Forbin, to whom she had been deeply attached, and who, driven from the convent in which she had become a nun, was in dire distress in Switzerland, caused her great anxiety.

Mademoiselle de Forbin, however, was not the only one about whom she was concerned. She complains that "all her friends are being persecuted." Even poor old Madame de Bretteville had become an object of suspicion, and was made the victim of all manner of petty annoyances, as a result of having sheltered an *émigré* who was fleeing to England.

"We are in the power of villains here," she writes, adding in exasperation, "it is enough to make one hate this republic if one did not remember that '*les forfaits humains n'atteignent pas les cieux.*'"

A tragic event which made a deep impression on her was the imprisonment of her eighteen-year-old friend Eléanore de Fautoas. It recalled with peculiar poignancy an incident that occurred after the fall of the monarchy. The two girls and Mademoiselle Levailant—afterwards Madame de Maromme—had been in the habit of studying English together, and one day while reading the account of the trial of Charles I they had stopped to discuss his misfortunes, which bore so striking a resemblance to those of Louis XVI. Mademoiselle Levailant was particularly impressed with the devotion and unalterable loyalty of the Cavaliers to their king.

"That," she exclaimed, "is what I would do, if such things happened in France. I would sacrifice myself for my king. 'All for the King,' is my motto!"

"Oh," replied Eléanore de Fautoas, laughing, "I should, of course, do all in my power to help him,

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except dying. I much prefer to keep my head on my shoulders, even though it were hind-side before."

Since then the King had lost his head, and now Eléanore de Faudoas had been arrested and imprisoned for being the daughter of a man who had been one of those that had attempted in vain to sustain the last vestige of royal power when attacked and destroyed by the people on the fatal 10th of August. For this crime the innocent Eléanore was guillotined along with her father and a widowed aunt. This event did not take place till some weeks after Charlotte herself had perished on the same scaffold, but the terrible fate of the girl was none the less sure. It was, perhaps, from this moment that the vengeance which was to spur "the victim of the demon of solitude" to the heroic suicide she termed sacrifice began to germinate in her heart.

V

These personal causes of grievance were exacerbated by political ones. The atrocities, the general insecurity of life, and the fury of the factions by which France was torn by the execution of Louis XVI, created a revulsion of feeling in all those who, while rejoicing in the abolition of the monarchy, desired to raise in its place a republic founded on the principles of justice, liberty, and order. The party which represented these opinions in the Convention was known as the Girondins. Recruited almost entirely from the upper middle-class, they were men of culture and refinement, sincerely patriotic, honest, and humane. They possessed, moreover, all the brains in the Con-

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vention, and in Vergniaud, their leader, an orator of the greatest eloquence. In a more peaceful and law-abiding epoch they would have governed the country with great efficiency and in the best interests of the people. But in a period of revolution they had not the requisite energy to usurp the supreme authority to maintain public order, the audacity to intimidate their opponents, or the cunning to pacify them.

Their very virtues weakened them. The loftiness of their principles was a constant source of reproach to those in whom the Revolution, with its abuse of liberty, had given a free rein to the vilest passions of mankind. The difference between them and their rivals for popular favour was aptly defined by Vergniaud. "The Jacobins," he said, "believe in consolidating the republic by terror. We would fain see it consolidated by love." Theorists rather than men of action, their enemies easily tangled them in their own theories. The position they held midway between the extremists was difficult and dangerous. In revolutions moderation is political suicide. The Girondins were the *enfants perdus* of the Ideal. Having overthrown the monarchy, they tried to save the monarch. The *political* death of Louis was all they desired. But at such a time no appeal to the nobler feelings of the people was of any avail; their efforts to obtain mercy for their own victim only weakened their influence and furnished the Jacobins with fresh weapons. In the end they were destined to slip in the very blood they had spilt.

Too late they perceived how foolish had been their attempt to create a Utopia by law. "My friends," said Vergniaud, on the night before the execution of

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the famous Twenty-two, who had refused to seek safety in flight like their less sublime comrades, "we have killed the tree by pruning it. The soil is too weak to nourish the roots of civic liberty. This nation is too childish to wield its laws without hurting itself. It will return to its kings as babes return to their toys. We were deceived in the age in which we were born. We deemed ourselves in Rome, and we were at Paris." Words more pregnant with truth were never uttered in the Revolution.

Of all the blunders these visionary disciples of Rousseau and Plutarch committed, the most fatal, and at the same time the most creditable to them, was their arraignment of Marat for his complicity in the infamous September massacres. To save themselves from a similar fate, Danton and Robespierre, though they dreaded the ascendancy of Marat in the Jacobins, were obliged to attempt to save him. All France took part in the struggle that ensued, by which Marat achieved a notoriety he had never before possessed, and out of all proportion to his real importance. The failure of the Girondins to bring him to justice was the direct cause of their downfall. The wonderful ovation Marat received on his acquittal, when he was carried in triumph on the shoulders of a Jacobin mob to his seat in the Convention itself, was the prelude to their own arraignment and condemnation. Twenty-two of their number who had refused to flee were arrested and executed in due course. Of the others, eighteen took refuge in Caen, "because this city had been the first to protest against the violation of the liberty of the people in the arrest of their representatives." With their proscription the republic became

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the tyranny of a party composed of men destitute of scruple or mercy, who took a sadistic delight in legalizing murder.

Marat, who had played a more prominent part than any one in the proscription of the Girondins, and whose thirst for blood for which he clamoured daily in his paper, *L'Ami du Peuple*, had become more insane than ever, was not unnaturally regarded in the provinces as possessing far greater importance than any of the Mountain—as the Jacobin party in the Convention was termed.

“The horror he inspired,” says Garat, “by his maxims and the popular idea of his revolting appearance made the people think they saw his influence in everything, so that they imagined *he* was the Mountain or that all its members were like him.”

Charlotte Corday was one of these. To her, beholding the political ideal of which she had dreamed outraged and destroyed, Marat became a symbol for the infamy and cruelty that profaned liberty.

The atmosphere of Caen only served to foster this illusion. In this stronghold of the Girondins, hatred of the Jacobins, above all of the man who was regarded as the incarnation of all their violence, had raised a battalion ready to march on Paris and strike down the tyrant, as the Marseillaise had struck down Louis XVI.

Such an atmosphere was like wine to the girl who had brooded so long in solitude over the anarchy of the times. In the proscribed deputies she believed she saw the saviours of her country. She burned with desire to know them, to assist at their discussions, and to take part in their actions. Attended by an old

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servant of Madame de Bretteville, she called at the Palais de l'Intendance, where they lodged as the guests of the city, on the pretext of interesting them in behalf of her friend Mademoiselle de Forbin, who had forfeited a pension to which she was entitled by leaving France. Barbaroux, "the Antinous of France," as he has been called, though his looks no longer warranted the title, received her. She had two or three interviews with him—on the strength of which, owing to his well-known weakness for women, historians have attempted to build a romance—that only served to confirm her in the opinion that, "as long as Marat lived there would never be any safety for the friends of law and humanity."

Believing that any means were justifiable to attain this end, the idea of his assassination was one she had probably often contemplated in her solitary musings. It was not, however, till the high hopes she built of rescuing the country by other means had been blighted that she became convinced that the rôle of Brutus was one for which she had been specially created.

The Jacobins in the meantime were by no means satisfied with their victory over the Girondins in the Convention. In the pass to which things had come, it was only by the wholesale slaughter of their enemies that they counted on escaping a similar fate. The lists of those thus doomed were drawn up, it was said, by Marat's own hand. In Brittany and Normandy alone three hundred thousand persons were reported to be marked out for destruction. To escape such a fate the Girondins all over France were prepared to defy the Convention.

Of Caen, where the Girondin leaders were trying

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to raise an army to march on Paris, great things were expected. It was arranged that on July 7 (1793) a great review of the National Guard should be held, at which General Wimffen, the commander, should call for volunteers. To celebrate the event fittingly, the review was conducted with the greatest pomp. But at the call of Wimffen only seventeen men of the thousands whom he addressed stepped forward from the ranks. To Charlotte, who was present on a balcony with the Girondin deputies, the sight of this pitiful handful seemed to spell the ruin of her country. She could not restrain her tears. Pétion, who stood next her, chaffed her on her tears, which he believed to be due to regret at the departure of a lover. "Ah, citizen," she replied with a spirit that astonished him, *blasé* though he was in emotion, "you judge me without knowing me. One day you will understand what I am made of."

It was at this moment, as she declared afterwards, that her resolution to rid France of Marat was formed.

VI

Having made up her mind, Charlotte lost no time in the execution of her project. Two days later, on July 9, she set out for Paris. She had previously engaged her seat in the diligence, burnt all her letters, and destroyed everything that was likely to incriminate her friends. She made no secret of her departure, though its motive obliged her to conceal her real destination. Madame de Bretteville believed she was going to see her father at Argentan for a few days.

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To M. de Corday she wrote that "she was going to England, because she could no longer live happy and at peace in France."

As she crossed the threshold of the Grand Manoir for the last time she met a little playmate of hers, the child of a carpenter opposite, whom she had been wont to make much of. "Here is something for you, Louis," she said, giving him her sketching-book, which he had been very fond of looking at. "Don't forget me; you will never see me again." And, taking him up in her arms, she kissed him and bade him be a good boy.

On passing the house of Madame Malfilatre, the last of her friends who remained in Caen, she stopped to say good-bye. When she left, her feelings got the better of her and she kissed young Malfilatre, a boy of sixteen, who was present, as well as his mother. "He grew up and grew old," says Chéron de Villiers, "envied and admired by all his neighbours, as if he had been touched on the brow by an angel. He lived to be seventy-five, and to the day of his death he claimed to have received the last kiss Charlotte Corday ever gave."

The journey to Paris was tedious and uneventful. The diligence reached its destination on July 11, at noon. On the recommendation of the guard, Charlotte proceeded immediately to the Hôtel de la Providence. Having obtained a room, she went to bed and slept till the following morning. On arising she went to call on Lauze Duperret, a member of the Convention, to whom she had a letter from Barbaroux in regard to the affair of her friend Mademoiselle de Forbin. Being informed that he was out, but would return at a

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certain hour, she went back to the hotel to wait, passing the time reading Plutarch's Lives, which she had brought with her from Caen.

At the appointed hour she returned to the deputy. On being received she told him she had come to Paris in the interests of Mademoiselle de Forbin, and besought his influence on her friend's behalf. The request was merely a pretext on her part to bring her into contact with a man who was in a position to give her the information she required concerning Marat. But Duperret could do nothing for her. As a friend of the proscribed Girondins he was already under suspicion, which, confirmed by the sequel to Charlotte's visit, was to lead him to the guillotine. She was, however, fully alive to the danger to which she exposed him, and before parting from him, implored him, in vain, to leave Paris.

Returning once more to the hotel, Charlotte occupied herself for the remainder of the evening in writing her famous "Address to the French People," which was at once her apology for the murder she contemplated and her political testament.

In it, while declaring that "the happiness of France depends on obedience to law," she denies that she disobeys the law in killing Marat, for "condemned by the whole world, he is beyond the pale of the law."

"What just tribunal would condemn me?" she pleads in justification. "If I am guilty, so was Alcides when he destroyed the monsters, if, indeed, he ever encountered any monster so hateful." In the nobility of her motive she finds a complete vindication of her conduct.

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“My heart,” she says, “is torn by the misfortunes of my country! My life is all I have to give her, and I thank Heaven I am permitted to offer it. I desire my last breath to be useful to my fellow-citizens. Let my head borne through Paris be a rallying-sign for all the friends of law. Let the Mountain, already tottering, see its fall written in my blood. Let me be their last victim, and the avenged universe will declare that I have deserved well of humanity. I care not if others view my conduct in a different light.”

It is her conviction that with the fall of the Mountain “only brothers and friends will remain.” She believes that “Marat, vilest of all wretches, whose name alone suffices to conjure up an image of every crime, in falling beneath the avenging steel has shaken the Mountain, made Danton and Robespierre grow pale, and terrified the other villains seated on this throne of blood.”

Regarding the task to which she had consecrated herself not as a murder, but as a solemn immolation which was to strike terror in the minds of the Jacobins, she desired to execute it in a manner that would produce the greatest effect. Her first idea had been to accost Marat in the Champ de Mars on July 14, during the fête in honour of the fall of the Bastille. The popular agitation, however, inflamed by the royalist rising in La Vendée, caused the ceremony to be postponed and deprived her of her theatre. She had then planned to strike Marat in the midst of the Convention itself, under the very eyes of the Mountain. But informed by Duperret that Marat was ill and did not go to the Convention, she was obliged to abandon this project too, and fall back on the more

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obscure and commonplace plan of slaying him in the privacy of his own house.

This, however, was not so simple as it seemed. The fear of failure evidently haunted her. On the morning of the 13th she awoke at six, and, in spite of the earliness of the hour, rose, dressed, and went out. She directed her steps to the Palais Royal and walked about the gardens till the shops opened. At eight she entered a cutler's shop and purchased for forty sous a common kitchen knife with a black handle. She then hailed a cab and directed the driver to take her to Marat's house. Here she encountered her first difficulty. The "Friend of the People," who clamoured daily for heads, lived in mortal fear lest his own should be the forfeit of his insane thirst for blood. The concierge had orders to refuse admittance to all strangers.

Forced to leave without seeing her victim, the girl returned quietly to her hotel and wrote him a letter, which she despatched at once by a messenger. In it she begged for an interview as one coming from Caen who had information for him which would enable him "to render France a great service." At half-past seven in the evening, having got no reply to her letter, she set out again for his door. To mollify those who guarded it, she bethought herself for the first time in her life of her great beauty, and dressed herself with the utmost care. She wore a low-necked white gown; on her beautiful hair, bound round her brows with a wide green silk riband, rested a Normandy cap, the long lace of which brushed her cheeks. In her bosom, concealed by the folds of a pink silk scarf which covered her shoulders, was the knife she

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had purchased. In her hand she carried a fan. No agitation revealed her deadly purpose, no suggestive pallor dimmed the brilliant hue of her cheeks, no tremulousness betrayed itself in her soft voice. Her eyes were as calm as Asian lakes, her manner was gentle and full of dignity. In this attractive guise, like "Judith, adorned with a marvellous beauty which the Lord had bestowed on her to deliver Israel," she knocked for the second time that day at Marat's door.

Once again she was refused admittance, but this time Charlotte was determined not to be sent away. The sound of the altercation drifting through the half-open door reached the ears of Marat. Gathering by the few words he could make out that the visitor was the stranger who had endeavoured once before that day to have an interview with him, he ordered his mistress to admit her. The woman did as she was bid, and at last Charlotte Corday found herself in the presence of her victim.

The room into which she was shown was small, ill-lit, and meanly furnished. On one of the walls hung a map of France, showing the departments into which the former provinces of the old régime had recently been divided. Opposite hung a brace of pistols, crossed, with the inscription "Death" above them. Several copies of the *Ami du Peuple* were scattered about the floor. A solitary window, through which there glimmered a faint shaft of the rapidly fading daylight, opened upon a dismal court. Beside it sat Marat, stewing in a slipper-bath.

Any description of Marat, self-styled "Friend of the People," is almost superfluous. The name of no



MARAT
(After Boze)

[To face p. 285]

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actor in the great drama of the Revolution is more familiar. Of his early life and antecedents little is known. His father, a learned and estimable man, was descended from a Spanish family resident in the island of Sardinia, whence he had emigrated to Switzerland, on becoming converted to Calvinism. It was in this country, to which his mother belonged, that Marat was born in 1743. He was exceedingly intelligent and had received a good education, enhanced by extensive travel. For a time he had lived in Scotland, where he studied medicine and took his degree, afterwards practising for some years in London with considerable success. In 1777 he left England to fill the post of physician to the body-guards of the Comte d'Artois, brother of Louis XVI. It would be interesting to know how he obtained this appointment, which was one of those coveted sinecures for the possession of which much influence was needed.

Being of a restless and energetic nature, he employed the leisure it afforded him in experimenting in chemistry and physics. He wrote pamphlets on these subjects from time to time, as well as on political questions, in which he had always been keenly interested. Enthusiastic for the new ideas, on the outbreak of the Revolution he abandoned himself entirely to politics. Henceforth his career is too well known to be recapitulated.

In justice, however, it is but fair to add that the execration in which his name has been held is not altogether deserved. But to rush to the other extreme, as some recent writers have done, is absurd. In reality Marat was neither a monster nor a model of civic virtue. Turbulent, bold, eloquent, active and full of

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energy, he was the sort of man to do the spade-work in a revolution. His hatred of the old régime was personal, and for that reason the more deadly. He professed to love liberty, but just what he meant by liberty he perhaps could not have explained himself. His statecraft, such as it was, was entirely destructive. He had a plan for a constitution, but it was merely replacing the old, worn-out tyranny of feudalism with the new, untried tyranny of Socialism in its most uncompromising form. He represented the masses more than any other person in the Revolution. Understanding them thoroughly, he was able to articulate their hopes, their fears, and their desires. It was the secret of his vast popularity.

Intensely neurotic, the Revolution with its negation of all restraint developed in him a latent tendency to degeneration. The terror and suspicion of the atmosphere in which he lived acted like cantharides upon his imagination. Naturally combative and vindictive, he saw a mortal enemy in every one who attempted to differ from him, and, in the panic inspired by the complete loss of control of his passions, he reverted to the primordial type, of which he had always possessed, unknown even to himself, all the ferocious and brutal instincts. In the transformation he passed from one extreme to the other. It is worthy of note that furiously as he clamoured for "heads," he had formerly as passionately pleaded for the abolition of the death penalty.

The same contrast was noticeable in his tastes and habits. As the physician of the Comte d'Artois' body-guards, he had been noted for the elegance of his attire and the luxury of his surroundings. As

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demagogue and "Friend of the People," he was slovenly in his dress, coarse in his speech, and preferred squalor to the graces to which he had been addicted. So complete a perversion is only to be explained by medical science. Its progress, indeed, was attended and accelerated by a physical decay. The loathsome and irritating disease of which he was the victim, and which by the suffering it entailed extenuates to some extent the violence of his temper, had all but run its course when Charlotte Corday entered his presence. According to his doctor, he was a stricken man who had but a week at the most to live—an object more deserving of pity than execration.

But Charlotte, utterly ignorant of his condition, and incapable of sympathizing with it had it been explained to her, could only judge him by the evil associated with his name. Nor was the sight of him calculated to diminish her hatred or alter her preconceived idea of him. Immersed to the waist in his medicated bath, with a ragged sleeveless gown on his shoulders and his matted hair wrapped in a dirty handkerchief, he was a sickening and disgusting object. His receding forehead, feverish protruding eyes, vast frog's mouth, hairy chest and shrivelled body seemed to belong to some loathsome animal rather than to a human being. Squalid, unclean, hideous, even in his bath he continued to stoke the fire of the Revolution. A rough plank laid across the bath served as a table. It was covered with papers, and letters and articles for the *Ami du Peuple*. On one—a letter to the Convention, demanding the immediate prosecution of all the Bourbons remaining in France—the ink was still wet.

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At the first glance at his livid, repellent features, distorted by suffering and revolutionary passion, Charlotte's calm almost deserted her.

He began at once to question her as to the state of affairs in Normandy. In replying she took care not to meet his eyes, lest the horror with which the sight of him had filled her should betray itself in hers. He then asked the names of the Girondin deputies who had taken refuge in Caen. As she repeated them he proceeded to write them down.

"Well," he said, when she had finished, "I shall have them all guillotined in Paris before they are a week older."

At these words Charlotte summoned all her courage, and before he could raise his eyes from the plank on which he was writing, she drew the knife from her bosom and plunged it up to the hilt in his heart. The blow, struck from above with superhuman force, passed through the lung, penetrated the clavicle, and severed the carotid artery. She then drew out the bloody blade and dropped it on the floor. The death of her victim was almost instantaneous. "Help!" he called once in a strangled voice; his head fell forward on the plank, and he expired.

VII

At his cry, the woman with whom he lived, a maid, and a fellow employed to run errands for the "Friend of the People" rushed in. Charlotte was standing motionless, like one petrified, half concealed by the window curtain. The man picked up a chair and

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felled her to the floor with it. The two women, with shrieks of horror and despair, flew to the dead man, and attempted to stanch the blood which still gushed from the wound in his breast.

The noise brought in the neighbours and attracted persons passing in the street. When it was known that Marat had been murdered, an immense multitude besieged the house clamouring for those within to throw the assassin out of the window to them. The police commissioner of the quarter and his guard arrived just in time to save Charlotte from being torn to pieces. The bayonets of the soldiers who surrounded her alone kept back the infuriated crowd, which both within and without the house continued to menace her with a thousand deaths. Her hands were bound behind her back with cords, so tightly that her wrists bled. But she never lost her presence of mind. To the questions of the police commissioner, who proceeded to examine her, she answered calmly, clearly, and in a manner that manifested the proud satisfaction she felt. She spoke of her deed as if it were deserving of the highest praise.

So rapidly did the news spread, that the four deputies sent by the cowardly Convention, which could suffer the blood of others to be shed with impunity but trembled with fear at the least menace to itself, arrived before the police examination was over. They came "expecting to behold a monster," and their astonishment was great when they saw a young and beautiful girl who answered the questions put to her quietly, firmly, and without the least sign of fear. Never before had a criminal produced such a curious impression. She appeared so to alter the

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aspect of her crime that they felt a sort of admiration for her even in the presence of her victim. Harmand de la Meuse, who was among those present during her examination, speaks of her in terms of the warmest admiration.

When the police commissioner had concluded his interrogations, the deputies ordered that she should be conducted to the Abbaye. The prison was distant from the house of Marat only a couple of minutes, but the route bristled with danger. On Charlotte's appearance, the crowd, which had waited for hours to see her, greeted her with a roar of fury. It was only respect for the members of the Convention that prevented the mob from seizing her.

If she seemed, as some thought, to falter for a moment, it was from disgust, not from fear. "I was really perfectly collected," she wrote afterwards to Barbaroux, "when I left Marat's house to go to the Abbaye, but the cries of some women pained me. Whoso saves his country does not count the cost."

She even considered the rage of the mob she had bereaved "excusable."

At the Abbaye she was subjected to a second examination, in the vain hope of discovering the conspiracy of which it was believed she was the agent. She was then confined in the room previously occupied by Madame Roland, who had been removed to the Conciergerie. At the instigation of the contemptible Chabot, one of the deputies sent by the Convention to report on the affair, two *gens d'armes* were placed in the room to watch her during the night, in spite of her repeated protestations against the indecency

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of such surveillance. Her request, however, for paper, pens, and ink was granted, but the trap which this clemency was intended to conceal was utterly futile.

Hearing the voices of criers set to hawk under the window of her cell the news of the arrest of Fauchet, the Constitutional Bishop of Calvados, who, though he had not even been aware of her existence, had been seized along with Duperret as an accomplice in her crime, she wrote to the Committee of Public Safety declaring that she had never seen him but once in her life, and then only from a window. This attempt to save Fauchet, "whom she despised," was repeated again on the following day at her trial, but it availed him nothing. Like Duperret, he had managed to incur the enmity of the Jacobins, who welcomed the opportunity of getting rid of them, and both were guillotined for a crime of which they were perfectly innocent.

Charlotte also wrote to Barbaroux and her father. Her letter to the former, written in a witty and ironical style, was a detailed account of everything that had happened to her since she left Caen. The truth which was stamped in every line of it was so convincing that when it was read at her trial it made it clear to every one, in the opinion of the public at all events, that she had no accomplice in the murder of Marat.

Of this letter Louvet, writing to Barbaroux after her death, declared: "Either nothing that is beautiful in the Revolution will endure, or this will pass down the centuries. Ah, dear Barbaroux, in the whole of your career, so enviable throughout, I have never

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envied you anything but the honour of having your name attached to this letter."

Her letter to her father in its brevity, simplicity, and sadness of tone, was a great contrast to the other. In it she begs his pardon for having disposed of her life without his permission; believes she has avenged many innocent victims and prevented many other disasters, and is convinced that the people will one day be disabused and rejoice at their delivery from a tyrant. In conclusion, she bids him "remember that line of Corneille: *Le crime fait la honte et non pas l'échafaud!*"

Needless to say, these letters never reached those to whom they were addressed. After her death they were published in the report of her trial, but the papers in which they appeared were immediately suppressed as "likely to excite sympathy for her act."

The morning after her arrest she was brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The court was crammed with an excited mob eager to catch a glimpse of the "monster" who had murdered their beloved Marat. On her arrival she was greeted with many signs of anger, which only respect for the despots who dispensed the odious justice of the Revolution held in check. But scarcely had she passed to her place than the murmur of rage was hushed by the wonder she excited. Her beauty and the calmness of her demeanour disarmed even the judges, and they gazed at her with a sort of stupid surprise and reluctant admiration.

"All," says Chauveau de la Garde, "judges, jury, and spectators looked at her as if *she* were the judge

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of a supreme tribunal before which *they* were about to be arraigned. Her features have been painted, and her words recorded, but no art could depict the nobility of her soul which manifested itself in her bearing. The moral effect of it was perceptible throughout the trial."

During her examination she showed neither fear nor remorse. "I was quite convinced," she said, "that I should be the immediate victim of the people. It was what I desired." Her imperturbability and the precision with which she answered the questions put to her astonished the court. "When she spoke," says Perlet, "she was listened to in perfect silence, because of the wonderful sweetness of her voice." Asked who had inspired her with hatred of Marat, she replied that she had no need of the hatred of others, her own was sufficient. "Besides," she added, "one always does badly what one has not devised oneself."

"What did you hope to effect by killing Marat?" asked one of the judges.

"To restore peace to my country," she said.

"Do you think you have killed all the Marats?"

"No," she answered sadly, "that is more than I am capable of undertaking. But, since he is dead, perhaps the others will tremble."

Taunted by Fouquier-Tinville with having lied to get access to her victim, she confessed that her ruse was unworthy, but that any means were justifiable when it was a question of getting rid of a tyrant. "I was a republican before the Revolution," she added proudly, "and I never wanted energy."

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“What do you mean by energy?” questioned a judge.

“The resolve that those make who put aside private interest, and know how to sacrifice themselves for their country. I have killed one man to save a hundred thousand.”

There was no shaking her composure. When her letter to Barbaroux was read in court, she was asked if she had anything to add to it.

“Yes,” she replied, “this sentence: ‘The leader of the anarchists is no more; you will have peace.’”

This thought was uppermost in her mind. “Peace at all costs,” she had written to Barbaroux, “must be procured.” Marat dead, she enjoys “a delicious peace.” Her letter to Barbaroux was dated “the second day of the preparation for peace.”

Shown the knife stained with the blood of Marat, and asked if she recognized it, “Certainly,” she replied, with an impatient gesture of disgust, “it is I who killed Marat.”

“You must be a practised hand,” sneered Fouquier, “to have dealt so sure a blow.”

“The monster!” she exclaimed, indignant at having her action dragged from its heroic height to the level of a vulgar crime. “He takes me for an assassin!”

The words had the effect of a thunder-clap, and ended the interrogation. Her defence then followed. The enactment of this cynical farce was entrusted to Chauveau de la Garde, who subsequently defended Marie Antoinette, Madame Roland, and all the notabilities whom revolutionary justice had pre-con-

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demned. He must have possessed great tact, for in spite of the great danger attached to his post, which he increased by the respectful sympathy he manifested to his unfortunate clients, he managed to escape the guillotine, and had the brilliant career he deserved under the Empire.

He had received instructions to confine his defence to a plea of insanity. "They wished me," he says, "to humiliate her. As for her, when I rose, her face was as calm as ever, but she looked at me in a manner that convinced me she did not wish any justification." Unable to save her, he courageously determined to gratify her, and, cleverly steering a middle course, stated that while her immovable calm and entire self-abnegation, "in some respects sublime," were unnatural and only to be explained by the exaltation of political fanaticism, she confessed that her "horrible crime" had long been premeditated.

She was unanimously sentenced to death, and, as in the case of all persons convicted of murder, to have her "goods confiscated." The perfect indifference with which she listened to her sentence was disconcerting. The Jacobin press was so irritated by the impossibility of making her tremble that it professed to see in her *sang-froid* another sign of her "monstrous" nature. Asked if she had anything to say relative to her punishment, she made no reply, but, turning to Chauveau de la Garde "with ineffable grace and sweetness," she said in her musical voice—

"Monsieur, you have defended me as I wished to be defended. I thank you, and I would offer you a proof of my gratitude. These gentlemen" (indicating

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the judges) "have confiscated my property. I owe a trifling sum in the prison, and I would rely on your generosity to settle the debt."

Needless to say, the request was scrupulously respected, and the chivalrous lawyer paid the little debt on the day after his client's execution.

VIII

At the conclusion of her trial, Charlotte was conducted to the Conciergerie to await the execution of her sentence, which was to take place that evening. The prisoners, informed of her coming, had ranged themselves in the courts and corridors to see her, and manifested their sympathy and admiration in the liveliest fashion. To Madame Roland, who was soon to follow her to the scaffold, she seemed "a heroine worthy of a better century."

Charlotte was amazed at the pity she inspired. The sacrifice of her life seemed such a simple thing to her; she renounced it without the least regret. In stabbing Marat she was convinced that she had fulfilled a sacred duty. She had no desire to be mourned. "The grief of my friends," she said, "would dishonour my memory."

During her trial she had perceived an artist sketching her, and she had smilingly turned her face towards him that he might better see her features. Recollecting that her removal from the court had interrupted his work, on arriving at the Conciergerie she requested that he should be allowed to finish the picture that he had begun. Conscious of the sublimity

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of her sacrifice, she desired to sit for her portrait to immortality. Her request was granted, and Jacques Hauer, whose name she thus saved from oblivion, was admitted to her cell. Whilst he painted she conversed with him on his profession, the events of the day, and "the delicious peace she felt after accomplishing the mission of her life." She also begged him to make a copy of her portrait and send it to her father. "Her tranquillity was such," said Hauer afterwards, "that I almost forgot the tragic circumstances under which I worked."

He was still painting when Sanson, the executioner, entered with his scissors and the red *chemise des condamnés*.

"What, already!" she exclaimed, with a bright smile, and, rising from her seat, she let down her beautiful hair which reached almost to the ground.

She begged Sanson to give her the scissors, and cutting off a strand gave it to Hauer.

"Monsieur," she said, "I know not how to thank you for the pains you have taken. I have only this to offer you. Please keep it as a token of my gratitude."

A constitutional priest then presented himself to offer her the last consolations of religion. She gently bade him thank those who had sent him, but firmly declined his services. When the priest withdrew she put on the red smock, and Sanson proceeded to cut her hair and bind her hands behind her back, which he did in such a manner as to occasion her as little discomfort as possible. She called it "the toilette of death which leads to immortality."

As she mounted the tumbril a violent thunder-

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storm burst over Paris, "as if Nature," says Chauveau de la Garde, "joined in the indignation the virtuous felt at her fate." It failed to disperse the immense crowd which had gathered to see her pass. The infamous *tricôteuses*, those furies of the Revolution, whom Robespierre and Marat encouraged to inflame the murderous instincts of the populace of Paris, surged round the tumbril and shrieked abuse and curses upon the girl. But neither the sight of these hideous creatures nor their insults made her falter.

The tumbril, forced to crawl at a snail's pace through the densely-packed streets, took two hours to reach the Place de la Révolution where the guillotine was erected. Several times Sanson turned to see if she showed any signs of weakness, but nothing blanched the brilliancy of her complexion and her lips were as red as ever.

"Do you not find the way long?" he asked her once.

"Bah!" she replied, "we are sure to arrive all the same."

The storm was brief, but it drenched her to the skin. The red gown, clinging in dripping folds to her classic form, displayed its exquisite symmetry, and gave a sinister splendour to her beauty. In her sublime serenity she seemed to be already in the Elysian Fields with the heroes of antiquity, of whom she had so often dreamed. Fascinated by the splendid vision, many could not restrain their admiration. As she proceeded, exclamations of pity mingled with the ribald execrations of the *tricôteuses*. Even they seemed to feel the majesty of her demeanour, and the

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silence which it often imposed upon them added to the impressiveness of her wonderful composure. Robespierre, Danton, and Camille Desmoulins, who were looking from a window, drew back as she passed, as if they had seen in her peaceful heroic face the Nemesis which threatened them.

On arriving at the scaffold, Sanson stepped in front of her to save her the shock of seeing the guillotine. But she leant forward to look at it, saying quietly as she did so, "Surely I have a right to be curious. I have never seen one before."

She leaped from the tumbril without waiting to be assisted, and quickly mounted the steps of the scaffold. A hush suddenly fell upon the crowd as it beheld her on the platform. Whilst she was being pinioned, one of Sanson's assistants tore away her kerchief, exposing to view her dazzling neck and shoulders. She crimsoned with shame, but at once regained her self-control and placed herself under the axe.

When the blade fell, a brute picked her head out of the basket into which it had fallen by the hair and struck it with his fist. It is said to have *reddened at the blow as if life were still in it*. A cry of horror burst from the bloodthirsty wretches round the scaffold, who had been impressed in spite of themselves by the heroism of their beautiful and splendid victim. So great was the popular indignation that the Revolutionary Tribunal deemed it wise to pacify it by imprisoning "the over-zealous patriot" for a week.

Even more atrocious was the indignity to which her corpse was subjected. The Jacobins, anxious to vilify her memory and make her appear, not only a

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common murderess, but a woman devoid of either beauty or virtue, caused her body before burial to be taken to a charity hospital and subjected to an infamous examination, in the hope of finding proof of the odious charge which had been brought against her moral character at her trial. This brutal outrage, however, which was intended to blast her reputation and rob her of her halo of martyrdom, only had the effect of establishing more conclusively than ever the virginity of the Joan of Arc of the Revolution.

The remains were then flung into a pit in the cemetery of the Madeleine where the guillotined were usually interred. The skull is said to have been sold by Sanson to a member of the Académie Française. This relic, the authenticity of which is extremely doubtful, after passing through many hands is now in the possession of Prince Roland Bonaparte.

IX

IF Charlotte Corday had lived in the days of religious persecution, she would without a doubt have died a martyr to her faith. As she did not pale before the guillotine, neither the arena nor the stake would have had any terrors for her. Born in an epoch no less stormy, she died for her political opinions, and antiquity offers no more shining example of stoicism than hers, if indeed there is any in its annals to equal it. To condemn while admiring her, as is usually done in print in the interest of conventional morality, is absurd. There are times, fortunately rare in the

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history of the world, when tyrannicide is not only lawful, but a duty. In Athens and Rome statues would have been erected to her memory.

Her heroic sacrifice, however, was useless, as such sacrifices nearly always are. It was a sublime error of judgment rather than a crime. As Madame Roland shrewdly observed, "she deserved the admiration of the world, but, for want of a proper knowledge of the state of affairs, chose her time and her victim badly." She failed to deliver her country from the butchers who were slaughtering it. To Marat succeeded Robespierre, Hébert, and the studiously cruel St. Just.

The moral effect of her deed was immense and terrible. The night after Marat's death the people hung garlands at his door. The Convention decreed him a public funeral. In the Jacobins he was compared to Christ, and extolled as a god. Sections and clubs squabbled for the possession of his heart. His bust was to be seen everywhere. Streets and newborn children were named after him. The Mayor of Nîmes called himself the Marat of the South, and the Mayor of Strasburg the Marat of the Rhine. A company of bravoës was formed in his honour. David, the chief artist of the Revolution and the worst France ever produced, arranged his obsequies and strove to imitate those of Cæsar. His funeral cortège took as long to pass as the tumbrel of his assassin. Everything was done to perpetuate his memory. The body of the great Mirabeau was torn from its sepulchre in the Panthéon to make room for that of the idol of the moment, which was destined in its turn, two years later, to be dragged forth and cast into a sewer.

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“What a people to found a republic!” as Charlotte Corday herself exclaimed.

But the divine people do not think of the future, least of all in revolutions. Marat became more terrible dead than he had ever been when alive. Death lurked in his very name. A poor couple, who had a little theatre of marionettes in the Champs Elysées, were the victims of uttering it thoughtlessly. One day during a representation of the tragic end of the popular idol, a marionette that played the part of Charlotte Corday forgot herself so far as to cry, “*À bas Marat !*” The unfortunate couple were arrested, and confined in the same prison as the haughty Duchesse de Gramont and other royalists. But their humble condition did not save them from the guillotine. The Jacobins were not discriminating, their guillotine was a glutton, not an epicure—one head tasted as nice as another to it. In the frenzy of the Terror which they legalized, to escape the guillotine men rushed to enlist, and the armies of the republic, thus recruited and reinforced, stifled every attempt at protest in seas of blood. In a word, as Lamartine says, “the poniard of Charlotte Corday, instead of stanching blood, seemed to have opened the veins of France.”

In Caen, as elsewhere, the Jacobins got the upper hand, and the Girondins who had taken shelter there were obliged to flee. Their flight was one of the most dramatic episodes in the French Revolution. All who were in any way connected with Charlotte were the victims of Jacobinical persecution. Her father, M. de Corday, was arrested, but managed somehow to evade the scaffold, as did his brother, the Abbé de Corday. Threatened in her turn with

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arrest, Madame de Bretteville took refuge with a friendly carpenter and his wife, whose son, Louis Lionel, used afterwards to dispute with young Malfilatre the honour of having received the last kiss of Charlotte Corday. She lived throughout the Revolution concealed in a cupboard of the Grand Manoir in daily fear of the fury of the mob. Bougon-Longrais, whose intimacy with Charlotte was well known, was hunted down, and perished on the guillotine, as previously stated. Little Mademoiselle de Faudoas, who was in prison as a suspect at the time of the murder of Marat, was guillotined with her father and aunt a month after Charlotte. Rose Fougeron du Fayot, another of Charlotte's friends, was condemned to imprisonment with hard labour.

But the vengeance of the Jacobins only served to perpetuate the memory of the heroic Maid of Caen. The Girondins, who were the immediate victims of her deed, could not contain their admiration. "She has killed us," exclaimed Vergniaud, "but she teaches us how to die!" Barbaroux regretted that he had not known her better. Louvet invoked her passionately as "the future idol of all republicans." Pétion, who had regarded her somewhat contemptuously as "a pretty aristocrat," was loud in his praise of the "sublime woman." At a public meeting in Caen he declared that she had "set an example for men to follow."

Royalists found in her name a talisman to conjure with far more efficacious than that of Louis XVI, which had only the interest of misfortune. "Even the most zealous partisans of the Mountain itself," says Klause, "recognized in this extraordinary woman

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a strength of character, a fixity of purpose, and a self-possession of which few men would be capable."

Her execution was no mere dramatic episode of the Revolution, but the commencement of a legend. It was no longer Brutus, old patron saint of despot-slayers, that those who would rid their country of a tyrant at the cost of their lives invoked, but Charlotte Corday. The passion for immortal fame, which made the Revolution resemble a pagan renaissance of liberty, received a fresh impetus from her death. In an age and among a people prone to imitation, it became the fashion to die like her. A veritable cult of the poniard was founded in her blood. An ode dedicated to her containing the lines :

"O vertu ! le poignard, seul espoir de la terre,"

cost the poet André Chénier his head. Cécile Renault was sent to the guillotine for having a knife concealed in her basket when she called on Robespierre "to see what a tyrant was like."

There were some, too, conquered by her youth, beauty, and fearlessness, who sought to die for her, as well as like her. During her trial, a young man asked the judges to make him a prisoner in her stead, and to suffer the punishment to which she was condemned. They granted him only the half of his request—he was sent to the guillotine. Another enthusiast, "who lived in the Rue Jean Jacques Rousseau," went to the scaffold for comparing her to William Tell, and seeking to incite others to profit by her lesson. Equally fatal and still more extravagant was the admiration that "the Angel of Assassination" inspired in Adam Lux. Of all the strange and tragic

Charlotte Corday

passions begotten of the Revolution, there is none purer and more fantastic.

Adam Lux, whose name will for ever be linked to Charlotte Corday's, whom he only saw once, was the deputy whom the citizens of Maintz, infected by the ideals of the Revolution, had sent to France to plead for the inclusion of their town in the republic. He had been among the first to welcome the new ideas, for which, like Charlotte, his mind had long been prepared by the works of Plutarch and the French philosophers. *Exalté* and Utopian almost to the point of madness, the revolutionary saturnalia he had witnessed in Paris had filled him with a profound loathing of the actions of the men of the Convention, whose high-flown speeches about the regeneration of humanity had so thrilled him in Maintz. Reality made him hold the dream in horror. After the proscription of the Girondins he had resolved to kill himself at the bar of the Convention, a project from which he was with difficulty dissuaded by Pétion, to whom he had confided it. The influence of the sentimental Rousseau on his impressionable nature was so great that he had begged a friend to see that his body was buried beside that of the author of the *Contrat Social*, with no other epitaph than: "Here lies Adam Lux, the disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau."

It was in this state of disillusionment that he heard of the assassination of Marat. The news revived all his old ardour. He believed, like Charlotte, that the deed would petrify the Jacobins and give peace to the distracted country. The hand that had struck down the tyrant appeared to him sublime. He had followed the course of Charlotte's

Daughters of Eve

trial, as it was reported in the papers, with the liveliest emotion. Drawn by an irresistible curiosity, he went to catch a glimpse of her as she passed on her way to the guillotine. When she appeared, proud, beautiful, and tranquil, with the scum of humanity shrieking insults round the tumbril, his enthusiasm knew no bounds. Intoxicated with the splendid vision, he followed her to the end of her terrible journey. Once her gaze, scanning the crowd, as it seemed to him, in search of sympathy, met his, and in that fleeting interchange of looks he drank death. Instantly he was seized with a sudden and violent panic, the travail-pang of a strange and marvellous love, the purest and most immaterial the heart of man ever conceived.

In a pamphlet of great eloquence entitled *The Apology of Charlotte Corday*, which he caused to be placarded the next day on the walls and distributed publicly in the streets, describing the feelings she had raised in him, he requested the honour of dying under the same knife "which, since the death of that incomparable girl, had lost any ignominy that was ever attached to it," and demanded that a statue should be erected to her memory bearing the inscription: "Greater than Brutus."

Three days later he was arrested. He knew well the fate that was in store for him, but death under such circumstances had no terror for him. His only anxiety was lest he should be forgotten in prison, in which he remained four months before being brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal. When he heard his sentence, he exclaimed with joy, "At last, I shall die for Charlotte Corday!" His elation was uncon-

Charlotte Corday

trollable. The Revolution never had a more willing victim. On the scaffold he kissed the guillotine. . . .

After this, of what use a moral? When it is a question of a tyrant, whether he be called Prince, Priest, or People, "Codrus-sacrifices and death well earned" will never fail to appeal to the imagination.

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