





*The Marquise du Châtelet.
After Nattier.*

AN EIGHTEENTH- CENTURY MARQUISE

*A STUDY OF EMILIE DU CHÂTELET
AND HER TIMES*

By FRANK HAMEL

Author of

"The Dauphines of France," "Famous French Salons," etc.

WITH FRONTISPIECE AND
SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THE eighteenth century was an artificial age, and none of the famous women of the day was more essentially a product of its artificiality than the Marquise du Châtelet. Her mind was deeply tinged with the philosophical and metaphysical ideas which accompanied the approach of the mental unrest preceding the Revolution. She was thinker and scientist, *précieuse* and pedant, but none the less a coquette—in short, a woman of contradictions. She was so strikingly original, so marked in her individuality, that she was worthy to be judged on her own merits, and to stand alone in the eyes of posterity, yet historians have persisted in regarding her merely as a satellite of Voltaire. This she would assuredly have resented. She would rather have been well hated than treated with indifference, and would have preferred to be written of with contempt rather than to be ignored. But this she would never have confessed. She desired to be loved for herself alone, and when told that certain persons refused to do her justice, she replied that if this were indeed the case she wished to ignore it. Jealousy was at the root of much of the dislike which her women friends lavished upon her, and occasionally expressed openly. It is significant that, according to Sainte-Beuve, the most bitter and most cruelly satirical

passages ever written in French appear in her pen-portrait by Mme du Deffand.

It is impossible to judge Mme du Châtelet apart from Voltaire, so closely were their lives intertwined, but it is quite practicable to discuss her from a broader standpoint than that of her influence on his work, and to give due consideration to her part in the almost masculine friendship which united them. Their liaison forms a narrative of love and intellectual companionship, of constancy and betrayal, which lasted fifteen years. In her infatuation for Saint-Lambert, she was, on the other hand, ultra-womanly. It was a wild, emotional episode, not often equalled in its improbable and incredible *abandon*, and it closed with her death after a year and a half. These contrasting passions bring out strongly the extreme powers of reason and feeling with which she was gifted. Her ardour for the diversions of the salons and the courts, for masquerades, excursions, theatricals, *petits soupers*, versifying and gambling was incidental to her character. Her real tastes were not for gaiety, nor yet even for renown. She had two absorbing interests—work and love.

FRANK HAMEL.

LONDON, 1910.



AN EIGHTEENTH-
CENTURY MARQUISE

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

The Dauphines of France

By FRANK HAMEL

Author of "Famous French Salons," etc.

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ETC., ETC.

AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MARQUISE

CHAPTER I

PARENTAGE AND YOUTH

“**W**HAT admirable and unique people you both are !” wrote Frederick the Great to Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire ; “ the wonder of all who know you increases day by day.” And judging from the complex natures of the lively marquise and her friend the philosopher, he might have filled a volume with their characteristics without coming very much nearer to the truth.

A study of circumstances and a knowledge of the extremes which made them distinctive are essential to unlock this problem of character. The first quarter of the eighteenth century in France was dull, decaying, and stagnant ; the second brought forth a burst of impetuous licence ; in the third, licence having become systematic, produced a reaction in favour of a new philosophy which aimed at amelioration of the social order ; and in the fourth quarter this was superseded by activity of the most drastic kind, so explosive in its course that decay, licence, philosophy, and all the known conditions disappeared before it, and a new day was ushered in. The first half of the century alone concerns Mme du

Châtelet, the Revolution and the period of immediate preparation which filled the latter half being an inevitable and terrible conclusion. The period of her lifetime was equally important psychologically, and more subtle than that which succeeded it. Profligacy rioted side by side with culture, the pursuit of science did not interfere with the indulgence of personal greed, individual opinion was awake amidst a sloth of oppression and corruption, and this spirit of contradiction resulted in mental and moral unrest, which is reflected in the character of the divine Emilie. She embodied in herself the definite intellectual aims which were springing up in the midst of social instabilities. Her personal idiosyncrasies were the outcome of hereditary tendencies battling with new and untried conditions.

Born in 1706, she had reached the most impressionable age when the fresh ideas and livelier manners of the Regency began to make themselves felt. She was not slow to imbibe them, and her position was one in which she had every opportunity to do so effectively. She was the daughter of the Baron de Breteuil, a frequenter of Courts, and an odd character who belonged to the later period of Louis Quatorze, and was inflated to an almost ridiculous degree with the pomposity of etiquette and ceremonial, in the atmosphere of which he had spent many years of his life. The Le Tonnelier de Breteuil family was an old one, and had numerous branches. Many of its members held appointments as magistrates, controllers of finance, and in the Church and the army. The family had settled in Paris in the middle of the sixteenth century, and one of its most celebrated scions was Emilie's grandfather, Louis le Tonnelier de Breteuil, Seigneur de Boissette, Mons and

Raville, who held a number of public posts, the more important being those of Controller-General of Finances and Councillor of State. His wife, Chrétienne Le Court, presented him with a large family of sons, of whom Louis-Nicolas, Baron de Preuilly, was the seventh and youngest. Born on September 14, 1648, at Montpellier, while his father was Intendant of Languedoc, he was early destined for a career at court, and soon won for himself a reputation as a gallant man about town. His first love-affair was with one of the queen's *femmes de chambre*, a certain Mlle de Périgny, who was not satisfied with a single string to her bow, and flirted with the Marquis d'Estrades and the Comte de Marsin at the same time as the Baron de Breteuil. One day the second called on her, to find the first and third already present. To his surprise she was dressed all in black and wore anything but a cheerful air. When the other two had taken their departure, the Comte de Marsin begged her to tell him why she had gone into mourning. Without a moment's hesitation she laughingly explained the position in verse :

“ Je prends mon habit de deuil
Et suis malade
Quand je vois entrer Breteuil
Avec Estrades.”

A far more romantic episode was that of Louis-Nicolas with the fascinating Anne Bellinzani, who fell madly in love with him when she met him at a ball in 1671. She wrote a passionate story of this affair under the title of the “*Histoire des Amours de Cléante et de Bélise*,” and described him at the age of twenty-one as possessing a charm of manner and appearance with which in later years he was never credited. Her parents and relatives regarded her attitude with stern disapproval, but she

ignored their prejudices until by chance she discovered that her lover was secretly married to another. Then she entered a convent, to emerge five years later on the eve of a forced marriage with Président Ferrand. For some time afterwards she hoped to renew the early romance, and kept up a correspondence with Louis-Nicolas, but his heart had long since ceased to respond to her calls upon it. In 1675 his wife, Marie Anne le Fèvre de Caumartin, who was also a distant cousin, bore him a daughter, and retired to a convent, where she died four years later. On her death-bed, the marriage, which for some mysterious reason had been kept secret, was acknowledged, and he claimed the little girl as his legitimate child. Anne-Louise, as she was called, died at the age of twenty-two, and was buried in the family sepulchre.

In 1677 Louis-Nicolas obtained the post of Reader to the King, and after holding this for some time he sold it and was sent in January 1688 as envoy extraordinary to the Princes of Italy. In 1699 he contracted a second marriage, and this wooing contained a flavour of mystery, like the first. He had been paying court for some time to the wife of his uncle, Claude le Tonnelier de Breteuil, who before her marriage had been a Mlle de Froulay. She invited her sister to come and stay with her, and the Baron de Breteuil soon found that his affections were newly engaged, and that he was obliged to play a double game. His aunt only discovered the truth when he announced his approaching marriage with her sister. The children of the marriage were René-Alexandre, born April 7, 1698; Charles-Auguste, Elisabeth-Théodore, and Emilie-Gabrielle, December 17, 1706.

Emilie's maternal grandmother was Angélique de

Beudéan, a *filie d'honneur* to Queen Marie-Thérèse. She was married in 1656 to the Comte de Froulay, *Grand-Maréchal des Logis*. The latter's functions consisted in making the arrangements for the housing of the king, the officers, and the court, in the various palaces and when travelling. Angélique was the sister of Mme de Navailles and daughter to that Mme de Neuillant who was responsible for the training of Françoise d'Aubigné, better known as Mme de Maintenon.

Two years after his second marriage the Baron de Breteuil was appointed Introducer of Ambassadors at the French Court in the place of Bonneuil, who had died recently and to whose widow he had to pay 40,000 crowns. The post was worth more than twice that sum, and carried with it certain prerogatives and privileges which were by no means to be despised. His main duties were to conduct to the king, to the queen, and to all the princes and princesses of the blood, the kings, sovereign princes and princesses, legates, cardinals, ambassadors, envoys, and other dignitaries coming from foreign countries. Moreover he had to introduce to the queen and all the princesses of the blood, the female relatives that these foreigners brought with them. No wonder that our friend the Baron had to be a good courtier! In such a post, tact, amiability and gallantry were absolute essentials. He knew how to make himself liked, and was a favourite with the young Duc de Bourgogne, who chose him to carry the candle on the night his marriage was consummated, this privilege of carrying the candle being much sought after by courtiers. The Baron revelled in the "world of small things" that devolved upon him incidentally in the course of his

duties. He left voluminous memoirs, which form a remarkable record of ceremonial at court, from events of real historical and political significance down to the smallest tittle-tattle, concerning the Duchess of So-and-so's breach of etiquette, the contempt of the Marquise somebody-else for a present bestowed upon her by the King, what happened at the wedding of some unimportant nobility, and what was the consequence of a moment's forgetfulness on the part of some dignitary who ought to have known better. La Bruyère and Saint-Simon bore witness to the Baron's less noble qualities, and even to the petty spirit he occasionally showed. His daughter, who was never petty, was not exempt from occasional ignoble traits, in spite of her breadth of view and intellectual superiority, and there are some sides of her character which were not unlike her father's.

Under the thin disguise of Celsus, La Bruyère described the Baron de Breteuil none too kindly. "Celsus is of mean condition," he wrote, "yet those of the best quality entertain him. He has no learning, but he has relations with the learned. He has little merit himself, yet he is acquainted with those who have a great deal. He has no abilities, but he has a tongue that serves to make him understood and feet to carry him from one place to another. He is a man born to run to and fro on errands, to listen to propositions and report them, to make himself appear important, to overdo his commission and be relieved of it, to reconcile people who quarrel at their first interview, to succeed in one affair and fail in a thousand, to attribute to himself all the honour of success and to cast the blame of failure on others. He knows all the news and gossip of the town. He does nothing himself, but tells and repeats what others are doing. He

is a newsmonger. He even knows family secrets, and he is concerned in the most intimate mysteries. He will tell you why such an one went into exile, and why another was recalled."

Saint-Simon's account was that the Baron was not at all wanting in intellect—which is far more likely to be the truth—but that he allowed his predilection for the Court, ministers, men of office and of fashion to carry him away; that indeed it amounted to a mania, and that he was not above using his influence for pecuniary considerations by promising his protection to those in search of appointments—wherein he did not differ from his fellows, for at that time office-finding was a lucrative pursuit. He blamed him also for tuft-hunting, accused him of being a bore, a boaster, and a chatterbox, as well as a butt for ridicule and chaff generally. To substantiate his first accusation he quotes the case of the Pontchartrains, into whose society he had forced himself through the influence of Caumartin, who was distantly related to his first wife. In this connection he tells a story about him similar to one which was told by La Bruyère of Le Nôtre, the famous gardener. One day when the Baron was dining at M. de Pontchartrain's house among a number of guests, he began to speak rather bumptiously. Mme de Pontchartrain, who was perhaps a little annoyed, wished to take him down a peg or two. She said to him that, though he appeared to know everything, she felt sure he did not know who composed the *Paternoster*. Thereupon Breteuil began to laugh and joke. His hostess pressed the point, and always returned to the same subject. He defended himself as well as he could, and then rose from table and left the room. Caumartin, who was aware of his embarrassment, followed

him, and whispered "Moses." The Baron, who had grown a little confused, thought this was all right, and when coffee was served he brought up the subject of the *Pater* again triumphantly. This time Mme de Pontchartrain had no difficulty in getting her way, and Breteuil, after reproaching her a number of times for the doubt she showed in him and the shame he felt at being obliged to answer a question so trivial, said that every one knew Moses was the author of the *Pater*. There was a loud burst of laughter. The poor Baron, utterly confounded, did not know where to hide his diminished head. Every one repeated his remark until it was worn threadbare. He quarrelled with Caumartin, and the *Pater* was held up against him for a long while.

Concerning the early years of Emilie's life, spent under the guardianship of such a father, there is very little reliable information.

There is a garbled account in the *Souvenirs* of Mme de Créquy, but it is difficult to sift truth from fiction, and the authorship of these memoirs is uncertain. The Marquise de Créquy was a Mlle de Froulay and first cousin to Emilie, so her evidence, had she given any, would have been invaluable. As it is, the contemporary anecdotes which exist in her supposed *Souvenirs* form an inaccurate but possible picture of the reality. Mlle de Froulay, so the story runs, was taken by her father to the Hôtel de Breteuil, close to the gardens of the Tuileries, where Emilie lived. She described the house as very beautiful and herself as overjoyed to go and live there. There were eight or nine rooms on each floor of the house, and all were decorated and gilded with great luxury. The Marquise de Breteuil-Sainte-Croix occupied the ground-floor, two or three of the rooms being reserved

for her mother, the Maréchale de Thomond. These two had fine apartments in the château of Saint-Germain, and they regarded those in the Hôtel de Breteuil as a mere *pied-à-terre* in Paris. Mme de Breteuil-Preuilly, Mlle de Froulay's aunt, lived in the first story with her husband. His library overflowed into three rooms. The second story belonged to the Dowager Countess de Breteuil-Charmeaux, another aunt, the eldest sister of the Baronne, who refused to share her apartments with any one. The third floor was occupied by the Commandant de Breteuil, who frequently had the Bishop of Rennes to stay with him. The Baronne's four children occupied the fourth floor, and Mlle de Froulay's cousin Emilie had to give up her room to the new arrival. It overlooked the Tuileries Gardens. She was moved into three little rooms looking out on to a blind alley, and for this, said Mlle de Froulay, "she never forgave me."

Mlle de Froulay was thus transplanted into the very bosom of the Breteuil family, and felt as though she were in a thicket of thorns, so carefully had she been instructed that etiquette and rank were the gods of the household. She never dared to mention commoners without looking round, as one would naturally do if speaking of hump-backs or people with red hair, to be sure there were none present.

M. de Breteuil was an old limb of the law, said his niece none too respectfully, and his chief topic of conversation was his father, the Controller-General, whose name he never mentioned without the title Monseigneur. His own titles made quite a recitation, and he repeated them on every possible occasion. He was Baron de Breteuil and de Preuilly, Premier Baron de Touraine and Secretary to the King, Minister Plenipotentiary and

Reader to His Majesty, besides Councillor and Introducer of Ambassadors. His wife, Gabrielle-Anne de Froulay, was renowned for her beauty. Her face was amongst those that strike the eye of the beholder, that once seen are never forgotten, and of a type that no one expects to see twice in a lifetime. Her complexion was of a marvellous freshness. She had fair, rather colourless hair, dark eyebrows, grey eyes, piercing like an eagle's, a sweet and lively, but above all imposing air. She was naturally serious, and if she smiled it was in a condescending manner, or tenderly when she looked at her children, who were all very charming except, according to the supposed Mlle de Froulay's account, the awkward Emilie. About her she had not a good word to say.

Emilie was a giantess in height and broad in proportion. She had marvellous strength and was quite exceptionally clumsy. She had huge feet and appalling hands. Her skin was as rough as a nutmeg grater, and altogether she was as ugly as a grenadier guard. Having deprived her of even a shred of presentable appearance, the prejudiced memoir-writer proceeded to deprive her of the slightest intellectual capacity. She was dull, muddled, and preoccupied, whilst her pedantry made her insupportable; she gained all that she knew of astronomy from the crumbs of knowledge which fell from her mother's lips. And this was the woman of whom Voltaire spoke as a beauty and a savante in after-years. How could he reconcile it to his conscience? "Ah, Madame," was the poet's reply when the leading question was put to him, "she would have trampled on me if I had not done so, and in the end she might have strangled me. You know little about her if you do not know that." "Well, Monsieur de Voltaire, that

may be so," was the reply, "but all I am willing to admit about Mme du Châtelet is that she was cleverer than you."

The children were taught their manners very carefully by their mother, who made them read books of advice as to the best way of eating boiled eggs, of serving glasses of liqueur, and of breaking their bread carefully at table. They were taught to avoid the habits of the middle classes as they would the pestilence. The household was carried on in the most lavish manner, and though there were but few members, the servants numbered as many as forty-four. Fontenelle, Dangeau, and Saint-Simon were said to be frequent visitors at the house.

This account of the Breteuil family may or may not represent the actuality of Emilie's early surroundings, but there is at least no reason to doubt that her upbringing was in most particulars similar to that of other girls of her class, with the exception perhaps that her tastes led her to profit by the classical education her father provided for her, and that from the first she was encouraged to indulge in original thought.

The birth of a daughter at this period was almost invariably a disappointment to the parents. A girl could add nothing to the family glory, nay, her dowry would before long deplete its coffers. She could not transmit her father's name nor win fresh glories on the battlefield or in diplomatic circles. Her arrival left her father indifferent and her mother a little regretful. The absence of the infant at nurse softened the disappointment, and by the time she returned to be placed in charge of a governess, she was welcomed in a kindly manner, as a pretty little doll to be dressed up and

regarded as a plaything. Her home was a forcing-house of artificiality. Her youth was but a foretaste of her later years. She aped her grown-up sister in her habits, her manners and her dress. A little girl of the eighteenth century had her hair done high and padded, crowned with feathers, or a ribbon-laden bonnet trimmed with flowers. She wore an embroidered muslin overdress, covering a wide-spreading blue or pink silk underskirt. She loved gewgaws, and adorned herself with ornaments of gold and silver, coral and pearl. Her playthings, consisting especially of dolls, were as much bedizened as herself, possessed hard red cheeks and gaudy clothes, and were so large as to be inconvenient to carry. Yet no good eighteenth-century mother of dolls would have dreamt of walking out in the park with her governess unaccompanied by her waxen baby. As for the little Emilie-Gabrielle, her love of fine clothes and gewgaws was deep-seated from the first, and grew with her growth, but if she ever played with dolls, it was surely to bang their heads on the floor when she was angry, and then, remorseful because she thought them pained, to hug and caress them with all the force of her passionate nature.

As regards education, it has already been said that Emilie was far better equipped in useful knowledge than others of her class. "Her father, the Baron de Breteuil, had taught her Latin," wrote Voltaire in his *Memoirs*, "which she understood as perfectly as M^{me} Dacier. She knew by rote the most beautiful passages in 'Horace,' 'Virgil,' and 'Lucretius,' and all the philosophical works of Cicero were familiar to her. Her inclinations were more strongly bent towards mathematics and metaphysics than any other studies. Seldom

has there been united in the same person so much justness of discernment and elegance of taste with so ardent a desire for information." He also declared that in her earliest youth she had read good authors in various languages, that he himself had seen several portions of a translation of the *Æneid*, which showed a wonderful knowledge of the meaning of the original; that, having studied Italian and English, Tasso and Milton became as familiar to her as Virgil; and that she made some progress in Spanish. She was also an accomplished musician.

In having had this classical groundwork Emilie was indeed fortunate. The ordinary governess was usually concerned in making her pupil acquainted with showy and glittering accomplishments rather than with solid learning, and with a superficial veneer of manners, etiquette, and pretty behaviour, than with rules for upright conduct and straightforward honesty. Emilie profited but little by the inevitable lessons in deportment, the turning out of toes, the elaborate curtsy, or the dignity to be attained from a head well-balanced on her shoulders. She was awkward to the last day of her life, but her delight in romping and her natural vivacity as a child were probably not nearly as well curbed as in the case of the ordinary pert misses.

A child at that time was taken to stiff *bals d'enfants*, driving there in her carriage, gorgeously attired, her hair decked with feathers, her person with jewellery, a coquettish bouquet fixed on the left shoulder, scented, powdered, rouged, and artificial to her finger-tips. Her relations with her mother were probably limited to a visit once a day for a few minutes to the semi-lighted, rose-tinted room where the latter lay resting after her

fatigues of the previous evening, receiving casual privileged visitors of either sex. The little daughter was encouraged to caress her mother's outstretched hand, delicate and white and glittering with rings, to say "How are you, *chère Maman*?" to obey the answer, "Kiss me, *ma petite*, and then run away and enjoy yourself as much as you can," with an added remark, addressed sotto voce to the visitor, "Isn't she a darling? I can hardly bear my lovely child out of my sight."

Apart from its purely devotional aspect, the convent was an institution of considerable influence in the life of a woman in the eighteenth century. Should there be no *dot* forthcoming because the sons of the house needed all the money, there was the refuge; it served too as an asylum or a prison in the case of injudicious love-affairs or unfortunate marriages; it was a sanctuary for those who repented of a wild youth, or whose beauty had been utterly disfigured by the prevalent scourge of smallpox. Marriage or a convent: there was no other alternative for a girl of good family at that period. She was sent there for educational purposes, and perhaps because the mother did not wish for the presence of a growing girl, blossoming into fresh beauty which might contrast with her own jaded charms to their disadvantage and thus dim the lustre of her popularity. Probably she was brought out again at the age of seventeen or eighteen, to take up the worldly life and contract a marriage of convenience. Marriage at that time was another term for emancipation; it presented itself as a period of bustle, of a sudden accession of importance, of the sensation of being grown-up, of endless interviews with dressmakers, milliners and jewellers, of family conclaves and receptions of friends, at which there was usually present a certain man who

was to be looked at from afar and with an accompaniment of becoming blushes, and who somehow was a necessary though not the most interesting part of the affair. He represented rank, luxury, enjoyment, coquetry, the opera, a display of jewels, and all the delights of freedom till then denied her.

Marriage was regarded by the French girl of the eighteenth century as the starting-point in the race of life, and Mlle de Breteuil took the same point of view as all the others. She had reached the age of nineteen when, on June 12, 1725, she contracted a marriage of convenience with the Marquis Florent-Claude du Châtelet-Lomont. Her husband belonged to an old Lorraine family, originally wealthy, but much reduced in fortune. Born at Namur, in 1695, the eldest son of Florent du Châtelet, Comte de Lomont, Seigneur de Cirey, he was ten years older than his wife. They had no mutual interests. He was heavy, and of the earth earthy; she was brilliant and full of the intention to live her life to the uttermost. They very soon agreed to go separate ways. He was a soldier, having joined the king's musketeers in 1712, served through the campaigns of Landau, of Freiburg, and assisted at the siege of Phillipsburg. His successful military career was rewarded, and he was appointed field-marshal in 1738 and lieutenant-general in 1744. His profession was the cause of many separations between husband and wife, but their lack of mutual understanding made this no hardship. There were three children of the marriage: Gabrielle-Pauline, born at Paris on June 30, 1726, Florent-Louis-Marie, born November 20, 1727, and Victor-Esprit, born at Paris in 1734, who died in infancy. Mme du Châtelet took the same kind of interest in her children as she

had taken in her dolls. She did not realise the part they were intended to play in the scheme of life. But she was always tolerant of them, and loved them now and again in her tempestuous manner, especially when she found them useful. Her husband had grown tired of her before the birth of her youngest son, for she had not the art of keeping a man's affections except through her intellectual gifts, which in no way appealed to the Marquis, and she had already turned for variety to the mathematical and philosophical studies which became her life-interest. Neither these nor the children prevented her from following the example set by the society women of her class. Their habits were extravagant, luxurious, and free, and included all kinds of frivolity, frailty and intrigue.

Mme du Châtelet participated in the custom of the day, and soon found among her numerous men-friends one in whom she could take more than a platonic interest. But she never went to extremes, like many a languishing beauty, and she lived neither an idle nor dissolute life. She was deterred from that by circumstances and tastes. She was not rich enough, and she loved intellectual pursuits; these things were her safeguard. But she enjoyed herself as much as any one—probably more than most, for she entered into gaiety with the robust spirit of play which is generally associated with the idea of childhood. And this happy side of her nature helped her to escape from the failings of her more light-minded companions, with their airs of artificiality and sensuousness which have been justly condemned.

“Voluptuousness clothes her,” wrote De Goncourt of the Frenchwoman of the eighteenth century, “placing on her feet slippers to aid her in her mincing steps, and sprinkling in her hair a powder which shows forth, as

through a mist, the features of her face, the sparkling eyes, the flashing smile. It lights up her cheeks with the delicate colour of the rose, enhancing the beauty of her complexion. It shrouds her arms in lace ; it peeps above her dress, subtly suggesting her entire form ; it leaves her neck bare, not only in the drawing-room in the evening, but even when out walking in the street, where she is to be seen day by day, and at all hours provokingly *décolletée*, permitting a seductive vision of fair white skin and delicate outline, that, to eyes jaded by town-life, are a reminder of fragrant flowers and shafts of sunlight." Besides, it was the day of patches, which had a bewitching meaning all their own. One in the corner of her eye signified *la Passionnée*, in the middle of her cheek *la Galante*, on the nose *l'Effrontée*, near the lips *la Coquette*.

The setting was usually worthy of the jewel. Her boudoir was extravagantly furnished, the silk that clothed her of the finest, mirrors reflected her beauty from every point of view, pictures adorned her walls illustrating the romantic side of life, with imaginary shepherds making love in flowery arbours to fair shepherdesses ; her books described in glowing language the glamour of passion, her music was thrilling melody. Mme du Châtelet was too sensible to attribute to this exotic atmosphere a value it did not possess ; on the other hand, however, she did not scorn it as an aid to making life pleasurable. One thing was lacking in her : she was not beautiful. She had fine eyes, a bright smile, and a striking presence, but the softer feminine graces were not hers.

Yet this want of personal advantages did not keep lovers at a distance, although it was a factor in preventing them from devoting a lifetime to her alone. It must be

recollected that the conventionalities of the day were concerned with appearances rather than with facts, and that the question "Is she discreet?" was more frequently asked than "Has she a lover?" In her first affair Mme du Châtelet was careful to comply with the rules of society until her lover, the Marquis de Guébriant, grew weary of her. Then she broke them all, and won a temporary notoriety by attempting to take her own life. There is little to tell of the Marquis de Guébriant, who was a nephew of the Maréchal de Maillebois, except that he was of a practical turn of mind and did not approve of hysterics and heroics. "The real character of Mme du Châtelet," wrote the Abbé Raynal, describing the manner in which she took her sentence of dismissal, "was to be extreme in all things. One single trait will paint her." That was a bold statement on the Abbé's part, which does not bear endorsement. "In despair at seeing herself deserted by her lover, who had formed a new attachment," he continued, "she begged the unfaithful one to come and see her. After a conversation which was carried on without constraint on either side, Mme du Châtelet asked M. de Guébriant to give her some soup which was on the table, and having taken it, she dismissed him, giving him a letter at the same time. As soon as the Marquis had reached the bottom of the stairs he read the letter, which was to the effect that Mme du Châtelet said she was about to die poisoned by her own hand. The Marquis did not waste time in vain lamentation. With wonderful presence of mind, he went to seek an antidote in the nearest place, and made his mistress swallow it. The effect of this remedy was so efficacious that nothing remained but the remembrance of her extraordinary act."

The account of this rash deed as given by Maurepas varies a little. Nothing is said about an interview between the lovers. On receiving a letter from Mme du Châtelet full "of eternal farewells," Guébriant, knowing her to be subject to fits of great excitement, hastened to her house, where he was refused admittance. He forced his way in, however, and rushed to her apartment, where he found her stretched upon a couch suffering from the effects of a dose of opium sufficient to kill her. He took measures to have her restored, "but being unable to renew his attachment in spite of this proof of love," concluded Maurepas, "she consoled herself with several others."

That phrase lends itself to misconstruction. Until her liaison with Voltaire, Mme du Châtelet's name was only coupled with that of one other man, a distant kinsman of her own, the irresistible and notorious Richelieu. Love between them was but a short-lived episode, friendship lasted her lifetime, and with Voltaire as a third became a triangular bond full of good-will and affection. Mme du Châtelet's letters to Richelieu are amongst the most intimate that she ever wrote, and contain much self-revelation. They are calmer, more level-headed and womanly than the excited and turbulent phrases she penned to d'Argental in the days when she thought her happiness with Voltaire was at stake. Richelieu did not approve of weeping and scenes, and she respected his tastes in this respect and restrained her feelings.

Louis-François Armand Duplessis, Duc de Richelieu, established his reputation as a rake long before Mme du Châtelet was grown up. He was ten years older than she was, and his sister had married into her husband's family. D'Argenson called him an amateur of interesting

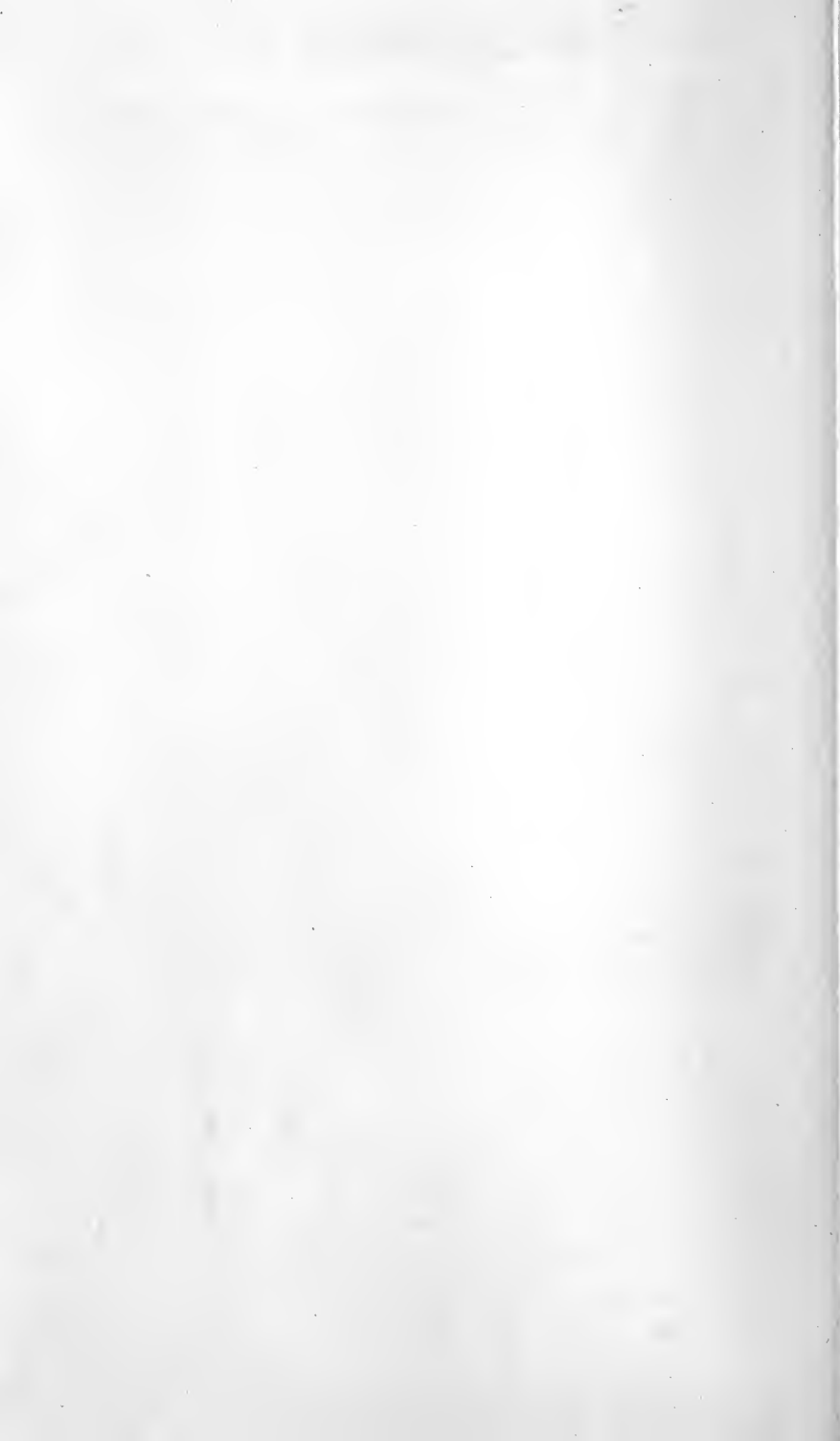
trifles, a butterfly. He was a slave to fashion, and though gifted with personal merit, he based his hopes on blind favour, on seduction, charm and graces, rather than upon more solid qualities.

“Ever since he was twelve years of age he has made himself talked of in the world,” wrote d’Argenson. “His love of voluptuous pleasures has more of ostentation in it than of real delight ; he is a prodigal without magnificence or generosity ; he is saving, but without prudence ; in his domestic affairs he shows both skilful management and disorder. Such is the practical side of a French Alcibiades—they call him thus. . . . He has been much the fashion among women. The pretensions and jealousies of coquettes have procured him a quantity of *bonnes fortunes*—never a passion, but much debauchery ; he has deceived a weak sex ; he has taken senses for heart ; he is not fortunate enough to possess a friend ; he is frank through heedlessness, distrustful through contempt of mankind and shrewdness, disobliging from insensibility and misanthropy. Such is the sad character of a nation gay and volatile as ours ; the more superiority there is, the more contrasts there are in qualities which destroy each other.”

De Goncourt is still more severe on a society which welcomed a man of this stamp in its midst. “If he bear the name of Richelieu his career throughout the century will be as triumphant as that of a god. He will be woman’s idolised lord, and at sight of him modesty will have nothing but tears to show for itself ! She will positively invite scandal if only it will be on his account ; she will intrigue, simply for the glory of being submitted to exposure through him ; there will be honour in the shame which he bequeaths. The



THE DUC DE RICHELIEU
Lover and friend of Mme du Châtelet



coquette and the prude, the duchess and the princess—all alike will yield to him. The youth and beauty of the Court of the Regent and of Louis XV will go out to meet him like women of the streets. Women will fight for him for passion's sake, like men who fight in anger; and it will be on his behalf that Mme de Polignac and the Marquise de Nesle exchange pistol-shots in the Bois de Boulogne. He will have mistresses who will aid him even in his acts of infidelity, their jealousy stifled by their desire to please; mistresses upon whom he can never heap too many indignities, and whose patience he can never tire. When he abuses them they kiss his hand; when he drives them away they come back. He will no longer count the portraits, the locks of hair, the rings and trinkets, and he will forget to whom they belong; they will be jumbled together in his drawers, as they are jumbled in his memory. Every morning he awakens to homage; when he rises, prayers greet him from a heap of letters. They are thrown away unopened, with the words 'Letters which I have not had time to read,' scribbled over the superscription. At his death will be found five notes, with unbroken seals, all bearing the same date, from five great ladies, each begging an appointment of him for an hour of the night! Or it may be that he will deign to open them, and then glancing hurriedly through them, he will yawn over the burning lines of supplication and let them fall from his hands as a minister lets fall a petition."

Emilie du Châtelet must have possessed personal charm of a novel order to attract even for a moment the man who had only to choose amongst the most beautiful women that he met. Perhaps "piquant, radiant, and

adventurous”¹ are good words to apply to her. But she did not pride herself on having won the attention of the most popular man of the hour. She was not at all the sort of woman to boast of her conquests. She was sincere when she wrote that Voltaire “does not pardon me for having indulged in passing sentiments for you, light as they were. Assuredly the character of my friendship should repair this error, and if it is to that I owe yours, I shall say, in spite of all my remorse : *O felix culpa !* It would have been much sweeter to me to owe it to your esteem, and to be able to take pleasure in it without blushing every moment under the eyes of my *ami intime* ; but such is my destiny, and it is necessary to submit to it. I ought to seek to wipe out this idea, but remorse continually renews it. I should have been too happy without that.”

That was her attitude—she was not ashamed of having been Richelieu’s mistress, or if ashamed, then only with a surface show of remorse for expediency’s sake, but neither did she glory in it ; she only rejoiced in being his friend. Her letters to him strike that note continually, almost at the risk of becoming wearisome through repetition. “It is the privilege of friendship,” she cries, “to see one’s friend in every condition of his soul. I love you sad, gay, lively, oppressed ; I wish that my friendship might increase your pleasures, diminish your troubles and share them. There is no need on that account to have real misfortunes or great pleasures. No events are necessary, and I am as much interested in your moods and flirtations as other people are in the good fortune or bad fortune of the people they call their friends. I agree with you that one would

¹ Carlyle, *Life of Frederick the Great*.

rather see one's lover rouged, but one prefers to see him without rouge than not to see him at all. . . . I do not know whether it is flattering to you to say that you are as agreeable far off as near by ; but I know very well that it is thought to be a great merit by a lonely person, who, in renouncing the world, does not wish to renounce friendship, and who would be very sorry if a necessary absence made a breach between her and you. . . . I discover in your mind all the charms and in your society all the delights which the whole world has agreed to find there ; but I am sure that no one has felt more than I have the value of your friendship. Your heart has prepossessed mine. I believed that there was none other but myself who knew friendship in a measure so keen, and I was provoked by the proofs I wished to give you of it, sometimes on account of my scruples, at other times from fear, always in defiance of myself. I could not believe that any one so amiable, so much sought after, would care to disentangle the sentiments of my heart from all my faults. I believed that I had known you too late to obtain a place in your heart ; I believed also, I confess it, that you were incapable of continuing to love any one who was not necessary to your pleasures and could not be useful to you . . . you, unique and incomparable man, understand how to combine everything ; delicious friendship, intoxication of love, all is felt by you and spreads the sweetest charm over your fine destiny.

“I confess to you that if, after having made me, as I may say, give myself up to your friendship, you should cease (I do not say to love me) but to tell me of it ; if you should allow a breach to appear in your friendship, if the remarks or the witticisms of people who find me

pleasing to-day and who will perhaps be displeased with me to-morrow, make the least impression on you, I should be inconsolable . . ."; and again: "I should be most unfortunate if you do not keep your friendship for me, and if you do not continue to give me proofs of it. You would make me repent of the candour with which I speak, and my heart does not wish to know repentance."

The sentiment contained in these letters is sincere and charming; they are letters of friendship genuine and warm. All the time she is writing them she is in love with another man.

"Good-bye," she concludes. "There is no perfect happiness in the world for me until I can unite the pleasure of living with you to that of loving him to whom I have devoted my life."

Richelieu was Voltaire's friend as well as hers. The acquaintance between the two men began at the close of 1718, soon after the first representation of *Œdipe*, and the poet was the recipient of many confidences made by the duke concerning his affairs of the heart. Reticence on these subjects was not Richelieu's strong point. Voltaire's own record was not absolutely stainless. His mind too had been tainted with the taint of the Regency. Hardly a man of them all escaped the influence of the brilliant, cultured, profligate Duc d'Orléans, "whose intellect grasped the future while his vices clung to the past," who had made possible the Mmes de Parabères and de Pries and the scandalous doings at the Palais-Royal, and who had extended in all directions the luxury, the daintiness, and at the same time the coarseness of life.

Intimate as the two men were, Richelieu had never taught Voltaire the finesse of gallantry in which he

himself was an adept. Voltaire was primarily a poet. His passions were intellectual. His critical mind asked for experience which had grown upon the tree of science. He enjoyed the society of women, but he never gave himself up to the systematic art of wooing that was the fashion. Women were growing more exacting. They had long been accustomed to the flattering language of passion ; they required that it should become more and more extravagant and symbolic. Their hearts, their ears, their feelings were blunted with custom. They demanded something fresh, and Voltaire gave them verses because verses were dealt out by him as easily as cards by a gambler. But he did not trouble himself even to pretend that the verses meant more than appeared on the surface. They meant less. They were written for the sheer joy of writing them, and for the pleasure of seeing an answering smile on some fair woman's lips, an answering glance from some fair woman's eyes.

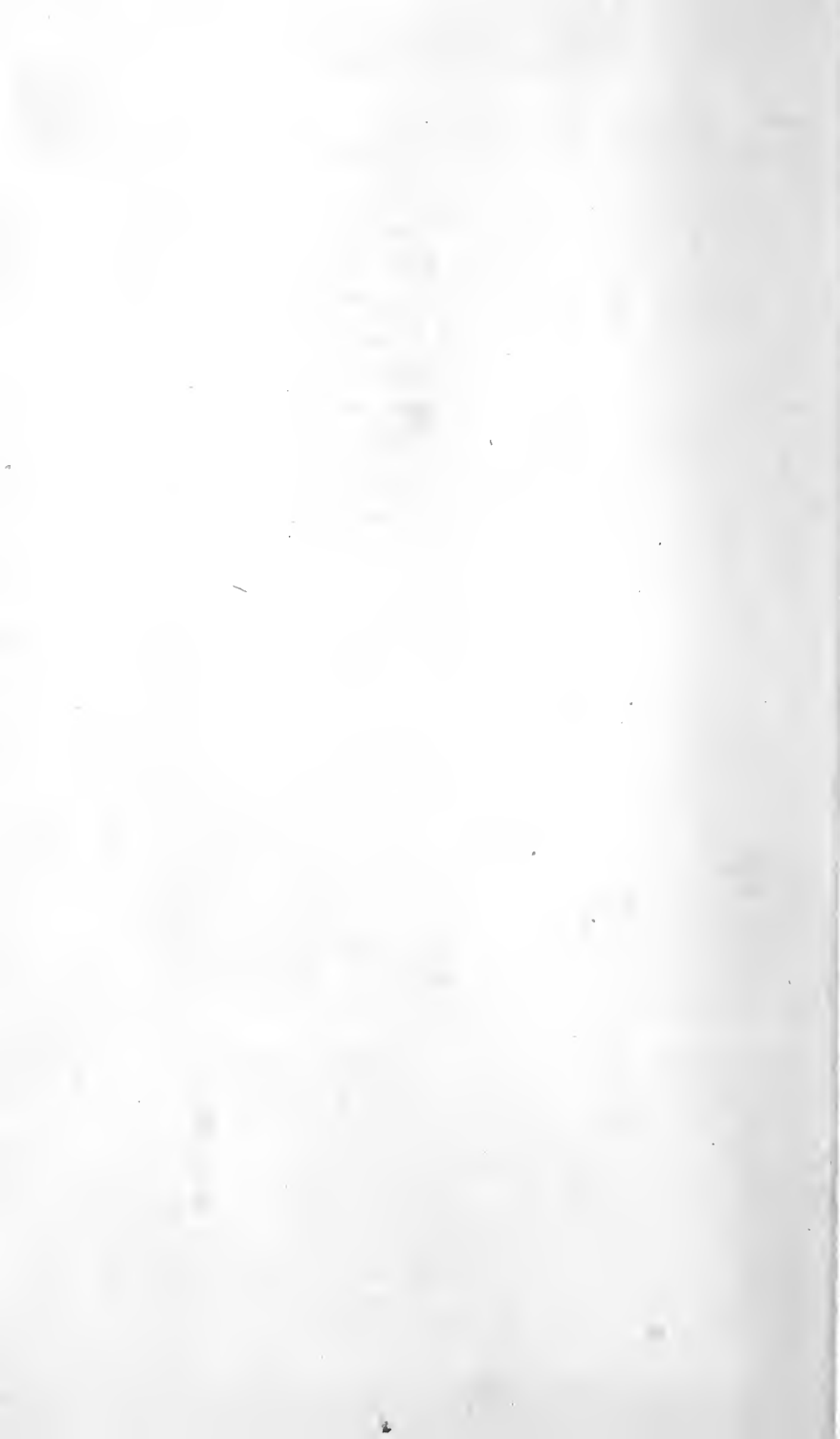
But in his youthful days three women at least had awakened temporarily all the passion of which he was capable. First there was Mme Olympe du Noyer, the adorable Pimpette, who was the heroine of a short, vivid delightful episode of his boyhood. Then there was Mlle de Livri, companion to the Duchesse de Sully, with whom he rode in coaches, and enjoyed surreptitious suppers, and played the sentimental attendant, until she spoilt things by falling in love with his friend De Génonville, who died of small-pox in 1723. She tried to keep Voltaire's friendship too, and wheedled him into letting her act in the revival of *Œdipe*, but she was not at all a success. Presently she married the Marquis de Gouvernet, and in after-years she met her old lover, and they discussed the springtime of love together like two sen-

timental children. His passion for Adrienne Lecouvreur was a more serious thing, and had much of torment in it, because she was a great actress and belonged to the public rather than to any one man. There were other women with whose names his own was more or less truthfully linked—the gay and witty Mme de Villars, the Présidente de Bernières, his philosophic friend Mme de Rupelmonde, and a few others, who attracted him, but who were incidental to a life that was at that time full of change and movement and stress. He was a strange genius, this Voltaire—poet, story-teller, dramatist, historian, philosopher, savant and courtier (though he would never admit the courtier), who was French, yet belonged exclusively to no one nation; who lived amongst those of highest rank, yet was born of the middle-class and found court life irksome; who was destined to spend his days amidst volcano-like eruptions and explosions, whether at Paris, Berlin, Cirey or elsewhere, and who was prepared to dodge *lettres de cachet* as an impecunious individual dodges unpaid bills. And this man was to link his life with a woman as restless, feverish and intellectual as himself, and who had still more energy and passion than he. Twenty years had passed since he had been the lover of Pimpette, and no sooner had he met Emilie than all other women appeared as naught in his eyes. Before they met the strongest link between them was their mutual friendship for Richelieu.

In 1720 the latter had been elected a member of the Academy, and the following year he entered Parlement. It was not until 1722 that Richelieu and Voltaire became thoroughly intimate, and that the poet was frequently the duke's guest at the Hôtel de Richelieu and elsewhere. Early in 1725 Richelieu went to Vienna, and did not



VOLTAIRE AS A YOUNG MAN
(After a painting by Largillière)



return to France until July 1728. During this time Voltaire was in England, and the friends did not meet until the spring of 1729. They stayed at Plombières together, and were both in Paris in July 1730. In the autumn of the following year Voltaire was staying with Richelieu at Versailles, in 1733 he was at his house in Fontainebleau, and about that date he conceived the idea of marrying the incorrigible lady's man to the youngest daughter of his old friend the Prince de Guise. But before this plan came to anything, the meeting had taken place between Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet, which utterly changed the face of the world for both of them.

CHAPTER II

AN INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP

SOMETIMES it happens that a meeting between two people is significant of everything. This was true in the case of Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet. It was not their first meeting. They had seen each other before in the early days—probably at her father's house when Emilie was a child, for Voltaire knew the Baron de Breteuil well. "I saw her born," he wrote of the baron's daughter in a letter to Dumas d'Aigueberre, which was to tell him of her death in 1749. "It was you who helped me to renew my acquaintance, more than twenty years ago, with that unfortunate lady who has just died in the most unfortunate circumstances, and who has left me alone in the world." The twenty years were in reality only sixteen. D'Aigueberre introduced them to one another, it is thought at Sceaux, early in 1733. But Voltaire knew Mme du Châtelet well enough by reputation, not improbably through her scientific connection with Maupertuis.

In 1731 he wrote her some verses on the epic poets. The following year he addressed to the "charming and sublime Emilie" his *Ode on Fanaticism*. His first dated letter referring to her is considered by the authorities to have been written to Cideville on July 3, 1733, in which he refers to the *Épître en Vers sur la Calomnie* dedicated to a very amiable and much calumniated lady. It was true then that he knew of her relations

with Richelieu. In the light of what happened later, nay, was to happen within a few weeks, the first lines of the *Epître* read like a strange warning, a warning he himself was the last to heed, or to help her to realise. The writing of these verses led to that significant meeting. They began :

Écoutez-moi, respectable Émilie :
 Vous êtes belle ; ainsi donc la moitié
 Du genre humain sera votre ennemie :
 Vous possédez un sublime génie ;
 On vous craindra : votre tendre amitié
 Est confiante, et vous serez trahie.
 Votre vertu dans sa démarche unie,
 Simple et sans fard, n'a point sacrifié,
 A nos dévots ; craignez la calomnie.¹

In the course of the poem Voltaire proceeded to paint J. B. Rousseau under the name of Rufus as a perfidious soul :

That Rufus whom your sire befriended
 And from the attacks of want defended.

At that time this unfortunate individual was in exile, and could not have been responsible for a slander upon the daughter as he had been previously for a libellous attack upon the Baron. Rousseau was the son of a shoemaker and a servant. He was born in 1671, and

¹ *Epistle upon Calumny*. Translation by Francklin and Smollett, 1781 :

Since beautiful, 'twill be your fate,
 Emilia, to incur much hate,
 Almost one half of human race
 Will even curse you to your face ;
 Possesst of genius, noblest fire,
 With fear you will each breast inspire ;
 As you too easily confide,
 You'll often be betray'd, belied :
 You ne'er of virtue made parade,
 To Hypocrites no court you've paid,
 Therefore of Calumny beware,
 Foe to the virtuous and the fair.

his father, seeing the boy had exceptional talents, strove his utmost to give him a position better than his own. At first he was destined for the Church, but made his *début* in the literary world with several more or less unsuccessful plays, of which *Le Café* was one of the earliest. Among his protectors were Chamillard, Tallard, the Baron de Breteuil, and Saint-Evremond. He behaved very badly to all of them. He went as copyist in the secretarial office of M. Tallard, the French Ambassador to England, and his unfortunate taste for epigram soon led to his dismissal. Returning to France he found employment with the Bishop of Viviers, where, Voltaire said, he wrote the "Moïsade," and the Bishop dismissed him. Oddly enough Rousseau accused Voltaire of being the author of the "Moïsade," which was by Lourdet. His next venture was in the secretarial office of the Swedish Embassy, but that did not last long. He came back to Paris fortified by a letter of introduction to the Baron de Breteuil, who was still Introducer of Ambassadors. He recited some of his verses. The Baron, who had both taste and culture, was charmed, and employed Rousseau as his secretary and man of letters, heaping favours upon him. But Rousseau could not keep up friendly relations with the other servants of the household ; and once, during a journey to the Baron's estate of Preuilly, in Touraine, he complained of having been badly treated. In revenge he wrote a satire on his master, called "La Baronnade," "as," explained Voltaire, "he had called his piece against Moses Moïsade, and his piece against M. de Francine la Francinade." Rousseau had the unpardonable taste to read this effusion to various people, among others to the Duchesse de Saint-Pierre. The Baron heard of it, and was furious. At length he

forgave his secretary, who denied the authorship, but refused to employ him any longer, and placed him with M. Rouillé, where Rousseau had the audacity to parody a verse that his new master composed in honour of his mistress Mlle de Louvancourt. When all this took place Emilie was still a child of not more than ten ; but she knew the whole story, probably through the Duchesse de Saint-Pierre, who became one of her greatest friends.

At the time when he wrote the *Épître sur la Calomnie*, which was not printed till three years later, Voltaire corresponded with the Duchesse de Saint-Pierre, praising her letters and saying that he dare no longer write in prose since he had seen her letters and those of her friend. This versifying and correspondence roused the duchess and the marquise to a greater interest in the poet, and before many weeks had passed they paid a memorable visit to Voltaire, a visit so startling and delightful, that ever after that day he believed in divinities, like Abraham :

Vers les approches de la nuit
Une visite de trois anges.

The only difference was that the celestial trio supped at Abraham's house, and Voltaire's visitors would not deign to accept his hospitality. The intellectual feast, however, was perfect. Of the three Voltaire was only aware of one, the divine Emilie, in whom he recognised a kindred spirit ; but the verse he produced to celebrate the visit was practical to the extent of being prosaic :

Ciel ! que j'entendrais s'écrier,
Marianne, ma cuisinière,
Si la Duchesse de Saint-Pierre,
Du Châtelet et Forcalquier,
Venait souper dans ma tanière !

The gay Forcalquier, who was a great favourite among women, and of whom it was said that he never entered a room without brightening it, was the eldest son of the Maréchal de Brancas, and at that time was dancing attendance on the Duchesse de Saint-Pierre. The duchess was a daughter of the Marquis de Croissy and niece of Colbert. Born in 1682, she was twenty-four years older than Mme du Châtelet, a difference in age which did not seem to affect in the least a similarity of tastes. Mme de Saint-Pierre had been twice widowed. She had been *dame d'honneur* to the Queen of Spain, and had travelled in Italy. She knew Vienna as well as Madrid.

On the death of the Duc de Saint-Pierre, in 1727, she came to France, and was closely in touch with the Court through her brother, the Marquis de Torcy, Minister for Foreign Affairs. It is probable that her friendship with Emilie began about this time. Several flattering portraits were written about the duchess. Saint-Simon described her as very beautiful. Mme de Staal said she was a pleasant, sociable woman, and a very desirable companion. Mlle Aïsse wrote to Mme Calandrini, in December 1730, a very attractive description of a woman who was no longer in her youth.

“This lady is always beautiful. She has preserved a fine complexion, a full throat; she might be only twenty years old. She is very lovable, she has seen good company; and a stern husband, who knew the world, has made her charmingly polite. She knows how to wear the air of a *grande dame* without humiliating others. She has not at all the kind of haughty politeness which patronises. She has much wit. She knows how to say flattering things, and how to put people at their ease.”

It was left to *Président Hénault* to put the finishing touches to the picture: "Everything about her is noble," he wrote—"her countenance, her tastes, the style of her letters, her discourses, her politeness. Her words are choice without being affected, her conversation is agreeable and interesting. She has forgotten nothing, and she has seen a great deal. But she always regulates the length of her recitals according to the desire of others. Without omitting any essential circumstances she makes one regret their brevity. If books were written as well as she speaks, love of reading would be the virtue of all the world.

"She has an admirable discernment in the choice of friends, and her friendship is courageous and unassailable"—that was a compliment to *Emilie*. "In short, she is a person born to shine in the grand world, and the only one who gives us an idea of what we hear said concerning the true politeness of courtly manners."

Surely *Voltaire* endorsed all these amiable remarks a thousand-fold! How could he do otherwise, when under the wing of this charming duchess came the one woman in the universe for him? She glided like a spirit from the world of ideals into the ugly and commonplace apartments he had chosen in the *Rue de Long-Pont*. *Mme du Châtelet* was substantial enough, it is true, and grace was never her strong point; but lovers, especially when they are poets, do not trouble to be literal. The rooms in the house of the corn-merchant *Demoulin*, into which he had removed after his travels in the spring of 1733, never seemed dull again.

"I am at last opposite the Church of *Saint-Gervais*," he had written to *Cideville*, "in the worst quarter of

Paris, in the worst house, more deafened by the noise of bells than a sacristan, but I make so much noise with my lyre that the noise of the bells will be nothing to me." Other thoughts occupied his mind after he had met Mme du Châtelet, thoughts to which he gave vent in an expression of supreme satisfaction addressed to the same old friend, on August 14, "You are Emilie in a man, and she is Cideville in a woman."

Few great men have won the companionship of the one woman on such equal terms. Neither Goethe nor Chateaubriand, neither Mirabeau nor Balzac, loved women with half as many qualities in common with their own. Voltaire and Emilie were both essentially intellectual and egoistic; they both possessed superabundant nervous energy, an unslaked thirst after knowledge and the truth, a passion to produce, to make an effect, and a reckless disregard of the opinion of other people; they were both too big to be bound by laws made by man to shield weaker men and women, and both desired to understand the laws of nature and write about them for the enlightenment of others. These were some of the characteristics which brought them together. But their differences were as marked. Voltaire was the more imaginative, the more original, and the more purposeful; Mme du Châtelet the more precise, persevering, and methodical in thought. He was generous to a fault, and forgiving; she was never tired of receiving, and if she considered more was due to her she did not hesitate to urge her claims. In such a union it was not surprising that clashes of will should occur and that sparks should be emitted in the process of fusing ideas and imposing them upon others.

Other great men have looked for a reflection of all

they were not in the women they loved ; their wayward genius demanded in the partner a calm patience, and a gentle persistent optimism, which should be ever ready in reserve for them to draw upon when their own failed. To every great mind there come moments when the world seems to totter, and the desire is overwhelming to commune with a fellow-mind that has a steady equilibrium. Voltaire was not exempt from such moments. They abounded in his volcanic career. But Mme du Châtelet had no such soothing influence upon him. When roused she was quite as mercurial as he, and less able to regain the balance and resume the sway of reason. The action of nerves on edge upon nerves yet more highly strung was at times an appalling thing. But Voltaire and Emilie would not have been themselves had the sway of love been unbroken. Intermittence gave zest to their friendship. In the hours of his triumph no one could have responded more fully than she, nor could any one have been more loyal to her success than he. Together they raised a chorus of joy in accomplishment. She had stronger physical life than he, which gave her an advantage, but which in time caused her to resent, like most healthy individuals, the hypochondriacal tendencies in another. When the fire of his youth had departed, she was still in love with love, and therein lay something of a tragedy. But that day was not to arrive for many years to come.

After the visit to his rooms in the Rue de Long-Pont, their intimacy increased by leaps and bounds. She was Emilie to all his friends, he was the one man that mattered to all of hers.

The *Epître sur la Calomnie* aroused a great deal of

interest among Voltaire's acquaintances, and several of them asked to be allowed to see it. It was one of his misfortunes that his writings frequently fell into the hands of indiscreet people, who were eager to rush them into print and risk the result of this misplaced enthusiasm, which generally led to fresh persecutions for the author. On July 24, 1733, he promised to send the *Épître* to Thieriot; on August 2 he had gained wisdom, owing to a difference of opinion on the subject with his lady-love, and he wrote to Cideville that he dare not send the *Épître* because she had forbidden him to do so. But Cideville persisted, and "asked so well" that not even the cautious Emilie could withhold her assent, though she stipulated that the verses were to be returned without being copied. A third request for a sight of them had been made by the Abbé Sade, author of *Mémoires pour la Vie de Pétrarque*, and one of the typical Abbés of the day, who combined his profession with a love of letters and a taste for liaisons. Sade was just about to leave Paris. "The divine Emilie knows how much I love you and how greatly I shall regret your absence," wrote Voltaire. "She knows your worth and mingles her grief with mine. She is the kind of woman one does not meet every day, and certainly merits your esteem and friendship." Regarding the *Épître sur la Calomnie*, he added, "You know well that it is necessary to address yourself to the divinity herself, and not to one of her priests, and that I can do nothing without her orders. You may well believe that it is impossible to disobey her," and then he improved the occasion by dwelling on the virtues of the new-found goddess. She had not been weaned from the world and its vanities, a fact in which he gloried :

Cette belle âme est une étoffe
 Qu'elle brode en mille façons ;
 Son esprit est très philosophe,
 Et son cœur aime les pompons.¹

What harm could there be in that, he declared, since the "pompons" and the world belong to her age and her merit far transcends her age, her sex and the opposite sex? "Her only fault, if fault she has, is that she is tyrannical, and in order to pay court to her it is necessary to discuss metaphysics when one is dying to speak of love all the time." That must have been a great hardship to Voltaire, and one which he endeavoured to overcome by writing verses expressing the admiration with which her intellectual gifts inspired him, and the adoration of his soul for her personal charms :

Sans doute vous serez célèbre
 Par les grands calculs de l'algèbre,
 Ou votre esprit est absorbé
 J'oserais m'y livrer moi-même ;
 Mais hélas ! $A + D - B$
 N'est pas = à je vous aime.

By the end of the year she was his Urania—what mattered it that in earlier days another woman had the same honour, and that verses to Urania were addressed to Mme Rupelmonde? All other Uranias were gone, forgotten, then and for ever, in this new one :

Je vous adore, ô ma chère Uranie :
 Pourquoi si tard m'avez-vous enflammé ?
 Qu'ai-je donc fait des beaux jours de ma vie ?
 Ils sont perdus : je n'avais point aimé,
 J'avais cherché dans l'erreur du bel âge
 Ce dieu d'amour, ce dieu de mes désirs ;
 Je n'en trouvai qu'une trompeuse image,
 Je n'embrassai que l'ombre des plaisirs.

¹ Her soul is like a brook which has a thousand ripples, her mind is gravely philosophical, but her heart rejoices in trinkets.

Non, les baisers des plus tendres maîtresses ;
 Non, ces moments comptés par cent caresses,
 Moments si doux et si voluptueux,
 Ne valent pas un regard de tes yeux.¹

His poems breathed a fiery passion : his letters to Emilie, with the exception of two incomplete fragments, were lost. They probably contained equal warmth of feeling. Eight volumes full of them, said Voisenon, were burnt.

The months rolled on. Voltaire was still in the Rue de Long-Pont, Emilie was always at the Court, "a divine bee that carried its honey to the drones of Versailles," and their mutual friend Richelieu was preparing for the marriage on which Voltaire had set his heart.

"I am leaving to be witness at a marriage I have just made," he wrote to Cideville. "A long time ago it entered my head to marry M. de Richelieu to Mlle de Guise. I conducted this affair like an intrigue in a comedy ; the *dénouement* will be at Montjeu, near Autun. Poets are more accustomed to make epithalamiums than contracts, but I have nevertheless made the contract ; probably I shall make no verses." But he did.

Mlle de Guise lived at her father's house in the Temple. The young princess was tall, had fine eyes, and the upper part of her face was charming, but her

¹ I adore you, dearest Urania. Why have you kindled my love so late? What have I done with the best days of my life? They were wasted, for I never really loved. I sought in the error of youth the god of love, the god of my desires. I found only a deceptive image, I embraced only the shadow of delight. No kisses bestowed by the most tender of mistresses, nor moments which held a hundred caresses, moments that were both sweet and voluptuous, can be counted worth one glance from your eyes.

mouth was large and ill-furnished with teeth. Her carriage and manners proclaimed gentleness and majesty. Richelieu was satisfied with an alliance with the imperial house, which promised honour enough, though no wealth. Illustrious as was the birth of Mlle de Guise, her fortune was insignificant.

Like many others of her sex, she was ready to worship at the shrine of the *amant volage*, and Voltaire composed a verse warning her to keep her affections under control if she valued her happiness :

Ne vous aimez pas trop, c'est moi qui vous en prie ;
C'est le plus sûr moyen de vous aimer toujours :
Il faut mieux être amis tous les temps de sa vie
Que d'être amants pour quelques jours.¹

Richelieu waived the question of dowry, and the wedding bells rang merrily. Voltaire and Emilie were both present at Montjeu, the latter none the less rejoicing at her friend's good fortune because he had once been her lover.

The marriage took place on April 27, and the bridegroom left soon afterwards to join the army. Emilie wrote several letters to her friends from Montjeu, "the most beautiful place in the world, where the people were charming." The only cloud that came to dull the sky of happiness was Voltaire's anxiety regarding the *Lettres sur les Anglais*, which had been printed by Joré without his authorisation and with his name on the title page. To these letters was appended the *Lettre sur les Pensées de Pascal*, which he declared it had been his intention to destroy.

¹ Do not love too deeply, I beg of you ; that is the surest way to love always. It is much better to be friends throughout the whole of life than lovers for a few days.

Immediately after the wedding he wrote to Cideville, "I do not really wear the air of the fair Hymen, but I have performed the functions of this charitable god." He then proceeded to tell Richelieu of the danger which threatened. He wrote similar letters to Formont, to the Abbé d'Olivet, and to Maupertuis, the last containing a hint of coming exile: "I shall have much more to complain of than you if I have to go to London or Basel whilst you are in Paris with Mme du Châtelet,"—your geometrician, as he called her,—“Cartesians, Malebranchists, Jansenists, all are railing at me; but I hope for your support. It is necessary that you should become *chef de secte*, please. You are the apostle of Locke and of Newton, and an apostle of your standing with a disciple like Mme du Châtelet could easily give sight to the blind.”

Moncrif, Berger and d'Argental also shared his confidence, and on May 6 he fled from Montjeu, leaving Emilie behind to mourn his departure. No one knew exactly where he had gone. "All who were at Montjeu sent me quickly to Lorraine," he wrote. His book was burned publicly at Paris on June 10, and his lodgings were searched. Joré was thrown into the Bastille.

"My friend Voltaire, towards whom my sentiments are known to you," wrote Mme du Châtelet on May 12,¹ "is supposed to be at the Château d'Auxonne, near Dijon. He left us some days ago to go and take the waters at Plombières, of which his health has stood

¹ There is no reason to doubt that this letter, which was published in *Lettres de M. de Voltaire et de sa célèbre amie*, addressed to an anonymous correspondent, was to Richelieu, as asserted by M. Desnoireterres. M. Eugène Asse, in his collected edition of Mme du Châtelet's letters, however, does not confirm the statement.

in need for some time past, when one of the men of M. de La Briffe, Intendant of Bourgogne, brought me a *lettre de cachet*, instructing him to go to the said Auxonne and there await fresh orders. He was told that he was at Plombières. I do not doubt that he will receive the King's orders immediately and that he may have to obey. There is no alternative when one cannot escape them. I do not think he can be warned before he receives them. It is impossible for me to describe my grief; I do not feel as though I could bear to hear that my best friend, in his present frightful state of health, had been put into a prison where he would certainly die of grief, if he did not die of disease. . . . I spent ten days here with him and Mme de Richelieu; I believe I have never spent more agreeable ones anywhere, but I lost him at the time when I felt most keenly the joy of having him beside me, and to lose him in such a way! I should have less to complain of if he had been in England. His company having been the happiness of my life, his safety would have made me feel tranquil. But to know that he, with his health and imagination, might be imprisoned, I say it again, I have not enough strength of mind to make me bear the thought. Mme de Richelieu has been my only consolation. She is charming; her heart is capable of friendship and gratitude. She is, if that be possible, even more afflicted than I, for she owes to him her marriage, the happiness of her life. We suffer and we console ourselves in each other's company."

Meanwhile Voltaire was hastening to Basel. "Votre protégé Joré m'a perdu," he cried in his anxiety to Cideville, and he wrote letter after letter to influential friends at home to help him. Amongst others Mme

du Deffand and the Duchesse d'Aiguillon exerted themselves on his behalf. Discretion was never Voltaire's strong point, however, and in July, hearing that Richelieu had been seriously wounded in a duel, he showed himself at the camp of Phillipsburg, just after the Duke had killed the Prince de Lixin, with whom he had quarrelled because the latter had refused to sign his marriage contract. The Prince was his wife's cousin, and husband of one of the celebrated Craon women who shone at the Court of Lunéville.

Mme du Châtelet was terrified lest this mad act should prejudice Voltaire still further in the eyes of the authorities, and she cudgelled her brains to find means of ensuring the safety of the man she adored. The rumours of banishment grew louder and more loud. "In his place I would have been in London or in The Hague long ago," she wrote. "I confess that I am terribly afflicted. I shall never accustom myself to live without him, and the idea of losing him beyond hope of return will poison the sweetness of my life."

In this her hour of need she was struck by an inspiration. Voltaire should go to Cirey. The astonishing thing was that she had not thought of it sooner. True, the castle was a tumbledown old place that had been in her husband's family for centuries and had not been repaired for many years. Part of it could easily be made habitable, though—if Voltaire cared to provide money for the purpose. Cirey was so near the Lorraine frontier that within a few steps perfect safety would await him. As for the other risks attendant upon such a project, it was not the moment to think of them. The matter was arranged at fever heat. Voltaire expressed the delight with which he was prepared to avail himself of

such an offer. To him it seemed a heaven-appointed way out of all his difficulties. He would be able to work there unfearing, undisturbed, and in peace. He could make love there under the most idyllic conditions. At the time his heart beat fondly, wildly, at the daring, the utter lawlessness of the scheme; in after-years he discussed it calmly enough in his Memoirs.

“I was tired of the lazy and turbulent life led at Paris,” he wrote, shearing the episode of more than half its risk and glamour, “and of the multitude of *petits-mâîtres*, of bad books printed with the approbation of censors and the privilege of the King, of the cabals and parties among the learned; and of the mean arts, plagiarism and book-making which dishonour literature.

“In the year 1733 I met with a young lady who happened to think nearly as I did, and who took a resolution to go with me and spend several years in the country, there to cultivate her understanding far from the hurry and tumult of the world . . . and those amusements which were adapted to her sex and age; she, however, determined to quit them all, and go and bury herself in an old ruinous château upon the borders of Champagne and Lorraine, and situated in a barren and unhealthy soil. This old château she ornamented and embellished with tolerably pretty gardens; I built a gallery and formed a very good collection of natural history; in addition to which we had a library not badly furnished.

“We were visited by several of the learned, who came to philosophise in our retreat: among others we had the celebrated Koenig for two entire years, who has since died professor at The Hague, and librarian to her highness the Princess of Orange. Maupertuis came

also, with Jean Bernoulli, and there it was that Maupertuis, who was born the most jealous of all human beings, made me the object of a passion which has ever been to him exceedingly dear.

“I taught English to Mme du Châtelet, who, in about three months, understood it as well as I did, and read Newton, Locke, and Pope, with equal ease. She learnt Italian likewise as soon. We read all the works of Tasso and Ariosto together, so that when Algarotti came to Cirey, where he finished his “Newtonianismo per le Dame” (the Ladies’ Newton), he found her sufficiently skilful in his own language to give him some very excellent information by which he profited. Algarotti was a Venetian, the son of a very rich tradesman, and very amiable; he had travelled all over Europe, he knew a little of everything, and gave to everything a grace.

“In this our delightful retreat we sought only instruction, and troubled not ourselves concerning what passed in the rest of the world. We long employed all our attention and powers upon Leibnitz and Newton: Mme du Châtelet attached herself first to Leibnitz, and explained one part of his system in a book exceedingly well written, entitled *Institutions de Physique*. She did not seek to decorate philosophy with ornaments to which philosophy is a stranger; such affectation never was part of her character, which was masculine and just. The qualities of her style were clearness, precision, and elegance. If it be ever possible to give the semblance of truth to the ideas of Leibnitz, it will be found in that book: but at present few people trouble themselves to know how or what Leibnitz thought.

“Born with a love of truth, she soon abandoned

system, and applied herself to the discoveries of the great Newton ; she translated his whole book on the principles of the mathematics into French ; and when she had afterwards enlarged her knowledge, she added to this book, which so few people understand, an 'Algebraical Commentary,' which likewise is not to be understood by the general reader. M. Clairaut, one of our best geometers, has carefully reviewed this 'Commentary,' an edition of it was begun, and it is not to the honour of the age that it was never finished.

"At Cirey we cultivated all the arts ; it was there I composed *Alzire*, *Méropé*, *l'Enfant Prodigue*, and *Mahomet*. For her use I wrote an *Essay on Universal History*, from the age of Charlemagne to the present. I chose the epoch of Charlemagne because it was the point of time at which Bossuet stopped, and because I dare not, again, treat a subject handled by so great a master. Mme du Châtelet, however, was far from satisfied with the *Universal History* of this prelate ; she thought it eloquent only, and was provoked to find that the labours of Bossuet were all wasted upon a nation so despicable as the Jewish."

The fair Emilie's view of the important step she contemplated was naturally far less serene and matter-of-fact, and concerned itself with other things than the purely intellectual. She could not foresee how her friends would regard the arrangement. She feared—a hundred nameless possibilities. Perhaps people would be indiscreet enough to gossip ; not that she minded personally what they said, but because their ill-timed remarks might reach her husband's ears, and set that worthy gentleman thinking. Then there would be times when the Marquis would come to Cirey, and she dreaded the trials to temper

of a *ménage à trois*. Besides, she did not feel quite certain that she would not miss the accustomed gaiety of Paris. On the other hand was the joy of devoting herself to the happiness of the man she loved.

Her misgivings as to the success of the plan are set forth in her letters to Richelieu early in 1735—that is to say after she had spent a few weeks with Voltaire in the country in October and November of 1734. She returned to Paris before Christmas, and it was early summer before the lovers paid their next visit to Cirey. She poured forth her feelings and impressions on this difficult subject in all sincerity to the man she had insisted on retaining as an intimate friend :

“On this matter there are things which I have never said, either to you or to any one, least of all Voltaire. But there is heroism, perhaps folly, in my shutting myself up at Cirey *en tiers*. Nevertheless the decision has been made. I still believe that I shall be able to master and destroy the suspicions of my husband more easily than to curb the imagination of Voltaire. In Paris I should lose him beyond return and without a remedy. At Cirey I can at least hope that love will render still more opaque the veil which ought, for his own happiness and ours, to shield the eyes of my husband. I pray of you have the kindness to say nothing about this to Voltaire. He would be overcome by anxiety, and I fear nothing more than to afflict him, especially if it be uselessly. Keep your eloquence for my husband, and prepare to love me when I am unhappy, should I ever become so. To prevent my being entirely miserable, I am going to spend the three happiest months of my life. I leave in four days, and I am daring to write to you in the midst of the confusion of departure. My mind is weighed down

with the thought of it, but my heart is full of joy. The hope that this step will persuade him that I love him hides all other ideas from me, and I see nothing but the extreme happiness of curing all his fears and of spending my whole life with him. You see you were wrong, for assuredly my head has been turned, and I confess that in spite of this his anxiety and distrust sensibly affect me. I know that this is the torment of his life. It may well be that on this very account it will poison mine. But perhaps we may both be right. There is a great deal of difference between jealousy and the fear of not being loved enough. One can brave the one if one feels that one does not merit it, but one cannot refrain from being touched and afflicted by the other. One is a troublesome feeling, and the other a gentle sense of uneasiness against which there are fewer weapons and fewer remedies, except that of going to Cirey to be happy. There in truth is the metaphysics of love, and that is where the excess of this passion brings one. All this appears to me to be the clearest thing in the world and the most natural."

These are the qualms of a woman to whom to love and to be loved is of the utmost importance, and who is prepared to sacrifice all else in life, honour included.

On May 20 she referred to the subject again :

"The more I reflect on Voltaire's situation and on mine, the more I think the steps I am taking are necessary. Firstly, I believe that all those who love passionately should live in the country together if that is possible for them, but I think still more that I cannot keep my hold on his imagination elsewhere. I should lose him sooner or later in Paris, or at least I should pass my days fearing to lose him and in having cause

to lament over him. . . . I love him enough, I confess it to you, to sacrifice all the pleasure and delight I might enjoy in Paris for the sake of the happiness of living with him without fears, and of the pleasure of wresting him in spite of himself from the effects of his own imprudence and fate. The only thing which causes me anxiety, and which I shall have to manage carefully about, is the presence of M. du Châtelet. I count greatly on what you are going to say to him. Peace would destroy all our hopes, although I cannot keep myself from longing for it on your account. My position is indeed embarrassing; but love changes all the thorns into flowers, as it will do among the mountains of Cirey, our terrestrial paradise. I cannot believe that I am born to be unhappy; I see only the delight of spending all the moments of my life in the company of the one I love, and see how much I count on your friendship, by the confidence with which I have written of myself for four pages without the fear of boring you.

“It seems rather insipid to come back to the stupid bustle of the everyday world after this, but I have several interesting things to tell you.”

She then proceeded to write of affairs at Court; but hardly a day passed before she returned to the topic nearest her heart—the desire that her husband should not be allowed to misinterpret her actions, that at all costs he must be sounded on the subject of Voltaire and be brought to see the necessity of the step she proposed to take. For this part of the arrangements she relied on her friend.

On May 22 she wrote: “If you see M. du Châtelet, as I have no doubt you will, speak of me to him with esteem and friendship; above all boast about my journey,

my courage, and the good effect it will have. Speak to him of Voltaire simply, but with interest and friendship, and try to insinuate especially that it would be absurd to be jealous of a woman who pleases one, whom one esteems, and who conducts herself well; that might be essential to me. He has great respect for your intelligence, and will readily be of your opinion on this matter. You see with what confidence I address you. You are certainly the only person in the universe to whom I should dare to say so much. But you know my way of thinking, and I trust that this mark of confidence will increase your friendship without taking anything from your esteem."

A curious letter for any woman to write, and not one which enhances a good opinion of her. But she might have spared the words and saved her dignity. M. du Châtelet had no complaint to make. He also was a philosopher in his way. And the two who had chosen to share the good and bad fortune of life together settled down on their estate in the wild desert, spending but little time in sighing lovers' sighs or in singing madrigals in the green arcades of the park. They turned to intellectual pursuits with a new zest, they armed themselves for discussion, they burned for glory and display, and Voltaire summed up his content in a phrase: "I have the happiness to be in a terrestrial paradise where there is an Eve, and where I have not the disadvantage of being an Adam."

Of all the lovers who had wandered in generations past through the gardens of that old chateau, surely there had never been so strange a pair, nor any brought there under greater stress of circumstances.

To begin with, the castle was almost a ruin. It had

been in the Du Châtelet family since the early years of the fifteenth century. The name was one of the oldest and most important in the chivalric records of Lorraine, for the Du Châtelets claimed connection, through a younger branch, with the ducal house. Together with the Ligniville, the Harancourt, and the Lenoncourt, they formed the four *grands chevaux de Lorraine*, a term of which the origin is unknown. The eight or ten families which came next in importance were known as the *petits chevaux*.

The estate of Cirey came into the possession of the family through Alix, daughter and heiress of the Baron de Saint-Eulien and Cirey, who married Erard du Châtelet surnamed Le Grand. The château was besieged during the Wars of Religion, and was almost lost to the family in the reign of Louis XIII, when the Baron sided with Gaston d'Orléans against the King. At the end of the seventeenth century decay had set in with a vengeance, the Du Châtelet family having become greatly impoverished. Situated south of the wine-growing district of Champagne, Cirey was a hundred and forty leagues from Paris, and the only connection with the capital in Mme du Châtelet's day was a lumbering coach twice a week. The nearest village was Vassy, noted for an old manor house in which it was said Mary Stuart had stayed. Four leagues to the south-west was Joinville, where Mme du Châtelet's daughter was in a convent.

Voltaire arrived at the château in September, Emilie followed him in November. At that time there were only two ladies in the neighbourhood who were likely to break in upon their solitude. Mme de Champbonin was one. She was a distant connection of Voltaire's,

and he nicknamed her *gros chat*. She lived with her son at Bar-sur-Aube, four or five leagues away, and Voltaire thought of marrying the son to one of his nieces. The other was Mme la Comtesse de la Neuville. He was delighted to exchange hospitalities with either. One of the first letters he wrote from Cirey to Mme de Champbonin was to this effect :

“My amiable Champenoise, why are not all who are at Cirey at La Neuville or at your house? Or why are not all at La Neuville and your house at Cirey? Is it because the unfortunate necessity of having bed curtains and window-panes separates such delightful people? It seems to me that the pleasure of living with Mme du Châtelet would be doubled in sharing it with you. One does not regret any one else when one is with her, and one has need of no other society when one enjoys yours; but to unite all this in one would be a most charming life. She counts a great deal on being able to pass her time with you and with Mme de la Neuville: for it is not to be permitted that three people who are such good company should remain at home. When you are all three together, the company will be paradise on earth.”

The transformation of the castle into a habitation had already begun. Voltaire was architect, overseer, gardener. In November Emilie came to add her inexhaustible energy to the general bustle and confusion. Voltaire wrote of her arrival to Mme de Champbonin :

“Mme du Châtelet is here, having returned from Paris yesterday evening. She came just at the moment when I received a letter from her, by which she informed me that she would not be coming so soon. She is surrounded by two hundred packages which arrived

here the same day as she. There are beds without curtains, apartments without windows ; china cabinets, but no armchairs, charming phaetons, and no horses to draw them.

“Amidst all this disorder, Mme du Châtelet laughs and is charming. She arrived in a kind of tumbril, bruised and shaken, without having slept, but she is well. She asks me to send you a thousand compliments for her. We are going to patch the old tapestries. We shall look for curtains, and make doors ; everything to receive you. I swear, joking apart, you will be very comfortable here.”

To Mme de la Neuville he confessed that the divine Emilie’s methods did not quite accord with his own :

“She is going to put windows where I have put doors,” he wrote. “She is changing staircases into chimneys and chimneys into staircases. She is going to plant lime trees where I proposed to place elms, and where I have planted herbs and vegetables she is going to make a flower-bed. Besides all this she is doing the work of fairies in the house. She has changed rags into tapestries, she has found the secret of furnishing Cirey out of nothing.”

A struggle then took place between the claims of hospitality and the desire to put the house to rights. Voltaire insisted on the importance of the first ; Emilie, womanlike, was determined to devote herself to the second. She was up to the eyes in her work ; she arranged, discussed, altered, and instructed by turns. She rejoiced in having Voltaire’s money to spend on adorning her domain, and she meant to adorn it right royally. *She* did not want Mmes de Champbonins and de la Neuilles. She wanted to lord it over her lover,

over her builders, her carpenters, her paperhangers and upholsterers—indeed, over every being of the opposite sex with whom she had anything to do.

So Voltaire had to sit down and exert his pen on her behalf, uttering excuses that had little sincerity, promising visits that were never destined to be paid. "She is like love, which comes not when one wants," he wrote to *gros chat*. "Besides, she could not have run off with you to bring you to Cirey because it is necessary to have carded wool and to have bed-valances. Cirey is not yet in a fit state to receive visitors. It astonishes me that even the lady of the house can inhabit it. She has been here until the present on account of her taste for building. She remains here to-day out of sheer necessity. Her teeth are troubling her a great deal and your absence still more. That is a feeling I share with her."

Then Mme de Champbonin herself became impatient, and had to be rebuked. She ought to show more faith, said Voltaire. Her would-be hostess was occupied all day long having wool carded for an extra mattress, for were not three beds necessary since there were to be three persons? and she was having large glass doors placed where *gros chat* could pass through them without inconvenience on account of her *embonpoint*, and how could visitors be expected to put up with the "ragged state" of Cirey?

At length the first visit was paid to Mme de la Neuville, and scarcely had ten days elapsed when it was necessary to apologise that a second one had not become an accomplished fact: "I curse, Madame, all upholsterers, masons, and workmen who hinder Mme du Châtelet from going to see you," he explained. The

little phaeton, light as a feather, drawn by horses as big as elephants—so appropriate in a country of contrasts—had not rolled towards the Court of Neuville for more than a week. Nor was it to journey in that direction soon again, for in January Emilie was to be seen no more at Cirey. She had returned to Paris and to her usual occupations, which were gaiety, frivolity, philosophy, and—first of all in her heart—mathematics.

CHAPTER III

THE MATHEMATICIANS AND THE CAFÉS

THERE have been comparatively few great women mathematicians in the world. Hypatia in the fourth century was the first ; Mme du Châtelet in the eighteenth the second ; shortly after her came Maria Agnesi in Italy, and at the close of the century Sophie Germain holds the fourth place.¹ It would be tiresome to discuss their individual merits or compare their powers with those of their scientific male contemporaries. The woman who seeks to enter a field appropriated exclusively by men, suffers from a double disadvantage. On the one hand are those who give her the credit of her sex, regard her work as marvellous and overpraise it ; on the other are those who for the very same cause discount it, and do not even accord it the justice it deserves. Mme du Châtelet's reputation was sound. She was an earnest and indefatigable worker ; she helped to spread certain new ideas which were being taken up by the French scientists and philosophers of the day ; but she did nothing great in the way of original thinking, nor could it be said that her contributions to science emanated solely from herself, because in all her work she had the support of one or another among the greatest savants on the Continent.

Voltaire, needless to say, had unbounded faith in her

¹ A. Rebière, *Mathématicques et Mathématiciens.*

intellectual gifts, and was for ever singing her praises. Nay, he protested too much, and, falling into the first-named class of judges, laid more stress than was necessary on the fact that the author of *Les Institutions de Physique*, a work which, he said, "would be an honour to our age if it was by one of the principal members of the Academies of Europe," was a woman, one, moreover, who belonged to the upper and so-called idle classes, and who in modesty had concealed her name. A dozen years later, after her death, he wrote, in 1752, his still more flowery "Eloge Historique" upon Mme du Châtelet's translation of Newton. At that time these Eloges were greatly in vogue and were usually written in a flamboyant style. "Two wonders have been performed," he cried: "one that Newton was able to write this work, the other that a woman could translate and explain it;" and after setting forth its special brilliancy, he went on to describe what a remarkable person the translator was in every way. "Ladies who played with her at the queen's card-table were far from suspecting that they were sitting beside the commentator of Newton," he wrote; "she was taken for quite an ordinary person. Only occasionally people would show their astonishment at the rapidity and accuracy with which she could calculate accounts and settle differences. When it came to working out a combination of figures, it was impossible that the philosopher in her should remain hidden. I was present one day when she divided nine figures by nine other figures, entirely in her head, without aid of any sort, and an astonished geometrician was there who could not follow what she did." He endeavoured to put all the admiration he felt into one phrase, "Jamais femme

ne fut si savante qu'elle, et jamais personne ne mérita moins qu'on dît d'elle : C'est une femme savante."

Learned as she was, *la docte Emilie* must always be regarded as far more interesting as a woman than as a mathematician. But the importance of her intellectual side is very great, because it led her into the society of many a clever man besides Voltaire. The little group of mathematicians who were her friends included Maupertuis, Clairaut, Koenig, and Bernoulli, men who were the immediate forerunners of the great thinkers of the last half of the century—d'Alembert, Diderot, Montesquieu, Lagrange, Turgot, Condorcet and many others.

Maupertuis was the most important among her scientific friends. She had known him before she knew Voltaire, he was her first teacher, and she corresponded with him for many years. When he was anywhere in the neighbourhood she was angry if he did not visit her every day; when he was away she waited impatiently for his letters. She never seemed to lose faith in his capabilities or to be annoyed by his disagreeable mannerisms. Voltaire wrote one of his facile verses on their intellectual friendship :

Et le sublime Maupertuis
Vient éclipser mes bagatelles.
Je n'en suis fâché, ni surpris;
Un esprit vrai doit être épris
Pour des vérités éternelles.¹

Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis was born at Saint-Malo on September 28, 1698. He soon gave signs of possessing intelligence of an unusual order. He was the kind of prodigy who wanted to know why the wind

¹ The sublime Maupertuis has put my trifles in the shade; I am neither angry nor surprised, for the true intelligence must ever feel the charm of striving after eternal truth.

which extinguished a candle fanned the flame of the fire. The Maupertuis family was composed of quite ordinary people who went to Versailles in 1704, and enjoyed the privilege they shared in common with every one else of watching royalty dine. Pierre, who was a fair-haired boy of six, with bright eyes and a knowing face, was so interested in what he saw, that he pushed himself into the front rank of the onlookers, and made himself so conspicuous that the Duchesse de Bourgogne, then a charming young lady of nineteen, insisted on sending for him, fed him with sweets, and remarked on his precocious intelligence. Maupertuis had the good fortune to be educated privately by tutors who laid special stress on the study of natural history, mathematics and philosophy. In spite of his talents it was many years' before he turned them to account. In 1718 he enlisted in the Grey Musketeers, and because his military duties were light and peace reigned during the first years of the Regency, he threw himself into intellectual occupations and became that anomaly, a soldier-philosopher.

During the winter of 1722 he was in Paris, and joined a set of savants and wits. There he met the satirist Collé, who said many unpleasant things about him. His worst grievance was, perhaps, that Maupertuis had never read Molière, or at least that he told him so; but there were other counts against him. He had not taken up the highest sciences, nor learnt geometry until he was over thirty, so that of course it was impossible he should know a great deal about it. "He was the most unfortunate individual that ever lived," wrote Collé in his Journal. "Devoured by envy and a desire for reputation, he did everything and sacrificed everything during his life to establish one which did not last long, and which

indeed he outlived, although he was not very old when he died. He was sixty-two or sixty-three at the most. I heard the greatest geometrician say that he only knew as much geometry as any good scholar might be acquainted with, and that he never discovered anything. . . . He was an intriguer, praising himself without ceasing, and having his own praises sung by a pack of inferior scribblers, by a prodigious number of fools, and by women of quality whom he persuaded into learning geometry, a fashion which lasted two or three years, and at the head of which was Mme d'Aiguillon." This was doubtless a hit at Mme du Châtelet, who was her friend, and whose lessons with Maupertuis began about 1730. The Duchesse d'Aiguillon was some years older than Mme du Châtelet, and lived until 1772, keeping her intellectual tastes untarnished. From being the special friend of Montesquieu, she became very intimate with all the Encyclopædists, and was called the philosophers' *Sœur du pot*. She was very ugly when she grew old; her cheeks had fallen in, her nose was awry, her glance wandering, but her conversation remained inspired to the last. She had much influence with the Princesse de Conti, and used it so well that Voltaire wrote her, in May 1734: "I am overcome with gratitude, and thank you in the name of all the partisans of Locke and of Newton for the kindness with which you have awakened the Princesse de Conti's interest on behalf of the philosophers in spite of the outcry among the *dévots*."

Besides knowing these two influential women, Maupertuis was well received at the houses of the Comtesse de Caylus, the Duchesse de Villeroy and Mme de Pontchartrain. He was disliked for his somewhat overbearing manner, but was clever at keeping the conversational

ball rolling, his talk being larded with witty sallies. He had travelled both in England and Switzerland, visiting Bernoulli at Basel in the company of Clairaut ; and his trip to Lapland, for the purpose of measuring the length of a degree of the meridian within the polar circle, immensely enhanced his reputation. Having raised the question of the oblate figure of the earth, he appealed to Louis XV to permit him to make an expedition to the polar regions, and this was carried into effect in 1736 in company with Clairaut, Le Monnier, Camus and Outhier. Collé said that he took all the glory of the calculations and operations, but that Clairaut did the work. On their return Cardinal de Fleury distributed the King's bounty, granting to each of the explorers a pension of a hundred pistoles and to Maupertuis twenty more. The latter, feeling himself but ill-paid, waved the favour aside with one of his pompous flourishes, and suggested that it should be divided amongst his colleagues. This action alienated the great Maurepas, who said he could no longer be his friend except in secret.

Glory was not the only thing that Maupertuis brought from Lapland. His reputation for gallantry followed him there, and he did such execution among the Lapp ladies, whom he praised in every letter, that one of them followed him to Paris, and he celebrated her in verses, describing how impossible it was to flee love, even when journeying within the polar circle.

Mme Graffigny told one version of this story in a letter to Devaux, in which the name of Maupertuis did not appear. " You will not be sorry to hear, my dear friend, that our amiable Frenchmen please even in frozen climates, and that love is of every country. The secretary of Clairaut, one of the voyagers to the pole, made love to a



MOREAU DE MAUPERTUIS

Demonstrating the flatness of the earth at the Poles
(Engraved from a painting by Tournières)

Lapp lady, promised to marry her, and then departed without keeping his word. The young woman has just arrived in Paris with her sister, to pursue her faithless lover. They arrived at M. Clairaut's house, who lodged them, although he is rather poor. *L'épouseur ne veut point épouser*, and the lady did not wish to go home. At last Clairaut, who informed Voltaire, told him that he had obtained a little pension for her, and was going to try to make her enter into a convent to console her. All Paris goes to his house to see the Lapp ladies. Ah, mon Dieu, how can one be a Laplander ! ”

After his return, Maupertuis posed as a genius and a power in the land, and his vanity was tickled by Tournières, who painted him dressed in the clothes he had worn in the north, and with one hand resting on the terrestrial globe as though he were flattening it at the poles. The picture was engraved, and Voltaire embellished it with verses :

Ce globe mal connu, qu'il a su mesurer,
Devient un monument où sa gloire se fonde,
Son sort est de fixer la figure du monde,
De lui plaire et de l'éclairer.

Mme du Châtelet was jealous because the picture was sent to Voltaire and not to her. “ Had it not been for the fact that he has it in his power to adorn it [with verses], and therefore merits the preference,” she wrote, “ I would certainly have claimed my right to it against all the world.”

On their return, in 1737, Maupertuis and Clairaut retired to Mont-Valérien in order to work in peace. Perhaps they were struck by Voltaire's plan of withdrawing from the world. Mme du Châtelet poured forth indignant protests in her letters because she could not

see them as often as when they were in town. From Cirey she wrote that if she had been in Paris she would certainly have come to visit them, "on foot or on horse-back, in rain or in sunshine." The lessons in mathematics which Clairaut gave her were gathered and printed under the title of *Eléments de Géométrie*.

Clairaut, like Maupertuis, was a prodigy, but a more amiable one. When he was ten years old, he read *L'Analyse des Infiniment Petits* and *Le Traité des Sections Coniques* by L'Hôpital. At thirteen he sent a treatise to the Académie des Sciences, at sixteen he was working at his famous book *Recherches sur les Courbes à Double Courbure*, concerning which Voltaire wrote in 1739 to Frederick, then Prince Royal, that though it was not nearly finished, the beginning appeared to him of great value. In return for his praise Clairaut told Voltaire that he was convinced he would never rise above mediocrity in the sciences, and advised him to devote his time to philosophy and poetry. Clairaut's book was published two years later, and opened the Academy of Sciences to its author before he was of the regulation age, which was a very unusual distinction.

Mme du Châtelet was both pupil and friend to Clairaut; he helped her with her work, and she housed some of his scientific instruments at Cirey as an acknowledgment of her gratitude. He was not at all averse to combining the lighter moods of passion with the serious study of mathematics. He was in love with a certain Mme de Fourqueux, who was scrupulously virtuous and turned a deaf ear to him. Whether he tried to ingratiate himself too well with his hostess when he stayed at Cirey is not certain; but Voltaire, who, when he left, wrote to Thieriot that one of the best geometers in the world and

one of the most amiable men had gone back to Paris, was so jealous of their intimacy that one day, being irritated beyond measure, he went so far as to warn M. du Châtelet of the flirtation, saying half-sadly, half-comically, "Ma foi, Marquis, this affair requires stern handling, and I wash my hands of it altogether!"

Longchamp tells a story which bears on this subject of an incident, which took place some years later, when Mme du Châtelet was revising her Commentary on Newton for press. She had plunged anew into science with great ardour, and had invited Clairaut to come and verify her calculations. The operation took a good deal of time. Clairaut visited her every day, and together they shut themselves up in her study, in order that they might not be interrupted. Having spent the day at work, they usually had supper with Voltaire. He had been suffering from indigestion for a few days. "One evening, when he wanted his supper, he told me to let the two savants know," wrote Longchamp. "Mme du Châtelet, who was deep in a calculation she wished to finish, asked for a quarter of an hour's respite. Voltaire agreed, and waited patiently. Half an hour passed and nobody came. He sent me up again. I knocked at the door and they cried, 'We are coming down.' At this reply Voltaire had the supper served and took a seat at table waiting for the guests. Nevertheless they did not arrive, and the dishes were getting cold. Then he became furious, went lightly up the staircase, and finding the door was locked he kicked savagely upon it. At this noise the work had to cease. The geometers came out and followed Voltaire. They were a little abashed. As he came down he said, 'You are of one mind to let me die, then?' Ordinarily supper was gay

and took a long time ; that day it was soon over, they hardly ate anything, and fixing their eyes on their plates, said not a word. M. Clairaut went to bed early, and did not come back to the house for some time. At last they became friends again. Mme du Châtelet, with her usual cleverness, reconciled them. Clairaut returned, the revision of the Newtonian commentary was resumed, and in future they were at the supper-table with remarkable exactitude."

This tragic story was to have an equally tragic sequel.

After the scene was over Voltaire retired to his room, but he could not rest, as he was still much moved by the events of the evening. The following morning Mme du Châtelet sent some one to inquire the state of his health, and ask him whether he would like her to come and have breakfast with him. He sent back a message that she would be well received. A moment later Emilie came down to him, carrying in her hand a superb breakfast-cup of Saxon porcelain which he had given her and which she loved to use. The interior of the cup and saucer was gilt, outside it was adorned with charmingly painted pastoral figures. Voltaire ordered Longchamp to fill it with coffee and cream, and then the latter withdrew. Mme du Châtelet, with the cup in her hand, began discussing the incident of the previous evening, saying that Voltaire ought not to have been angry, and making excuses which the poet received coldly. She came quite near him, and as he moved from his chair to offer her a seat, he knocked against her accidentally and the valuable cup and saucer were shattered. Emilie said what she thought of his clumsiness—in English—and hurriedly left the room. Voltaire despatched Longchamp on the spot to obtain a new breakfast-set to replace

the broken one. It cost him ten louis ; but that was not much after all, for Mme du Châtelet accepted the peace-offering with a smile. Voltaire had only one thing left to say, and he said it so low that she could not hear it. Next time he thought she had better have her breakfast in her own room before coming to his ! Poor Clairaut of course received his share of the blame for this unfortunate incident.

The young geometrician, whose Christian names were Alexis Claude, was seven years younger than Emilie. He was handsome, gay, fond of music and good living ; in fact he had more of the graces of social life than many of the savants, and was just the kind of young man to attract a woman who swung like a pendulum between the passions and the intellect.

Bossut said of him : “ A character gentle and pliant, great politeness, and scrupulous care in never wounding the self-love of anybody, gave to Clairaut an existence and consideration in the great world which talent alone would not have obtained for him. Unfortunately for the sciences, he gave himself up too much to the general desire and rush to know and make much of him. Engaged for suppers and evening entertainments, carried away by a keen taste for the society of women, and wishing to ally pleasure to his ordinary work, he lost rest, health, and at length his life at the age of fifty-three, although his excellent physical constitution had appeared to promise a much longer career.”

Bossut, mathematician and Abbé, who translated Maria Agnesi's work on the Infinitesimal Calculus, was the friend of Maupertuis as well as of Clairaut. When he was dying Maupertuis was by his bedside. No one knew whether the agony was ended. “ Twelve times twelve ? ” asked

Maupertuis in a distinct voice. "One hundred and forty-four" came the automatic answer, as Bossut breathed his last.

Mme du Châtelet owed to Maupertuis not only her introduction to Clairaut, but also to Koenig and Jean Bernoulli *fils*, a member of the well-known family of mathematicians. Maupertuis met Koenig in Switzerland, and again in Paris, where he was nearly starving. Born at Buedingen in 1712, Samuel Koenig was a follower of Leibnitz, and his masters were Bernoulli and Wolff. He was friendly with Voltaire and Réaumur, and was a member of the Academies of Berlin, of The Hague, and of Göttingen, as well as a correspondent of the Paris Académie des Sciences.

He did not begin his lessons at Cirey until 1739, in which year Mme du Châtelet wrote to Prince Frederick that he was coming for the purpose of conducting her "in the immense labyrinth where Nature loses herself." She was just about to leave off studying physics for some time, with the idea of learning geometry. "I have perceived that I have been going a little too fast," she added: "it is necessary to retrace my steps. Geometry is the key which opens all the doors, and I must work hard and acquire it."

Maupertuis, Clairaut, Koenig and Jean Bernoulli *fils* were the four masters who instructed her methodically and consecutively. At the close of 1733 and the beginning of 1734 her letters to Maupertuis are full of requests that he would come and teach her something new. "Yesterday I spent the whole evening profiting by your lessons. I would like very much to render myself worthy of them. I fear, I must confess it, to lose the good opinion you have expressed about me. I

feel that that would be to pay very dearly for the pleasure I take in learning the truth, adorned by all the graces you lend to it. I hope that the desire I have of learning will to some extent take the place of capability. . . . I have studied much, and hope you will be a little less discontented with me than last time. If you will come and judge of it to-morrow, etc. . . . I am staying at home to-day : come if you can and teach me to raise an infinite *nome* to a given power. . . . I spent yesterday evening with binomes and trinomes. I cannot study any more if you do not give me a task, and I have an extreme desire for one. I shall not go out to-morrow till six ; if you would come to my house at four o'clock, we would study for a couple of hours," and so forth and so on—an untiring demand for knowledge which no amount of hard work seemed able to quell.

On June 7, 1734, she wrote from Montjeu : " I have begun to work at geometry again these days ; you will find me precisely where you left me, having forgotten nothing, and learnt nothing fresh : and with the same desire to make progress worthy of my master. I confess to you that I understand nothing of Guisnée¹ alone ; and I do not think that, except with you, I could learn with pleasure one A — four A. You scatter flowers on the path where others only discover thorns. Your imagination knows how to embellish the driest facts without depriving them of their accuracy and precision. I feel how much I should lose if I did not profit by the kindness you have shown in deigning to condescend to help my weakness, and to teach me such sublime truths in an almost jesting manner. I feel that I shall

¹ A former master of Maupertuis and author of *Traité de l'Application de l'Algèbre à la Géométrie* (1715).

always have over you, the advantage of having studied with the most amiable, and at the same time the most profound mathematician in the world,"—a letter which throws light on the subtle relationship between Maupertuis and his pupil. At this time Maupertuis was living in the Rue Saint-Anne, near the Nouvelles-Catholiques, and when they were both in town they met nearly every day. If a day passed without a lesson, the indefatigable pupil wanted to know the reason why, and had no scruples about hunting up her dilatory professor wherever she thought he might be found, even in his most sacred haunt, the Café Gradot on the Quai de Louvre, where Maupertuis had his own little circle of intimates, and where he was usually to be found in the middle of the day and after the theatre at night.

"Yesterday and to-day I went to look for you at Gradot's," she wrote at the beginning of 1734, "but I did not hear you spoken of. . . ." "Please sup with me to-morrow. I will come and fetch you from Gradot's when the Opera is over, if you will wait for me. It is necessary for me to see you. I am sorry to begin so late, but I am engaged for the Opera." When she rushed in from Créteil, where her mother lay ill, to spend a few hours in Paris, she arranged to meet him at the same café, and if she turned up there and found he was gone she heaped reproaches and recriminations on his head. That was her way, and it was not only Maupertuis who knew it.

The cafés were a comparatively new institution in Paris at this time, and had taken such a hold on the imagination of the people that there were already several hundreds of them. Their history dates from the close of the seventeenth century. Coffee was then a new

drink, and cost about eighty francs a pound. It was introduced to the nobles of the court of Louis XIV by the Turkish Ambassador. The doctors were horrified, and spread the news that it was a deadly poison. For a time this aroused a violent desire among smart people to drink it and die, if necessary, trying to be fashionable. However, when nothing serious happened, the medical men were forced to moderate their tone. But for a long time the drink was not popular. Mme de Sévigné did not like it, but in Mme du Châtelet's day Voltaire and Fontenelle did, and Delille made a little verse on the subject :

Il est une liqueur au poëte plus chère,
Qui manquait à Virgile et qu'adorait Voltaire ;
C'est toi, divin café !

It was Voltaire who was responsible, too, for Mme de Sévigné's distaste being remembered. At one time she had run down Racine, whom she compared to her favourite Corneille to the great disadvantage of the former. When she saw *Phèdre* and *Athalie* she entirely changed her opinion, but it was too late. What Mme de Sévigné had said was on record and could not be wiped out by a mere change of mood. Four years after she had belittled Racine, she also remarked that coffee was a horrible drink and would soon disappear from fashionable dinner-tables. Voltaire, speaking of Racine, combined Mme de Sévigné's two little phrases, and said she had judged him as she did coffee, thinking that neither would last. It was left to La Harpe to crystallise the *bon mot* often attributed to the queen of letter-writers in its final form, "Racine passera comme le café."

Not only did the drink itself stay in fashion, but it quickly gave rise to the institution of special houses

where it was drunk. The Turkish Ambassador's idea was followed up by an Armenian of the name of Pascal, who opened a public café not far from the Abbaye de Saint-Germain des Près. It had only moderate success, but two that followed became the rage. One was owned by a Syrian called d'Alep, the other by a Sicilian of the name of Procope. In 1720, says Michelet, Paris became one great café. Three hundred were open *à la causerie*. Every apothecary sold coffee and served it at his counter. Even the convents hastened to take part in this lucrative trade. France never chatted more freely or more gaily. The arrival of coffee was the cause of a happy revolution and of new customs. The effect was marvellous; it was not then neutralised or weakened by smoking. Men took snuff, but smoked little.

The cabaret was superseded, "the ignoble cabaret where, under Louis XIV, youth was tossed about betwixt barrels and women." Fewer drunken songs polluted the night. Fewer young nobles were found lying in the gutter. The smart talking-shop, which was more a salon than a shop, changed and ennobled manners. The day of the café was that of temperance and virtue; the reign of the intellect had begun.

The most interesting historically is the Café Procope, which was once a fine bathing establishment, where there were hot towels and meals and drinks for the bathers, where a man could sip sherbet and hear Italian music. It was originally founded by the Sicilian Procope Cultelli, who came to Paris in the suite of Catherine de Médicis. His descendant, François Procope, at first peddled his liquor in the open air, then he had a coffee-stall, then a shop, and at last a spacious divan, where in salons, elegantly decorated, with mirrors and gilt mouldings, the

most celebrated people met to talk and take refreshments. Fine ladies stopped their carriages at the café door, and waited there till they had finished drinking a cup of coffee served on a silver saucer.

In the time of Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire the Café Procope, the Café Gradot and the Café Laurent were the most famous of all, the first-named gaining a reputation throughout Europe. Opposite the Palais-Royal was the Café de la Régence, where chess and draughts were played. It was frequented by Voltaire, the Duc de Richelieu, the Maréchal de Saxe, Buffon, Fontenelle, and many others among the famous men of the day. The Café d'Alep, in the Rue Saint-André des Arts, was the first to sell ices and have marble-topped tables. Very soon the other places imitated these luxuries. At the Café Buci, which opened soon after the Procope, the *Gazette* and the *Mercure de France* were to be had for the asking, and tobacco was given free with the coffee. Strong drinks could also be obtained. But the *raison d'être* of the café was none of these things. They were rendezvous first and foremost. Writers, critics, dilettantes, professors, pseudo-politicians, financiers, soldiers, philosophers, comedians and dancers—every kind of individual, in short, brought his intellectual wares and threw them into a common stockpot of wit and good fellowship. The café was a neutral ground upon which men of totally different habits and tastes might meet without clashing. The intrigues and follies, the fashions and affairs of everyone who was anyone, and many who were nobodies, were discussed and pulled to pieces, exaggerated and perverted until a man might hear a tale of himself so disguised that he would think it concerned his neighbour. The airy nothings of yesterday

about to become great happenings of the morrow figured in process of materialisation in the gossip of the café. Songs, verses and *bon mots* were coined in profuse plenty ; eulogies, satires and scandal were born and went forth from their cradle in the cafés to do their good or evil work, to lift up to fame or perhaps condemn to oblivion some struggling beggar of an author, an actor, or a musician. Mad visions were dreamt there of Utopias where all men should be free, great schemes were planned whereby all men should become rich, and men sang and versified, quarrelled and fought and swore everlasting friendship, and laughed in the face of fickle fortune, and grasped one another's hands when luck was in sight, and in their emotional French way went further and wept on one another's shoulders in their grief, or kissed and embraced in an ecstasy of happiness ; in short, whatever life had to offer them, the battle-field where they discussed it, to curse or to bless it, and where they tore it in a thousand shreds with their babbling tongues, was the common meeting-place—their coffee-house.

Each café had its distinctive note. The Gradot had a strong sprinkling of scientific men, of astronomers and geometricians, of academicians and serious writers ; the Procope, which was situated in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain, now Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie, opposite the old Comédie Française, was frequented by theatrical people of every grade and every shade, from actors and dancers to dramatists and dramatic critics. The house kept by the Veuve Laurent had a leaning towards art ; poets, musicians, painters, and amateurs in belles-lettres met there.

According to La Beaumelle¹ the Procope was the

¹ *Vie de Maupertuis.*

favourite resort of Maupertuis before the death of Lamotte in 1731, but Collé declared that he met Maupertuis and Lamotte most frequently at the Gradot, and Mme du Châtelet's letters seem to confirm this statement. Perhaps he frequented both. If any one grew tired of the Procope he had but to take a few steps into the Rue Dauphine to visit the Laurent; and if the proprietor did not show him enough politeness there, he had only to cross the water to the Quai de Louvre and find himself at the Gradot. Procope's son, who was studying medicine, but preferred versemaking and writing plays, composed a drinking-song which sounds the note of friendship for all alike :

Buvons, amis de ce vin frais,
Remplissons tous nos verres ;
De la grandeur les vains attraits
Sont pour nous des chimères ;
Buvons, buvons, tous à longs traits,
Buvons en frères.

Wherever he went Maupertuis was a conspicuous figure, in a fantastic coat and a curious short wig which drew all eyes upon him. His master, the great Nicole, also used the Gradot; and Saurin, who having been a Protestant minister in Switzerland, bartered his faith when he came to France for fifteen hundred livres a year. Saurin was accused of having plundered churches, but nothing would have been proved against him and this unenviable reputation might have died out had he not confessed his guilt in his own letters. Saurin quarrelled fiercely with J. B. Rousseau, but that was at the Café Laurent. At the Gradot was La Faye, of whom Duclos said he was a very amiable man. He had a considerable fortune, a good house, and he kept good company. His brother had been a captain of the Guards, and his chief

claims to interest were the facts that he had lost a leg in battle and that he possessed a splendid library. Voltaire made a little verse about him :

Il a réuni le mérite
 Et d'Horace et de Pollion,
 Tantôt protégeant Apollon
 Et tantôt chantant à sa suite.

There was Melon, the economist and author of the *Essai politique sur le Commerce*, of which treatise Voltaire wrote that it was "the work of a man of wit, of a citizen and a philosopher." Melon had been an inspector-general of farms at Bordeaux, and then clerk to Cardinal Dubois. He was a friend of Maupertuis, and when he died, in January 1738, Mme du Châtelet wrote to the mathematician to condole with him on his loss. Her grief was sincere, she said. "A man who was your friend must have had merit." And again, "I regret him as one of your friends and as a worthy man, for the two titles cannot be separated." She knew his book very well, and went on to generalise that with so many fools about it was very sad that death should select the wise. The Abbé de Pons was "less a man than a dwarf," said the Abbé Denys, who wished to prevent him being elected Canon of Caumont ; the "singularity of his exterior will surprise and may scandalise the weak." To which Pons replied lustily, "An honest man must never be hurt by reproaches which have only for their object physical faults or infirmities, since such failings do not soil the soul." Melon said of him that he had a fine face, and an extremely prepossessing countenance which bore the stamp of candour ; in fact he was a pleasant humpback. He was, moreover, a staunch partisan and faithful to his leader Lamotte. The latter's fables had been much

applauded when they were read at the assemblies of the Academy; but no sooner were they printed than they had hardly any other admirer than the Abbé de Pons, who insisted that the public was wrong. One day he arrived at the Café Gradot in an excited state and very angry because his six-year-old nephew, to whom he had given two fables to learn by heart, one by La Fontaine, the other by Lamotte, learnt the former without the slightest difficulty, but could not remember a word of the other. This did not convince the Abbé that he was wrong; it only seemed to him to foreshadow execrable taste on his nephew's part.

At the Gradot the dispute on the Ancients and Moderns was carried on with great vigour. The Abbé de Pons enrolled himself in the ranks of the Moderns, led by Lamotte, who had renewed the struggle begun by Boisrobert and continued by Desmarests de Saint-Sorlin, Fontenelle, and Charles Perrault. The latter had ridiculed Homer's heroes, and, whilst not denying the genius of Horace, criticised his work. He maintained against all comers that the "siècle de Louis" equalled or even surpassed the centuries of Pericles and Augustus. Fontenelle, in his *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, also took up the cudgels in defence of the moderns. There was much debating. Their ideas were endorsed by many of the wits of the early eighteenth century, Mme de Lambert, l'Abbé Dubos, the historian, diplomatist, and future Secretary of the French Academy, who was followed by Marivaux, (who laughed at both sides), Maupertuis, Montesquieu, Buffon and Duclos. Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe ridiculed the champions of the ancients, not the ancients themselves; but the two warmest disputants of all were perhaps Lamotte and

Mme Dacier—the same learned woman to whose classical knowledge Voltaire had compared that of his beloved Emilie.

Lamotte wrote his *Discours sur Homère*, his greatest weapon being an abridged Iliad, from which he had deleted all that seemed to him superfluous. This challenge he sent to Mme Dacier. She replied to his *Discours* with her *Des Causes de la Corruption du Goût*. Voisenon thought that the dispute did her no honour. “She fought,” he said, “with the roughness of a savant. Lamotte replied with the elegance and graces of a charming woman.”

Verses on the subject appeared written in chalk on the door of the Academy, composed in the style of Corneille’s verse on Cardinal de Richelieu :

Lamotte et la Dacier, avec un zèle égal,
Se battent pour Homère et n’y gagneront rien :
L’une l’entend trop bien pour en dire du mal,
L’autre l’entend trop peu pour en dire du bien.¹

The quarrel grew fast and furious. Fénelon was drawn into it. Lamotte appealed to him only to obtain the response, “I would much rather see you a new Homer, whom posterity would translate, than see you translate Homer.” Gaçon defied Lamotte in *Homère Vengé*, saying various cutting things, and Lamotte’s friends begged him to reply. The Abbé de Pons, who was furious on his chief’s account, answered for him with a burning pen, besides supporting him in shrill accents at the Café Gradot, where no one contradicted him.

At length peace was declared. Valincourt, who was

¹ Lamotte and La Dacier are fighting about Homer with equal zeal, but they gain nothing. The one understands him too well to say bad of him. The other understands him too little to say good.



MADAME DACIER

A spirited admirer of Homer, who opposed Lamotte in the dispute concerning Ancients *v.* Moderns. Voltaire compared Mme du Châtelet's knowledge of Latin favourably with hers.

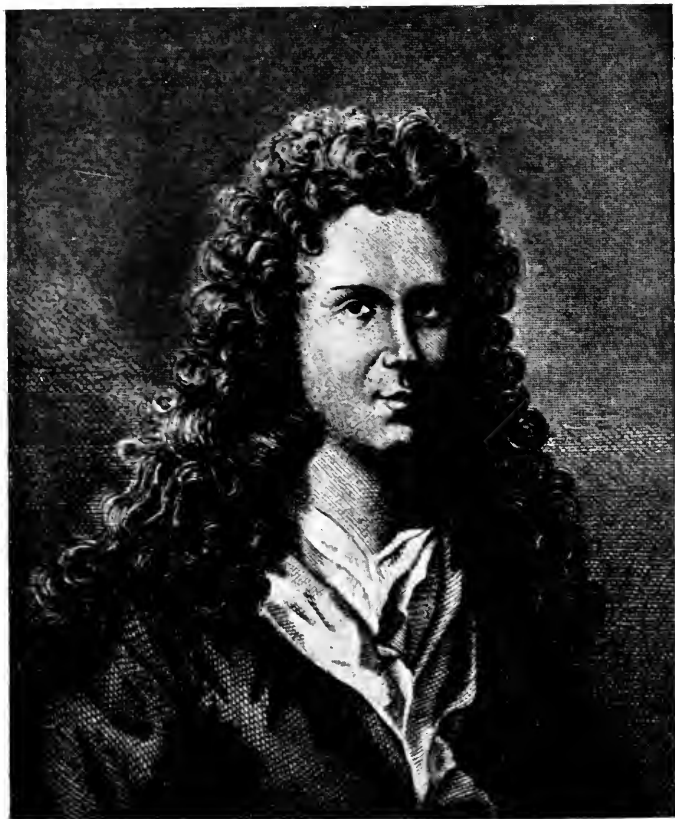
a friend to both parties, acted as mediator and brought about a reconciliation. He knew so well how to mollify the terrible and stormy Mme Dacier that he persuaded her to meet her opponent at supper. "M. de Valincourt introduced me to M. and Mme Dacier," wrote Mme de Staal in her Memoirs; "he asked me to be present at a repast which he gave to reunite the ancients and the moderns. Lamotte at the head of the latter, keenly attacked by Mme Dacier, had replied politely but with force. Their combat, which for a long time had amused the public, ceased by the intervention of M. de Valincourt, their mutual friend; after having negotiated peace between them, he confirmed the solemn treaty at this assembly, to which the chiefs of both parties were convoked. I represented neutrality. We drank the health of Homer, and all went well."

When Lamotte died, Maupertuis became the chief of the circle at the Gradot, which he kept alive by sheer wit and a gift for repartee.

At the Laurent Lamotte was in the thick of the couplet war in which J. B. Rousseau and Saurin played conspicuous parts. Danchet the despised poet, Crébillon, La Faye, Gresset, and Fréron joined in the altercation; also Roi, who had a talent for inventing ballets, Rochebrune, who composed songs, and Boindin, who loved noise, more especially the noise he made himself, and who was a charming talker, although he insisted on contradicting every one. Nowhere were couplets, epigrams, chansons, maxims, and such-like airy trifles more the vogue. Voltaire described it as a school of wit where licence had much sway. J. B. Rousseau, in his usual unamiable manner, made satirical verses against most of those who frequented the café. Danchet replied in kind, Lamotte

answered in his "Ode sur le Mérite Personnel," which referred in unmistakable terms to some of Rousseau's less praiseworthy characteristics, an effort which was much applauded and caused Rousseau much despair. Pécour, the dancing-master, used a more material weapon, and shook his stick in the delinquent's face. Autreau, another wit, whose poetry was bad enough to be suppressed even under such provocation, went a step further than Lamotte, and wrote an *histoire scandaleuse* of Rousseau's life. It was to be sung at the victim's door in the Pont Neuf by a dozen blind men; but Lamotte, who was gentle in spirit and had a reputation for courtesy and good feeling, prevented this culminating act of vituperation; and so for a time the couplet war subsided, although Fontenelle, Saurin and Boindin were strongly against Lamotte's conciliatory attitude. The reconciliation was obviously forced, and came to an end when Lamotte was elected to the Academy and Rousseau was refused a place. Then Rousseau broke out once more into stinging couplets, slashing Lamotte, Saurin, Boindin, La Faye, and all his former friends.

The verse dealing with the last-named gentleman contained an aspersion on the lady whom he was about to marry, unfortunately for its author. This time a stick did its legitimate work, and La Faye managed to get twenty strokes into the face of the misguided Rousseau, who fled before him into the Palais-Royal, where he purposely took refuge, with the intention of informing against his assailant for beating him on royal premises. La Faye returned the compliment by informing against Rousseau as the author of infamous libels; and Saurin took summary measures to eject the offender from the Café Laurent, whither, it is believed, he never returned.



HOUDART DE LAMOTTE

Frequenter of cafés, courts and salons, who took part against J. B. Rousseau in the couplet war and against Mme Dacier in the dispute of Ancients *v.* Moderns.

But the affair did not end there : Saurin was thrown into the Châtelet and presently released, and Rousseau was sent into exile. His master, the forgiving Baron de Breteuil, who was amongst his protectors, did his best to obtain his recall. Rousseau refused the privilege of returning to France, and wrote to Mme du Châtelet's father in the proudest terms : " I love France well, but I love my honour and truth still better." He was away for twenty years, and returned at length broken in health, dying in 1741 a disappointed man. His last words were a sacred oath that he was innocent. Ten years later a sensation was caused when the will of Boindin was read, in which he stated that Rousseau had never composed the couplets which had been the cause of his exile, and that they had been concocted by a jeweller, Malafer, by Saurin and Lamotte. There was not the faintest evidence of this being the truth, and Voltaire contradicted it.

The Café Procope dealt in quarrels of quite a different kind. Many of them began with Saint-Foix, the dramatist and musketeer, who had won for himself the double wreath of glory in war and in letters. He was a restless, captious kind of individual, who rejoiced in duelling and was always willing to go three parts of the way to a dispute. In strange contrast to this aggressive temperament, he composed fairy-like plays ; and Voisenon, who also frequented the Procope, described him as " something like an inkhorn which scattered rose-water." One day, when Saint-Foix was in his usually hostile mood, one of the king's guards walked into the café, and with a swagger demanded a cup of coffee and a roll for his dinner.

" What a sorry repast ! " remarked Saint-Foix.

The soldier took no notice.

Saint-Foix, appearing preoccupied and bored, repeated his remark again and again, each time in a louder tone :
“ A sorry repast ; a sorry repast ! ”

At length the soldier grew angry and plainly commanded him to be silent ; but Saint-Foix continued until his refrain became unbearable, and the soldier lost his temper, drew his sword, all present took sides, and out they rushed to the nearest square, where a sharp fight ensued. Saint-Foix was wounded, and his opponent, feeling that he had received satisfaction, expressed himself in courteous terms to that effect.

“ If you had killed me, ” remarked the imperturbable Saint-Foix, “ I should have died with my opinion unaltered. A cup of coffee and a roll make but a sorry dinner. ”

The soldier was about to renew the fight, when some guards arrived on the scene and arrested the combatants. An explanation ensued, and to the last Saint-Foix maintained that he did not see why the king's guard should have taken exception to so obvious a truth as that he was about to partake of a very sorry repast. The affair ended in general laughter, but it nevertheless had its pathetic side. For at the Café Procope, many Academicians, many struggling dramatists and broken-down actors, many an angry poet raving against comedians who refused to present his play, and many an aspirant for literary fame who was to starve perhaps before he won it, munched rolls in silence and spun out the single cup of coffee they could pay for in the fear that their next meal might be even less appetising.

The Abbé Pellegrin was one of the impecunious. One day, when this author of tragedies that were hissed

and verses that he could turn out at pleasure by the yard was exerting his wits to get a loan from the wary *claqueur*, Rochette de la Morlière, a new-comer entered the café and began complaining that he was going to be married and had no epithalamium for his wedding. Pellegrin hastened to offer one of his own composition. A deal was soon arranged, and the price agreed upon was twenty sous a verse. The Abbé disappeared. The bridegroom was presently accosted by a stranger, who began a conversation on various subjects, and suddenly making an emphatic gesture said, "By the by, my friend, what price are you paying Pellegrin?" "Twenty sous a verse." "H'm!" "Is that too dear?" "No"—doubtfully—"not if you fixed the length of the poem." "I never thought of doing that." "When is he to bring your epithalamium?" "To-morrow morning." "To-morrow morning!" cried the stranger. "Why, you must be rolling in money!" "What do you mean?" "That you will have to pay for at least a thousand verses." "Oh, what a fraud!" exclaimed the bridegroom, and rushed off to find Pellegrin in his attic. The versifier had just completed his hundredth verse.

It was at the Procope that Piron, Diderot, Fontenelle, and the others discussed literature, politics, philosophy, and religion, and invented a strange vocabulary of expressions. They called religion "Javotte," the soul was "Margot," the Almighty was referred to as "M. de l'Être." Crébillon, La Tour, Carle Vanloo, Marivaux, Rameau, Desfontaines, Fréron and Piron formed a body of journalists of whom Piron was the chief. He was a sort of Hercules, with bushy hair, half-closed eyes, a face not unkindly, but the corners of his mouth turned up in a malicious smile. He was well dressed and proud

of his elegance, but he always had something of a forsaken and tragic air. "It's surprising," said Procope of him, "that such a gay spirit should lodge in such a mournful abode." His poetical nature warred constantly against his clownish nature—and so he wrote tragedies. Grimm said of him: "He was a machine that gave out sallies, sparks, and epigrams. In examining him closely one saw that his shafts clashed and collided in his head, went off like crackers, and rushed helter-skelter by dozens to his lips. In a combat of tongues he was the strongest athlete that ever existed. His repartee was always more terrible even than his attack. That was why M. Voltaire always dreaded a conflict with Piron."

One of their passages at arms—they had any number—was played out at the Procope in later years, and concerned Voltaire's play *Semiramis*. Longchamp tells the story.

When *Semiramis* was played in Paris for the first time, Voltaire was in a fever of anxiety to know how the tragedy would be received. The author's rivals, jealous of his success, had arranged a strong party to bring about the downfall of the piece, led by Piron, and composed of *soldats de Corbulon*, as Voltaire called Crébillon's partisans. To counterbalance this state of affairs Voltaire distributed about four hundred tickets to acquaintances and friends, all of them people "capables de bien claquer et à propos," as Longchamp declared. The leaders of the party in his favour were Thieriot, Lambert, the author, the Abbé de La Mare, Chevalier de Mouhy, Dumolard, who accompanied Voltaire to Berlin on one occasion, and the Chevalier de la Morlière, who was the *chef de claque*, and had much influence in

the pit. Longchamp was given a number of tickets to distribute, and doled them out to the right people. On the day of the performance both parties arrived in full force. The chief parts in the play were acted by Mlle Dumesnil and Lekain.

Voltaire desired to hear an impartial criticism of his play, and betook himself to the Café Procope; which, says Longchamp, was called the Antre de Procope, or Procope's Den, because it was very dark even in the middle of the day, and at night was very badly lit, and because lean and wan poets were often seen there wearing the air of ghosts.

"In this café," continued Longchamp, "which is opposite the Comédie-Française, the tribunal of so-called Aristarques was held for over sixty years, which sat in final judgment upon plays, dramatists and actors. M. de Voltaire wished to appear at the sitting, but disguised and entirely incognito. After leaving the theatres the judges opened in the café what they called their grand session. On the day of the second representation of *Semiramis* Voltaire borrowed the dress of a priest, wore a cassock and long cloak, black stockings, girdle, bands, and even carried a breviary. Nothing was wanting to his disguise. He placed a full wig on his head, without powder and badly dressed, which covered more than half his cheeks, and left little more visible than the tip of a long nose. The wig was crowned by a large three-cornered hat.

"In this get-up the author of *Semiramis* went on foot to the Café de Procope, where he crouched in a corner to await the end of the show, having ordered a *bavaroise*, a roll, and the *Gazette*. Before long the occupants of the pit and the usual café customers arrived. They

belonged to all parties. They soon began to discuss the new tragedy. Partisans and adversaries pleaded their cause warmly and adduced their reasons. Some who were impartial said what they thought and recited some of the fine verses. All this time, Voltaire, his glasses on his nose, his head bent over his *Gazette*, pretended to be reading, but in reality was listening to the discussion. He profited by some of the more reasonable observations, but suffered much from the absurd remarks that were made and which he had no power to contradict. This put him in a bad temper. Thus for an hour and a half he had the courage and patience to hear *Semiramis* jeered at and discussed, without saying a word himself. At length all the pretentious arbitrators of the fame of authors withdrew without having converted each other. M. de Voltaire went out also, took a cab in the Rue Mazarine, and reached home at eleven o'clock." Longchamp was terrified to see him appear in his strange disguise, and took him for a spectre or the shade of Ninus out of his own play.

CHAPTER IV

THE SALONS AND A SUPPER PARTY

THE men met at the cafés and the women flocked to the salons. These centres of wit and gossip, where the personal note was never lacking, had blossomed in the first half of the seventeenth century, had faded somewhat in brilliancy towards the close of it, and at the time when Mme du Châtelet left Paris to bury herself with her kindred spirit at Cirey, had taken a new lease of life which was to make them more popular than ever before. The divine Emilie did as others did when she was in Paris, but she did not become famous in the capital as a *salonnière*, nor was she one of the favourite guests at the receptions of her friends. She was fond of gaiety, ever ready to join in supper-parties, to go to the opera, to shine at balls, to drive in the Park, to visit people and to receive her friends in return, but she lacked the gifts and qualities essential to the atmosphere of the salon proper. She could not keep the conversational ball rolling in the light and airy spirit peculiar to French wits. She disdained the affectations and mannerisms which were the fashion. She knew nothing of drawing out the accomplishments of others and merging her own personality in theirs. She was, in short, too much wanting in adaptability to keep her intellect in tune with the general trend of talk, and was a discordant factor, blundering like an intrusive

beetle in a spider's web through the delicate fabric of this particular form of social gathering. Emilie's thoughts were too large and unconventional to match the neat mosaic pattern of salon conversation. She was happier at Court. But she belonged to the circles all the same in the guise of a semi-stranger, and entered them in the wake of Voltaire.

Voltaire, although not very fond of salons himself, found it difficult to escape them all. One of the brightest of those which opened in the early years of the eighteenth century was held at the Hôtel de Sully. Every qualification that a salon should have was to be found there. It was celebrated for wit, rank, culture, good manners, good taste, learning that was not pedantic, literature that was more than talented, and a certain freedom of speech which was never dissociated from perfect courtesy. Mme de Villars was there and Voltaire was her protégé, Chaulieu belonged to it and he was the protégé of Mme du Maine. Mme de Flamarens, the beautiful, the witty, the virtuous, was a bright particular star. Voltaire wrote a verse to her when she burnt her muff because it was out of fashion, and it was inscribed on the urn which held its ashes :

Je fus manchon, je suis cendre légère :
Flamarens me brûla, je l'ai pu mériter,
Et l'on doit cesser d'exister
Quand on commence à lui déplaire.¹

That was quite in the spirit of salon airs and graces. Fontenelle was there, of course. He went everywhere. So did Caumartin, as long as it was select enough.

¹ Once I was a muff, now I am nothing but ashes :
Flamarens burnt me, perhaps I deserved it—
One should cease to exist the moment one displeases her.

Voltaire was as much at home as any one, and worked at the *Henriade* as a safeguard against too much frivolity. Président Hénault, and the Comte d'Argenson, who always had a word to say about every one and everything, were frequent guests, as well as Mme de Gontaut, who was thought to be like Cleopatra, stung by an asp. Coming one day from the Duc de Sully's house, Voltaire was set upon and beaten by the lackeys of the Chevalier de Rohan, and when a few months later he asked to be allowed to revenge the insult at the sword's point, he was clapped into the Bastille—that was for the second time.

The Maréchale d'Anville was also famed for her salon, which was one of the first where the new philosophy had its birth, and Voltaire was never far from its cradle. The prettiest salon of the day was the Société du Temple. The room was light, decorated with mirrors and white wainscoting and woodwork. The curtains were of rose-pink silk. The Comtesse de Boufflers, mistress of the Prince de Conti, was its presiding genius, and its aims and ends were more luxurious than serious, appealing rather to the tastes and habits of the divine Emilie in her lighter moods than to those of the poet-philosopher.

The Palais-Royal was open to intimates at all times, and very gay were the gatherings there. All the Regent's friends were welcome: the Marquise de Polignac, the Baronne de Talleyrand, the famous Mme de Luxembourg, who went everywhere; the Marquise de Fleury, the Comtesse de Boufflers, the Beauvau-Craons when they were in Paris; Mme de Blot, who was quite unresponsive to the Duke's advances; and Fontenelle, whom the Regent admired so much that one day he said to him, "M. de Fontenelle, would you like to live

in the Palais-Royal? A man who has written the *Pluralité des Mondes* ought to live in a palace." "Prince," replied the poet, "the wise man thinks little of position, and does not care for changes; but since you are so pressing I will come and live at the Palais-Royal and bring my arms and baggage to-morrow—that is to say, my slippers and my nightcap." In gratitude for the favours showered upon him, Fontenelle gave the Regent his *Eléments de la Géométrie de l'Infini*, remarking as he did so, "There are only seven or eight of the geometers in Europe who understand my book, and I assure you I am not one of them."

Fontenelle had hundreds of friends beside the Regent, and was especially made much of by all the *salonières*. At this time there was a kind of hereditary succession of hostesses. Mme de Lambert was one of the most important and most cultured. Président Hénault said it was necessary to be in her salon to get into the French Academy. "On one day of the week," he continued, "people dine there, and the afternoon is spent in all kinds of academic conferences, but in the evening the entertainment as well as the actors change. Mme de Lambert gives supper to a more gallant company. She then delights in receiving the people who are agreeable to her. Her manner does not change on this account. She preaches *belle galanterie* to those who prefer it. I belong to both schools. I dogmatise in the morning and sing songs at night."

It was concerning these famous Tuesday meetings that the Duchesse du Maine wrote a letter to Lamotte which almost rivals in style those of Mme de Sévigné. She had been roused to anger because Mme de Staal had read aloud before the Tuesday gathering part of a

letter she had written. Lamotte, however, reassured her as to its reception and she wrote to thank him :

“O Tuesday, deserving of respect, O imposing Tuesday, Tuesday more dreaded by me than all the other days of the week! Tuesday which has witnessed so many times the triumph of the Fontenelle, the Lamotte, the Mairan, and the Mongault. Tuesday on which the amiable Abbé de Bragelonne was introduced, and, still more, Tuesday over which Mme de Lambert presides. I received with extreme gratitude the letter you had the kindness to write me. You changed my dread into affection, and I find you more agreeable than the most delightful of Shrove Tuesdays. But one thing is still wanting for my glory—it is to be received at your august senate. You wish to exclude me in the quality of Princess, but could I not be admitted simply as Bergère?¹ Then, indeed, I could say that Tuesday was the most perfect day of my life.”

Needless to say she worked her will, to the temporary discomfort of the Academicians.

Mme de Tencin frequented Mme de Lambert's house in order to obtain the right of succession. In this she did very well for herself, because Mme de Lambert was of high rank and distinction and unimpeachable reputation, whereas Mme de Tencin was bourgeoisie and one of the worst offenders against morality; a type of eighteenth-century laxity. “After the death of Mme de Lambert,” said Trublet, Fontenelle's biographer, “the Tuesday was at Mme de Tencin's, but passing from the Rue Richelieu to the Rue Saint-Honoré the Tuesday was remodelled.” Mme de Geoffrin was Mme de Tencin's successor.

¹ Her *nom de Parnasse*, used chiefly by her friend Sainte-Aulaire.

“So long as Mme de Tencin lived,” wrote Marmontel, “Mme Geoffrin was in the habit of going to see her, and the cunning old woman penetrated the motive of her visits so well that she used to say to her guests, ‘Do you know why la Geoffrin comes here? It is to see what she can collect from my inventory.’ And, indeed, at her death a part of her company, and the best part, had passed into the new society.”

When Fontenelle, who was accustomed to dine at Mme de Tencin’s almost every day, was told that she was dead, he said, “Ah, well, I shall have to dine with la Geoffrin.”

No study of an eighteenth-century Frenchwoman could be exhaustive without some reference to Mme de Tencin, who embodied many of the worst characteristics of the period.

To contrast Mme de Tencin with Mme du Châtelet is to contrast utter heartlessness, selfishness and depravity with tastes and actions which were far more free and untrammelled than people consider wise to-day, perhaps, but which were natural and honest if not invariably honourable, and which were based on a fixed code and according to certain standards then in vogue. Mme du Châtelet was the large-minded individual to whom special laws must be applied; Mme de Tencin, on the other hand, was beyond the pale of all law. Mme du Châtelet did things of which others could not approve, because she felt they were right for her; Mme de Tencin deliberately did the wrong things, and no amount of condemnation deterred her for a moment from the path she had chosen. The only point in her favour, which at the same time is a reflection on the morals of the day, was that she was clever enough to live as

she did without being ostracised. Because she was without scruples she was probably the happier of the two women. She knew how to propitiate others, a step to which Mme du Châtelet rarely condescended; and she seems to have gloried in publicity, whereas Mme du Châtelet went only so far as to disregard appearances.

There were too many differences in their condition and standing for them to be good friends. Mme de Tencin was a woman of the lower classes, Mme du Châtelet was a great lady. The former had led the life of the gutter, the *alcôve*, the gaming-house, and the fringe of society. She had been known as a *femme galante* before she became a *femme de salon*, and her company was largely composed of lovers, who were so numerous and well-known that their names were on everybody's lips. Mme du Châtelet's circle, if not spotless, was at least outwardly respectable, and she remained in favour with the devout Marie Leczinska, which was a guarantee that she had not stepped too far outside the *convenances*. Perhaps the strongest bond the two women possessed in common was their determination to take advantage to the full of such liberty as had become possible under the relaxed conditions of the Regency. In their different ways each was remarkable, but whereas in the case of Mme du Châtelet to know all may be to forgive at least half, in Mme de Tencin's case the more that is known the more she appears unpardonable.

Mme de Tencin made several unsuccessful overtures to Emilie; she wanted to win over Voltaire through her. Voltaire did not like her. Emilie, who was always good-natured, even though she wore an air of superiority towards women acquaintances, treated her

with calm indifference, perhaps more especially because she read her intentions. Mme de Tencin was one of those (Clairaut was another) who advised Voltaire to give up writing plays. His retort, delivered in an obvious and courteous manner, was *Zaire*. That had happened in 1731.

In 1736 Mme de Tencin opposed him when he was trying to get into the Academy. Later she showed great interest in his diplomatic visit to the King of Prussia, and acted in an underhand manner towards Mme du Châtelet.

Voltaire had been on more or less friendly terms with Mme de Tencin before he knew Mme du Châtelet, for in 1726 they were both in the Bastille, and he wrote to Mme de Ferriol to assure Mme de Tencin that one of his greatest griefs whilst in prison was to know that she was a fellow-captive. "We were like Pyramus and Thisbe," he declared, "separated only by a wall, but we were not able to kiss through a chink in the partition." Later, when the opportunity for kissing came, Voltaire had no desire to make use of it. Indeed, if it had not been that they possessed mutual friends, the ill-feeling between them might have developed into open disagreement. Mme de Ferriol was Mme de Tencin's sister and the mother of Pont de Veyle and d'Argental, who was Voltaire's *bon ange*. Saint-Simon said of the two sisters, "Both are beautiful and amiable; Mme de Ferriol has more gentleness and gallantry, the other far more wit, intrigue and profligacy." Duclos condemned Mme de Tencin without mercy. He agreed that she was pretty when young, and that as she grew old she preserved her charms of wit; but he accused her of having a genius for intrigue, of being thoroughly

corrupt and utterly unscrupulous in her endeavours to advance the interests of her friends, and in particular of her scapegrace brother the Cardinal.

Born at Grenoble in 1682, Mme de Tencin was intended for the religious life, but feeling that she would prefer to make a stir in the world, she had her vows revoked by a pontifical bull, and entered upon a career of which not the least discreditable episodes were her liaison with the Regent, which came to an end through her rapacity, her abandonment of her son d'Alembert in 1717, and the suicide at her house of Councillor Lafresnay, who left a testament to witness that she was to blame for his violent death.

But when she installed herself in the Rue Saint-Honoré, men of letters and men about town crowded to her house, and were nothing loth to avail themselves not only of her ambitious projects on their behalf, but of more personal favours which she dealt forth with no unsparing or partial hand. The beginnings of the salon were humble enough. Fontenelle was one of the first to come, dressed in his large fair wig, in a light suit and a yellow waistcoat. Lamotte wore a smart red cloak. Saurin, the mathematician, was negligent of his appearance, as befitted his profession, but he was perhaps the most talkative and assertive of all. These four drank their morning chocolate together, and ate ham toasted on a spit, Mme de Tencin herself serving her three guests. After Mme de Lambert's death, Marivaux and Mairan took the places of Lamotte and Saurin, and four new friends joined the circle—Duclos, De Boze, Astruc, and Mirabaud, the seven forming a permanent court, a respectable senate known by the name of the "seven sages."

Mirabaud was secretary to the Duchesse d'Orléans, De Boze was a numismatist, Astruc a doctor who had invented a new specific against small-pox; Duclos was a *littérateur*, a libertine, and a cynic; Mairan, who was later to cross intellectual swords with Mme du Châtelet on the subject of fire, was a great friend of Mme de Geoffrin's. He was a facile and courteous talker, was famed for his politeness, and wrote instructive and agreeable letters. He was the author of the *Traité de l'Aurore boréale*, which Voltaire called "l'aurore de sa gloire."

Perhaps Marivaux was the most interesting of the seven. He depicted his hostess under the thin disguise of Mme Dorsin in *Marianne*, giving her credit for being "an admirable conversationalist."

The novelist was as original in his life as in his works. "I would rather be humbly seated on the last row of the little group of original authors," he wrote, "than proudly placed among the front rank of the numerous herd of literary apes." His originality lay more in his manner of expressing his ideas than in the ideas themselves. His muse was a coquette.

It was said of his career that it resembled that of a pretty woman, and that it followed the course of the seasons, opening with a delightful spring, merging into the full bloom of summer, followed by a sad autumn and a desolate winter.

In his day this author was given a place in the front rank, but his work did not live. Voltaire said of him that he knew all the bypaths of the human heart, but not the main road.

When Marivaux was a young man he fell in love with a girl who was very beautiful and more youthful than she was artless. The day before the wedding was

arranged to take place the lover stole softly into his lady's boudoir to speak to her for the last time before she became his wife. She did not hear him enter the room, so busy was she practising various facial expressions in front of her mirror—the amorous, the pensive, the smiling, the sighing, and the provocative. Seeing that she must be the most hardened of coquettes, Marivaux walked out again without saying a word. He never returned.

Before long Mme de Tencin's salon was open to all : financiers, for her guests gambled heavily in stocks and shares according to the system of the notorious John Law ; to courtiers, soldiers, and men of the long robe. Those who did not know the salon in the Rue Saint-Honoré did not know Paris. Chesterfield, Prior, and Bolingbroke were amongst the English there. The usual society amusements were in vogue : they wrote portraits, evolved maxims and epigrams, and discussed problems of sentiment.

The salon was on the threshold of the Academy, and about a year after refusing (on the death of Sainte-Aulaire) to intervene on behalf of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon's candidate, the Abbé de La Bletterie, Mme de Tencin made a campaign for the "good devil," Abbé Girard, against the Abbé de Bernis. She was beaten after a hot fight. The election of Marivaux, in 1736, was a triumph for her. Voltaire was his opponent, and swore to succeed, while Mme du Châtelet canvassed everywhere for him, and Richelieu did all he could. "Marivaux has been elected unanimously," she wrote to Richelieu in triumph, when the result was known. All the seven sages were already Academicians, or were about to join the immortal Forty. When Montesquieu,

Piron, Helvétius, Autreau and Danchet were added to the seven, Mme de Tencin called her salon her menagerie. Marmontel paid a visit there in his youth, and would no doubt have become a frequent guest had he not been advised by his guardian, La Poplinière, that to dawdle in ladies' drawing-rooms was an occupation likely to interfere with serious work. At any rate he left an interesting picture of Mme de Tencin's receptions :

“In spite of his repugnance to see me escape from him,” wrote Marmontel of La Poplinière in his Memoirs, “he could not refuse Mme de Tencin, to whom he was respectful out of policy, when she requested that he would take me to her house to read my tragedy. The piece was *Aristomène*. The audience was respectable. I there saw assembled Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Mairan, Marivaux, the young Helvétius, Astruc, and others, all men of letters or science, and in the midst of them a woman of excellent talents and profound judgment, but who, enveloped in her exterior of plainness and simplicity, had rather the air of the housekeeper than the mistress. This was Mme de Tencin. I had occasion for all my lungs to make myself heard by Fontenelle ; and, though very near his ear, I was obliged to pronounce every word very loudly and forcibly. But he listened to me with so much kindness, that he made the efforts of this painful reading pleasing. It was, as you may well conceive, extremely monotonous, without inflexion or colour ; yet I was honoured with the suffrages of the assembly. I had even the honour of dining with Mme de Tencin, and from that day I should have been inscribed on her list of dinner visitors ; but M. de la Poplinière had no difficulty in persuading me that there was too much wit there for me ; and, indeed, I soon perceived that

each guest arrived ready to play his part, and that the desire of exhibiting did not always leave conversation the liberty of following its facile and natural course. It was a question as to who should seize the flying moment most quickly to air his epigram, his story, his anecdote, his maxim, or his light and pointed satire ; and to make or find this opportunity the course they took was often unnatural.

“In Marivaux impatience to give proof of acuteness and sagacity was visibly betrayed. Montesquieu, with more calm, waited till the ball came to him, but he expected his turn. Mairan watched opportunity. Astruc did not deign to wait. Fontenelle alone let it come without seeking ; and he used the attention with which he was listened to so soberly, that his acute remarks and charming stories never occupied more than a moment. Helvétius, attentive and discreet, sat collecting for a future day. His was an example that I should not have had the constancy to follow ; and therefore to me this society had but little attraction.

“It was not the same with that of a lady to whom my happy star had introduced me at Mme de Tencin’s, and who from that time had the kindness to invite me to go and see her. This lady, who was then beginning to choose and compose her literary society, was Mme Geoffrin. I answered her invitation too late, and it was again M. de la Poplinière who prevented me from going to her house. ‘What should you do there?’ said he ; ‘it is but another rendezvous of fine wits.’”

Walpole drew a good likeness of Mme de Tencin’s successor. After crediting her with a vast amount of common sense, penetration of character, the power of portraiture, the knack of exacting great court and

attention, he admits that she had little taste and less knowledge, that she tried to obtain influence in order to advance the interests of the authors under her protection, and concludes his remarks with, "She was bred under the famous Mme Tencin, who advised her never to refuse any man; for, said her mistress, though nine in ten should not care a farthing for you, the tenth may live to be an useful friend."

Mme de Geoffrin's salon first opened in 1741. Among her guests were Algarotti, Voisenon, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Thomas, Morellet, d'Alembert, Diderot and Saint-Lambert.

It was at Mme de Geoffrin's house that the argument between Mairan and Mme du Châtelet began; and when the discussion grew heated and Mairan appealed to his hostess, the latter said, to calm him, "Sir, surely you would not draw a sword against a fan." History does not say that the fair Emilie rose upon these words and left the room, but the action would have been in keeping with her character. She was not particularly in favour at Mme de Geoffrin's house. This lady did not care for women, and the only one who was allowed to be present at her most important dinners was Mlle de Lespinasse. But that was later. Mme de Geoffrin's salon did not attain to its most glorious heights until after the death of Emilie, which occurred in the same year as that of Mme de Tencin. It was said that Mme de Geoffrin was fortunate. In 1749 her husband died. Till then he had taken it upon himself to order the dinners and order them frugally—at supper there was sometimes only chicken, spinach, and an omelette. He left her a fortune, and Mme de Tencin died and left her good company, and there she was without a rival.

The latter statement, however, is not literally true. She had a serious rival in Mme du Deffand, and one of the few points which they had in common was their perfect accord on the question of Mme du Châtelet, who they agreed added nothing to the festivity and harmony of salons.

The relation between Mme du Deffand and Mme du Châtelet is one of the most astonishing things of its kind. Appearances may have been deceitful. If they were not, the two women must be regarded as rival wits who embraced whilst they would have preferred to choke one another, and made the prettiest possible speeches full of compliments whilst in an undertone they made remarks about one another hardly suitable for publication. Mme du Châtelet had a virtue above all price—she never spoke ill of people behind their backs, but she was not nearly so circumspect in their presence. Voltaire was Mme du Deffand's friend. He tried to make Mme du Châtelet her friend too. Emilie had one fault natural to a jealous woman—she was not fond of the friends of her lover. Still an intimacy existed, and Voltaire bracketed them together in one of his letters as “two most lovable women.” In his letter to Mme du Deffand when Mme du Châtelet died, he wrote that Emilie sincerely loved her, and that she had spoken only two days before her death of the pleasure she would have in seeing her in Paris. But then Voltaire always wrote pretty phrases. In the spring of 1749 they met, perhaps not infrequently, at supper, but it must be believed that there were insurmountable prejudices on both sides, which rendered such meetings more or less of a shock to both.

Emilie was too much of everything to please Mme

du Deffand's fastidious tastes—too pedantic, too frivolous, too positive, too enthusiastic, too angular, and too direct. On the other hand, Mme du Deffand had a number of peculiarities which accorded but ill with these qualities, and irritation, exasperation, groans and sparks were the result of the clash of character. The footing on which they stood was both caressing and menacing, the armed neutrality of enemies at peace; the only difference being that Mme du Châtelet was the more inclined of the two to uphold the armistice, while Mme du Deffand was longing for the opportunity of becoming aggressive. What else made her dare to pen such an outrageous portrait of any woman whose eyes it might reach? and why, if she saw it, did not Mme du Châtelet retort? It was thought that she wished to do so, but that she died before her chance came. There is no evidence to show when the portrait was written. However, there is in existence a letter from Mme de Vintimille to Mme du Deffand written at Fontainebleau on October 7, 1739, which refers to a description of Emilie, but it is hardly safe to assume that this was more than a mild sketch which might have been a forerunner of the other. "You mentioned Mme du Châtelet in your last—I am very anxious to see her, because, since you have favoured me with her portrait, I fancy myself perfectly acquainted with her. I am much obliged to you for having given me your real opinion of her, as I like to be guided by your judgment. I must endeavour to meet her somewhere, and to make the King of Prussia the subject of our conversation, admitting that she deigns to listen to me; for probably I shall strike her as being very foolish."

The king's favourite no doubt referred to Mme du



MADAME DU DEFFAND

Who wrote a scathing pen-portrait of Mme du Châtelet

Châtelet's well-known jealousy of Frederick the Great, who at that time, if the date of the letter be correct, was still Prince Royal; but could she have discussed so amiably and have been so interested in a woman described in such scathing expressions as appear in the well-known portrait which ran through the *ruelles* and was thought to be very amusing, in spite of its ill-nature? Thomas said that its author reminded him of a naïve doctor of his acquaintance: "My friend fell ill," he remarked; "I treated him; he died; I dissected him."

"Imagine," wrote Mme du Deffand, "a tall, hard and withered woman, narrow-chested, with large limbs, enormous feet, a very small head, a thin face, pointed nose, two small sea-green eyes, her colour dark, her complexion florid, her mouth flat, her teeth set far apart, and very much decayed: there is the face of the beautiful Emilie, a face with which she is so well pleased that she spares nothing for the sake of setting it off. Her manner of dressing her hair, her adornments, her top-knots, her jewellery, all are in profusion; but as she wishes to be lovely in spite of nature, and as she wishes to appear magnificent in spite of fortune, she is obliged in order to obtain superfluities to go without necessaries, such as under-garments and other trifles.

"She was born with sufficient intellect, and the desire to appear as though she had a great deal made her prefer to study the most abstract sciences rather than more general and pleasant branches of knowledge. She thought she would gain a greater reputation by this peculiarity, and a more decided superiority over all other women.

"She did not limit herself to this ambition; she wished

to be a princess as well, and she became so, not by the grace of God nor by that of the king, but by her own act. This absurdity went on, like the others; one became accustomed to regard her as a princess of the theatre, and one almost forgot that she was a woman of rank.

“Madame worked so hard to appear what she was not, that no one knew what she really was; even her faults were perhaps not natural; they may have had something to do with her pretensions, her want of respect with regard to the state of princess, her dullness in that of the *savante*, and her stupidity in that of a *jolie femme*.

“However much of a celebrity Mme du Châtelet may be, she would not be satisfied if she were not celebrated, and that is what she desired in becoming the friend of M. de Voltaire. To him she owes the *éclat* of her life, and it is to him that she will owe immortality.”

Many things may be forgiven the witty, sharp-tongued, sightless *amie* of Walpole, but this ill-natured composition deserves no pardon. The truth in the background which was always to be found in Mme du Deffand's caricatures makes the whole none the less insulting. Mme du Deffand was a victim to ennui. Perhaps she once suffered more than ordinarily from that terrifying complaint, and set to work upon the above in a drastic attempt to obtain relief. It was not a fair return for Voltaire's complimentary little impromptu written at her house only a few years previously :

Qui vous voit et qui vous entend
Perd bientôt sa philosophie ;
Et tout sage avec du Deffand
Voudrait en fou passer sa vie.

Mme du Deffand's salon was among the gayest and brightest of all. At one time or another most of the famous men and women were to be seen there. Hénault was, of course, the demigod, Pont-de-Veyle the standing dish. M. and Mme de Beauvau, better known at Lunéville, were great friends with their hostess. The Chevalier de Boufflers kept the circle amused at his gay sallies, and told stories of his mother, the charming Marquise. The Comtesse de Boufflers, too, *l'Idole du Temple*, was never long absent, and the Duchesse de Boufflers, who had fortunately by then changed her name to Luxembourg and thus saved oceans of confusion, was a very prominent guest. She was called *la chatte rose* on account of her beauty and certain not unfeline propensities. The following little story suggests them. A verse about her was running through Paris. It began :

Quand Boufflers parut à la cour
On crut voir la mère d'amour.

Some said it was by Nivernais, others by Tressan. She suspected the latter of being its author. Discussing it, she remarked to him, "It is so well made, that not only should I pardon the one who wrote it, but if I could find him I should reward him with a kiss." "It is I," replied the expectant Tressan. For his pains he received a couple of resounding boxes on the ear.

There was besides the Duchesse de la Vallière, whose house Mme du Châtelet frequently visited. The duchess was the daughter of the Duc d'Uzès and much inclined to gallantry. The Comtesse de Choiseul-Beaupré, called *la petite dévote*, Mme de Flamarens, Mme d'Aiguillon, the Princesse de Talmont, the Maréchale de Mirepoix and many others, formed a representative and brilliant group, typical of the society of the day.

Sometimes a small number of them arranged another kind of entertainment—a supper, a picnic in the country, or a water-party. Longchamp, in describing Mme du Châtelet's ordinary habits, gives an account of one such an occasion on which both she and Mme du Deffand were present. It has been quoted as typical of the free manners of the period.

Mme du Châtelet, he said, "passed the greater part of the morning with her books and writings, and did not like to be disturbed. When she stopped work, however, she did not seem to be the same woman. The serious air gave place to gaiety, and she gave herself up with the greatest enthusiasm to the delights of society. She might have been taken for the most frivolous woman of the world. Although she was forty years old, she was always the life of the company, and amused the ladies of society who were much younger than she with her witty sallies. When their husbands were with the army or called away by other duties, these ladies, to amuse themselves, sometimes arranged pleasure parties, little trips into the country or to neighbouring towns, where they dined or supped in some hostelry or tea-garden in the neighbourhood of Paris. Whilst I was in Mme du Châtelet's service I only saw one of these joyous parties. It was a supper which took place at Chaillot, in an inn called the *Maison Rouge*, a sign which, as far as I believe, has since been changed. (In this evasion Longchamp was perhaps wise. He did not wish the hostelry to be identified too easily.) I was sent there the evening before by Mme du Châtelet to order a copious and dainty repast for a company of six distinguished individuals. The five who with her formed this little party were Mme la Duchesse de Boufflers, Mmes les Marquises de Mailly, de Gouvernet,

du Deffand, and Mme de la Poplinière. The carriages belonging to these ladies, after some turns in the Bois de Boulogne, arrived at the rendezvous at the hour arranged. It was summer, and very hot. Although lightly clad, these ladies, when they arrived, began making themselves comfortable, and took off part of their dress and ornaments, even that which propriety demanded them to keep on. I have already said that they were not shy before their servants."

At Chaillot the friends were together *en famille*. They helped themselves. The servants of the Maison Rouge placed the dishes they brought on a sideboard in an antechamber. They were fetched from there by the ladies' lackeys. Longchamp directed the proceedings. At dessert the lackeys supped in their turn in another room and Longchamp did the honours. Wine was no more spared there than in the banqueting-hall, and they were no less gay. "The ladies amused themselves vastly. We could not doubt that. We could hear them sing and laugh, and perhaps they would have danced if they had only had partners and violins; but these things had not entered into their plans. They did not think of leaving the Maison Rouge until five o'clock in the morning. Then the carriages came to take them home. They found in them mantles or pelisses which their maids had had the thoughtfulness to put in for them, and which were not useless to the ladies considering the heavy dew which was falling. Arrived at Paris they separated and went to their own hotels." Longchamp remained to pay the bill; he concluded that Mme du Châtelet had not borne the expenses alone, and that the "pique-nique" had been a joint affair. He followed to Paris on foot.

Perhaps of all forms of entertainment Mme du Châtelet loved the theatre best. She had good histrionic powers, and she had been known to warble through a whole opera in an evening to please her guests at Cirey. Nothing delighted her more than to take part in one of Voltaire's plays, either at Sceaux, Anet, Lunéville, or wherever her friends arranged for such a performance.

Her early letters are full of references to the opera and the actresses and singers, many of whom she knew personally because they stayed in the châteaux whilst rehearsals were taking place. Amongst them was the celebrated Mlle Gaussin, who created the rôles of *Zaire* and *Alzire* and played in *Zulime*, *Mahomet* and *Nanine*. It was this lady's boast that she had no prejudices: "I go where the wind blows me, I love when it pleases me," she said; "I listen only to folly, and I laugh at the wisdom of others." Truly a woman after Mme du Châtelet's own heart. Another favourite was Mlle Le Maure, who surpassed herself in *Issé*, the opera by Lamotte and Destouches in which Emilie herself excelled. In *Les Eléments*, by Roi and Destouches, "the singer's voice was better than ever," but even her charming performance could not redeem Quinault and Lulli's opera *Athys*. Mlle de Seine, whom Mme du Châtelet calls by her married name, Dufresne, was to play in *Alzire*, but Le Franc begged Voltaire to allow her to take part in his *Zoraïde* instead, and this caused a feeling of unpleasantness between the rival dramatists, which was settled in the end by the "naïve, youthful and gracious Gaussin" appearing in *Alzire*.

Mme du Châtelet never rested. She went to the opera with Mme de Saint-Pierre, to the comedy with Mme d'Aiguillon; she walked in the park with Fontenelle,

and in the Jardin du Roi ; she supped with Mme de Rohan, with Mme de Luxembourg, with *la petite Crève-cœur*, and most frequently of all with Mme de Brancas. At this time the last-named lady showed her great friendship, inspired thereto by Richelieu. Emilie said that the Duke's interest in herself was a virtue in the eyes of Mme de Brancas.

The duchess was quite a well-known figure at Court. Born in 1676, her maiden name was Marie-Angélique Fremyn de Moras. She was an heiress. When she was nineteen it was proposed that she should marry the Comte de Duras, but the plan fell through and the Duchesse du Maine, whose favourite she was, helped her to make a better match with the Duc de Villars-Brancas. "Never did any one appear more like the goddess of youth," wrote Saint-Simon of the young duchess ; "she had all the charm and all the necessary gaiety. She danced ravishingly."

In 1703 Mme de Brancas was appointed dame d'honneur to Madame ; more than forty years later she took the same post in the household of the shy and unprepossessing dauphine, Marie-Thérèse d'Espagne. She did her best to keep her mistress bright and cheerful, but was hopelessly unsuccessful. When the Spanish princess died, a year after her marriage, her household was re-formed for the new dauphine, Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, and Mme de Brancas retained the post of her chief lady.

Mme de Brancas was a very intimate friend of Richelieu's. Her son, the Duc de Lauraguais, married first Mlle Félicité d'O, and later one of the charming Milles de Nesle. The first Mme de Lauraguais died at the age of nineteen, and Mme du Châtelet, who had only

recently lost her baby son, sympathised deeply with Mme de Brancas in her bereavement. "Her letter touched me to tears," she wrote to Richelieu; "it would make the rocks weep, and I do not pride myself on being made of stone. Was it not sad to see this flower cut in its first bloom?" But in those days life was too full of incident to allow of much time for mourning, and the round of gaiety was soon resumed. There were country visits for Mme du Châtelet to pay: a week in the company of Du Fay at Saint-Maur, the gay home of the Condés; a week at Chantilly, where she felt like the heroine of a romance as she sat in a wood within sound of the sweet murmur of a fountain; a rush journey to Créteil, where her mother lived. She travelled a hundred leagues there and back in five days, without going to bed, "un pied chaussé et l'autre nu." In the intervals there were little trips to Versailles, Fontainebleau, and to the Château de Madrid, where Mlle de Charolais lived; and the afternoon visits in town never ceased; to the Hôtel de Richelieu, to the rooms of the Chevalier d'Hautefort, to call upon the Venetian Ambassadors, and so forth and so on through the endless list of her friends.

Besides she read all the good books that appeared, and many unworthy of the qualification. Montesquieu's *Causes de la Décadence de l'Empire Romain* she did not regard as up to the standard of the same author's *Lettres Persanes*. *The Tale of a Tub* she thought very pleasant and very extraordinary. The *Vie de Turenne* she recommended to Richelieu because he loved to be bored intellectually. In short, during the few months she spent in Paris in the early autumn of 1734 and spring of 1735 Mme du Châtelet's days were as busy and full as any

could be, and the wonder of it was that through it all she prosecuted her studies and never lost interest in them or her pleasure in trifles. In the *Traité du Bonheur* she boasts that she laughed more than anybody at puppet-shows, and that to her a new casket, a piece of furniture or a porcelain vase were objects of veritable delight. Not one of the frivolous joys of life was too frivolous for her. The activity of her mind and the natural simplicity of her character occasioned a bizarre struggle between work and play. In Paris the latter gained most of the day. At Cirey she applied herself unrestrainedly to the former. She, as well as Voltaire, welcomed the quiet of the terrestrial paradise.

CHAPTER V

A PARADISE ON EARTH

IT was the summer of 1735 before the lovers returned to Cirey. Voltaire had been paying a visit to Lunéville, where he stayed until the second week in June. He wrote to Thieriot, "Here I am in a Court, though no courtier; I hope to live here like the mice in a house, which live none the less gaily because they do not know the master and his family. I am not made for princes, and still less for princesses." Nevertheless he managed to find much entertainment at the ducal Court. "Voltaire seems to be enjoying himself marvelously in Lorraine," wrote the fair Emilie, "and I am delighted. I am not at all like a dog in the manger. He has seen all the princes and princesses, has been to balls, the comedy, has had his plays acted, rehearsed the actresses, and, above all, he sees much of Mme de Richelieu, and appears enchanted." But his time was not all given to frivolity. Whilst in Lorraine he visited a scientific institute admirably arranged and little known. The large hall was filled with scientific appliances, especially relevant to the Newtonian system. The instruments were valued at some ten thousand crowns, and most of them had been constructed by a simple locksmith who had studied philosophy and was sent by Leopold, Duc de Lorraine, to gain a knowledge of his subject in England.

When Voltaire was back in Cirey he began to turn his attention to science. "Verses have gone out of fashion in Paris," he wrote to Cideville in April 1735; "every one is beginning to reason, to turn geometrician or natural philosopher. Sentiment, imagination, and the graces have been banished." Was Mme du Châtelet in any way responsible for this point of view? She has been blamed for causing him to subdue his highest creative genius, and she has been praised for keeping him in France when he might otherwise have settled permanently in another country. Surely the praise cancels the blame!

"I have returned to my cherished country," sighed Voltaire in utter relief, as he set to work afresh. The château was not yet finished, and was in no fit state to receive guests. Emilie had wished for a visit from Richelieu, but she warned him that in coming he would run dangers of being badly lodged, of finding a hundred workmen in his way, in short, of not being treated well in any respect—if it could be called not well, seeing that he was awaited with the eagerness of the tenderest friendship. She wrote to Maupertuis that she was happier than Christina of Sweden who left her kingdom to run after pseudo-scientists, whereas she (Mme de Cirey) gathered together those for whom the Northern queen might have searched a good deal farther off than Rome; but in spite of this boast no savants were in evidence at the moment, and the Cirey colony was composed solely of Voltaire, Emilie herself, her little son, and his tutor Linant. The latter was a thorn in Emilie's flesh. He was one of Voltaire's unsuccessful protégés. Voltaire's kindness to him was quite pathetic, he merited it so little. It was one of the great man's best traits

to be generous to the undeserving, to give them time and temper and money, and then be balked of the reward he had a right to look for. All this was an excellent example in patience and charity for Emilie. She bore it sometimes in silence, sometimes like an angry hen protecting a chick for which she feared the onslaught of a hawk.

Voltaire had first concerned himself with Linant at the close of 1731, and presently told Cideville that he made verses full of imagery and harmony and was worthy of his goodwill. Thinking he showed great promise, Voltaire made several attempts to interest people in Linant, all of which failed without exception; and in the spring of 1735 he decided to make him tutor at Cirey. He was then already becoming disillusioned, for his protégé was idle, ignorant, and wrote "like a woman who writes badly and cannot even spell." Voltaire, seeing the young man would be destitute without help, decided that it would be an advantage for him to stay in the country for a few months and teach a child whose requirements were not exacting and would give him time for study. Linant had few of the qualifications of a tutor. He stammered, was short-sighted, and knew very little Latin. It was proposed that the marquise should teach the classics to the tutor, who was to pass on to the son what he received from the mother. That was quite a Voltairian plan. But M. du Châtelet's consent had to be obtained before the idea could be carried out. "Mme du Châtelet has a husband, she is a goddess married to a mortal, and this mortal dares to have wishes," was the poet's quaint way of expressing it. One of the wishes was that the tutor should also be a priest. "Nonsense," cried Voltaire emphatically: "point de prêtres chez

les Emilies." In this he was not quite consistent, for a little later, when he wanted to engage a chemist, and Moussinot suggested one who was also a priest, he thought there would be a great saving in combining the offices, and stipulated that the man should work in the laboratory on week-days and say Mass in the chapel on Sundays. The kindly marquis never allowed his wishes to obtrude unpleasantly, however, and the affair of Linant was settled with or without his consent, and soon proved unsatisfactory to all concerned. The new tutor was incorrigibly lazy and ill-behaved. He had the audacity to make love to Mme de la Neuville, and Voltaire had to apologise on his behalf. He was supposed to be writing a tragedy, but never had any of it to show. He did get as far as to write a quatrain on Cirey :

Un voyageur, qui ne mentit jamais,
 Passe à Cirey, s'arrête, le contemple;
 Surpris, il dit : " C'est un palais " ;
 Mais voyant Emilie, il dit que c'est un temple.¹

Voltaire was pleased with that—he liked to hear eulogy of his nymph—but when, a short time afterwards, the ungrateful preceptor, forgetting the profound respect he owed to the name and sex of his benefactress, wrote her from a neighbouring estate where he was visiting (without even having obtained permission to do so) that "the ennui of Cirey was the worst of all ennuis," Voltaire could hardly restrain his annoyance, and was much put to it to calm the indignant Emilie, who wished to chase the ingrate from her door then and there. Voltaire made excuses for him. He said he was young, had little know-

¹ A traveller who always told the truth arrived at Cirey and paused in contemplation. Surprised, he said, "It is a palace," but seeing Emilie he said, "No, it is a temple."

ledge of the world, and threw him upon her charity, saying that if she turned him off he would starve. Not only was he forgiven, but was allowed before the year was out to introduce his sister into the household, though she wrote letters like a servant and had the pride of a queen. Then the inevitable happened. The young lady quarrelled with her mistress, and openly sowed discord in the household. She was quite as lazy and parasitical as her brother, and imposed on those who fed her. "Voilà toute la famille de Linant placée dans nos cantons," cried Voltaire—"the mother, the son, the daughter, all are at Cirey." But when the demon of prose-writing had seized upon the sister as well as the brother, Emilie's patience, too long strained, gave way, and she insisted that the Linants must go. There was no appeal from this decision. Go they did, but not without inflicting a wound upon Voltaire's over-sensitive nature. "My duty is to forget him, for he has offended Mme du Châtelet," he wrote. He promised not to write to Linant himself, and so far kept his word, but he sent him money through Thieriot when he heard he was unhappy.

No doubt dismissal was the only safe course. Linant at last completed the tragedy commenced seven years previously, of which Voltaire had said if he worked hard there was a chance of his finishing the fifth act in another fourteen years. It was submitted to d'Argental, who was appointed judge. A sitting was held at his house upon the play, at which Algarotti was present. "This Prometheus has stolen some rays from the sun, and the statue shows signs of life," was the verdict expressed by the latter. Nothing great ever came from Linant's struggles to attain literary fame; but his relations with

Voltaire and Emilie show up two people who had every excuse to be self-centred in a generous and disinterested light which shone at times upon others equally helpless, equally self-deceived, and just as anxious to achieve a fame they had not earned. Linant's case was not the only one of the kind which was brought to the notice of Algarotti and d'Argental. At this period these two were closely united in friendship with the Cirey household. During 1736 and 1737 Emilie wrote more letters to them than to any one else, including her favourite correspondents Richelieu and Maupertuis. In the latter case she had good reason for her silence, because at that time he was travelling towards the Pole.

Her letters are the letters of a busy woman, one who is more concerned with a good reason for writing than because she wishes to turn pretty phrases or finds pleasure in expressing the warmth of her friendship. Not that her letters were ever cold ; those to Richelieu, Maupertuis, Algarotti, and d'Argental certainly were not. They had a good sprinkling of compliments, in accordance with the fashion of the day. No one followed this fashion more thoroughly than Voltaire, who was one of the most voluminous correspondents of the eighteenth century. He wrote almost every letter as though the person he addressed were his greatest, if not his only, friend.

Voltaire said that there was nothing of Mme de Sévigné's style about Mme du Châtelet's letters. He compared her writing to that of a Pascal or a Nicole. He explained that she was born with a singular eloquence, but that this eloquence only became manifest when the object of it was worthy.

“Letters in which she was only concerned with

endeavouring to show wit, little refinements and delicate turns of language, such as are given in the case of ordinary thoughts, did not rouse her immense powers to their full extent. The use of the right word, accuracy, exactness, and force were the characteristics of her eloquence . . . but this vigorous, grave, and firm trend of her thought, did not leave her unmoved by the beauties of sentiment."

However much of eighteenth-century French wit Mme du Châtelet possessed, she was lacking in that particular sense of humour which sees amusing possibilities in difficulties and trials. In her letters there are now and again pale gleams of something approaching fun, but at no time can they be described as hilarious.

Her first recorded letter to Algarotti was written in October 1735. She was expecting him to pay a visit to Cirey, but was not sure that he was coming, as there had been talk of his accompanying Maupertuis and Clairaut to the Pole. "It would have been very wrong of you," she wrote, "to have left for the Pole without making a tour in Champagne, and I have always hoped that you were incapable of playing me such a villainous trick. I do not know whether you will convert Clairaut from his purpose ; but I shall still be happy enough if he does not pervert you. M. de Maupertuis has taken him away from me ; he believes that it is quite sufficient if he knows how to take the elevation of a star, and that it is not necessary to come and take that of Cirey." Then she proceeded to tell him that the castle was not yet finished, hoped he would be pleased with the room she had prepared for him, and appreciate still more the delight with which she looked forward to his visit. She assured him that Voltaire shared this sentiment, that it was in-

spired by his sincere friendship, and that he was preparing verses relating to the polar exploits. "You will be able to tune your lutes together. The voyage of the Argonauts will not have been more celebrated, and certainly was not more worthy of it." She begged him to come and spend the winter philosophising. She described Voltaire's library and her own, and told him she was learning Italian as fast as she could for his sake, though the paperhangers and workmen interrupted her. To help him to find the château, she described his route through Charenton and Bar-sur-Aube, from which village the post-chaise came frequently, and that he would find it more reliable than relays.

The visitor arrived the following week. He was the son of a rich merchant of Venice, and was born in that city on December 11, 1712. He travelled through Europe for the purpose of learning French and English. Algarotti was a particularly charming young Italian, with dark languishing eyes, and a warmth and gaiety of manner which greatly appealed to Mme du Châtelet. Perhaps he dressed a little too carefully, and was foppish as to his curls; but then he was so full of respect for her learning, and so anxious to have her advice about *Il Newtonianismo per le Dame*, on which he was working at Cirey, that had she even noticed signs of effeminacy and resented them—which was not likely—she would have speedily forgiven him. Voltaire called him the brilliant and wise Algarotti, and his dear swan of Padua. "We have the Marquis of Algarotti here," he wrote to Thieriot from Cirey on November 3, "a young man who knows the languages and customs of every country, who makes verses like Aristotle, and who knows his Locke and his Newton. He reads us dialogues which he has made on

interesting questions of philosophy." In return Voltaire read aloud the early cantos of the *Pucelle*, or a chapter of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV.* "After that," he continued, "we return to Newton and to Locke, not without drinking the wine of the country and enjoying excellent cheer, for we are very voluptuous philosophers." Of Emilie he declared that she understood Locke better than he himself, and that she read Virgil, Pope, and algebra as others read novels. In short, they were a well-suited trio, and spent a delightful time, as Algarotti himself explained in a letter to the Abbé Franchini, envoy of the Grand Duke of Tuscany at Paris :

"Here, far from the bustle of Paris, we lead lives fraught with intellectual pleasures ; and we can say with Boileau, that neither Lambert nor Molière are lacking at our suppers. I am putting the last touches to my *Dialogues*, which have found grace in the eyes of the belle Emilie and the savant Voltaire. I try, when near them, to acquire those choice terms, that charming turn of speech with which I should like to embellish my work."

He also embellished it with an engraving of Emilie and himself set in a rustic scene, which represented the Cirey gardens with the château on the right. The marquise was, of course, highly flattered at being placed at the head of the work to represent "wit, grace, imagination, and science." But she would have preferred Algarotti to dedicate his book to her. As he had already promised this honour to Fontenelle, it was impossible. Algarotti had taken his idea of a marquise, figuring in his *Dialogues*, from Fontenelle's *Pluralité des Mondes*. "People will think I am your marquise," said Emilie, and she dubbed him marquis, a title to which he had no real claim.

Voltaire wrote the promised verses about the Polar

trip. They closed with an indiscreet reference to his life with Emilie at Cirey, and were therefore not intended for publication. They fell into the malicious hands of Desfontaines, however, and he printed them without permission, thus adding one misdemeanour to the many which resulted later in serious disagreement.

“While Condamine, the great courier of philosophy,” ran the poem, “goes to grill himself at the Equator, Maupertuis and Clairaut, in their passion for knowledge, mean to freeze at the Pole. Even the stars are astounded, and remark, ‘Either these people are fools or they are gods.’ And you, Algarotti, Swan of Padua, musical pupil of the Swan of Mantua, you also wish to sing your immortal songs to the Laplanders, whilst you trace parallels on frozen mountains. Meanwhile, I await you upon my meridian in the fields of Cirey, a tranquil admirer of your knowledge of astronomy.”

Allez donc, et du pôle observé, mesuré,
Revenez aux Français apporter des nouvelles.

Cependant je vous attendrai,
Tranquille admirateur de votre astronomie,
Sous mon méridien, dans les champs de Cirey,
N’observant désormais que l’astre d’Emilie.
Echauffé par le feu de son puissant génie
Et par sa lumière éclairé,
Sur ma lyre je chanterai
Son âme universelle autant qu’elle est unique ;
Et j’atteste les cieux, mesurés par vos mains,
Que j’abandonnerais pour ses charmes divins
L’équateur et le pôle arctique.

A storm of indignation broke forth from Voltaire and Emilie on account of Desfontaines’ action in the matter of these verses. The latter called him “this pirate of literature.” Voltaire wrote to Thieriot: “I begged and prayed him to be very careful not to publish this bagatelle. I made him feel that what may be

good among friends may become very dangerous in the hands of the public. No sooner had he received my letter than he began to print. That which astonished me is that he knows the world so little as to suffer the name of Mme du Châtelet to be handed over to the malignity of the pamphleteer. If M. and Mme du Châtelet complain to the Keeper of the Seals,¹ as they ought to do, I feel sure the Abbé Desfontaines will repent of his imprudence." Voltaire's patience was so great, however, that it was some years before that slippery gentleman was caught in his own trap.

Algarotti paid a second visit to Cirey at the close of December 1736, and in the intervals of his absence Emilie wrote to him frequently, envying him his stay in England, where she wished to study, telling him about Voltaire, whom she called the first of the Emiliens (perhaps Algarotti had been favoured with second place of honour in her bodyguard), and sympathising with him because Duperron de Castera had made a faulty and impertinent translation of his *Dialogues*.

About the same time that Algarotti was at Cirey—that is to say, in December 1736—Cirey had another visitor, a certain Chevalier de Villefort, who is only interesting because he told the most amazing stories, savouring of the Arabian Nights, about Cirey and its mistress.

Villefort's account appears in the *Correspondance du Président Bouhier*.

After he had crossed the courtyard of the château, a servant in livery came towards Villefort and conducted him to the first hall. There a bell was rung, and a long wait ensued before the door was opened. Sud-

¹ Chauvelin.

denly it sprang open in a mysterious manner, and a waiting-woman appeared in the aperture with a lantern in her hand. It was only four o'clock in the afternoon, but all the shutters were already closed. Villefort asked to see the Marquise du Châtelet. When the servant returned after announcing him, she asked him to step through a number of rooms, where he could make out very little owing to the feeble light of the lantern. He arrived at last at an enchanted spot where the door opened on the instant—it was a salon lighted by more than twenty candles. The divinity of the place was so richly adorned and loaded with diamonds that she would have been like Venus at the opera, if, in spite of the gentleness of her air and the richness of her garments, she had not been resting her elbow on papers bespattered with *xx*'s. Her table was covered with instruments and mathematical books. She gave a half bow to Villefort, and, after exchanging some questions, it was proposed that they should go to see M. de Voltaire. A secret staircase led to the apartment of the wizard poet. They mounted, they knocked at the door—all without avail. He was busy with some magic operations, and the hour of leaving his study or of opening the door was not yet come.

However, his usual rule was infringed for M. de Villefort. After half an hour's talk a bell sounded for supper. They descended to the dining-room, an apartment as singular as the rest of the castle. At each end there was a tower like those in a convent—the one for serving the meal, the other for clearing it away. No servant appeared on the scene; they helped themselves. The food was very good, the supper a long one. Presently the bell was heard again. This was to

announce the time for moral and philosophic readings, which took place with Villefort's permission. At the end of an hour the clock announced bedtime. They all retired. At four o'clock in the morning Villefort was awakened, and asked whether he cared to assist at certain exercises of poetry and literature which were about to be held. Complacent or curious, he went. "I should never finish if I were to tell you all that is said of the wonders and strange occupations of Cirey," concluded Le Blanc, Bouhier's correspondent. "I will only add that on the next day Venus and Adonis in a car and the stranger on horseback were eating cutlets in a corner of the wood, *and the books were ordered to follow them.* It was asked by the curious what the husband was doing all this time, but nobody knew. You may take or leave as much as you like of this story, which I give you as I received it and as it was told all over Paris."

Eventually these rumours reached Emilie's ears. She was not sure whether to be exceedingly indignant or merely amused. She sent word of it to d'Argental, as she always did about anything that appeared trifling, but might bring about an embarrassing if not dangerous publicity. "They tell me that M. de Villefort gave descriptions which have been embroidered until they sound like a fairy-tale," she wrote. "That which I have been told has neither head nor tail, neither rhyme nor reason."

D'Argental reassured her, in his usual diplomatic manner, that no harm was likely to come of Villefort's indiscretion.

No two individuals could have differed more than Mme du Châtelet's friends Algarotti and d'Argental.

The former was showy and a little superficial, the latter staunch, true, and plain in his ways. Emilie wanted them to like one another, because she liked them both. "D'Argental appears to me to be enchanted with you," she wrote to Algarotti; "he is worthy of pleasing you and of loving you. He is a charming friend. Speak of me when you are together, I beg of you." The last sentiment is characteristic of Mme du Châtelet. She liked to be thought of, and talked of, and loved. When d'Argental married Mlle du Bouchet in 1737, she wrote to Algarotti, "I loved d'Argental with all my heart, and I wish his wife to love me. So when you write to her, please will you tell her something nice about me." She need not have been afraid. Mme d'Argental was as loyal as her husband. Voltaire addressed her as Madame l'Ange—d'Argental being his *ange gardien*, who was always ready to befriend him. Mme du Châtelet poured out to him, in an almost unceasing stream, the anxieties which beset her on account of her lover. He was so sensible and so sympathetic. He knew what suffering meant, too, for he had lived through a stormy youth to a serene and happy prime.

Born in 1700, d'Argental had early been destined to follow a military career. He fell passionately in love with Adrienne Lecouvreur, and his mother, in the hope of curing him, decided to send him to San Domingo. The actress, hearing of this resolution, herself addressed a letter to Mme de Ferriol, begging her not to send her son to the other end of the world, promising never to see him again, and putting herself entirely in the hands of the mother of the young man who loved her in spite of all she could do to bring him to reason. This letter, written in a most charming style of appeal and self-

effacement, only came to the knowledge of d'Argental sixty years after it had been penned, when he was an old man with one foot in the grave.

When Mlle Lecouvreur died she appointed d'Argental trustee on behalf of her two natural daughters': a rather embarrassing legacy, for, in order to keep her secret, he had to pay a large sum as indemnity to the relatives, and hold himself responsible for the education and suitable marriage of the two girls.

D'Argental passionately loved everything connected with the stage, and had made a study of the history of the drama. "He lived only in the green-room," said Marmontel. Voltaire submitted all his plays to him, and often found cause to congratulate himself on having followed his advice. La Harpe declared that d'Argental's admiration of Voltaire was a real sentiment, indulged in without ostentation, that he adored his talents as he loved his person, and thoroughly rejoiced in his success. Marmontel was not nearly so flattering. He called him *l'âme damnée* of Voltaire, and the enemy of all talent that seemed likely to succeed. But he could not deny that d'Argental was extremely helpful during the nerve-racking periods when Voltaire had committed an unusually blatant indiscretion, and had to flee for very life into hiding.

Such an occasion happened in December 1736, when his satire *Le Mondain* had been found at the house of M. de Luçon, and distributed by Président Dupuy. The copies were garbled, and Voltaire was much annoyed. This poem contains flippant allusions to Adam and Eve. Its author admitted that, "quite innocent as it was, it was certainly not intended to be made public," and it brought a storm of abuse and threats of im-

prisonment with it. D'Argental warned Voltaire that his position was not safe. "What a frightful life," cried the poet-philosopher, who was at that moment certainly not philosophic, "to be eternally tormented by the fear of losing one's liberty on the least report, without a proper trial! I would sooner be dead."

It is difficult to realise in these days, perhaps, that the danger of arrest for such offences was a real and imminent one, and that Voltaire lived continually in its shadow. To this truth most of Mme du Châtelet's fears and alarms, her ill-temper and nervous excitement are traceable, and at this date she was in greater trouble than usual. When he fled from Cirey she could not go with him. That would have been taken amiss, although everybody knew that she had virtually resolved to pass her life with him. A tearful parting took place at Vassy, whither she had accompanied him, and Voltaire caught the coach which was to take him to Holland. It was the tearing asunder of two souls.

To d'Argental Voltaire wrote: "As I saw the moment arrive when it became necessary to separate for ever from the one who has done everything for me, who left Paris for me, all the friends and all the pleasures of life, one whom I adore and whom I have reason to adore, you will easily imagine what I felt; the thought is horrible." And then a different note creeps in, the note of the one who feels the chain of love irksome, because other interests pull in a contrary direction. "I should leave with inexpressible joy, I would go and see the Prince of Prussia, who often writes to beg me to come to his Court, I would put between jealousy and myself a wide enough distance to save being troubled in the future. . . . I should be free and I should not abuse my liberty; I should be the

happiest of men. But your friend is near me and is plunged in tears. My heart is stricken. Would it do to allow her to return alone to a château which she has built for me, and to deprive myself of life because I have enemies in Paris? In my despair I postpone my decision."

Emilie, womanlike, concerned herself first with the more practical side of the trouble. She, too, made d'Argental—"ange tutélaire de deux malheureux" she calls him—the recipient of her anxiety. "When I look at the snow-covered earth, the dark and stormy weather, when I think of the climate he is going to, and his excessive susceptibility to cold, I am ready to die of grief. I could endure his absence if I could feel reassured about his health."

Voltaire had gone to Brussels incognito, and was to be addressed as M. de Renol or Révol, a merchant. Emilie hoped he would stay in Holland. Already she felt pangs of jealousy against Prince Frederick, soon to be Frederick the Great, who was to regard her as his rival in Voltaire's affections. Voltaire had received a letter from him in August of that year: "If my destiny does not favour me to the extent of possessing you altogether, at least I hope to see one day the one whom I have long admired from afar." At this time Frederick was twenty-four. "I positively do not wish that he should go to Prussia, and I go down on my knees to you," she wrote to d'Argental, who had advised Voltaire to take advantage of this opportunity. "He will be lost in that country; entire months would pass before I could have news of him: I should die of anxiety before he returned. The climate is dreadfully cold. Besides, how can he return at any given moment? In Holland he would be

almost as though he were in France—one could see him from one week to another, there would be news. His affairs are not at all desperate: you flatter me in the hope that they will be settled within a few months. Why, then, should he go so far? I might be able to see him again this spring at the Court of Mme de Lorraine.” She meant at Commercy, where the widow of Duke Leopold, Elisabeth-Charlotte, daughter of Madame, was then residing. “His stay in Holland might be useful to him, but it could only harm him to go to Prussia. All these reflections are nothing compared to those which the character of the King of Prussia furnishes. The prince royal is not king. When he is we will both go and see him; but until that takes place there is no surety about anything. His father sees no other merit in men than being ten feet in height. He is suspicious and cruel. He hates and persecutes his son; he keeps him under an iron yoke; he will believe that M. de Voltaire may give him dangerous counsels. He is capable of having him arrested at his Court, or of giving him up to the Keeper of the Seals. In one word, no Prussia, I beg you. Do not speak of it again. Recommend him to hide and be wise,”—and so on, her womanly fears accumulating more and more strength as she went on.

In order that the address of Cirey “should not serve to excite curiosity,” she asked d’Argental to send her letters to Mme de Champbonin at Bar-sur-Aube. The worst feature of the whole affair was the fact that Voltaire would have been arrested before except for the respect paid to the house of du Châtelet, and that there were those ready to warn the Marquis that he must no longer give shelter to so dangerous a guest. Emilie cudgelled her brains day and night as to which of her relatives,

which of her enemies, or what lampoon, if any, could be held responsible for bringing about a possibility so odious. Her suspicion fell on a distant cousin whose name she had the misfortune to bear, and who had once held an official position. He hated her, and had quarrelled openly with her six months before. He had gone so far as to persuade her mother to write to M. du Châtelet to force her to abandon the person she had taken under her protection—a letter which might well have wrecked the household. She thought it was more than likely that he had gone a step further and had done this vile thing out of revenge, under the pretence of rendering a service to M. du Châtelet. She did not know; she could only surmise what had taken place. Besides, Voltaire's *Eléments de la Philosophie de Newton* had been dedicated to her, and, worse still, the first few cantos of that dangerous *Pucelle* were written, and either might be responsible for the threatening disaster. She begged d'Argental to weigh these conflicting ideas and find out the truth at all costs. "I hope sincerely that I have been mistaken," she wrote in her agitation, "but if I am not mistaken, as I greatly fear, it is of the greatest importance that I should know. It would change my whole life. It would be necessary to abandon Cirey, at least for a time, and come to live in Paris. Here there would be no pretext for begging M. du Châtelet not to give him a refuge, and at least we could see each other. . . . It would be terrible to leave Cirey, but anything would be better than such a letter to M. du Châtelet. . . . I pray you on my knees to clear up this iniquitous mystery; my honour and peace of mind depend on it." Even then she was not satisfied to let the matter rest. She counted up the members of her family again, her mother, the suspected cousin, her

brother with whom she was great friends, and the Bailli de Froulay, a relative of her mother's, who was incapable of such a trick. No fresh light came to her, but the mere idea that she or some one belonging to her could be the cause of misfortune to Voltaire was enough to make her die of grief.

In the meantime Voltaire passed from Antwerp to Amsterdam and to Leyden, and Mme du Châtelet was left without news of him. "I am a hundred and fifty leagues from him, and it is twelve days since I had any news," she complained. "I have not heard since the 20th," she wrote on December 31; "my heart is breaking with anxiety and grief; you will perceive this from my letter." Presently, however, when it became certain that Voltaire would not go to Prussia, she grew more hopeful, and even reconciled to his strange wanderings under an assumed name. The disguise was so thin that *Alzire* was played in honour of the supposed merchant Révol at Brussels, at Antwerp, and in all the towns through which he passed. "What a chaos of glory, ignominy, good and bad fortune! Happy, happy obscurity!" she sighed; "his laurels follow him everywhere. But how can glory of this kind help him? The happiness of obscurity would be worth far more."

"O vanas hominum mentes! ô pectora cœca:"

from which Latin quotation it may be gathered that the marquise, after an interlude of stress, was more like herself again. She enjoyed introducing Latin quotations in her letters when she wrote; Voltaire did it too.

The news of Voltaire's whereabouts was not kept out of the papers all this time. The *Gazette d'Utrecht* had

a paragraph in its issue of January 14, 1737, on his arrival in Leyden from Aix-la-Chapelle. It was hinted that it was his purpose to study under Professor S'Gravesande, the celebrated Newtonian philosopher, whose advice he desired on the subject of his *Philosophie de Newton*. He also intended to consult Boerhaave on the score of his health. In a previous issue the *Gazette* had printed a report that the Marquise du Châtelet had gone to Lorraine, as indeed the marquis had wished her to do, in order that she might be present at the marriage of Princess Elisabeth-Thérèse and Charles-Emmanuel de Savoie; and that Voltaire, who had been living at her house for a year and a half, had chosen the occasion of her absence to visit the Prince Royal of Prussia.

Poor Emilie hardly knew what to make of the conflicting accounts. She was torn this way and that way. There was a rumour—ill-founded, as it turned out to be—that “the old serpent Rousseau” had returned from exile. She was terrified lest this should upset Voltaire, because she had heard him say a thousand times he would leave France the day J. B. Rousseau re-entered it. She went so far as to imagine that Chauvelin might have recalled Rousseau, out of animosity against her lover, which she said would be cutting off his nose to spite his face. “After animosity so marked,” she continued, “he would never return here, and I am accustomed to sacrifice my happiness to his tastes and to the justice of his resentment. I am as indignant as he, I swear it, and all honest people ought to be the same. . . .” Then she discussed the possibility of Voltaire’s secret return to Cirey, and whether he could remain in hiding there. It might be dangerous, and,

if so, how could she take it upon herself to persuade him? To hide was a humiliation; besides, the district was priest-ridden, and the people round about were so curious. She would prefer to know that he was free and happy in Holland than that for her sake he should lead the life of a criminal in his own country. She would rather die of grief than be the cause of a false step on his part.

Driven almost into hysteria, endeavouring to remain heroic, Mme du Châtelet appears a most pathetic figure. Voltaire's letters, when they came, were gloomy and depressed. D'Argental alone was left to lean upon—a tower of strength and sympathy in her affliction—and his letters had the soothing effect of David's harp. She began to blame herself for giving way to her fears.

But in the end she could contain herself no longer, and urged d'Argental to persuade Voltaire to return to Cirey at all costs. She was ill; she had had fever for two days; the violence of her feelings was capable of killing her in four. "Who is there could save him in spite of himself?" she cried. "I at least have nothing to reproach myself with, but that is a sad consolation. I am not born to be happy." His letters, few as they were and seldom as they came, were cold. She knew it was only for prudence' sake, but he called her Madame, though the letter was signed. D'Argental could surely not condemn her for giving way to misery. "This is a disparity so extraordinary that my brain was mazed with grief," she added.

Meanwhile the exiled "M. de Révol" had other compensations besides the complimentary performances of *Alzire*. He was superintending the printing of the *Eléments*, and had promised to stay at Amsterdam until

it was through the press, which he expected would keep him busy until the close of the winter season. At the end of February, however, he capitulated. "I am leaving Holland immediately, in spite of myself," he wrote to Prince Frederick; "friendship calls me back to Cirey." He spread a report that he was going to England, and returned to the terrestrial paradise. There is no letter on record in which Emilie expressed her joy at this solution of her troubles. Her relief and gratitude must be left to the imagination.

On March 1 she wrote to d'Argental, enclosing a letter to him from Voltaire, which she described as "bien noire."

"Poor fellow! his position is cruel," she admitted; which was generous enough on her part, for his letter, which M. du Châtelet took in person to Paris, struck a note which in the future was never absent for long, and which Emilie might well have resented. After assuring his guardian angel that he had not dared to write sooner, and had not written to any one else, he continued: "I confess to you that if I had not been recalled by a friendship stronger than all other sentiments, I would willingly have spent the remainder of my days in a country where at least my enemies could not harm me. . . . I have only to expect persecutions in France; that will be the whole of my reward. I should regard my presence in the country with horror if it were not that the tenderness and all the great qualities of the person who holds me here did not make me forget where I was. . . . I became a willing slave for the sake of living with the individual near whom all disagreeables disappear. . . . I have always said that if my father, my brother, or my son were prime minister in a despotic

state, I would leave it to-morrow, but Mme du Châtelet is more to me than father, brother, or son. I ask nothing more than to live buried in the mountains of Cirey."

Mme du Châtelet added a touch of her own which amounted to genius: "Advise him to be careful at all times, to print Newton in France, and to keep the Pucelle under a hundred locks!"

The poet was indeed buried—under the name of Mme d'Azilly—to which imaginary person his letters were addressed. The spring passed away quietly. Voltaire corresponded chiefly with the Abbé Moussinot, whom he warned to put nothing in writing which might reveal his secret, and with Prince Frederick. Mme du Châtelet wrote not at all, or if she wrote her letters have been lost, for the next few are dated September and November, and were addressed to Maupertuis to welcome him back from the Polar regions. But if she did not write, she thought the more, especially about Voltaire's letters to Prussia. She watched the growing intimacy between prince and poet with alarm. She scented a coming struggle.

Frederick was charmingly complimentary on paper where Emilie was concerned. All he asked was that he need never meet her. A single extract is sufficient to mark him hypocrite.

"How much I approve of a philosopher," he wrote, "who knows how to take his relaxation in the company of Emilie! I know very well that I should greatly prefer to make her acquaintance than to understand the centre of gravity, the squaring of the circle, potable gold, or the sin against the Holy Ghost."

In the same letter he advised the departure of the ambassador, his dear Césarion, who was known more

prosaically as the Baron de Keyserlingk, and whom he was sending to Cirey to see "the chief of all thinking beings," in default of being able to come himself. Keyserlingk was furnished with a letter of credit and a portrait of the prince. Although a born Courlander, Césarion was "the Plutarch of this modern Bœotia." Voltaire regarded this embassy as an honour, and expected Emilie to do the same. "Mme du Châtelet is awaiting this amiable man with impatience whom Frederick calls friend, this Ephestion of this Alexander," he declared.

An ill-timed attack of the gout, to which he was subject, following on military business, delayed the visit, but at length the ambassador set forth, Frederick's last words to him ringing in his ears: "Remember that you are going to a terrestrial paradise," he said, "to a spot a thousand times more delightful than the Island of Calypso; that the goddess of this place yields in nothing to the beauty of the enchantress of Telemachus; that you will find in her all the charms of the mind, so superior to those of the body, and that this marvel among women occupies her leisure in searching after truth. It is there that you will see the human mind in its highest degree of perfection, wisdom without austerity, surrounded by tender loves and smiles!" and then he proceeded to pay Keyserlingk the greatest possible compliment, by saying he regarded him as perhaps the one mortal who might be worthy of becoming a citizen of Cirey, and that he expected him to return bearing the golden fleece—that is to say, the *Pucelle*.

In due course the ambassador arrived. In July Voltaire wrote to the Prince that he was surrounded

by his favours—Keyserlingk, the portrait, Wolff's *Metaphysics*, and Beausobre's *Dissertations*, besides a charming personal letter ; things which chased away the fever and languor from which Voltaire was suffering at the moment. The visit, from the guest's point of view, was a huge success. Voltaire wrote to Thieriot that the only real prince in Europe had sent a little ambassador into his Eden. " We received him like Adam and Eve received the angel in Milton's Paradise, only that he had better cheer and more gallant fêtes."

And all the time Emilie played hostess with more than usual care, for she could be very negligent of her guests if she did not feel an interest in them. In this case, however, she thought it wise to live up to the very embarrassing compliments which the prince strewed thickly in his letters. These compliments frightened her ; she felt they were veiled threats, threats which might at any moment break into her peace and happiness. The only thing she wanted was Voltaire, and Frederick was angling for him. Therefore she was her sweetest and gayest, helped to arrange comedies and fireworks, dressed fashionably, wore her most sparkling smile, and all because she wanted Keyserlingk to assure the prince that Mme du Châtelet was worthy the love of her poet. Underneath the gay exterior all her wits were ready to circumvent the prince. Voltaire was a child ; she knew it. He had to be safeguarded against himself. He must be watched lest he should do himself an injury. The moment was come when she had to put her foot down firmly. Keyserlingk was sent back to Prussia bearing a huge burden of treasures, the *Histoire de Louis XIV*, some short poems, and a few fragments of philosophy, but not a single line of the *Pucelle*. " Your

ambassador will tell you the thing was impossible," wrote Voltaire, perhaps a little regretfully. "For almost a year this little work has been in the charge of Mme du Châtelet, who will not allow herself to be deprived of it. The friendship with which she honours me does not permit me to risk a thing which might separate me from her for ever. She has renounced everything to live with me in the bosom of retreat and study; she knows that the least knowledge of this work would certainly raise a storm. She fears every accident."

When he had left Cirey, Keyserlingk received a complimentary letter from Voltaire, and his portrait in verse.

"Favori d'un prince adorable,
Courtisan qui n'est point flatteur,
Allemand qui n'est point buveur,
Voyageant sans être menteur;
Souvent gouteux, toujours aimable.

We shall remember all our lives, that we have seen Alexander of Remusberg in Ephestion Keyserlingk."

Frederick returned the compliments with interest. "How happy is Césarion! He has passed delicious moments at Cirey. The wisdom of Solomon was well rewarded if the Queen of Sheba resembled the Queen of Cirey, and so forth, *ad nauseam*.

The year 1737 was the year of the great competition of Essays on the "Nature du Feu et sur sa Propagation," for the best of which a prize had been offered by the Academy of Sciences. Voltaire set to work in good time. The last day for sending in the essays was September 1; but Emilie, a month before that date, with one of her sudden impulses, decided that she too would like to compete. Was she scared because so little time was left at her disposal? Not at all! She desired to

keep her aspirations secret from Voltaire, whose essay was almost finished ; and to do this she had to confide in some one—the only possible person being the accommodating marquis, who was always there when he was wanted, never when he was not. She found it necessary to work at night. She only slept an hour every night for a week, kept herself awake by plunging her hands into iced water, and then paced up and down beating her arms. After this manner she wrote the most abstract reasoning in a style which made it delightful reading for its own sake.

Mme de Graffigny, who read her essay first and Voltaire's afterwards, thought the latter not at all worthy of the former. "It is true," she said, "that when women mix themselves up with writing they surpass men. What a prodigious difference ! But how many centuries does it take to produce a woman like her ?" Perhaps it is as well that Emilies are not born every day. They have a way of breaking through recognised rules and irritating smaller-minded people.

The essays by Emilie and Voltaire both contained original ideas. Perhaps they were too original. Emilie, who knew the line Voltaire had taken, combated his ideas boldly. She stated that fire and light had neither the property of gravitation towards a centre, nor that of impenetrability. "This proposition," said Voltaire, "has revolted the Cartesians. . . . As for myself, seeing that light and fire are material, that they exert pressure, that they divide, that they propagate I do not see sufficient reason to deprive them of two principal properties of which matter is possessed." She also tried to prove that light and heat were the same element, luminous when it moved in a direct line, heating when

the particles had an irregular motion. Where she failed was in not seeing that the movement was only vibratory, and the differences of effect were caused by differences of speed. But she discovered that different-coloured rays of light did not give out an equal degree of heat, which was later proved to be true.

Excitement ran high at the beginning of 1738, when the awards were to be made. Alas! disappointment was in store for both. The prize was divided between Euler, Lozeran du Fesch, a Jesuit, and the Comte de Créquy. The winning essay, which contained the formula for the speed at which sound travels, vainly sought by Newton, was only sixteen pages long, that of Mme du Châtelet ran to eighty-four. "When we saw the judgment," wrote Emilie to Maupertuis on May 22, "we were in despair. It is hard that the prize should be divided, and that M. de Voltaire had no share in the cake." Voltaire, on the other hand, was deeply regretful that his wonderful Emilie had not been amongst the chosen.

There was some compensation in store, however. The Academy decided to print both essays at the close of the Prize Essays, because, although they did not hold with all the ideas they contained, they admitted, nevertheless, that they bore witness to much research, a knowledge of the best works on physics, and were replete with facts and fresh points of view. Besides, the authors' names were likely to arouse the interest and curiosity of the public. One was by a lady of high rank, the other by one of the best of the poets.

Emilie was resigned. At least she had failed in good company. Besides, she received a full meed of praise in a letter from Prince Frederick. "Without wishing to flatter you," he wrote, "I can assure you that I should

never have believed your sex, usually so delightfully gifted with all the graces, capable also of such deep knowledge, minute research, and solid discovery as appears from your fine work. Ladies owe to you what the Italian language owes to Tasso. This language, usually soft and deprived of forcibility, appeared in a masculine and energetic form when used by this clever poet. Beauty, which ordinarily is the highest merit ladies possess, could only be reckoned among the least of your advantages." And to Voltaire he wrote on the same subject: "I can only say I was astonished when I read it. One would never imagine that such a treatise could be produced by a woman. Moreover, the style is masculine and in every way suitable to the subject." After that there came a few criticisms on her statements regarding the origin of forest fires; but surely Emilie must have felt that her efforts had been of some value.

Beside this absorbing interest the other events at the close of 1737 and early part of 1738 paled somewhat in significance. Linant, having been dismissed, was replaced by another tutor. Voltaire lost his brother-in-law, M. Mignot, husband of his sister, Marie Arouet. Two daughters were left fatherless and dowerless. Voltaire came to their rescue. He stepped into the breach, provided them with dowries, and busied himself about finding them husbands. He had the brilliant idea of marrying the eldest, Louise, who was then twenty-five years old, to the son of Mme de Champbonin. It seemed to him that inestimable advantages were to be derived from this arrangement. The Champbonin family would be at her feet, she would be mistress of a pretty château, newly decorated according to her taste. More than any of these things would be the privilege she would

enjoy of spending part of the year in the company of the divine Emilie, and on occasion going with them to Paris. "In short, I shall be her father," was his final inducement, although on no account would he care to risk making her unhappy.

But Mlle Louise would have none of M. de Champbonin. She wanted to help choose her partner in life, and in February 1738 married M. Denis. Her sister Elizabeth wedded a M. de Dompierre in the following June. These things kept Voltaire very busy. "The marriage of his two nieces and his physics laboratory have left him very little time this year for the pleasure he takes in doing good," wrote Emilie to d'Argental. Louise and her husband spent part of their honeymoon at Cirey. The good Mme Denis, who was to play a larger part in her uncle's later years, was already much troubled about his concerns.

"I spent nine days at Cirey," she wrote to Thieriot on May 10, 1738. "I accomplished everything with which you charged me for Mme du Châtelet and M. de Voltaire. They thank you a thousand times, and await you with impatience. M. de Voltaire has very delicate health. He was ill all the time that I was at Cirey. Mme du Châtelet has grown stout, has a pleasant face, and is very well. We spoke much of you. My uncle is attached to you by taste and by gratitude. He is infinitely thankful to you for having loved and consoled us during his absence. I am in despair. I believe him to be lost to all his friends. He is bound in a fashion which makes it appear impossible that he could break his chains. They are in a solitude terrible to humanity. Cirey is four leagues from the nearest house, in a country where there is nothing to be seen but mountains and uncultivated

land ; abandoned by all their friends, and hardly ever seeing any one from Paris.

“ That is the life which the great genius of our century lives. In truth, he is in company of a woman of much intellect, very pretty, and who uses every possible art to seduce him.

“ There are no frivolities which she omits, nor passages from the best philosophers that she does not recite to please him. Nothing is spared by her. He seems more enchanted than ever. He is building a very fine apartment, where there will be a dark room for experiments in physics. The theatre is very nice ; but they do not play comedy for want of actors. All the country comedians within a radius of ten leagues have orders to show themselves at the castle. They did impossible things to try and get some during our visit, but nothing of the kind was to be had except very good marionettes. We were received in the very best style. My uncle loves M. Denis tenderly. I am not astonished at this, because he is very amiable.” And then she goes off into praise of her husband, and there is no more of her naïve description of her uncle’s household.

Another visitor that year was Thieriot, who spent the end of September and beginning of October with Emilie and Voltaire ; and still another was the unfortunate Abbé La Mare, whose arrival astonished everybody. “ No one has ever travelled so far for the sake of alms,” said Emilie. The Abbé was one of Voltaire’s most unfortunate and ungrateful pensioners. It was said of him that he prided himself on his literary knowledge, and that his head was topsy-turvy. Having been dismissed from the post of King’s Jester, he asked Mme du Châtelet whether he might be hers. “ The post isn’t vacant, my friend,”

she replied. She called him a *petit ingrat*, because after leaving Cirey he never even wrote to thank Voltaire, but claimed his linen, which had been kept as a hostage, through Abbé Moussinot. Voltaire had entrusted his play *l'Envieux* to the Abbé. This play was a scathing denouncement of Desfontaines, and Emilie was terrified lest through La Mare's bungling, or his having taken a copy, it should fall into the wrong hands. She wrote to d'Argental on this subject: "Deliver me from the torment of La Mare. I am suffering death and passion. Please draw this thorn out of my foot, amiable guardian." She was to suffer from another visitor who quite unwittingly also became a thorn in her flesh. It was the gentle, discursive, and well-meaning Mme de Graffigny, who arrived at Cirey in December 1738, in a flutter of joy and contentment, and left two months later sickened with misery and disgust.

CHAPTER VI

MME DE GRAFFIGNY AT CIREY

“**Y**OU will jump with joy at the date of this letter, and you will say, ‘Ah! mon Dieu! she is at Cirey.’”

The letter in question was indited by Mme de Graffigny to M. Devaux on December 4, 1738.

No one can ever think of Devaux as Devaux after reading Mme de Graffigny’s letters. He is Panpan, or Panpichon, or any of the fond nicknames she bestowed upon him as truly to her readers as he was to her. She was very fond of bestowing nicknames, and she had the art of making them fit the person to whom they belonged. She wrote the most amusing, the most indiscreet, and the most intimate letters, and she told things about Voltaire and Emilie that they would have been only too glad to have had buried for ever.

Born in 1695 at Nancy, of noble family, but without a fortune, Françoise d’Issembourg-d’Happencourt was married in her youth to François Huguet de Graffigny, Chamberlain to the Duc de Lorraine. He was a very objectionable person, tyrannical, selfish, and brutal. He rendered his wife’s life one long misery. In her despair she turned to literature and friendship for consolation. Three promising young writers at the Lunéville Court became her friends—Saint-Lambert, Desmarests, and Devaux. The last-named was her favourite, and was

seventeen years younger than she, so it may be supposed that she regarded him as her son.

In 1735 Voltaire was at Lunéville, and met Mme de Graffigny. He was heartily welcomed in their midst by the little group of literary aspirants there, and was named the "Idol." He was gracious to all, and especially to Saint-Lambert, writing the verse which must have greatly pleased its recipient :

Ma Muse, les yeux pleins de larmes,
Saint-Lambert, vole auprès de vous,
Elle vous prodigue ses charmes.
Je lis vos vers, j'en suis jaloux.¹

At length Mme de Graffigny's difficulties increased. She was obliged to apply for a judicial separation from her husband; she was almost penniless; she had no home. She accepted an invitation to Cirey with eagerness, and looked forward with great delight to spending some months in the society of her beloved Idol.

She was well received by him on her arrival at Cirey. She had travelled by "roads which might have been made by the devil himself," in fear lest the carriage might upset at any moment, and at times obliged to paddle through the mud on account of this danger. It was two o'clock in the morning before the château was reached. Mme du Châtelet, whom she called the Nymph, welcomed her graciously. Then she went up to her room to rest. A moment later Voltaire made his appearance, holding a candlestick in his hand, and looking like a monk. He was so pleased to see the visitor that his demonstrativeness almost approached transport. He kissed her hands ten times, and asked for news with an interest that was

¹ My muse, with tears in her eyes, approaches you,
Saint-Lambert, and lavishes her charms on you.
I read your poems and suffer jealousy.

quite touching. His second question concerned Devaux. It took a quarter of an hour to ask and answer it. After that he inquired after the other members of the trio—Desmarets and Saint-Lambert. Then he took his leave.

Mme de Graffigny soon made herself at home at Cirey, and she tried to make Panpan at home too. That is to say, she wrote voluminous letters to him every day, and many times a day, and described to him everything she saw and everything she heard. No detail was too small to be touched upon. The way a bow was tied upon a curtain, the colour of a cupboard door, the number of steps down into the garden, the least word that dropped from the inspired lips of her acting host, the retiring manners of her nominal host, these and a thousand other such points kept mind and heart and pen ever busy. "I should like to describe everything that I see and everything that I hear, my dear Panpan," she confessed the day after her arrival. "In short, I should like to afford you as much pleasure as I am having. But I fear lest the heavy touch of my hand should mix up and spoil everything. I believe it will be better to tell you everything plainly, not day by day, but hour by hour."

And she succeeded in her desire to give pleasure, not only to Panpan, but to thousands of others who were curious as to the *vie intime* of Voltaire and his marquise. First of all she described them both outwardly.

The most noticeable thing about Emilie was her constant stream of conversation. "Her chatter is astonishing. . . . She speaks like an angel, I recognise that. She wears an Indian gown and a large apron of black taffetas, her black hair is very long, and is fastened up at the back at the top of her head, and falls in ringlets like the hair of little children. It suits her very well. As I have only seen

her style of dress, I can only write of that. As for your Idol, I do not know whether he wore powder on my account, but all I can say is that he makes as much display as though he were at Paris. Le Bonhomme goes to Brussels to-morrow. We shall be *à trois*, and no one will weep on that account. It is a confidence we have already made to one another."

Then she went on to describe the first supper of which she had partaken in that "enchanted spot." It was laid in Voltaire's room.

"I found this supper made delightful," she wrote, "by all that I felt within myself, as well as by my surroundings. What did not we discuss? Poetry, sciences, the arts, all in a tone of badinage and good-humour. How I wish I could reproduce them for you—these charming discourses, these enchanting discussions—but that is beyond me. The supper was not plentiful, but it was choice, tasty, and dainty; there was plenty of silver-plate on the table. Opposite were five globes and all the instruments of physics, for this unique repast took place in the little gallery. Voltaire was beside me, as polite and attentive as he was amiable and clever; the lord of the mansion was on the other side: that is to be my place every evening; thus the left ear will be gently charmed, while the other is scarcely likely to be bored, for he speaks very little, and retires as soon as the meal has been served."

Besides these four there were, just then, only two other inmates, very unimportant inmates, in the château. The one was the invalid Marquis de Trichâteau, who added nothing to the gaiety of the assembly, but was concerned in the great law-case, the details of which Emilie was not slow to pour into Mme de Graffigny's ears; and



VOLTAIRE'S " DIVINE EMILIE "
 (After the painting by Marianne Loir)

the other was Voltaire's *gros chat*, Mme de Champbonin, whom Mme de Graffigny called the *grosse dame*, because she was, "feature by feature," the short fat woman in Marivaux's *Paysan Parvenu*. She paid an early call upon the new visitor, who soon decided that she had a most agreeable character. A point in her favour was that she loved Voltaire madly because he had such a good heart. Together they discussed the *Idol*, and, although she stayed a long time, Mme de Graffigny was not bored by her talk. Usually the old lady remained in her room and read books which did not make her more learned. It was one of the unwritten laws of Cirey that all guests should spend a great deal of time in their own rooms. There was no other entertainment provided whilst the host and hostess were at their respective writing-tables. Mme de Graffigny found plenty of occupation in describing all the habitable rooms in the castle. She began with the suite belonging to Voltaire :

"His little wing is so close to the main part of the house that the door is at the bottom of the chief staircase. He has a little ante-chamber as large as your hand ; then comes his own room, which is small, low, and upholstered in crimson velvet, a cosy corner done the same with golden fringe. It is winter furniture."

The window of this room looked out upon a meadow crossed by the river Blaise. On opening a door he could hear Mass said—a concession to the conventions. The walls of his rooms were wainscoted, and in the panels pictures were framed ; mirrors, beautiful lacquered corner-cupboards, porcelain marabouts, a clock supported by marabouts of a peculiar shape, an infinite number of ornaments, expensive, tasty, and everything so clean that you could kiss the parquet ; an open casket con-

taining a silver vase ; in short, everything which was luxurious, and therefore necessary, to Voltaire. What money ! What work ! He had a case for rings, which held two dozen with engraved stones, as well as two set with diamonds. From this room one passed into the little gallery, which was as much as thirty or forty feet long. Between the windows were two very fine statues, on pedestals of Indian varnish. The one was Venus Farnese, the other Hercules. The other side of the windows was divided into two cupboards, one for books, the other for scientific instruments. Between the two there was a stove in the wall, which made "the air like spring." In front was a high pedestal, on which stood a large Cupid, about to shoot an arrow. At its base this Cupid bore the well-known inscription by Voltaire :

Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître :
Il l'est, le fut, ou le doit être.

This was not finished ; there was to be a sculptured niche for the Cupid which would hide the front of the stove. The gallery walls were panelled and painted yellow. Clocks, tables and desks were in profusion. Nothing was wanting. Beyond was the dark room for experiments in physics. Nor was this finished. There was also to be one for instruments, which at that time were kept in the gallery. Everything but physical comfort was catered for, for there was only one sofa, and no padded arm-chairs. Voltaire was no loungee.

The panels of the wainscoting were hung with beautiful India paper, and there were screens of the same. A door led directly into the garden, and there was a pretty grotto outside. Could any Idol have found a more perfect temple ?

Yes; but only one. The Idol's idol. Her rooms were still more beautiful, even more *recherché*. Mme de Graffigny visited them in the company of their mistress.

The bedroom was panelled in wood and varnished in light yellow relieved with edges of pale blue. That was the colour scheme, and everything harmonised—even the dog's basket. The bed was of blue watered silk; the wood of the arm-chairs, the chest of drawers, the corner-cupboards, the writing-desk, all yellow. The mirrors, set in silver frames, were all polished and wonderfully brilliant. A large door made of looking-glass led to the library, which was not yet furnished. Then there was Madame's boudoir, a really eighteenth-century boudoir, which made one feel ready to go down on one's knees and worship at the shrine of beauty. The wainscoting was blue, and the ceiling was painted and varnished by a pupil of the famous Robert Martin. In the smaller panels were pictures which Mme de Graffigny thought were painted by Watteau, but which were really by Pater and Lancret. The chimney-piece and corner-cabinets were loaded with treasures, amongst others the wonderful amber writing-desk which was a present from Prince Frederick. There was an arm-chair upholstered in white taffetas, and two stools of the same. This divine boudoir had an outlet through its only window on to a terrace, from which the view was charming.

On one side of the boudoir was a clothes closet, paved with marble slabs, hung with grey linen, and adorned with prints. Even the muslin window-curtains were embroidered. Nothing in the world could be so lovely!

And then her jewels! They were finer than those

belonging to Mme de Richelieu. Mme de Graffigny could hardly contain her surprise. She had known Mme du Châtelet when she had only one tortoise-shell snuff-box ; now she possessed fifteen or twenty of gold, of precious stones, of beautiful lacquer, of enamelled gold, a new fashion which was very expensive, and incense-boxes of the same kind, one more magnificent than the other ; jasper watches with diamonds, *étuis*, and other wonderful things ; rings containing precious stones, and charms and trinkets without end. "Indeed," concluded Mme de Graffigny, "I cannot get away from the subject, for they have never been rich." Perhaps she suspected that some of Emilie's treasures came out of the pockets of Voltaire. Perhaps she was right in thinking so. Voltaire was often accused of living at the expense of the du Châtelets ; but he lent money for the rebuilding of the château, which was not all paid back, and he bought furniture, good wines, and other luxuries. His purse was sometimes at Emilie's service—when she gambled at cards, for instance—and no doubt he at times helped to satisfy the taste for gewgaws, in which he encouraged her.

One would think that by this time Mme de Graffigny's taste for description would have been more than satisfied. Not at all ! It was essential—quite essential—that Panpan should know what her own particular apartment was like. "It is quite a hall, taking height and size into consideration, where all the winds disport themselves through a thousand chinks and crannies round about the windows, which I shall stop up, if I live to do it. This huge room has only a single window cut in three, as in olden times, and having six shutters. The walls, which are white, to some extent diminish the dullness

consequent on little light of day and but little view ; for an arid mountain, which is almost close enough to touch, shuts it out completely. At the base of the mountain there is a meadow of about fifty feet breadth, on which one can see twisting a little river with a thousand turns. Re-enter ; for it is ugly by the window. The tapestry is by great people unknown to me, and also ugly enough. There is a nook, hung with very rich hangings, which are disagreeable to the sight, because they do not match."

In this great barn of a place the fireplace was so small that even when it blazed to the uttermost the air was hardly tempered. Indeed, the whole castle, with its thirty-two fires burning every day, struck chill. The furniture of her room was stiff, old-fashioned, and ugly. The whole was a great contrast to the comfort of Voltaire's and Emilie's apartments. Mme de Graffigny heartily disliked the room, not without good cause. There was also a study, a dress-closet, and a room for her maid, Dubois, which was only lighted from the corridor, and therefore not so draughty ; and a fine staircase, difficult to ascend because it was so old, led to this suite of guest-rooms. But the real disadvantage was that every part of the castle, except those occupied by the chief lady and gentleman, were of a disgusting filthiness ! Emilie and Voltaire were both much concerned with their own comfort, otherwise the servants probably did as much or as little work as they chose ; and a tumbledown castle is not the kind of place to remain clean and sweet without much effort on the part of those responsible for its upkeep.

There was one other apartment which received attention from everybody concerned. It was the bathroom. In

those days a bathroom was apparently not in constant use for its legitimate purpose. We hear of the fair Emilie taking a bath when she was expecting Desmarets to arrive at Cirey—no doubt as a kind of welcoming ceremonial. Certainly this room was occasionally used as a drawing-room. It was so like the study that perhaps confusion arose on that account. Emilie dated one of her letters to Algarotti from “la chambre des bains,” and Voltaire held a reading there, behind closed doors, as though his poetry took on an added flavour from the mystery of the surroundings. If we are to believe Mme de Graffigny, the apartment was a work of art in itself. She goes into ecstasies over it.

“Ah, what an enchanting place! The antechamber is the size of your bed; the bathroom is tiled all over, except the floor, which is of marble. There is a dressing-room of the same size, of which the walls are varnished in sea-green, clear, bright, lovely, admirably gilt and sculptured; furniture proportionate: a little sofa; small and charming arm-chairs, of which the wood is in the same style, carved and gilt; corner-cupboards, porcelains, prints, pictures, and a dressing-table. The ceiling is painted; the room looks rich, and very much like the study; there are mirrors and amusing books on lacquer tables. All this seems as though it were made for the people of Lilliput. No, there is nothing prettier; for this retreat is delicious and enchanting. If I had an apartment like that, I would be wakened at night for the pleasure of looking at it. I have wished for you to have one like it a hundred times, because you have so much good taste in little nooks of this kind. It is certainly a pretty *bonbonnière*, I tell you, because the things are so perfect. The mantelpiece is

no larger than an ordinary arm-chair, but it is jewel enough to be put in one's pocket."

At length, and none too soon, Mme de Graffigny's mania for describing things was exhausted, and she turned to the far more interesting task of describing people.

There was a good deal for the student of human nature to observe in that household, and the thing that struck the casual visitor first was the variable relations between Voltaire and Emilie. Were they happy together? No! Yes! No! All their little differences of opinion, their tiffs, their tempers, their irritated nerves were perfectly obvious to the looker-on in that circumscribed area, where nothing happened to turn the attention in a more profitable direction. Emilie was too trying for words. She sulked, she stormed, she spied, she refused to allow her lover out of her sight. Voltaire resented her interference, forgot his usual suave politeness, pleaded colic to save a confession of anger, and deliberately disobeyed her commands. When he was ill "he wriggled like a devil in a holy water pot." One day, when they were going to play a comedy, he received annoying letters. He gave fearful cries and fell into convulsions. Dorothea had tears in her eyes as big as a fist.

Mme de Graffigny, who had no clue at all to private troubles, which at this time were making life difficult for both of them, saw only the results of their anxiety, and judged the worst. She forgot that people with temperaments could not be expected to live in perfect peace—that there is a zest in quarrels sometimes, and a still greater zest in reconciliations; that though the annoyances of daily life together may seem unbearable at times, the pains of separation would be no better.

Voltaire and Emilie were not the kind of couple who find it impossible to live together, and equally impossible to exist apart. They had periods of storm and sunshine and great stress, but in the main they were lovers, and on certain intellectual lines they were entirely necessary the one to the other.

Their quarrels were petty in the extreme. Now it is Voltaire's coat that does not please his lady. She begs him to change it. He gives many reasons for not wishing to do so—the chief one the fear of catching a worse cold than the one he has at the moment. She insists. He sends his valet for another coat and disappears. Presently a message reaches him, asking him to return. The response comes that he is not well. A visitor arrives. Emilie goes herself, and finds Voltaire chatting gaily with his *gros chat*. At last he comes to her command, but resumes his black looks and injured air. Then she begins to cajole. Presently they are both smiling, and peace is re-established. A reading of *Méropé* takes place; the quarrel is forgotten.

Another time it is a glass of Rhine wine that she orders him not to drink. Angry words pass between them—very angry words. Those present try to joke it off. In time—it is a long time—they succeed. A recitation from the *Pucelle* causes all else to be forgotten. There are whispers that Madame forgets herself so far as to throw such handy portables as plates and forks when she is roused, that Monsieur lets his tongue run away with him and utters words such as “Stop looking at me with those haggard, squinting eyes of yours,” and others he assuredly regrets the moment they have left his lips; still, even were such lapses true, are they not counter-balanced by the merriest scenes imaginable, when every-

body is friendly and gay, and nothing can disturb the harmony and good-fellowship? There were experiments in physics and explanations of cylinders and globes, wonders seen under the microscope, puppet-shows, magic-lantern exhibitions, play-acting, sing-songs, recitations and readings, stories fit to make you split your sides, and punch-making which produced laughter for laughter's sake.

Voltaire at his best can be one of the most delightful, most amusing fellows, with a stock of entertainment in his brain and at his finger-ends which never fails until his audience is too tired to laugh any more, and he recites something serious and gives them thrills of a different kind. Emilie too! Could any one be more versatile? She can sing through a whole opera in an evening if need be; she accompanies herself on the harpsichord; she can act any part ever written, and the more grotesque it is the more she delights in the roars of laughter and jeers that her performance evokes; she can tell tales that bring the tears to the eyes of every one present, good honest tears that keep the heart young and tender, and leave no scars. She can be very, very sympathetic. Witness the evening when she desired to hear all about Mme de Graffigny's life-history—had she had any children, and other intimate questions. When the sad tale of her husband's brutality, tyranny, and avarice was told, every one present wept. She had had children, who had all died young; her husband had made her suffer and almost caused her death, so that she had had to take steps to get rid of him; she was almost penniless and homeless. Emilie "laughed to keep herself from crying," Voltaire burst into tears, Mme de Champbonin did likewise. It was so infectious that Mme de Graffigny cried too. For two hours they made remarks on this

unfortunate fate. Emilie, who liked to go to bed at eleven, sat up out of sheer kindness and sympathy, afraid that if her guest went to bed with her heart so full she would not sleep. She did not leave her until after three in the morning. "She spoke like goodness itself speaking," she consoled and comforted and crooned like a mother over a sick child. She made all kinds of offers in the fullness of her friendliness, suggesting that Mme de Graffigny should live with her, should be provided for.

But alas! Emilie was one of those unfortunate individuals who can never rest on the good impression she has created. Before many days had passed she was to act in a manner which not only put these overtures of friendship entirely into the shade, but awakened—and justly awakened—an enmity which was never to die out of Mme de Graffigny's memory as long as she lived. And her excuse—well, the only excuse she had for anything of the kind was Voltaire.

But the hour had not yet struck. Before it came there was to be more fun and frolic, a visitor in the shape of Emilie's brother, the Abbé de Breteuil and Grand Vicaire de Sens, an Abbé who loved good living and questionable stories, and who was himself *assez bon conteur*. More plays than ever were arranged for him; Emilie gave up some of her work and dressed herself more becomingly while he was there—when there were no visitors she was often *mal tenue*—and Voltaire said of him that he was "the most gay, the most pleasing of guests and of lovers."

Every one was requisitioned to act. Even Mme du Châtelet's little convent-bred daughter, Françoise Gabrielle Pauline, now twelve years old, was sent for from Joinville, four leagues away. She was the true offspring of that



MADAME DE GRAFFIGNY

Whose gossiping letters reveal the *vie intime* of Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet at Cirey

erudite mother. She took naturally to Latin, and she learnt her part in the play travelling in the coach to Cirey. She was not very pretty, but at least she had "joues rebondies," cheeks that Voltaire pinched in a fatherly manner.

Mme de Graffigny found that the part she had been asked to play was that of a young woman who was dying to be married, and who kept on asking whether there was not a queen at Paris. It seemed to her that the play was a farce, and that she was being chaffed, which she greatly resented. The play was one of the versions of *Boursouffle*. These comedies were distinguished by being called respectively "Grand Boursouffle" and "Petit Boursouffle." The first was performed in 1761, under the title of *Echange*, or *Quand est-ce qu'on me marie?* The other, with the famous part of Mlle de la Cochonnière played by Emilie herself, was performed under the auspices of Mme du Maine at Anet.

Mme de Graffigny's wishes were met, and she was excused from playing the part of the forward young woman, and given that of a governess instead.

The little theatre where all the representations took place was pretty, small, and not finished, but it did well enough for the shows. Mme de Graffigny enjoyed them all immensely, especially the puppets. She was greatly diverted by the piece in which Punch's wife thinks she kills her husband and sings *Fagnana, fagnana!*

Voltaire and Emilie were in their element when play-acting. She allowed her wild animal spirits to get the better of her; he was like an amiable child as well as a sage philosopher. Emilie wrote to Maupertuis about the theatre at Cirey, saying they had a company of tragedians and a company of comedians; that they played *Alzire*

and *l'Enfant Prodigue*, and only such plays as were composed at Cirey, for that was one of the rules. They were indefatigable, and tired everybody out. They had been known to go through thirty-three acts of tragedies, operas, and comedies in twenty-four hours. But that was exceptional.

When the Abbé de Breteuil, who only stayed a week, had gone, and there were no guests present, Emilie and Voltaire remained tied to their desks. The former worked during the greater part of the night, as well as all day long. She kept Mme de Champbonin's son copying her manuscripts until five o'clock, or even seven, in the morning. She slept only for two or three hours, and left off working for an hour for coffee, and at supper-time. Voltaire was nearly as much a slave to his pen. Coffee, which began about eleven, and was taken in Voltaire's gallery, was over by noon: Supper was at nine. When he was busy Voltaire did not come down for it till it was half over, and when he had finished hurried back to his work. Mme de Graffigny was much impressed by the manner in which the poet was served. His valet-de-chambre remained behind his chair, and the other servants handed everything that was required to him, "like pages waiting on the king's gentleman"; but it was done without an air of luxury or affectation, and Voltaire was scrupulously particular to see that Emilie was served first with what she liked.

Mme de Graffigny must have been aware that her pen tripped far too lightly over the paper. She soon resorted to several expedients for disguising her real meaning, expedients which any child could have fathomed at a glance. She called Voltaire Nicomedes and Emilie Dorothea, and she talked as though they were people

of whom Devaux had written to her and she was making comments on their conduct, saying how glad she was to hear that they were at ease enough in his presence to eat from the same spoon; that she rejoiced in what he told her of the happiness of their union, and hoped it would last, and so forth. But her greatest source of enjoyment was to copy little extracts of the poems and prose she heard at the readings, and this indiscretion finally led to her undoing. She wrote a description of Catinat from *L'Histoire de Louis XIV*; she told him the story of *Mérope*, crying as she wrote it, for when Voltaire had read it her heart felt "plus gros qu'un ballon." She ventured to send him parts of Mme du Châtelet's translation of *The Fable of the Bees*, which she thought admirable. The preface had been written in half an hour. "Our sex ought to raise altars to her," cried the grateful Graffigny. "What a woman she is! How small I am compared to her! If I were diminished physically in proportion, I should be able to escape through the keyhole." But her crowning mistake was in describing the *Pucelle* to Devaux, who, it is true, had heard some of the early cantos at Lunéville. It does not say much for Mme de Graffigny's perspicacity that, after being in Emilie's house and seeing her day after day, she had not realised the risk she ran in as much as mentioning that terrible *Pucelle* in her letters. Poor blundering old lady, she little deserved the indignity that was to befall her, if intention may be said to play a part in the enormity of crime. No one could have been more innocent of the desire to do harm than she. But it is always the well-meaning people who make the most mischief.

First of all she noticed something wrong about her

letters from Panpichon. They did not arrive when they ought to have done so. One was missing altogether; and then she suspected, nay, she soon was sure, that they were being opened; read, and sealed up again before she received them. She thought the people at the post office must be exceedingly curious concerning her expressions of friendship. She knew nothing of authorities in wait to discover the smallest of Voltaire's indiscretions. To her the charm of Cirey was gone for ever. It had not lasted long—only a bare three weeks. Now she had “vapours,” she was ill, her eyes troubled her, she brooded over the mystery, she felt an air of hostility against her, she was indeed utterly miserable. She refused to tell her dear Panpan the cause. She wrote to him: “I have received the letter which I told you had not come to hand. You speak in it to me of a verse of the *Pucelle* which you find charming. I no longer remember which it is. Please return to me the leaf of the letter in which I speak of it . . . this letter is necessary to me. Do not make any comment upon it.”

Her fits of the blues increased. “You will not believe, my dear friend, that I could suffer from vapours in this enchanted palace? Ah, well! Nothing is more true than that I have been overcome by them,” she wrote. She read Voltaire's Essay on Fire, but it did not relieve her mind. At length she threw herself on her bed, and lay there for three hours without them passing away. She was more miserable than ever; she withdrew to her room constantly, and thought of nothing else but the terrible thing that had happened. At last, at last Panpan must share her confidence; she was so overcome by her frightful experience that she felt on the point of death, and could no longer keep it secret.

On the evening of December 29 she had supped in company with Voltaire, Mme du Châtelet, and the others. Everything was quiet, there were no signs that a storm was brewing, no premonitory rumbles from the thunder-clap that was to burst at midnight, not without streaks of lightning. After supper, being told that no letter had arrived for her, and pondering upon how this could be, she withdrew to her room to seal one to Panpan. She generally used black wax, hoping it would give him gay thoughts—that was one of her little jokes. She was happily absorbed in her occupation, the time passing in memories of her favourite little poet, when suddenly, without warning, the door burst open, and Voltaire entered the room unceremoniously and in a state of extraordinary agitation.

“I am lost!” he cried; “my life is in your hands.”

Naturally Mme de Graffigny did not in the least understand this melodramatic appeal to her. “What can you mean?—bon Dieu!” she asked.

“What do I mean? Why! that a hundred copies of some verses of the *Pucelle* have been circulated. I am off. I shall flee to Holland—to the end of the world—I hardly know where.” Then in excited language he begged her to write to Panpan and insist that he should do what he could to withdraw the verses from publication.

Mme de Graffigny assured him in all good faith that she would do everything possible to help him, and mildly expressed her regret that such a *contretemps* should have taken place during her visit. She had still no inkling of the truth. But Voltaire refused to listen. He burst into a rage, and accused Mme de Graffigny to her face of sending the poem to Devaux. “No shuffling,

madame ; it is you who sent them," he said. At this she fell a-trembling, and protested her innocence. Then he declared that Mme du Châtelet had proof that Panpan had read the verses to Desmarests at the house of some lady, and that he had given copies of them away. He begged her to write to Panpan to send back the original and the copies. She was so frightened that, hardly knowing what she did, she wrote as he requested. Whilst she was writing Voltaire redoubled his cries that he was lost, and that nothing could save him.

The scene lasted about an hour, but it was only preliminary to a far worse state of affairs. Presently Emilie burst into the room like a fury, and repeated Voltaire's accusations with added epithets. Mme de Graffigny remained silent under this shower of abuse. It was impossible to do otherwise, for the lady's language flowed in a forcible and uninterrupted stream. She drew the offending letter from her pocket and thrust it into Mme de Graffigny's face, almost shrieking at her : "There is the proof of your infamy. You are one of the most unworthy creatures. You are a monster whom I have sheltered, not through friendship, for I never had any for you, but because you had nowhere else to go. And you have been shameless enough to betray me, to ruin me, to steal from my writing-desk a work which you deliberately copied——" and much more of this kind. She stood in front of her victim, who was rendered almost speechless and uncertain as to whether she was about to receive a blow. As soon as she could find her tongue she murmured : "Be quiet, madame. I am too unhappy that you should heap such indignity upon me."

At last Voltaire dragged Emilie away by main force. She continued her torrent of abuse in so loud a tone that

Mme de Graffigny's maid, who was two rooms away, heard every word. The scene lasted until five o'clock in the morning, and Mme de Graffigny was quite exhausted. When she recovered herself sufficiently to look at the letter which had been thrust under her eyes she saw in it the unfortunate phrase, "The canto of the *Pucelle* is charming." She explained its meaning at once. She had told Devaux how much the reading had delighted her, but there had been no copying or stealing or anything else underhand.

What an unfortunate scene ! What a sad termination to Mme de Graffigny's enjoyment of her visit ! She could not realise that Emilie, tuned to breaking pitch on the subject of Desfontaines' perfidy, of which Mme de Graffigny as yet knew nothing, had completely lost her wits and wreaked her gathering passions on the head of the nearest possible victim. They were not justifiable passions, by any means—they were ugly and vulgar, and all the more unpardonable for being hurled at the weak and defenceless ; but Voltaire was all she had, and the happiness of her life and his was threatened. Let the woman with one treasure, which she fears to lose, be the first to judge her. She was guilty, moreover, of opening private letters, and nothing can ever be said in extenuation of that except the worst of excuses, that at that date everybody's letters were more or less under public surveillance, and perhaps there was not the privacy attached to them that exists to-day. By her own confession Emilie was accustomed to open Voltaire's letters, except those she knew were on business, and these she regarded as sacred. That gave an element of domesticity to their friendship which was half its charm. But even then, there was a wide step between opening Voltaire's

letters and those addressed to Mme de Graffigny. She ought to have been thoroughly ashamed of herself for what she had done, and when she had cooled down and come to her senses she was so, no doubt.

Voltaire, feeling he had misjudged the case, was the first to ask for pardon ; but to persuade the excited Emilie to do likewise was a far more difficult matter. He argued with her for hours in English. He besought, he prayed, he insisted. Megæra (so Mme de Graffigny renamed her now) refused. The poor insulted lady could not recover from her trembling and convulsions. She spent three days and three nights in tears. She was "in hell," homeless, friendless, without money, unable to leave the house, though she would have preferred to sleep on straw in a stable rather than in the room that seemed so full of horrible memories.

When the apology was given it was unsatisfying. At eight o'clock that evening Megæra, followed by her attendants, came in, and after a curt bow remarked in a dry tone, "Madame, I am sorry for what has happened," and then she turned to Mme de Champbonin and spoke of something else, and drew her husband into the conversation with the sang-froid "of some one who has just got out of bed." M. du Châtelet had already done his best to explain away his wife's unreasonableness. He advised Mme de Graffigny to send for the suspected letter and clear her name. Mme de Champbonin was also of this opinion. Voltaire continued to weep forth excuses, and confessed that his mistress could be very terrible, and was wanting in flexibility, but that her heart was nevertheless in the right place. Mme de Graffigny was not easily consoled. She spent the days in her room, only coming forth at supper-time like some prowling bat. The suppers

were dreadfully uncomfortable. Nobody spoke. The Megæra threw looks of fury at her victim now and again, until the latter felt it a relief to get up from the table and leave the room at the earliest moment possible.

It must have been obvious to every one but the poor blind Graffigny woman that beneath her uncompromising attitude Emilie was aching with distress at the misery she had caused. But she had too much false pride to confess it. It was out of her power to be really ill-natured. Whilst she thought her rage was justified, she had let it loose without restraint. But the matter once explained, she did not wish for any more scenes. Seeing that her apology had not been taken in the right spirit, she spoke of the matter again, saying plainly and simply that her apparent coldness was due to the embarrassment she felt that such a thing should have happened, but if Mme de Graffigny would help her everything should resume its usual course.

Emilie was capable of forgetting, but not so the Graffigny. She had been wounded in the tenderest spot—her dependence on others. After the second explanation things were a little better, and Emilie took Mme de Graffigny for a drive—a doubtful pleasure to the latter. Fortunately visitors arrived, and caused at least some diversion. The “Gradot Mathématicien,” as Mme de Graffigny called Maupertuis, came on January 12, but, smarting under her rebuff, she was not interested in him, and only supped in his company three times. When he left on the 17th to go and see Jean Bernoulli at Basel, Voltaire wrote to the Abbé d’Olivet, “You should come and take a cell in the convent or rather the palace of Cirey. The one of Archimædius Maupertuis,

who has just left, would be well occupied by Quintillien d'Olivet."

There had long been talk of inviting Mme de Graffigny's three friends, Panpan, the little saint, and the doctor. It was her motto that "to live in one's friends was almost to live in heaven." But Mme du Châtelet did not care for guests who expected too much attention, so that she asked before inviting him whether Saint-Lambert was one of those who liked to stay in his room. She was assured that he was, but nevertheless the visit fell through. Mme de Graffigny chided him gently for not accepting the invitation. "Oh, my little Saint," she wrote, "all that hinders you from coming is the fear of appearing to be an ass. But I can assure you that asses are well received here."

Supposing Saint-Lambert had come then—nearly ten years before his actual meeting with Emilie—would there have been such tragic consequences? Things might have gone differently.

Failing Saint-Lambert, Voltaire asked that Panpan should be invited—that dear Panpichon, the pet of the ladies of Lunéville.

One evening at supper he remarked, "Now then, let's have dear little Panpan here, so that we may get to know him."

"With all my heart," echoed Mme du Châtelet; "tell him he must come."

"But you know how timid he is; he will never speak before *cette belle dame*," said Mme de Graffigny.

"Wait," said Voltaire: "we will put him at his ease. On the first day we will only look at him through the keyhole; on the second we will keep in the study, and he will hear us speak; on the third he shall come into the

sitting-room and shall speak from behind a screen. We shall love him very much as soon as he has grown accustomed to us."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Emilie; "I shall be charmed to see him, and I hope he will not be afraid of me."

But this visit did not take place, any more than the other. Then they tried to get Desmarests to come, and he allowed himself to be persuaded.

Mme de Graffigny was very fond of Desmarests—fonder than he was of her. She called him the Doctor, Cliphon, the big dog, the big white dog, or Maroquin, whichever pleased her best at the moment. She grew quite excited when he did not turn up at the hour he was expected. When he came they all spent the first day in Mme du Châtelet's room, where she lay lazily taking a siesta; but she soon enrolled him as an actor in *Boursouffle*, sang to him accompanied by the harpsichord, and took him for drives and rides. His old love was forgotten, he only busied himself with the new.

And the old love, broken and unforgiving, was wondering where to lay her diminished head. She had bethought herself of a convent in the neighbourhood, but the plan fell through. At last it was arranged that she should go back to Paris, and there the Duchesse de Richelieu offered her hospitality. She left Cirey on February 8, a sadder if not a wiser woman.

One day Voltaire had come to her room to tell her of *La Voltairomanie*. No sooner had he begun to speak of it, than a servant came with a message from Mme du Châtelet to call him away. Another day, while Mauptuis was staying at Cirey, Athys (she called Voltaire Athys now, because it was shorter than Nicomedes),

believing Dorothea occupied with her guest, sent for Mme du Graffigny to read her his *Mémoire sur la Satire*, which was the reply to *La Voltairomanie*. While they were in the middle of this absorbing occupation, Dorothea entered suddenly, stood still at the door, pale with anger, her eyes flashing, her lips quivering. After a moment's silence and embarrassment on both sides, she said, "If you will permit me, Madame, I wish to speak to Monsieur." Athys said, "I am reading what I have written to Madame." Mme du Châtelet made an effort to restrain herself, and the reading continued; she objected to one or two of the phrases, and then began to argue with him. At length she flung herself out of the room in a rage. Mme de Graffigny felt uncomfortable; she had wished to escape, but was not allowed to do so. The reading continued.

Had Mme de Graffigny only realised the gravity of the situation, she would at least have had some sympathy with Mme du Châtelet, who during the preceding weeks had been plunged into the bitterest despair and anxiety over the Desfontaines affair.

CHAPTER VII

A LIBEL AND A LAWSUIT

IN none of her relations with Voltaire does Mme du Châtelet appear more the devoted friend and comrade than in the Desfontaines affair. Ever since Voltaire had taken the trouble to obtain Mme de Prie's influence in releasing the Abbé in 1724 from an imprisonment which for once had probably been justly deserved, and had procured for him a shelter under the roof of his own friend, the Président de Bernières, Desfontaines had been a danger and a menace to him. In 1735 and for three long years he made attacks on Voltaire's work in one form or another. First he wrote a slander against the man to whom he owed his honour, if not life itself. For this he begged pardon on his knees. Then he translated the *Essay on Epic Poetry*, from the English in which Voltaire had written it, so badly that the harassed author had to re-translate the whole. Then he wrote against the *Henriade*, allied himself with the arch-enemy J. B. Rousseau, composed an infamous satire on *Julius Cæsar*, and made himself generally so objectionable that Voltaire, bewildered, wrote to Thieriot, "What fury possesses this man, who has no ideas in his mind except those of satire, and no sentiments in his heart except those of base ingratitude? I have never done anything but good to him, and he has never lost a single chance of outraging my feelings."

In 1736 Desfontaines seemed about to suffer for his

indiscretion in holding up the French Academy to ridicule ; and Voltaire, seeing him in the depths of misfortune, was generous enough to forgive all he had done ; but Desfontaines continued his attacks. "He is like a dog pursued by the public, which turns now to lick and now to bite," continued the victim of the Abbé's spite ; and because it was impossible to remain patient for ever under repeated insult, the seeming worm turned at last, and showed that it was not a worm at all, but a scorpion with as keen a sting as any. In language suitable to the retort he wished to make, Voltaire wrote a strong denunciation of his tormentor under the title of *Le Préservatif*, fathering it upon the innocent Chevalier de Mouhy. The *Préservatif* was full of just and unjust, instructive and destructive criticism. In it Voltaire declared that Desfontaines, as a mark of gratitude, made a libel against him, which he showed to Thieriot, who made him suppress it.

The disguised authorship did not deceive his adversary. In reply Desfontaines produced the *Voltaireomanie*, a publication which shook the terrestrial paradise of Cirey to its very foundations. It appeared on December 12, 1738, and in it the *Henriade*, the *Temple du Goût*, and the *Eléments de Newton* were held up to ridicule ; and, worse still, Voltaire, the man and his life, or certain episodes of his life, such as the onslaught by Rohan's men, and his beating on the bridge of Sèvres by Beauregard the spy, were dragged to light and given the worst possible interpretation—his personal courage being impugned. Mme du Châtelet, receiving a parcel which contained this vile compilation on Christmas Day, concealed it from Voltaire, and poured forth some of her resentment to d'Argental.

"I have just seen this fearful libel," she wrote on the

26th. "I am in despair. I fear your friend's sensitiveness more than the public, for I feel assured that the cries of this mad dog cannot harm him. I have prevented him from seeing it; his fever did not leave him till to-day. Yesterday he fainted twice. He is in a state of great weakness, and I should greatly fear if, in the condition he is in, he should suffer any violent shock. He is extremely sensitive on these points. The Dutch booksellers, the return of Rousseau, and this libel—these things are enough to kill him. There is no fraud which I would not practise to hide, or at least soften, news so afflicting; and I dare not flatter myself that I shall succeed for ever."

Mme du Châtelet's state is more easy to imagine than to describe. She had worked herself up into a fury against Desfontaines and against Thieriot, who seemed to her the most dishonest and ungrateful persons it was possible to imagine. She was in a fever of anxiety on behalf of Voltaire; she was dying to do something to ameliorate a condition of things which was unbearable, and she did it, and did it in her most characteristic manner, by writing an answer to the defamatory letter by the Abbé Desfontaines herself. When Mme du Châtelet decided to hit out, she hit out straight from the shoulder, like a man.

"Naturalists," she wrote, "seek with care certain monsters which nature occasionally produces, and the researches they make concerning their origin are only undertaken out of simple curiosity, which does not protect us against them; but there is another kind of monster the search for which is more useful to society, and the extermination of which is far more necessary. Here is one of an entirely new kind; here is a man who

owes his honour and his life to another man, and who has gloried not only in outraging his benefactor, but even in reproaching him for his benefits. Unfortunately for human nature, there have always been ingrates, but perhaps there have never been any who have gloried in their ingratitude. This crime heaped on crime was reserved for the Abbé Desfontaines. The new libel which he has just published against M. de Voltaire bears this double character. The horror and contempt which this infamous writing has inspired against its author in all those who have brought themselves to read it, have avenged M. de Voltaire sufficiently, and no one doubts but that he will follow the advice of all his friends—that is to say, of all honest people—who have begged him not to compromise himself with a wicked scamp, who for a long time has been an object of public horror, and to treat with contempt shafts which cannot reach him, and which will recoil upon the feeble hand which launched them. Moreover, no one would deign to raise the question of this libel if it were not full of falsehoods which it is necessary to refute, however contemptuous may be the source from which they originate.”

She then proceeded to enumerate the misstatements—to use no harsher term—which Desfontaines had had the audacity to make in *La Voltairomanie*. He had claimed intimacy with Président de Bernières prior to Voltaire’s introduction, which the latter’s widow could easily refute; he denied that Voltaire had ever taken up cudgels on his behalf; and, worst of all, he contradicted Voltaire’s statement in the *Préservatif* that Thieriot had ever set eyes on a libel written by him against Voltaire. He said, in fact, that no such libel had ever existed. Emilie was quite ready to bear witness to the contrary; nay, she

panted to disclose the truth. "M. Thieriot," she said, "is so far from ever having thought of denying the fact [of having seen the libel] that during his last visit to Cirey he acknowledged it in the presence of several people worthy of trust, and spoke of it with the indignation that such a horror merited." Her reply continued for many pages, and concluded with a parting shaft: "Socrates thanked God that he was born a man, and neither brute, Greek, nor barbarian; and Voltaire ought to be equally thankful that his enemy is so contemptible."

This long and indignant reply to the *Voltaireomanie* Mme du Châtelet despatched to d'Argental, telling him of her embarrassment and of her desire to keep the affair secret from Voltaire, but, at the same time, of her determination not to let it pass in silence. "I flatter myself that I have shown more moderation than he would have done, even though I may not have been as spirited." She wrote adding that she did not wish to take such an important step without consulting the guardian angel, and hoping he would approve of her plan. Her chief anger was against Thieriot, and she felt there was nothing she would not do to induce him to clear his name of the imputation against him.

"What do you think of a man," she continued in the same letter, "who suffers them to say publicly of him 'that he trails, in spite of himself, the shameful remains of an old bond, which he has not yet had the strength of mind to break'?—he who owes the little that he is to the friendship with which M. de Voltaire honours him; and, further, who informs me coldly 'that he has not read this libel, but that M. de Voltaire drew it upon himself,' while l'Abbé Desfontaines has the audacity to say, 'When M. Thieriot was asked whether the fact of the

libel at the Président de Bernières' house was true, he was obliged to answer that he had no knowledge of any such thing.' I wrote about this in good strong terms, but if he does not make the most authentic reparation to M. de Voltaire, I will pursue him to the end of the universe to obtain it."

All the fat was in the fire, as the saying goes. Thieriot temporised, prevaricated, wrote a letter to Mme du Châtelet full of weak argument and weaker defence. He did not, it appeared, wish to be mixed up in the affair at all. His answers were vague and equivocal. He was afraid of the vituperations which might be hurled at his head. He desired to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Mme du Châtelet could hardly contain her indignation. She took his letter phrase by phrase, and rent each one of them to pieces. What! he recognises my zeal for my friend? Is it not edifying that Thieriot should appreciate my zeal? The *Préservatif* had scandalised him? Just then he was edified, now he is scandalised! He remembered the facts but not the circumstances? No doubt it was very convenient for him to forget circumstances which concerned Voltaire. He wrote about the author of *La Voltairomanie* without mentioning his name? Then he was the only one who pretended not to know it or dared not pronounce it. He spoke of having nursed Voltaire through the small-pox, but never a word of the favours Voltaire had showered upon him. And as a final fling, it was worth noting that all the very important circumstances which Master Thieriot had found it convenient to forget were written in black and white, word for word, in twenty letters still in existence, which should be printed, for fear he should forget what was in them again.

What a staunch friend, what a terrifying enemy, was this divine Emilie!

Meanwhile Voltaire had been concealing from her the very truth that she had been concealing from him. This mutual deception between friends for each other's sake was praiseworthy.

"All my precautions have been in vain," she wrote to d'Argental on January 3. "This unfortunate libel has reached your friend. He confessed it, but he did not show it to me. I even saw that all he feared was lest I should see it. I could not do less than appear to be in accord with his delicacy on this score, and I conformed to it by not letting him know that I had any knowledge of it. I sacrificed to his feelings the pleasure which I should have had in telling him that which I was prepared to do on his behalf. Thus, my dear friend, no one else but you is aware of it. He has never shown so much coolness and wisdom. He will not reply to this frightful libel except to destroy the slander which I know well he could not leave in existence without dishonouring himself."

Emilie had undoubtedly taken too much upon herself, but one can only like her for it.

Voltaire was soon to learn what she had done, and naturally was not altogether pleased. He wrote to d'Argental: "Mme du Châtelet is laughing at me, with her kindness of soul and her hidden benefits. She has at last confessed to me and read to me what she sent you. Would to God that it had been as presentable as it was admirable!" But to Thieriot he wrote more irritably than to d'Argental: "She was very wrong indeed to have hidden all this from me for a week. It means she has retarded my triumph for that length of time."

He had already decided to take legal action against

Desfontaines for criminal libel. His chief witnesses were to be Mme de Bernières and Thieriot; but—a bolt from the blue—Thieriot refused to say a word. His treachery dawned slowly on Voltaire's mind. For twenty-five years they had been confidential friends. Voltaire had done much for the younger man; on one occasion he had hidden fifty louis in the trunk which Thieriot had brought to Cirey, as a pleasant surprise for him. And now this blow! He wrote to implore him to explain:

“I have been your friend for twenty years, and all the bonds which could unite friendship have drawn us one to the other. . . . And to-day, a man universally detested for his wickedness, a man who has been justly reproached for ingratitude to me, dares to treat me as an impudent liar, when he is told that as the price of my services he has issued a libel against me. He cites you as a witness, he prints a statement that you have betrayed your friend, and that you are ashamed of still being a friend. . . . I know only from you that Desfontaines wrote a libel against me in the time of Bicêtre. I know only from you that this libel was a horrible irony called *Apologie du Sieur Voltaire*.”

Thieriot had not only mentioned the libel in the presence of Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet; he had written about it, and the letters were in Mme du Châtelet's possession.

“How is it,” continued Voltaire, “that he has the impudence to say you disavow that which you have said to me so many times . . . that he dishonours me through your lips?”

A few days later he refers to Thieriot's ill-considered letter to Emilie:

“Why have you written a harsh and unsuitable letter

to Mme du Châtelet under the existing circumstances? In the name of our friendship write her something better suited to her feelings. You know the strength and pride of her character; she looks upon friendship as a sacred bond, and the slightest shadow of policy in friendship appears to her in the light of a crime. How can you say to her that you hate libels as much as you love criticism, after sending her the manuscript letter against Moncrif, the verse against Bernard, against Mlle Sallé?—what do you expect her to think? . . . Once again, inform her that you are not vacillating for a moment between Desfontaines and your friend. Give the truth its due.”

Nothing hurt Voltaire more in the Desfontaines affair than Thieriot's defection. Pressure was brought to bear upon the defaulter from every side. Prince Frederick's influence was enlisted; d'Argental wrote to urge him to remain the poet's friend, and to render the service demanded of him; the *gros chat*, Mme de Champbonin, was despatched to Paris to woo him with feline blandishments; and, wonder of wonders, M. du Châtelet bestirred himself—no doubt at his wife's instigation—and wrote a long and persuasive epistle well calculated, as Emilie herself said, to make him reflect seriously, perhaps to die of shame.

The other witness, Mme la Présidente de Bernières, did all that was required of her without persuasion. It was suggested that Voltaire had been lodged and fed at the président's expense. This she contradicted, saying that Voltaire had paid amply for himself and his friend. Emilie was delighted. “La bonne Bernières,” she cried, “I love her with all my heart”—and she prayed that Thieriot might see the letter. Voltaire clinched the matter by writing a reply entitled *Mémoire sur la Satire*;

and the result of his shafts and Emilie's somewhat hysterical shrieks of denunciation appeared when Desfontaines was forced to retract his libel or go to prison. Being the man he was, he chose the former alternative, and signed a deed to that effect on April 4. Voltaire, gasping, bruised, and exhausted, was victorious. Emilie, smarting, weary, but rejoicing in her rôle of protector, was triumphant.

Only one anxiety remained. Throughout the trying time of the Desfontaines affair, Voltaire had been fretting to go to Paris, and fight openly on the field of battle. Among others the Abbé Moussinot had urged him to do so, much to Emilie's despair. She had brought all her wits to bear on the subject of keeping him at Cirey, and prayed d'Argental "on her knees" to write and say he would do wrong to go. She also begged him to send an antidote to Moussinot's suggestions. Voltaire said, "It is fearful that they will not let me go to Paris." However, no sooner was peace restored, and Voltaire fairly settled at work on a tragedy, than Emilie experienced a sudden perverse desire to make a move. Voltaire had suffered severely, and did not appear to be quite recovered in health. The only thing that she thought would restore him was the bustle of travel. He was not grateful for her solicitude, however. "I do not know when I shall return to my charming solitude," he sighed. "I am ill, and perhaps I shall never come back." But he had to go.

It was May 8, 1739, when they left Cirey, after living there with very little interruption since March 1737. Their destination was Brussels, their object the law-suit about the Marquis de Trichâteau's estates, which was to keep them in a kind of exile for some years to come.

Brussels was reached on May 28, after a stay at Valenciennes, where they had been entertained by the Intendant, M. de Sechelles, who arranged balls, ballets, and comedies "with infinite gallantry," as Emilie put it. On the 30th they proceeded to Beringhen, the estate composed of Ham and Beringhen, situated near Liège and Juliers, which had been left to the Marquis de Trichâteau through his mother, the Baronne de Honsbruck. The Marquis de Trichâteau died at Cirey in 1740, leaving the landed property to the Marquis du Châtelet. Voltaire had for some time been trying to dispose of "this little corner of the earth," which was burdened by debts, to the King of Prussia; but Frederick was not keen on buying it on his father's behalf, although it promised a convenient meeting-place between him and Voltaire.

The latter returned to the charge again and again, though he had to confess that the district was extremely desolate. "If Mme du Châtelet stays in this country for long," he wrote, "she may be called the Queen of Savages. . . . To-morrow we are going to the superb château of Ham, where we are not at all sure to find beds, windows, or doors. They say that thieves abound here. In that case they must be thieves who are doing penance. No one is worth robbing except ourselves."

From Beringhen they returned to Brussels, and took up their residence in the Rue de la Grosse-Tour; but they were still living what Emilie calls "a wandering life," in a letter she wrote to Prince Frederick to thank him for a present of amber inkstands and a box of games. "They arrived whilst we were at Enghien, rehearsing a comedy," she wrote. "We went down promptly from the theatre to play a little game of quadrille with the charming cards you sent."

A day or two later their host, the Duc d'Arenberg, caused Prince Frederick's health to be drunk in good wine of Hungary, which tasted like nectar. They remained the duke's guests until July 18, "in a castle where there are no books except those that Mme du Châtelet and I brought ourselves," wrote Voltaire, "but as a recompense there are gardens more beautiful than those of Chantilly, and one leads that free and delightful life which makes the charm of the country. The owner of this fine resort is worth far more than many books." They returned to the Rue de la Grosse-Tour on July 18, and set to work again. Mme du Châtelet was extremely busy with her lawsuit, learning Flemish and studying mathematics under Kœnig, whom she had taken to Brussels with her. These occupations left her so little time that she hardly knew whether Brussels was gay or sad. She feared that she would not have the advantage of his help for long, and desired to make the most of it. Kœnig was not well at this time, and appeared to look back with regret upon his life in Switzerland.

Mme du Châtelet found it hard to make progress under his tuition, and was discontented because she did not get on more quickly. She thought she was being hindered by the anxieties the law-case was causing her, and thereupon redoubled her efforts. "Just imagine," she wrote to Maupertuis, "that although I am often obliged to stay in town for supper, I get up every day at six o'clock to study, and in spite of this I have not yet been able to finish the algorithm. My memory fails me at every moment, and I fear that it is too late for me to learn such difficult things. M. de Kœnig encourages me sometimes; but he, who often told me to go slowly, hurries

me on at a pace with which I have great trouble to keep up. It is nearly six weeks since we have been working as much as our journey, his health, and my affairs have permitted, and I should be quite unable to respond with the application of rules I have learnt in even the smallest problem. To see things under another form disconcerts me ; in short, at times I am ready to abandon the whole thing. *In magnis voluisse sat est*, is not at all my motto. If I cannot at least succeed in being mediocre, I wish I had never undertaken anything. I do not know if Kœnig feels that he can make anything of me ; I believe my incapacity disgusts him. He who has attained to things so difficult may well pride himself on the honour of it. But I cannot complain. He is a man with a clear and profound mind. He is as patient with me as he can be, but he is discontented with his fate, although assuredly I forget nothing which can make his life pleasant and which may win his friendship."

So much for science. Law was quite as trying. No one knew whether the case would last three months or three years ; the only certain thing was that in the end it would be won. And as it turned out, for the next few years Emilie had to move from Brussels to Paris and back to Brussels at irregular intervals. Voltaire was in her train. He followed of necessity ; and he grumbled. Perhaps it relieved his feelings. But, by his own confession, the society of Mme du Châtelet was "his banquet and his music." At the end of August she dragged her two slaves to the capital. Voltaire lodged in the Hôtel de Brie, Emilie at the Hôtel de Richelieu, and Kœnig vanished for a space, to be heard of soon again. Paris was very gay, and there were many changes at Court. Mme de Mailly was now the reigning beauty. The

marriage of Louis XV's eldest daughter to the Infante Philippe took place on August 26, and gave rise to a number of festivities which Emilie thoroughly enjoyed and which Voltaire found boresome. "Paris is an abyss where one loses repose and the contemplation of one's soul, without which life is only a troublesome tumult," he wrote to the good Champbonin. "I no longer live. I am dragged in spite of myself into the stream. I go, I come. I sup at the end of the town, to sup the next night at the other end. From the society of three or four intimate friends it is necessary to fly to the opera, to the comedy, to see curiosities, to be a stranger, to embrace a hundred people a day, to make and receive a hundred protestations, not one instant to oneself, no time to write, to think, or to sleep. I am like the ancient who died, crushed by the flowers they threw at him." And after being tossed about in a perpetual tempest and brilliant chaos, they had to go back to Brussels to plead sadly, "It is like the gout after gambling. My dear tomat," he concluded quaintly, "I kiss your velvet paws a thousand times."

As for Emilie, *she* was never flustered; she never lost her wits, and she could collect her thoughts everywhere, being quite capable of dancing, feasting, and playing cards all night, and getting up to work out mathematical problems before breakfast. During this visit she saw a good deal of the learned Mme d'Aiguillon, who had studied English very successfully, probably to please her friend Algarotti. "She seems quite English now," she wrote to the Italian; "she understands this language better than I do, and I think perhaps almost as well as you do."

Emilie was also in communication with Maupertuis

concerning Bernoulli, whom she desired as a successor to Kœnig. Voltaire thought the latter a great metaphysician, but wanting in imagination, nor did he agree with his Leibnitzian views on matter.

In November the illustrious couple spent a week or so at Cirey, and then returned to Brussels, passing through Liège. The law-case was as exacting as before. Mme du Châtelet regretted Cirey as much as she regretted Paris; Voltaire said they had "abandoned the most agreeable retirement in the country to bawl in the labyrinth of Flemish chicanery." Yet the days passed much as at Cirey, seeing few people, studying till evening, and supping gaily. He was at work on *Louis XIV*, but was short of material. Emilie was concerned with the publication of her *Institutions de Physique*, written a couple of years before. She sent it to Prince Frederick, with whom she was now in regular correspondence, from Versailles in April 1740. Voltaire had remained at Brussels. "I hope and fear almost equally that you will have time to read it. You will perhaps be as much astonished to see it in print as I am ashamed." She told him that he would gather from the preface of the book that it was intended for the education of her only son, "whom I love with extreme tenderness." It began: "I have always believed that the most sacred duty of men was to give their children an education which hinders them in after-years from regretting their youth, which is the only time in which they can really learn. You are, my dear son, in that happy age at which the mind begins to think, and in which the heart has as yet none of the keener passions to trouble it." Voltaire had already sent his *Métaphysique de Newton*, wherein he had combated the principles of

Leibnitz, which Mme du Châtelet upheld. "Perhaps you will be astonished that our opinions differ so much," she added. "It seems to me that our friendship is the more sure and well-founded since such differences of opinion cannot affect it. The liberty of the philosopher is as necessary as the liberty of conscience."

Frederick found her book delightful, and that was saying a great deal for a work on metaphysics; but he thought parts of it might have been compressed with advantage. Cideville wrote to her to say that the work was written with the elegance and grace which she communicated to everything she touched. "You are capable, Madame, of awakening a taste for the most abstract sciences. . . . Can it be that the sublime author of this grave and dogmatic book is the adorable woman I saw lying in bed three months ago, whose large, fine, gentle eyes, dark eyebrows, charming and noble countenance, ingenious and piquant intellect, cheerfulness and sallies of wit give us all in truth quite different things to think of than philosophy, and who knows how to mix sentiment and admiration very agreeably?"

Lecteur, ouvrez ce docte écrit ;
 La physique pour nous quitte son air sauvage,
 Et vous devinerez à son charmant langage
 Que c'est Vénus qui vous instruit.¹

Unfortunately the *Institutions* was to cause a good deal of ill-feeling. Although Mme du Châtelet referred to Kœnig's help in her preface, the mathematician chose to quarrel with her because he thought she had appropriated too much of his work. Voltaire was up in

¹ Reader, open this learned script; physics no longer wears a savage air, and you will divine from the charming style that it is Venus teaching you.

arms in her defence in a moment. He could not bear ingratitude. He had suffered enough from it himself to know. He wrote a strong letter to Helvétius :

“There are very few lords with an income of two hundred thousand livres who do for their relatives what Mme du Châtelet has done for Kœnig. She looked after him and after his brother, lodged them, fed them, loaded them with presents, provided them with servants and carriages in Paris. I can witness that she inconvenienced herself considerably on their account, and in truth paid very well for the metaphysical romancing of Leibnitz with which Kœnig sometimes regaled her in the morning. All this has ended in proceedings quite unworthy of him, which Mme du Châtelet, in the largeness of her heart, wishes to ignore.”

The obscure writer Abbé Leblanc repeated the *on dit*. He appeared to have a special knowledge of the subject, and referred several times in an ill-natured way to Mme du Châtelet, saying that her passion for Voltaire was made ridiculously conspicuous, and that Paris was simply amused by her scientific pretensions.

“I must tell you,” he wrote, “of a scene which Milady Newton—that is to say, Mme du Châtelet—has prepared for us. She has been unfaithful to this great philosopher, and has deserted him for Leibnitz. During her stay in Paris she had the *Institutions de Physique* printed in three volumes, in which she adopted the system of the German philosopher and refutes Newton and his disciples. The work is ready, and has cost her two thousand crowns, which she has borrowed to have it printed. But that which prevents her from springing it on us is that she quarrelled with a German geometrician who was being paid by her when she composed it. M. Guillaume, in

l'Avocat Pathelin,¹ mixes the colours for his cloth with his dyer. The said erudite lady has done the same, they say. The geometrician has told the secret of the school; he has sworn to me and to all those whom he has seen here that this work was nothing else but the lessons he had given her, and that, since they had appeared, he would claim as his all that was good, and leave to M^{me} la Marquise only the follies and extravagances which she had added. However that may be, when M^{me} du Châtelet arrived here, M. Kœnig (which is the name of the German who is called here her geometrical *valet de chambre*)—M. Kœnig, I say, was the most honest and at the same time the most learned man there was in France; when she returned, she spread the report everywhere that he was the most dishonest man and the most ignorant man that she had ever known in her life. Such a prompt contradiction does not appear to be in favour of the lady, it seems to me. The geometrician and she both produced documents to justify their conduct; and, taking it all in all, I fear greatly that the lady acted very badly, and that the geometrician on his part conducted himself quite as badly. After all, if, as they said to him, she paid for his lessons, he was wrong to cry out about it and claim them back again.”²

Kœnig's opinion of the work was expressed in a letter to Maupertuis in February 1741. “M^{me} du Châtelet's book has appeared at last. I confess to you, Monsieur, that one must have a mania for writing in order to dare to commit a foolishness of this kind. They say that it has already been refuted. I shall enjoy seeing how she will reply on such matters as she does not understand.”

¹ An old farce.

² *Portefeuilles du Président Bouhier.*

The opportunity was soon to be given him of seeing how she replied upon matters she thought she understood very well.

Early in 1741, Mairan, the Perpetual Secretary of the Academy of Sciences, addressed to Mme du Châtelet a letter in reply to her *Institutions de Physique* on the subject of *vis viva*, or, as it is now termed, kinetic energy. It roused a wide discussion among the scientific men of the day. Voltaire agreed with Mairan's anti-Leibnitzian views, and did not defend her. "I flatter myself," he wrote, "that your little war with her will only serve to augment the esteem and friendship you have for one another. She was a little bit vexed that you should have reproached her for not having read your treatise carefully. I only wish she might have been persuaded by the things you say in it as easily as she read them, but remember, my dear and amiable philosopher, how difficult it is for the human mind to renounce its views. . . . Mme du Châtelet will not sacrifice the *vis viva* even for you."

Her reply was dated March 26, at Brussels. In it, it was said, she left nothing unanswered, opposed reasoning to reasoning, shafts of wit to shafts of wit, politeness to politeness. It is unnecessary to follow the technicalities of the discussion, but in the end the marquise was in the main victorious.

"Mairan is aggrieved, which is quite natural," she wrote to d'Argental, on May 2. "He has a right to be so, seeing that he was wrong, and that he mixed personalities in a purely literary dispute. It was not I who began saying piquant things. The *Institutions* contains only very polite statements about him and the reasons against his paralogism, but in his letter there are

only very sharp things against me and no reasons for his theories. Could I possibly do too much to remove the outrageous reproach which he made, that I had neither read nor understood, but had simply transcribed the results of another? Is there anything more piquant than that, and at the same time more unjust? I quite realised all his malignity. Kœnig's remarks have given reality to his reproaches, and he could not get over the idea that I had adorned myself with the peacock's feathers like the jay in the fable."

Mme du Châtelet may have desired to ignore what she regarded as Kœnig's perfidy, but from this letter it is easy to see that it hurt her none the less. Writing to Maupertuis from Fontainebleau in October 1740, she said: "They inform me from Berlin that it is an understood thing that Kœnig dictated it to me. I do not ask any other proof of your friendship in the matter of this injurious rumour than that you should tell the truth, for you know that my self-love is easily satisfied, and that I do not blush to admit the part he had in it. The only thing I have to blush for is to be under the slightest obligation to so dishonest a man."

Maupertuis had gone to Berlin at the request of Prince Frederick, who had also gathered Algarotti, Euler, and Wolff at his Court. Eventually Maupertuis married one of the Court ladies-in-waiting. Later he quarrelled with Kœnig, with Diderot, and with Voltaire, who satirised him in *Docteur Akakia*; but in the matter of the *Institutions de Physique* he appears to have sympathised more with Kœnig than with Emilie, and a breach in their friendly relations was the result. Again Voltaire saw that his championship was required, and was up in arms on her behalf. "I am grieved," he wrote

to Maupertuis on July 21, "to see you cold to a lady who, after all, is the only one who can understand you, and whose manner of thinking merits your friendship. You were made to love one another. Write to her (a man is always right when he puts himself in the wrong to please a woman); you will regain your friendship, because you still have her esteem." The letter came, but it was not all that could be desired. "You have written a little dryly to a person who loves and esteems you, if I may say so," he continued on August 9. "You have made her feel that she has been humiliated in an affair she thought she was conducting with generosity. She has been much afflicted." But this quarrel did not last long. "I do not know how to love nor how to be reconciled by halves," wrote Emilie. "I gave all my heart to you, and I count on the sincerity of yours." That was one of her characteristics—she could do nothing by halves.

Voltaire's two letters to Maupertuis were written from The Hague, whither he had gone to supervise the printing of the *Anti-Machiavelli* for Frederick, who had become king in May of that year, and found it advisable that some of his ideas on the duties of monarchs should be re-edited. This caused a separation of Voltaire from Emilie, of which she did not at all approve. She had tried to prevent it. It made her heart bleed, she wrote to Frederick, to see the human race deprived of such a valuable work as the *Réfutation de Machiavel*. She thought it was an incomparable work, knew of nothing better written; the thoughts in it were fine and just, and possessed all the charm of eloquence. If necessary, of course Voltaire would be ready to go to Holland and serve the king in this matter, but at the

same time she hoped such services might be dispensed with.

The correspondence—Voltaire's and Frederick's, with an occasional dash of Emilie—grew warmer and warmer, the compliments were heaped thicker and thicker, the jealousy—on the part of Emilie—strengthened daily, and she became aware that now Frederick was king and had no one to consider but himself she would have to exert all her powers to counterbalance those he was bringing to bear upon Voltaire.

The Hague visit lasted about a fortnight, and Voltaire returned to Brussels early in August. Already there was talk of a meeting between the king and the poet. It was suggested that it should take place at Antwerp on September 14. Emilie begged to be present. Perhaps she feared Frederick's personal influence even more than his written invitations; perhaps she thought such an interview would cause her to shine with reflected glory; or perhaps she suspected the truth—which was that Frederick, whilst he could not help acknowledging her as an important factor in Voltaire's life, nevertheless resented her interference in his plans. Her presence might win him over to a fairer view of the case. Frederick did not hesitate to express his real feelings. He wrote to Voltaire from Berlin on August 5, "To speak to you frankly concerning her [Emilie's] journey, it is Voltaire, it is you, it is my friend that I desire to see, and the divine Emilie with all her divinity is only the accessory of the Newtonian Apollo." The next day he reiterated his wish even more forcibly: "If it must be that Emilie accompany Apollo, I consent; but if I could see you alone, I should prefer it. I should be too much dazzled, I could not bear so much splendour all at once; it would

overpower me. I should need the veil of Moses to temper the united radiance of you two divinities."

However, Voltaire, or Emilie under the name of Voltaire, won by insistence. The moment when Apollo and Venus Newton (as Frederick called her) were to see Marcus Aurelius in the flesh was at hand, when destiny stepped in and prevented such an apparent anachronism. Frederick had an attack of fever. He wrote on September 5 from Wesel: "If the fever does not return I shall be at Antwerp on Tuesday (to-morrow week), where I flatter myself I shall have the pleasure of seeing you with the marquise. It will be the most charming day of my life. I fear I may die of it, but at least one could not choose a more delightful kind of death."

Emilie was not long kept in a state of suspense. Surely she must have gnashed her teeth and groaned about Frederick's untimely ague, which proved "to be more tenacious than a Jansenist," and for which the best cure appeared to be a visit from Voltaire alone at Moyland, near Cleve. "I do not know which afflicts me most," she wrote, "to know that your Majesty is ill, or to be disappointed in the hope I had of paying my court to you." Had she told the truth she would have confessed that the greatest pain she suffered was that Voltaire should go without her. She said as much to Maupertuis: "I felt great regret in seeing M. de Voltaire leave, and the king ought to give me the credit of this sacrifice. . . . I hope he will soon send back to me the one with whom I reckon on spending my life, and whom I have lent to him for a very few days only." Voltaire was becoming used to Emilie's appropriative way. He knew just the arguments she would use to prevent him leaving her: had he not suffered from them

in July when he went to The Hague? She no longer disguised her jealousy, her fears, her demands. She wanted him always by her side, almost without a soul to call his own. He saw alike her greatness and her pettiness, her generosity and her meanness. He applauded and resented these respective traits. This combination of the infinitely large and the infinitely little would have amused him had it not been so irritating. She allowed her feelings to overpower her judgment, and she had lost her sense of proportion where he and his affairs were concerned. "Madame," wrote Carlyle, summing up the position, "watches over all his interests and liabilities and casualties great and small; leaping with her whole force into M. de Voltaire's scale of the balance, careless of antecedences and consequences alike; flying, with the spirit of an angry brood-hen, at the face of mastiffs, in defence of any feather that is M. de Voltaire's."¹

It must be admitted on her side that Voltaire had done many things which had justified her attitude. He was impossibly indiscreet, child-like, emotional, and helpless in many ways. He had needed some one to look after his interests, and ought not to have blamed her for abusing the privileges he had at one time been only too ready to grant. In the disagreements of the present they were seriously jeopardising their future relationship. Voltaire was growing hardened to her appeals, Emilie was exhausting her passion for him in much lamentation and complaint.

The invitation to Cleve being too alluring to be disregarded, Voltaire started off in the face of all Emilie's upbraidings. He reached Moyland on September 11,

¹ Carlyle, *History of Frederick the Great*.



VOLTAIRE

(After an engraving by Alix)

and found Frederick surrounded by his little Court, which included Maupertuis, Algarotti and Keyserlingk. "I was conducted into his Majesty's apartment," he wrote, describing the interview in his Memoirs, "in which I found nothing but four bare walls. By the light of a candle I perceived a small truckle bed, two and a half feet wide, upon which lay a little man, wrapped up in a morning-gown of blue cloth. It was his Majesty, who lay sweating and shaking beneath a beggarly coverlet in a violent fit of ague. I made my bow, and began my acquaintance by feeling his pulse as if I had been his first physician."

Fortunately the attack was over by supper-time, and the kindred spirits were able to discuss the immortality of the soul, liberty, Plato, and a thousand subjects dear to their heart with a freedom that Emilie's presence would certainly have fettered.

Voltaire was in his element. He wrote his impressions of the visit to Maupertuis. "When we parted at Cleve, and you went to the right and I to the left, I felt as though I were at the last judgment, when the good God separates the elect from the damned. *Divus Fredericus* said to you, 'Sit at my right hand in the Paradise of Berlin,' and to me, 'Go, thou cursed one, to Holland.' I am now in this phlegmatic hell, far from the divine fire which animates the Fredericks, the Maupertuis, the Algarottis."

The king, too, had been charmed. His favourite poet had recited the admirable tragedy *Mahomet*, and carried them all off their feet with the eloquence of it. "The du Châtelet is lucky to have him," he wrote to Jordan.

It was not till the close of 1740 that the real blow

fell upon the divine Emilie—that Voltaire escaped and went to Berlin. In October he had returned to The Hague and installed himself in the King's old palace, still busying himself with the *Anti-Machiavelli*. Mme du Châtelet went to Fontainebleau in the meantime. She wished to look after Voltaire's interests at Court. On the 20th of the month the Emperor Charles VI died, and Frederick's ideas of sustaining peace vanished in smoke. Early in November Voltaire started for Reinsberg, accompanied by Dumolard, librarian-elect to Frederick. They passed through Herford, where the carriage broke down, and Voltaire rode into the town on horseback. He was attired far too gaily for equestrian exercises. "Who goes there?" said the sentinel at the gate. "Don Quixote," responded Voltaire lightly. From Reinsberg he went to Berlin, from Berlin to Potsdam, and then through Wesel, Cleve, and The Hague back to Brussels, where Emilie had worked herself into a state of hysteria and fever on account of his absence. He had left Berlin on December 2 or 3. He did not reach Brussels until January 2 or 3, owing to bad roads and the floods, and contrary winds which assailed him as he travelled by boat along the coast.

For twelve days whilst he was on the water Emilie had had no news of him. She was mad with anxiety. To the sorrow of his absence had been added the dread of such a fatiguing, not to say perilous, voyage. But at last he arrived. "All my troubles are over," she wrote to d'Argental, "and he swears to me that it is for ever." Meanwhile, Voltaire's version of his return to Frederick was not quite so complimentary to the divine Emilie. He had torn himself away from the most delightful court in Europe for the sake of a law-

suit, not at all "to sigh like a love-sick fool at the knees of a woman"—even of a woman who had abandoned everything for him, and to whom he owed every possible obligation. He felt virtuous, too, because Frederick had begged him to stay two days longer and this he had refused. "I do not say that from vanity," he wrote to d'Argental; "it is nothing to boast of; but it is necessary at least that my guardian angel should know that I did my duty. Mme du Châtelet was never placed more above kings."

Emilie found some crumbs of comfort in this. She mentioned it to d'Argental, and added plainly her sentiments about Frederick. "He does not understand certain attachments. One can only believe that he himself would care more for his friends. There is nothing he has not done to retain ours, and I believe he is annoyed with me. But I defy him to hate me more than I have hated him during the last two months. There: you will agree it is a pleasant rivalry." Poor Voltaire, however, found it quite the reverse. He did not see the delight of being fought over, and perhaps Emilie might have relaxed her energetic hold had she heard the word "duty" so often on his lips instead of "love."

As for Frederick, he smiled a meaning smile, and wrote to Jordan that he thought the seduction of Berlin was more than Voltaire could resist, the more so because the marquise's purse was not so long as his own. Well, well, kings must be allowed to be cynics, and Frederick had just then paid well for his cynicism, because Voltaire had sent him in a bill for his journey amounting to thirteen hundred crowns—"not bad wages for a king's jester!"

But when his idol was determined to invade Silesia

Voltaire was a little disappointed, and Emilie rejoiced at what she looked upon as a point gained to herself. "What does it matter how many provinces he takes," she cried, "as long as he does not rob me of my happiness!"

In the early months of 1741 Voltaire was working at *Mahomet*, which was performed at Lille, where he and Emilie went to stay with Mme Denis in April. In May they were back at Brussels. Towards the end of the year they were in Paris. They paid a short visit to Cirey in January, and then returned to Brussels.

One of the interests of this year was getting the fine Hôtel Lambert ready for occupation. It was situated on the Ile Saint-Louis. Voltaire took his share of the expenses. He described the house to Sir Everard Falkener, who was then at Constantinople, saying that it was one of the finest buildings in Paris, and placed in a position worthy of the Bosphorus, for it looked upon the river, and a long tract of land interspersed with pretty houses was to be seen from every window.

The Hôtel Lambert was built for M. Lambert de Thorigny, President of the Chamber of Requests; the architect was Levau. One of the most beautiful features of the interior was a monumental stairway. The first talk of the purchase occurred in 1738, but it was not till the end of March 1739 that the Hôtel was bought from the farmer-general Dupin at a cost of two hundred thousand francs. Four years later the residence became once more the property of its former owners. Mme du Châtelet's feminine excitement at owning one of the most beautiful hôtels in Paris was but a short-lived reality. It was not ready for occupation until 1742. On July 18 of that year Président Hénault wrote to Mme du

Deffand : " Mme du Châtelet is in her new house." She had then been there about three months, but by the end of the same year she returned to the more familiar hôtel in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. The exact cause of this removal is not certain. Voltaire had committed a new indiscretion, which perhaps had something to do with it. " The poor du Châtelet," wrote Président Hénault to Mme du Deffand, " ought to have a clause in the lease of all the houses she rents, that she will fulfil every part of the agreement except when Voltaire plays the fool during the period " ; and again : " She appears to me to be overcome with grief at the adventure of Voltaire."

The truth was that a letter was being talked of in Paris, " as mad a one as possible," which Voltaire had written to the King of Prussia. In it he expressed approval of Frederick's decision to make peace. All Paris disapproved, because Frederick's action was very anti-French. Voltaire, in his usual nonchalant manner, swore that he knew nothing about it ; he had, it was true, answered the King of Prussia's letters, but no one, not even the fair Emilie, had seen what he had written, and there was nothing in it resembling the one every one was discussing. He was accused of lack of patriotism. Mme de Mailly, who was usually good-natured, gave vent to uncontrollable anger, and demanded that he should be punished as a public example. Voltaire replied to her with a demand for an interview to prove to her that he was still a good citizen. All this had happened whilst Voltaire was on the verge of a great success with *Mahomet*. It considerably prejudiced his interests. The police reported the affair in August :

" The tragedy which Voltaire was to have produced this

week gives cause for public reflection on this author. It appears that he is generally decried. People are persuaded that the letter to the King of Prussia, which he repudiated, was certainly written by him. They cite M. de la Reynière, who has had it in his hands, and who gave it to M. le Cardinal.¹ They report that Voltaire, having been to exculpate himself in the eyes of Mme de Mailly, was very badly received, and that all those who have protected him so far have not wished to be mixed up in this affair. In spite of the protection of Mme la Duchesse de Luxembourg, they say she has forbidden him her door, as well as all other people of importance have done. Mme du Châtelet is regarded with eyes equally severe. They think it extraordinary that a woman of quality should lead by the hand a man who has become the object of general distrust. They say derisively that it will be well to guard against seeing her—that she has too much wit, and that she can remain with Voltaire, who ought to be all the world to her. They will no longer spare her on the score of gallantry.”

Nor was Voltaire's play spared. It was summarily withdrawn after four performances, being declared infamous, wicked, and blasphemous, no doubt through the agency of the usual cabal, of which Piron and Desfontaines were active members. Voltaire, disappointed and ill, departed suddenly for Brussels on the 22nd, accompanied by Mme du Châtelet. They were still mystified as to how the contents of the unfortunate letter had become public property. Mme du Deffand believed a supernatural agency had been at work. Frederick blamed the post-office officials at Brussels,

¹ Fleury.

but the truth was that the letter had been opened and copied at Paris.

In September Voltaire paid a rush visit to Frederick at Aix-la-Chapelle. As he had been ill, Emilie for once encouraged him in taking a short holiday. "He did not abuse his liberty," she wrote to d'Argental on October 10, "because he left on Monday and returned on Saturday." The king gave him as magnificent presents as before. He also offered him a fine house in Berlin, and a pretty estate. Voltaire replied that he preferred to dwell in the second story of Mme du Châtelet's house.

The following month she had an astonishing piece of news to communicate to the same correspondent. "The King of Prussia has written to M. de Voltaire to beg him to come to Berlin at the end of November or beginning of December. He has refused; but I assure you that it does not appear to me to have the merit of a sacrifice."

In the spring of 1743 Mme du Châtelet completed the arrangements for the marriage of her daughter Pauline to the elderly and none too charming Duc de Montenegro-Caraffa. Voltaire described him as "a Neapolitan with a big nose, a thin face, and a hollow chest." The marriage had been discussed for some time previously. Mme du Châtelet wrote to Frederick in May 1743, a few weeks after the wedding, to inform him that it had taken place. She said shrewdly that if her prayers had been heard, her daughter would have spent the remainder of her life at *his* Court, and that that would have been a happiness of which she would have been envious.

Within a month or two she exclaimed openly that the

King of Prussia was a very dangerous rival as far as she was concerned. Voltaire, having failed to obtain a seat in the Academy, and his tragedy *Julius Cæsar* having been refused representation, made these things an excuse for secret negotiations with Frederick, and left Paris on June 14, 1743, to carry out a special mission in Berlin. Emilie was in despair. The police report said that "all Paris was laughing at the tears which Mme du Châtelet shed on learning of Voltaire's resolution to go to Prussia"; and she wept still more because she did not receive many letters from him.

Voltaire described the reason of his journey in his *Memoirs* :

"The house of Austria rose from its ashes into new life; France was pressed hard by her and by England; and we had no resource left but in the King of Prussia, who had led us into this war, and who abandoned us in our necessity. They conceived the design of sending secretly to sound the intentions of this monarch, and try if he was not in a humour to prevent the storm."

Richelieu and the Duchesse de Châteauroux conceived the idea of sending Voltaire; the king fell in with it, and M. Amelot, Minister for Foreign Affairs, agreed. Voltaire was charged to hasten his departure. He wrote to Frederick that he had been persecuted by the Bishop of Mirepoix in the affair of the Academy, and that he desired to take refuge with a king. Boyer always signed himself *l'anc. de Mirepoix*. Voltaire read the abbreviation for *l'ancien* as *l'âne*. His revilings upon the head of the "ass of Mirepoix" were fast and furious.

Voltaire had the pleasure of revenging himself upon the bishop who had helped to exclude him from the Academy by enjoying a delightful journey, and serving

the king and the State. Maurepas, who ruled Amelot, also entered into the project with warmth.

“The most singular part of this business was that we were obliged to let Mme du Châtelet into the secret,” wrote Voltaire in his Memoirs. “There was not, in her opinion, anything in the world so unmanly, or so abominable, as for a man to leave a woman to go and live with a king; and she would have made a most dreadful tumult had they not agreed that, to appease her, she should be informed of the reason, and that the letters should all pass through her hands.” If she was aware of the wire-pulling that had led to the journey she greatly disapproved of, others were not. A letter from Mme de Tencin on this subject throws a confused light upon the negotiations, and a clearer one upon the relations between herself and Emilie. It was written to Richelieu on June 17, 1743.

“It is necessary that I should give you a confidence, of which I beg you to guard the secret. I should not like to grieve Mme du Châtelet, and I should do so deeply if what I am going to tell you were divulged by some one who could have heard it from her. This is it. They have reported that Voltaire was exiled, or at least that, in the fear of being so, he took flight. But the truth of the matter is that Amelot and Maurepas sent him to Prussia to sound the intentions of the King of Prussia on our behalf. . . . Mme du Châtelet would tell you this assuredly, if you were here; but would not write it, in the fear that her letters might be read. She believes that Voltaire will be lost if the secret escapes through any fault of hers. . . . Above all, let Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet believe that you have learnt of this matter through the *petits cabinets*.”

Doubtless Richelieu laughed in his sleeve when he received this effusion. The chief cause of it was far from laughing.

"I am in inexpressible affliction," wrote Mme du Châtelet to d'Argenson on August 28. "It is fearful, after three months of trouble, to be no further advanced than on the first day." She had been trying to get *Cæsar* played, in the hope that such an event would hasten Voltaire's return. On October 10 she wrote to d'Argental from Lille, that she had at last received a letter from Voltaire, but that it was only four lines long. "It is clear from this letter that he has not written me for a fortnight. He does not speak of his return. What things to reproach him with, and how far his heart seems from mine!" And then she said she was counting upon him, and upon his wife and his brother, to tell Voltaire how barbarous it was of him to expose her to such proofs of her love. If he was not costing her her life, her health was certainly suffering. Such a test was affecting it noticeably. "But if only I can see him again," she concluded, "all my griefs and ills will be cured."

Mme de Tencin wrote again on November 18 to the duke that Mme du Châtelet had completely lost her head, that she had gone to Lille in order to be more in touch with news from Voltaire, and that she felt quite sorry for her afflictions. "I shall not speak any more of the princess to you," she concluded; "it won't do to quarrel with her for the reason I have given you." Mme de Tencin, who was above all an intriguer, was intent on discovering something about the negotiations with Prussia from Mme du Châtelet, the "singular princess" who was "quite mad," but amused and irritated her by turns. She tried to make friends with

her and worm out her secret, but all to no purpose; the du Châtelet and her lover remained bound to Maurepas, and knew no better than to be his slaves.

In the midst of feasts, operas, and suppers the secret negotiation went forward at Berlin. But Frederick was too shrewd to make promises. At last he said: "Let France declare war against England, and I will march." Voltaire then returned to France. He had been away five months. Where was his promise only to stay ten days at the utmost? He had remained a fortnight at Bayreuth, "a delicious retreat"; he had been well entertained at Brunswick "with twenty dishes and admirable wines"; indeed, his journey had appeared celestial—a "passing from planet to planet." Moreover he had spent an extra fortnight at Berlin on his return journey. "Perhaps he would spend his whole life there," was Emilie's complaint to d'Argental. "I should feel sure of it if I did not know that his affairs of necessity call him back to Paris. He only wrote me four lines in a *cabaret* without explaining his reasons for going to Bayreuth, nor for his long silence." For two months she had had to learn of his whereabouts from ambassadors and gazettes. She had been dreadfully ill—she had had fever, a pain between her shoulders and in her right side, and a racking cough. She believed her chest was weak, and that she might die of consumption like poor M^{me} de Richelieu, who had succumbed to the same complaint in 1740. Her woes were endless, her letters a long sigh of reproach and grief at Voltaire's careless disregard of her feelings. "I have been cruelly paid for all that I did at Fontainebleau," she wrote in another letter. "I procured for M. de Voltaire an honourable return to his own country. I reopened the way to the Academy for him; in short,

in three weeks I undid all the harm that he had done in six years." And all this zeal and proof of her attachment had only resulted in this horrible journey to Berlin. He did not deserve to set eyes on her alive again. This idea filled her with self-pity. What fearful grief Voltaire would experience when the intoxication with which the Court of Berlin had inspired him should die out and nothing be left to him! She could not bear to think that some day the memory of her would be his torture.

Voltaire, it must be confessed, had thoroughly enjoyed his diplomatic rôle. It had been one long fête. "Through all," he wrote, "my secret mission went forward." But he was not to reap the reward. Soon after his return M. Amelot fell into bad odour with the reigning favourite, Mme de Châteauroux, and was dismissed. Voltaire was included in his disgrace. Emilie, disappointing as it must have been, was inured to many worries of a similar nature, and hardly realised this one in her joy at the return of her poet. In November they were together in Paris, from thence they went to Brussels for another spell of law-suit, and then, in the early spring, to Cirey—*en Félicité*—where all was bright again. "I am once more in charming Cirey," she wrote to d'Argental; "it is more charming than ever. Your friend appears enchanted to be here." The sun was shining very brightly indeed, for the time being, on the love affairs of the marquise and the philosopher. Président Hénault, who spent a long day with them in July, bore witness to their bliss. He was on his way to Plombières, and came in response to an invitation from Voltaire.

"I went through Cirey, where Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire invited me. I found them alone, except for a père minime, a great geometrician and professor

of philosophy at Rome. If one wished to draw a delightful picture of a delicious retreat, an asylum of peace, of union, of calmness of soul, of amenity, of talents, of reciprocity of esteem, of the attractions of philosophy joined to the charms of poetry, one should paint Cirey. A building simple and elegant *de rez-de-chaussée*, with cabinets filled with mechanical and chemical instruments. Voltaire in his bed beginning, continuing and completing works of all kinds." The père minime whom he found on the second floor was Father François Jacquier, who a few years earlier had published Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* with comments. He had gone to Cirey to finish a scientific treatise. Hénault also described his pleasant visit to Cirey to Comte d'Argenson; and Emilie wrote to d'Argental, "I assure you that I was very pleased to show my house to the président, and that I enjoyed the astonishment it gave him."

They had had a reading of the *Princesse de Navarre*, which Voltaire was writing for the marriage of the Dauphin. "The président and I cried," wrote Emilie, describing the beauties of the third act. Voltaire did not feel so convinced about the success of the piece. "It will make the dauphin and dauphine yawn," he said humorously to d'Argental; "but it may amuse you, for Mme du Châtelet likes it, and you are worthy to think as she does." The piece gave him an enormous amount of trouble. "How to amuse them? How to make them laugh?" he had written of the royalties for whose entertainment he was providing. "I to be working for a Court! I am afraid of writing nothing but nonsense. One only writes well when one delights in the choice of a subject."

Voltaire and Emilie remained at Cirey till September, the former polishing and re-polishing the *Princesse de Navarre*. Then they came up to Champs-sur-Marne, a place within five leagues of Paris, for the celebrations which took place on the king's recovery from an illness.

On September 14 Voltaire wrote to Hénault to tell him of a characteristic little action of Mme du Châtelet's, and that all unwittingly he had done her a great service and saved her much discomfort. They had been driving into Paris, and between the Croix des Petits Champs and the Hôtel de Charost had come upon a block of some two thousand carriages waiting in three rows to proceed. There were cries from two or three thousand pedestrians among the carriages, drunken men, hand-to-hand fights, "fountains of wine and tallow pouring on to every one," the mounted patrol increasing the confusion; and to make the matter worse, His Royal Highness Louis Philippe, Duc de Chartres, was returning calmly to the Palais-Royal with his great carriages, his guards, his pages; and nobody could advance or retreat until three o'clock in the morning. Their driver had never been in Paris before. Mme du Châtelet was covered with diamonds. She stepped out, crying for help, pushed through the crowd without being robbed or mobbed, entered Hénault's house, sent for a roast chicken from the cook-shop at the corner, and, concluded Voltaire, "we drank your health gaily at your own house, to which all the world wishes you would return."

At the beginning of January 1745 Voltaire went to Versailles, and stayed at the Hôtel de Villeray in order to be present at the rehearsals of *La Princesse de Navarre*. "Don't you pity a poor devil," he wrote

to Cideville, "who is the king's fool at the age of fifty, and who is more embarrassed with musicians, decorators, comedians, singers, dancers, than eight or nine electors would be in making a German Cæsar." This had a reference to the death of Charles VII. "I run from Paris to Versailles, I make verses in the post-chaise. It is necessary to praise the king highly, the dauphine prettily, the royal family gently, please the whole court and not displease the town."

The representation took place on February 23 in a specially constructed hall. The king and all the royal family were present. All the arrangements for this magnificent fête had been carried out by Richelieu. On the whole it was a success. Voltaire obtained more from it than he had hoped: the brevet of historiographer of France was delivered to him on April 1, 1745, and he received a pension of 2,000 livres as well as the promise of a post as Gentleman of the Chamber as soon as a vacancy should occur.

No sooner was Voltaire appointed historiographer than he set to work on his *Histoire de la Guerre de 1741*. This was remodelled later for the *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*.

Only one other event of importance occurred in the spring of 1745. Mme du Châtelet's son had been taken ill with the smallpox, and Voltaire accompanied Emilie to Châlons to nurse him. "That is all one can do," he wrote. "One is only a spectator of the ignorant tyranny of the doctors." However, Voltaire knew a good deal of the dread disease, and more than twenty years earlier had written a long letter of advice on the subject to Emilie's father. Now, by dint of much lemon-water and other common-sense measures he succeeded in saving her son.

Alas! that it was for no better fate than the scaffold during the Revolution.

In the autumn, as usual, Mme du Châtelet accompanied the Court to Fontainebleau, and Voltaire went too. De Luynes, in his *Journal*, tells a story of Emilie's ill-timed arrogance.

“The queen arrived between six and seven o'clock, the king three-quarters of an hour later from Choisy. The queen had three carriages, without counting those of the equerries. Mme de Luynes and Mme de Villars, Mme la Duchesse de Boufflers and Mme de Bouzols were in the queen's carriage. Mmes de Montauban, de Fitz-James, de Flavacourt, and du Châtelet were in the others. Mme du Châtelet had begged the queen a few days previously to have the honour of accompanying her on this journey. She told Mme de Luynes afterwards that she feared her health would not permit her to take advantage of the queen's kindness; but at length, the evening before the journey, she sent word that she would certainly be at Versailles before the departure of Her Majesty. She arrived in effect a quarter of an hour before Marie Leczinska stepped into her carriage. They say that Mme du Châtelet (Breteuil), puffed up with the grandeur which pertains to the house of du Châtelet, and the prerogatives which she regards as her due, desires to be considered first on all occasions and to take first place. No one could have more intellectual gifts than she, nor more scientific knowledge. She knows even the most abstract sciences, and has composed a book which has been published. She is so clever that she sometimes has fits of abstraction, and the prejudice against her makes people attribute her preoccupation to haughtiness, of which she is frequently accused.



EMILIE GABRIELLE DU CHÂTELET
(From an old engraving)

“The queen started immediately after Mass. Mme du Châtelet stepped forward first of all for the second carriage. She stepped in and placed herself in it comfortably, then asked the other three ladies whether they would get in. These three ladies, shocked by her manner, left her alone in the second carriage and went into the third. Mme du Châtelet, slightly embarrassed, wished to get out again to join the other ladies. The valet told her the third carriage was full. So she travelled the whole way alone.”

This is a delightfully characteristic glimpse of the divine Emilie. She wished greatly to repair her error, and begged Richelieu to ask Mme de Luynes to express her excuses to the Queen and try to explain away the awkwardness of her behaviour. The queen received Mme du Châtelet's excuses kindly, and no more was said of the affair. But on November 19, when the return journey was made, Mme du Châtelet took good care not to be alone in a carriage again.

Early in the following year an important addition was made to Mme du Châtelet's household in the person of Longchamp, who left memoirs which are valuable if not always reliable dealing with the more intimate aspect of the life of the divine Emilie and her poet.

This same Longchamp, who later became secretary, valet, and copyist to Voltaire, was at first employed by Mme du Châtelet. His sister had been her maid, and she suggested the post of *maitre d'hôtel* for her brother. Longchamp arrived in Paris in January 1746, and went to Mme du Châtelet's house, where he was expected. She rang for him as well as her maid when she dressed in the morning, and this offended his sense of propriety. He was not easily shocked, but according to his views

she was not sufficiently circumspect. His sister assured him that her mistress hardly regarded a man-servant as a human being, and that he was to feel no embarrassment. When it came to fetching boiling water for her bath, however, and she took no more notice of him than if he had been the kettle that contained it, he decided she had gone too far, and declared that he could never accustom himself to such freedom on the part of the mistresses he served.

For five or six months he remained in Mme du Châtelet's household, but did not find the work sufficient to keep him fully occupied. Her chief meal in the day was supper—indeed, it was the only substantial one—and for this she was often out. Her *déjeuner* consisted of coffee and cream with a roll. There was very little indeed for her *maître d'hôtel* to provide, and not much cooking in the house. During the months of his service Mme du Châtelet only gave ten or twelve supper-parties, and then there were not many guests, but few dishes and less wine. Nor was the cellar as well furnished as Longchamp would have liked to see it. The wine-merchant sent in a couple of dozen bottles at a time, half of it red wine, misnamed Burgundy—it was manufactured in Paris—and the other half white, styled champagne, and no more genuine than the other. When this quantity was finished it was supplied afresh.

“My chief work,” continued Longchamp, “was to provide other things for the household, such as wood, light, and forage. I was supposed to see that nothing was wanting in the rooms, offices, or stables. Madame did not supply food for her servants, but gave them money instead. I had to pay them every fortnight—her coachman, her two lackeys, and her cook at twenty sous

per day ; her Swiss, her maid, and myself at thirty sous per day. Besides, I had the remains from the table, which I shared with my sister. I was soon tired of the monotonous life I led in the service of Mme du Châtelet, where the greater part of the day I had to be idle. My duties did not take nearly all my time. I sought for some occupation which would dispel my boredom, and I found one I liked very well. M. de Voltaire lodged in the same house, as well as his secretary. I struck up a friendship with the latter. When the work of the household was done, and I had nothing else to do, I went up to the secretary's room. He gave me works of M. de Voltaire to read, and seeing that I wrote very well, he begged me to help him in copying out the author's MSS. This greatly interested me, and when Mme du Châtelet was from home, which happened frequently, I passed almost entire days in this occupation. M. de Voltaire found me there one day, and knowing that I was attached to the service of Mme du Châtelet and a dweller in the house, he did not in the least object. He examined my writing, and I perceived that it pleased him. . . . But at the end of a few months I had to drop this occupation, as well as to leave Mme du Châtelet's employ. I was hurt by an injustice she had done my sister, and made her leave as well. Some weeks later there was an even greater loss to her household. It was when the journey to Fontainebleau took place. Mme du Châtelet usually went there, for she had the right to a *tabouret*, and took part in the queen's card games. At the moment when she was ready to start for Fontainebleau, all her servants left, because they said living was dearer there than at Paris. They complained of her economy and their low wages. Only a maid she

had had for a few days stayed with her. She had put M. de Voltaire's servants on the same footing as her own, and they left also. As an additional trouble, his secretary had been taken violently ill, and had left."

It was then that Voltaire sent for Longchamp and asked him if he would go to Fontainebleau, and appointed him to be his secretary.

This happened in the October of 1746. Voltaire remained unmoved by these domestic upheavals. The presence of Longchamp insured a continuance of his work, he had won a seat in the Academy in the spring of that year, he had been appointed Gentleman of the Chamber to Louis XV, and he was the favourite of Mme de Pompadour. His heart was therefore content. Life had assumed a new and successful aspect. Emilie shared in his triumphs. Thus passed the spring of 1747. Perhaps the new honours were found to be a little exacting. It was something of a relief when in August an invitation arrived from the Duchesse du Maine, inviting them both to her incomparable Court.

CHAPTER VIII

SCEAUX AND ANET

THE Duchesse du Maine had a kind heart. She shielded Mme du Deffand when the breach between herself and her husband imperilled her reputation ; she afforded Voltaire a refuge and sanctuary when he offended against the canons of good taste and had to flee from Fontainebleau ; she welcomed the divine Emilie at Sceaux and Anet, in spite of her exacting demands on her hospitality, and she generally allowed herself to be imposed upon by her friends, asking nothing from them except to be spared as much *ennui* as possible if they did not contribute actively to her amusement.

She was an odd little figure, the Duchesse du Maine, but she played no inconsiderable part in the social affairs of France during the first half of the eighteenth century. In appearance, in habits, and in character she was exceptional. Her court was one of the most frivolous of the period, though not so corrupt as some ; it had pretensions to preciosity, and only succeeded in being finical ; it was formed to be a model of fashion and culture, and was in reality a carnival in which glitter and tinsel did duty for more solid qualities. It was divided into two distinct sections by an outburst of political activity on the part of its hostess and her husband, which ended in the imprisonment of both, and made a break of more than two years in Mme du Maine's social life. Mme du

Châtelet played a part in the second half of the court, which was as interesting, though not as brilliant and luxurious, as the earlier period.

The inception of the Court of Sceaux may be said to have taken rise in a not unnatural desire on the part of the Duc du Maine to take to himself a wife. He appealed to the King, his father, in the first instance, and Louis XIV told him frankly that he thought it highly undesirable that his legitimated sons should establish a household of their own. Then he confided in Mme de Maintenon, whose favourite he had been ever since she received him in charge from the hands of his mother, Mme de Montespan. A discussion took place, and owing to the favourite's influence the Duc du Maine so far made his point as to be allowed to choose one of the daughters of the Prince de Condé. Three were eligible at that moment—Anne-Marie-Victoire, Mlle de Condé, Anne-Louise-Bénédicite, Mlle de Charolais, and Marie-Anne, Mlle d'Enghien. Their names were far more imposing than their persons. They were all exceedingly tiny, almost dwarfs. The Duchesse de Bourbon, their eldest sister, who had had the good fortune to outgrow the others, called them *poupées du sang*. There was little enough to choose between the three of them. One had a scrap more intellect, one an inch more height than the others. The Duc du Maine thought he had quite enough intellect for two, and chose the inch, which belonged to Mlle de Charolais.

If we are to believe Elisabeth-Charlotte de Bavière, he did not choose very wisely. "Mme du Maine," she said, "is not taller than a child ten years old, and is not well made." She had one arm shorter than the other, but it was not for the Duc du Maine to complain of that, for

his own legs were not a good pair. "To appear tolerably well," continued Madame, "it is necessary for her to keep her mouth shut; for when she opens it, she opens it very wide, and shows her irregular teeth. She is not very stout, uses a great quantity of paint, has fine eyes, a white skin, and fair hair. If she were well disposed she might pass, but her wickedness is insupportable." The sting of the description is in its tail; perhaps devilry would have been a more appropriate word to use than wickedness, for Mme du Maine's ever-changing moods made any continuous evil impossible for her.

The marriage was referred to in a letter written by Mme de Sévigné in April 1685, but did not take place until March 1692, when Mlle de Charolais won her emancipation through a wedding which had all the *éclat* due to that of a king's son. She meant to claim as much attention wherever she went, for the rest of her natural existence. As Duchesse du Maine she cast aside every limitation, and appeared in her true character, the predominating quality of which was a sublime daring. Her first sign of revolt was against the influence of Mme de Maintenon, who had always ruled the duke. She railed against piety, and was free—for piety was essential to any one with whom Mme de Maintenon cared to have dealings of any kind. Then the duchess went a step further: she showed her contempt for all the forms of etiquette which obtained at Court, refused to play second fiddle to anybody, subjected many who were of importance to snubs and indignities, her own husband being treated most shamefully of all, and, in short, established a reputation for autocracy of the worst kind. Ability and intellect were not wanting to support this attitude. The Duc du Luynes' estimate of her was,

perhaps, too flattering. He said : “ She has a superior and universal mind, strong lungs, and excellent eloquence. She has studied the most abstract sciences—philosophy, physics and astronomy. She was able to discuss any topic like a person who was well informed and has good choice of language. Her voice was loud and strong, and she could converse in the same high tone for three or four hours without fatigue. Novels and light literature interested her equally.” He omits to mention, however, the erratic moods, which destroyed much of the value of these gifts.

Mme de Staal, who had the best of all opportunities for studying her mistress, draws a less prepossessing picture : “ Her nature is impetuous and unequal. She flies into a temper and is distressed, grows angry and is appeased twenty times in a quarter of an hour. Often she rouses herself from the deepest melancholy, and gives way to a fit of gaiety, in which she is most amiable. Her humour is noble, keen and light, her memory is extraordinary. She speaks eloquently, but with too much vehemence and prolixity. It was impossible to carry on a conversation with her ; she did not care to be understood, she only wished to be heard. Nor did she take into account the wit, the talents, the defects and the absurdities of those who surrounded her. They said of her that she had not only never left her house, but that she had not even put her head out of the window.

“ She spent her days in devising pleasures and amusements of every kind. She spared neither care nor expense to render her court agreeable and brilliant. In short, Mme la Duchesse du Maine is of a temperament of which it may be said, without exceeding the truth, that it is composed of much good and much evil. She



THE DUCHESS DU MAINE
Who held her brilliant court at Sceaux and Anet

has haughtiness without pride, extravagance without generosity, religion without piety, a great opinion of herself without contempt for others, much erudition without much wisdom, and all the outward appearance of friendship without the inner sentiment."

Intelligent as she was, Mme du Maine's vision was peculiarly circumscribed. She regarded Sceaux as the centre of the universe, herself as its deity, and everything outside as of relatively little importance. She first established her court at Sceaux in 1700, the Duc du Maine having bought the estate from the Marquis de Seignelay. The château had been built by Perrault for Colbert, and was beautifully situated amidst woods, water and pasture-land. Mme du Maine had previously gathered her circle of friends round her in a more modest establishment at Clagny, but she found Versailles too near for her comfort and privacy, she was overshadowed and supervised by the Court, and was glad when she was able to move to an atmosphere less laden with the conventional "Thou shalt and thou shalt nots."

Once installed at Sceaux, the Duchess surrounded herself not only with kindred spirits, but with every delight and luxury that money could devise or buy. She made a museum and filled it with sculptures and valuable porcelain; she had a menagerie with strange birds and beasts. Her card-room was a marvel of artistic colouring and comfort, and a boudoir in the upper storeys, to which she ascended in a kind of primitive lift, and which was called the *Chartreuse*, was as daintily and extravagantly furnished as any great lady's rooms in the whole of France. Here she sat, a jewel of many shining facets, in a casket lined with softest satin of gayest hues. And here her satellites composed the games of wit and hazard,

the poems, plays and music, the airy nothings of sentiment and sensation, which were inspired by the sight of miles of verdant country stretching before the windows—nature on the one hand, and, by every refinement of culture and civilisation obtainable—art on the other.

Every imaginable form of diversion was indulged in by turns or all together. No guest was admitted who did not sympathise with and share in the worship of merriment. This inviolable rule was responsible for the exclusion of the host himself from his wife's gatherings. It was feared that the Duc du Maine might cast a shadow of gravity where only levity was desirable. He was so much under his wife's thumb, however, that he hardly dared to let his shadow fall anywhere without her express permission. It was said that she led him a dog's life. Saint-Simon's account of their relations was probably exaggerated, but it contains too many sidelights on their respective characters not to be worth quoting :

“With the mind, I will not say of an angel, but of the devil, whom he resembled in doing service to none, but ill turns to all, in deep-laid schemes, in arrogant pride, in profoundest falsity, in artifices without number, in feigned characteristics beyond all estimate, yet pleasing, with the art of amusing, diverting, charming when he wished to charm ; he [the Duc du Maine] was a gifted poltroon in heart and mind, and being so, a most dangerous poltroon. . . . He was, moreover, pushed on by a woman of the same stamp, whose mind—and she had a great deal—had long been spoiled and corrupted by the reading of novels and plays ; to a passion for which she abandoned herself so much that she spent whole years in learning dramas by heart and playing

them publicly herself. She had courage to excess ; she was enterprising, audacious, passionate, knowing nothing but the immediate passion, and making everything bend to that.

“Indignant against the prudence and precautions of her husband, which she called miserable weakness, she constantly reproached him for the honour she had done him in marrying him ; she forced him to be supple and humble before her by treating him like a negro, and she ruined him from top to bottom without his daring to say a word, bearing everything in his great terror lest her head should give way altogether. Though he hid a great deal from her, the ascendancy she had over him was incredible ; and it was by force of blows that she drove him wherever she would.”

The vagaries in which Mme du Maine delighted, and from which her husband shrank in undisguised distaste, were, in the first decade of the new century, nothing more dangerous than picnics à la Decameron, water-parties by candle-light, midnight revels called *grandes nuits*, and a fantastic mimicry of chivalric orders entitled “L’Ordre de la Mouche à Miel.” Among those who participated in these extravagances were, first and foremost, Malezieu and Genest, who were poets *en titre* to the ducal court. The former was the more active of the two. He composed numberless verses and impromptus. In earlier years he had been tutor to the Duc du Maine, and had taught the Duc de Bourgogne mathematics.

“When M. le Duc du Maine married,” wrote Fontenelle, “M. de Malezieu found a fresh career awaiting him. A young princess, eager to learn, and capable of learning anything, found in her household one who could teach her everything, and she was not

slow to attach him to her, particularly by those infallible means which princes always find at their disposal—namely, the esteem which she made him feel for her. In order to make her familiar with the best authors of antiquity, whom many people prefer to admire than to read, he translated for her on the spot, in the presence of the whole court, Virgil, Terence, Sophocles, Euripides ; and later, translations were no longer necessary except for portions of these authors. We spoke also of the highest sciences, into the regions of which she wished the same guide to conduct her. But we do not care to reveal the secrets of so great a princess. It is true that one could easily divine the names of these sciences, but it was impossible to guess how far she penetrated them. . . . M. de Malezieu also had a very different duty to perform for her, and in this he succeeded no less. The princess loved to give fêtes, diversions, entertainments, and theatricals, but she desired that ideas should enter into them, and invention, and that the pleasures should not be without wit. M. de Malezieu used his less serious talents in planning and organising fêtes, and he was himself an actor. Verses were a necessary part of ingenuous amusements. He furnished them, and they always possessed fire, good taste, and appropriateness, although he was not given much time. He was equally clever at impromptus, and he contributed largely in establishing that language at Sceaux, in which genius combined with gaiety to produce sudden little outbursts of enthusiasm.”

Genest's talents were of a somewhat different order from those of Malezieu, and his most striking feature was a prominent nose, which gave rise to an anagram on his name, anagrams and acrostics, puzzles and forfeits, being intellectual food greatly appreciated by the habitués of

Sceaux. Charles Genest was metamorphosed into "Eh! c'est large nés." Genest was not only a poet, but a man of letters, of the sword, and of the long robe, and his humour was so jovial, his nature so unspoiled and happy, that he was installed in the Sceaux circle as a permanency, and contributed to the *grandes nuits* in the rôle both of composer and actor. Vaubrun, who was responsible for originating these entertainments, was described by Mme du Deffand.

"The Abbé de Vaubrun," she wrote, "measures three cubits on his right side and two and a half on his left, which renders his gait rather irregular. He carries his head high, and boldly displays a countenance which at first surprises, but which is not so displeasing as the oddness of his features would lead one to suppose. His eyes may be said to be the exact contrary of his mind. They have more depth than surface. . . . No one can display more gallantry when making the most unmeaning compliment."

Of this, one of her most devoted courtiers, the Duchesse du Maine, remarked that he was the most sublime of all frivolous beings.

Another of the Abbés was Chaulieu, whom Voltaire called "the first of the neglected poets." He fell in love with Mlle de Launay, and wrote verses to her, beginning

Thou, Launay, hast in high degree
The spell all hearts to subjugate,
Within thy very faults lies subtle witchery.

Chaulieu was always well received at Sceaux, though he played a more important part at Saint-Maur, one of the seats of the Condés, where he made verses for the duke, as Malezieu did for his sister, the Duchesse du

Maine, who paid periodical visits there, taking many of her friends in her train. The court was not a very stationary one. First one of the guests would play host or hostess, then another. Once a year there were visits to Châtenay, the home of Malezieu; Mme de Croissy gave dinners, and Mme de Polignac invited every one to Saint-Ouen for a collation. Président de Mesmes, of whom Hénault said, "I have never known a more agreeable man nor one of better style" (they used to drink their morning chocolate together), had a fine house at Cramaille, where he welcomed the duchess's friends. The Duc de Nevers entertained at Passy or at Fresne, Mme de la Ferté at Chilly, Mme d'Artagnan at Plessis-Piquet; and when every one was tired of country-life and wanted to be in town, the Duchesse du Maine allowed them to gather at the Arsenal in Paris.

A great favourite at the court was "le plus beau parleur de son temps," the compromising Abbé de Polignac, whose name was coupled with those of many ladies, and with whom the Duchesse de Bourgogne flirted more openly than was discreet. He was a great courtier, and won Louis XIV's favour. When he was walking with the king in the gardens at Marly it began to rain, and the king remarked civilly that the Abbé's coat was not much protection. "That is nothing, sire," remarked Polignac; "the rain of Marly wets no one."

"He was a tall man, very well made," wrote Saint-Simon of Polignac, "with a handsome face, much cleverness, and above all, grace and polished manners, all kinds of knowledge, a most agreeable way of expressing himself, a touching voice, a gentle eloquence, insinuating, manly, exact in terms, charming in style, a gift of speech that was wholly his own; all about him was original and

persuasive. No one knew more of belles-lettres ; delightful in putting abstract things within common reach ; amusing in narratives, possessed of a smattering of all the arts, all the manufactures, all the professions. In whatever belonged to his own, that is, learning and the ecclesiastical calling, he was rather less versed. He wanted to please valet and maid, as well as master and mistress. He was always aiming to touch the heart, the mind, and the eyes." Polignac was the author of *l'Anti-Lucrèce*, and was exiled when the Duc and Duchesse du Maine were imprisoned. He was quite as great a favourite in the second period at Sceaux as the first.

The most famous poets of the court were Fontenelle and Lamotte. The former outlived his hostess, and died a centenarian in 1757. He was as much a favourite at Sceaux as in Mme de Tencin's salon. It was said of him in one of the contemporary portraits that he had the rare talent of fine and delicate raillery, and the merit, still more rare, of not making use of it, or if at times he desired to employ it, it was kept for the ears of his friends. He boasted that he loved three things greatly, about which he understood nothing. They were painting, music—and women. He made many pretty speeches to the latter, and when asked at Sceaux what was the difference between his hostess and a clock, answered aptly, "The clock keeps us aware of the passing of the hours, our hostess makes us forget them."

Houdart de Lamotte, the dramatic author and frequenter of the cafés, was also a guest at Sceaux. At the age of forty Lamotte had become blind and crippled through gout. His letters were read with delight in the salons, but his poetry was found to have harsher notes, displeasing to some ears. "What would you have?"

remarked the imperturbable author ; “ a poet isn't a flute.”

Perhaps the Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire was the greatest acquisition at Sceaux. Mme du Maine called him her *Berger* and her Apollo, and he reciprocated by addressing her as *Bergère*. De Luynes said of him, “ He had much wit, a character gentle and pleasing, a turn of gallantry very amiable. He made pretty verses with much facility. . . . He always seemed at the point of death, but nevertheless enjoyed good health. He ate at all hours.”

The Marquis de Lassay and his wife were frequent guests at Sceaux. Mme de Lassay before her marriage was Julie de Bourbon, a natural sister of Mme du Maine's. Another visitor of rank was the Marquis de Clermont, who had been notorious in his youth on account of a love-affair with the Princesse de Conti and her lady-in-waiting, Mlle de Choin, afterwards wife to Monseigneur, son of Louis XIV. These and others constituted the leading lights of Mme du Maine's gay court.

For ever striving after something not to be enjoyed in ordinary everyday affairs, they indulged in many of the silly sentimentalities practised by the précieuses of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, unfortunately without the pretensions of the latter salon to genuine culture and a reform of manners, which was solid enough underneath the superficial absurdities. A new list of *noms de guerre* replaced the *noms de Parnasse* of a century earlier, which were catalogued by Somaize in his *Dictionnaire des Précieuses*. Malezieu was known as le Curé ; his confrère, Genest, was called l'Abbé Pégase, a title which was sometimes transformed into l'Abbé Rhinocéros, owing to his prominent nose ; the Duc du Maine was

nicknamed le Garçon (most frequently behind his back), and his sons became les deux Garçonnets. The Duc de Nevers, a very constant guest in the earliest days of the court, was Amphion ; his wife, who was one of the most beautiful women at Sceaux, Diane, and their daughter, who was well known during Louis XV's reign as the Duchesse d'Estrées, was dubbed Api ; Fontenelle was no longer Fontenelle, but Pigastro ; Voltaire became Museo ; Mlle de Choiseul, Glycère ; M. d'Albemarle, le Major ; his wife, Geneviève ; Mme d'Artagnan, who lived just outside the château, was called la Voisine, which was more reasonable than many of the names ; Mme du Châtelet alone seems to have escaped without a *précieuse* label, perhaps because she came too late and they were all exhausted, or more likely still, because she was intolerant of absurdities which did not originate with herself.

The Duchesse du Maine's emblem was the Bee, and her device "Piccola sì, ma fa pur gravi le ferite" (she is small, but she stings sharply). The Order was founded some years after her court was established at Sceaux, and included thirty-nine members besides its *dictatrice*, who went by the title of "La grande Ludovise." A peculiar ceremony accompanied the election of Knights and Dames to the Order, and the oath of the Society was, "I swear by the bees of Mount Hymettus fidelity and obedience to the perpetual directress of the Order, to wear all my life the emblem of the Bee, and to carry out, as long as I live, the statutes of the Order ; and if I am false to my vows, may honey change to gall for me, wax to tallow, flowers to nettles, and may wasps and hornets pierce me with their stings."

A medal was struck, which was worn by the members

of the Society attached to a lemon-coloured ribbon. It was of gold, and weighed between three and four drams. On one side was the portrait of the foundress of the Order, with the inscription, "Ludovise, Baronne de Sceaux, Dictatrice Perpétuelle de l'Ordre de la Mouche-à-Miel"; on the other a bee flying towards a hive, and the motto already quoted.

The aims of the Society were probably nothing more serious than the desire for something novel, and the intention of chasing away boredom. In the light of later occurrences, when Mme du Maine gave rein to her political ambitions, some of the authorities attempted to attribute a political significance to the meetings of its members, but it is scarcely probable that any underlying note of the kind existed. On the other hand, it is not easy in these matter-of-fact days to enter rightly into the delicate spirit of romance and poesy, pseudo-philosophy, and a dash of mysticism which animated many, both men and women, at that time, without condemning it as puerile and artificial. Mme du Châtelet was too direct to harbour the spirit of sentiment which made such institutions as the Order of the Bee possible. Some saw in it a protest against the more material aspects of love, an endeavour to refine and ennoble the relations between the sexes. M. de Goncourt, in *L'Amour au dix-huitième Siècle*, has chosen this point of view, and has succeeded in representing the illusive spirit of the hour.

"There sprang up in one corner of high society a sect which advocated the banishment of desire from the region of love altogether. By a natural reaction from the excesses committed by sensual love, and the brutal passions of licentiousness, a few delicate souls, of a refined if not noble nature, were thrown back on platonic

love. A group of men and women, half hidden in the discreet shadows of their salons, were gradually drawn back towards a state in which the emotions of the heart are spoken of in whispers, the region in which the spirit sighs forth its love—almost to a state of true tender-heartedness. This little world meditated on the idea of, and drew up plans for forming an ‘Order of Perseverance’ which should have a temple with three altars—one to Honour, another to Friendship, and the third to Humanity. Thus at the beginning of the century, when its earliest excesses were at their height, we find that the court assembled round Sceaux had endeavoured to restore the goddess Astræa, and had lodged its protest against the supper-parties at the Palais-Royal in the shape of a discourse on its ideas of love, and by the institution of the romantic Order of the Honey-Bee. ‘Le Sentiment’ is the name given to the new Order, and several men and women of note attached themselves to it. Here and there, at considerable intervals, are revealed figures of people of lofty sentiments, who claim to possess a peculiar delicacy in manners and principles, and in all matters of tone and taste, and who, by the aid of traditions of the refined and graceful manners of the great century, are striving to keep alive, as it were, the disappearing flower of chivalry in love.”

As regards the Order of the Honey-Bee this is very well ; Sceaux was coloured by the dominating personality of Mme du Maine. The same spirit will be found prevailing at the court of Lunéville, but in a different degree, during the period when Mme du Châtelet was a frequent visitor there.

Whenever a vacancy occurred in the Bee Society numbers of applicants competed for the honour of being

elected in place of the departed member. Mme de Staal (to give her the name by which she is best known, although she was at that time Mlle de Launay), described the jealousy and ill-feeling which took place on one such occasion, a few months after she entered the service of Mme du Maine. The three favourites in the running were the Comtesse de Brassac, the Comtesse d'Uzès, and Président de Romanet. The latter was the fortunate one to be chosen, and the ladies who had been passed over in his favour lodged a complaint against the honesty of the judges. Under cover of the hue and cry that followed, Mme de Staal addressed an anonymous protest to the Président, setting forth the ladies' woes. No one could guess whence the document originated. It caused much discussion, and was attributed first to Malezieu and then to Genest, but amongst all those mentioned as its possible author, none for a moment dreamt of the humble lady's maid. Seeing that they were thoroughly mystified, Mme de Staal followed up her first effusion by a second, as follows :

N'accusez ni Genest, ni le grand Malezieu
 D'avoir part à l'écrit qui vous met en cervelle.
 L'auteur que vous cherchez n'habite point les cieux.
 Quittez le télescope, allumez la chandelle,
 Et fixez à vos pieds vos regards curieux ;
 Alors, à la clarté d'une faible lumière,
 Vous le découvrirez gisant dans la poussière.¹

Undoubtedly she deserved to rise from her menial position. Her romantic story is well known, but it is

¹ Accuse no more Genest, nor yet Malezieu the great,
 Of having writ the document which doth excite
 So much disquietude. The author keeps no state.
 But rather quit your telescope, your candle light
 And your inquiring glances 'neath you concentrate ;
 Perchance the feeble radiance will to you disclose
 The humble author lying in the dust: who knows?

so closely interwoven with that of Sceaux that it is impossible to tell the latter without repeating the former. Moreover, she knew Mme du Châtelet well, and had a good deal to say about her. Born in 1684, her real name was Cordier, although a more usual version is that she was born in 1693, and was called de Launay. Her father was a painter, who, having managed to get into hot water in his native country, fled to England, leaving his wife and daughters to conceal their identity as much as possible. Henceforward they were known by the name of de Launay.

Mme de Staal's sister, thrown thus early on the world, took a post as companion to the Duchesse de la Ferté, one of the habituées at Sceaux. This lady, Marie-Isabelle-Gabrielle-Angélique de la Mothe-Houdancourt, was a daughter of the marshal of that name, and younger sister of the Duchesses d'Aumont and de Ventadour. She married the Duc de la Ferté in 1675, and played the important part in Mme de Staal's life of introducing her to the Duchesse du Maine. Mme de Staal was made known to her by her sister, and was in her household for a time, though she never desired a permanent post with her, because she had seen her sister degraded from companion into an ordinary waiting-woman; and from the first Mme de Staal had ambitions. The Duchesse de la Ferté was an eccentric. She composed a naughty little couplet against her husband, which became very popular in the streets of Paris. When she stayed at her country house she laid aside the mask of dignity, which was her usual bearing in town, and hobnobbed not only with her servants, but with the tradespeople, inviting the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker to seat themselves at her lansquenet

table and play cards with her. Mme de Staal, who once looked on at this promiscuous game, was no little astounded when the duchess turned to her and whispered in her ear : "I cheat them, you know, but it's in revenge, because they rob me."

At Sceaux, under the patronage of Mme de la Ferté, Mme de Staal 'appealed to Malezieu, saying that she greatly desired a post which would enable her to live in the manner to which she had always been accustomed. Negotiations were set on foot, and presently a transfer was made from the Duchesse de la Ferté to the Duchesse du Maine, not without much upbraiding and accusations of ingratitude on the part of the former. If Mme de Staal imagined that her troubles were over, and that she had fallen into circumstances compatible with her tastes, she was doomed to great disappointment. She was regarded as nothing better than a common servant, was lodged in an entresol of the château so low and dark that she could not walk without stooping, had to grope her way about as best she might, and could hardly breathe for lack of air or warm herself for lack of a fireplace. The first task imposed upon her was to make chemises for the duchess. When her mistress desired to wear one of the new garments she found the sleeve turned, so that "that which should have been at the elbow was at the armhole." The unhandy waiting-maid gained her first advantage. Her mistress said, not unkindly : "You don't know how to sew ; leave such tasks to others."

Undoubtedly Mme de Staal counted on her intellectual gifts to carry her on to the desired goal. As a lady's maid she can only be regarded as a gruesome failure, if her own account is to be trusted. She was short-

sighted—perhaps when it best suited her to be so. When she was asked to fill a glass with water for the duchess to drink, she spilt the water into the lap of her mistress ; when she was requested to bring the powder-box, she held it by the cover, with the result that the powder spilled over the dressing-table and carpet. “When you lift anything, you should take it by the bottom,” said the patient princess.

“I remembered this lesson so well,” wrote Mme de Staal, “that a few days later, when she asked for her purse, I took it by the bottom, and was greatly astonished to see a hundred louis roll out upon the floor. After this I knew not where to take hold of anything. I spilt as stupidly a package of gems, which I took hold of exactly in the middle. It may be imagined with what contempt my deft and trained companions regarded my clumsiness.”

For a long, long time she shared the menial duties of Mme du Maine’s waiting-women, keeping her eye ever upon the faintest chance of a rise in status. It came at last—in the shape of the *grandes nuits*.

The Duchesse du Maine’s love of amusement was insatiable. All those about her were kept busy day and night, devising new seasoning which might render the gaiety more piquant. The days were not long enough to enjoy the comedies, the masquerades, the lotteries, and fantasies which followed one another in quick succession. Mme du Maine loved to sit up all night, and expected suitable entertainment to be arranged for her. Her usual occupation was to play cards ; but games of this sort palled, and the Abbé de Vaubrun, who had many original ideas, conceived one that was quite new—namely, that during one of the usual vigils some one

should appear in the image of the Goddess Night, enveloped in sombre draperies, and present a tribute of gratitude to the duchess for the preference she accorded to Night over her sister Day. The goddess was to be followed by an attendant, who was to chant lines explaining this sentiment. The Abbé appealed to Mme de Staal to help him, begging her to compose and recite the speech in question. The companion agreed to his request. Unfortunately, however, she did not perform her part perfectly, owing to her nervousness, and because she was not accustomed to speaking in public. In spite of this slight drawback the idea was very well received, and was followed by magnificent fêtes on similar lines given at night by various guests in honour of Mme du Maine.

“I composed bad verses for some of them,” wrote Mme de Staal in her Memoirs, “and planned others, and was consulted concerning all of them. I acted at them and sang at them, but my nervousness spoilt it all; and at last it was decided that it was better not to employ me except for advice and suggestion, at which I succeeded so happily that I was greatly relieved.”

The entertainments were so costly that Mme du Maine, who, where her own pleasure was concerned, was a true spendthrift, was at length induced to see the error of her ways, and brought them to a close. “Sceaux,” wrote Saint-Simon in 1714, “was more than ever the theatre of follies of Mme du Maine, of shame, of embarrassment, of ruin of her husband by the enormity of the expenses, and the spectacle of the Court and town plunged in mockery. . . . There were *nuits blanches* in lotteries, cards, fêtes, illuminations, fireworks—in one word, feasts and fantasies of every kind and at every moment.”

Mme de Staal was entirely responsible for the last of the midnight shows, and it was given in her name, though not at her expense. Good Taste was represented as having fled to Sceaux and as there presiding over the princess's occupations. First Good Taste led forth the Graces, who prepared her toilet, dancing and singing the while. The second interlude represented Play. Gaming-tables were brought and arranged for games of chance, the songs and dances in this section being performed by professional actors from the Opera. The last interlude represented Laughter, who prepared a stage on which a little comedy was acted. It referred to the discovery by Mme du Maine of the magic square, to which she had long devoted herself, and which she claimed to have solved. It was all in verse, and in default of finding a poet who cared to compose on such a subject, Mme de Staal was under the necessity of writing the whole of it herself.

The lady's maid had advanced in usefulness by leaps and bounds. She had won the notice of many of the guests, especially Fontenelle and the Duc de Brancas, and she had several little affairs of the heart with various gentlemen, readily realising that she had no chance of being accepted as an equal by those with whom she had daily intercourse, unless she married a man of quality and was raised to his rank. At last the dearest wish of her heart was realised. A husband was found for her in the person of M. de Staal, who was an officer in the Swiss Guard. Her standing was at once assured. "Mme la Duchesse du Maine," she wrote, while her fate still hung in the balance, "fearing lest I might break the bonds that attached me to her, considered how she might strengthen them. . . . The position she had accorded me since I

had quitted the office and functions of waiting-woman had no precise limits. I scarcely even knew whether I stood within or without them. However little I might overstep them, either without perceiving it or by her orders, the glances and murmurs of her ladies, scrupulous as to the distance that should be maintained between themselves and me, made me retire discountenanced. . . . She told me that there was a way to remedy this by marrying me to a man of quality who would place me on a level with all the ladies of her court."

But that was not until after the disastrous break in the Duchesse du Maine's social campaign.

Once married to the illegitimate son of a king, Condé's daughter had done her utmost to procure for her husband and children a rank equal to her own. Louis XIV was fond of Mme de Montespan's eldest son, who was always at Court, and, aided by Mme de Maintenon, daily gained fresh favours. Step by step he had managed to obtain all the privileges of a prince of the blood. But even these heights of grandeur did not satisfy the ambitious soul of his wife. She had vowed to become "one of the kingdom's greatest ladies." Towards the close of the king's life she intrigued to obtain for her husband a position of the highest importance. She believed that the stigma of illegitimate birth had been practically removed, and was sanguine enough to urge the Duc du Maine to compete, if not for the succession, at least for the post of Régent to the infant heir. He did, indeed, manage to obtain from Louis XIV a testament investing him with the power of a guardian over the dauphin Louis. But no sooner was the king dead than this was set aside and the Duc d'Orléans was appointed Regent to Louis XV. War was declared

between the legitimate princes and the royal bastards. Mme du Maine and the faithful Mme de Staal pored night and day over intricate legal documents, and neglected no means of strengthening the duke's claims and those of his party. For two years they worked unceasingly, but all to no avail.

In 1717 a decree was obtained by the Duc d'Orléans depriving the du Maines of all rights to royal succession as well as to the rank of princes of the blood. The passionate duchess, when this news was confirmed, fell into a paroxysm of anger and dismay. She refused to accept the rulings of a cruel fate, and redoubled her efforts to obtain the end she had in view, joining in the famous intrigue with Alberoni through Cellamare. Unfortunately for her, she was indiscreet enough to infuse into public affairs the spirit of romance she loved in private life, and carried on her insignificant share in the great Cellamare plot with that very element of mystery which reveals all. She insisted on bizarre disguises, invisible ink, meetings in unheard-of places, and spies more noted for their zeal than their discretion. Polignac and Malezieu were both drawn into these dangerous games, which, while they might still be regarded as play, enchanted the duchess with their infinite novelty and excitement.

Suddenly a very serious aspect indeed was thrown over the whole matter. It was too late to withdraw. The conspirators were discovered. Confederates and assistants were arrested, and before the duke and duchess could make any attempt to justify themselves or to escape they were thrown into prison. When she found herself in this dilemma Mme du Maine fell into such a transport of rage that she almost choked to death, and it was a long

time before she recovered. She was imprisoned at Dijon and removed to Châlons. The Duc du Maine was confined at Doullens. Mme de Staal, of whom Elisabeth-Charlotte de Bavière said, "Mlle de Launay is an intriguer and one of the persons by whom the whole affair was conducted," was sent to the Bastille. She was not at all unhappy there.

Indeed, captivity was not made hard for any of the plotters, and in 1720 the Duc d'Orléans relented, and the Duchesse du Maine was permitted to return to Sceaux after an absence of some two years. She had not learnt wisdom, and was as impulsive as ever. When she obtained leave to go to Paris she called on her enemy, the Regent, and, according to Elisabeth-Charlotte's account, she suddenly jumped up from the sofa and clung about her son's neck, "kissing him on both cheeks in spite of himself." Of course the Duc du Maine blamed his wife for all his misfortunes, and she no doubt heaped recriminations on his unworthy head, so that he vowed never to speak to her again. To this vow he did not adhere, and Madame concluded her letter triumphantly: "The Duc du Maine is entirely reconciled to his dear moiety. I am not surprised, for I have long been suspecting it."

Thus opened the second period at Sceaux. At first very few people were received there, for fear the Regent should object. Mme du Maine played biribi, which d'Argenson called an ill-famed game, and when she was tired of cards, made Mme de Staal read to her for hours at a stretch. Gradually things became more lively. Président Hénault described the court at this time:

"It was now very different from what it was in the reign of the late king," he wrote. "M. le Duc du

Maine had then a great deal of credit, and the duchess only used it for amusing herself. The entire Court was at her feet. She acted comedies with as much intelligence as grace. Baron, la Beauval, Roséli composed her troop. One has heard speak of the *grandes nuits*, of music, of balls, etc. Times had changed very much. I had not the honour to be presented there until after their return from prison. But if the court was less brilliant, it was not less pleasant. It was composed of great people and witty people. Mme de Charost, since become Duchesse de Luynes, Mme la Marquise de Lambert, M. le Cardinal de Polignac, M. le premier Président de Mesmes, Mme de Staal, M. de Staal, M. de Sainte-Aulaire, Mme Dreuillet, Mme la Marquise du Deffand. It was she who replied so pleasantly to the Cardinal de Polignac. He was speaking to the Duchesse du Maine about the martyr of Saint-Denis. 'Just think of it, madame, this saint carried his chief in his arms for two leagues.' 'Two leagues . . . ? Oh, monsieur,' replied Mme du Deffand, 'ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.' There are hundreds of repartees of hers that are always being told. She has no other home than that of Sceaux, where she spends nearly the whole year."

It was at Sceaux that the liaison between Hénault and Mme du Deffand began which became the friendship of a lifetime. "I passed nearly twenty years there," continued the Président, "and, according to my destiny, found many ups and downs, contradictions and constraints. . . . Mme du Maine was the oracle of this little court. It would be impossible to have more wit, more eloquence, more badinage, more real politeness, but at the same time no one could be more unjust, take more advantage, or be more tyrannical."

A characteristic story was told of Mme du Maine and Mme d'Estaing, who did not arrive at Sceaux at the time she was expected. The former was in despair; "she cried; she was beside herself. 'Goodness gracious,' said Mme de Charost to her, 'I did not think that your Highness cared so much for Mme d'Estaing.' 'I? Not at all; but I should be very happy indeed if I took no notice of things I don't care for,' she replied. Everybody began to laugh."

The Marquise de Charost afterwards became the Duchesse de Luynes. She had been left a widow early in life. She was not beautiful, but had a charming figure. She had many friends, and, said Président Hénault, "no lovers, because her soul was not impassioned." She had, nevertheless, many good qualities, for she was noble, generous, faithful, and discreet.

Mme du Deffand, who was Mme de Luynes' niece, was a great favourite at Sceaux, more especially before she opened a salon of her own. She had sobered a little after her early indiscretions, but she retained her quick wit and sparkling conversation. "She conquered me with charms there was no resisting," wrote Mme de Staal. "No one had more wit, and no one was more natural. The dazzling fire of her intelligence penetrated to the heart of everything, and brought out into relief its smallest features. She possessed in a marked degree the talent of painting character, and her portraits, more lively than their originals, made them better known than the most intimate acquaintance with them."

Did Mme de Staal, one would like to ask, approve of Mme du Deffand's picture of Emilie? Mme du Deffand wrote a portrait of Mme de Staal, of which the latter did



MADAME DE STAAL

Who wrote famous letters to Mme du Deffand about Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire

not at all approve, so she tore it up and substituted the following description of herself :

“Mme de Staal is of the middling size, tolerably well made, very thin, very withered, and very disagreeable. Her character and her mind greatly resemble her figure : there is nothing absolutely awry in either, nor anything to admire. . . . She had the very good fortune to receive a most excellent education, from whence she has derived the little worth she has to boast, such as very rigid principles of virtue, very elevated sentiments, and a great regularity of conduct, which habit has rendered almost second nature. Her greatest ambition was to be thought reasonable. . . . Love of liberty is her ruling passion, which is peculiarly unfortunate, as her whole life has been spent in the service of others. She has therefore found it difficult to conform to destiny, in spite of the flowers which have occasionally strewed her path.”

Among the women who most graced the Court of Sceaux at this period was the Marquise de Lambert, of salon fame ; and another who frequented both Mme de Lambert's receptions and those at Sceaux was Mme la Présidente Dreuillet, concerning whom the story was told that one day, when she was dining with the Duchesse du Maine, her hostess pressed her to sing whilst soup was being served. Contrary to her usual habit, she excused herself on the plea of ill-health. Président Hénault, who was present (some versions of the story give the honour to Fontenelle), interceded on her behalf. But the duchess was angry at this interference with a plan which promised to give her amusement, and she answered crossly, “You are right, perhaps, président, but do you not see that there is no time to lose ? This woman might die before the roast is served.”

The présidente, who was pretty, prepossessing, and very rich, was such an acquisition that Mme du Maine had insisted that she should have a room both at her hôtel in Paris and at Sceaux; and she did, in fact, die there at a good old age in 1730. Several of the earlier guests had passed away in the twenties. Chaulieu, Genest, Malezieu, and Président de Mesmes were no more; Lamotte died in 1731, the Duc du Maine in 1736, Sainte-Aulaire in 1742; the Duchesse d'Estrées breathed her last at Anet in 1747. For the past twenty years the gay and gallant Api had trodden in the flower-strewn footsteps of the versifier Malezieu. She had organised several of the *grandes nuits*. Related to Mazarin, she was a Mancini-Mazarini, and in 1707 had married Louis-Armand, Duc d'Estrées.

Her ending had in it an element of tragedy. Two or three weeks before she died she had a terrible fall downstairs, of which at the time she took little notice. That was at the beginning of September, when Mme du Maine and her guests were at Anet, the famous old property of the day of Diane de Poitiers, which had come into the possession of the Duchesse du Maine, through her mother, at the same time as Sorel and Dreux. By the end of the month Mme d'Estrées was dead. She had been seized by an attack, probably of apoplexy, on the night of the 27th and 28th. Mme du Maine was advised of her guest's condition, and hurried from the card-table to her room. Mme de Fervaquez and Mme de St. Maur, of whom Mme de Staal said, "She is the only reasonable and decent person we have here," were with the invalid at the last. The loss of Api did little to interrupt the amusements of the Court. Mme de Staal was shocked at the apparent want of feeling which characterised the

proceedings at Anet. The guests went hunting as usual, and enjoyed all the ordinary recreations and dissipations, except comedies, which were postponed for a time.

Mme de Staal's correspondence gave the details of this sad affair to Mme du Deffand, and the same series of letters contained the famous account of Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet's visit to Anet in the August of 1747. The letters speak for themselves, and require no elucidation. The first was written in July. Emilie had given certain warnings of her approaching arrival.

"The secret of the du Châtelet has got wind," wrote Mme de Staal to Mme du Deffand, "but we are not to seem as though we had discovered it. She wished to have *Le Petit Boursault* (she meant *Boursouffle*) acted here impromptu on the day of St. Louis, and that everything might be in readiness, she had settled with Vanture to have the different parts written out, and to send them under cover to him. The said Vanture, not being overburdened with money, and naturally very prudent, reflected that were such a packet to be sent him by post, it would be his ruin; he therefore, through the medium of Gaya,¹ requested that some papers, of which he was in expectation, might come enclosed to Her Serene Highness. The petition was granted, without any questions being asked respecting the said papers. When the packet arrived, he and his petition having long since been forgotten, the two envelopes were opened and everything was disclosed. Still they did not throw a light on the mystery; and I was obliged to explain, which I did, as it would have been absurd to have refused, particularly as we are to appear as full of surprise as if we had remained in ignorance. The second envelope was then

¹ Chevalier Gaya was a member of Mme du Maine's household.

sealed up, and the packet delivered to Vanture, who is congratulating himself on having combined honesty and utility."

At the beginning of the month Mme du Maine and her court were at Sorel, a brick building flanked by two pavilions which lay about a league from Anet, in a high position, overlooking the surrounding country and the river Eure. From Sorel Mme de Staal wrote again on August 5, referring to Mme du Châtelet's desire to perform Voltaire's play at Anet. "La du Châtelet had, as I informed you, communicated her project to me. I think she will succeed in having her opera acted once, but we shall not choose to have it repeated."

Voltaire and Emilie were expected on the 15th, but in their usual whirlwind fashion arrived before they were due. Mme de Staal described the stir their coming made. "Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire, whose arrival was announced for to-day, and whose whereabouts nobody knew, arrived yesterday, at midnight, like two ghosts, with a smell of embalmed corpses, which they appeared to have brought from their tombs. We had just left the supper-table. Moreover, they were famished ghosts; they required supper, and, what is more, beds, which were not prepared for them. The concierge, who had already retired, got up very hastily. Gaya, who had offered his apartment when there was pressing need of it, was obliged to give it up in this instance, and he moved out with as much precipitation and displeasure as an army surprised in camp, forced to leave part of the baggage in the hands of the enemy. Voltaire found himself both well and quickly provided for. As for the lady, her bed was not properly made, it appears, and it has been necessary to change her quarters to-day. Note

that she made the bed herself, as there were no servants, and she discovered a mathematical error in the mattress, which, I fancy, wounded her exact mind more than it did her not very delicate body. In the meantime, she has a room which has been promised. She will leave it on Friday or Saturday for that of the Maréchal de Maillebois, who takes his departure one of these days."

Mme de Staal found ample material for descriptive writing in the doings of "the ghosts." They at once set to work to rehearse the play. "Vanture," she added, "is to perform the Comte de Boursouffle. I cannot think he will look the character, any more than Mme du Châtelet will that of Mlle de la Cochonnière, who ought to be short and stout."

"Our ghosts do not show themselves during the day," she continued on the 16th. "They appeared yesterday at ten o'clock in the evening. I doubt whether we shall see them much sooner to-day, as the one is very busy writing the lives of great heroes, and the other in making comments on Newton. They do not care to play cards or go out. They are of no value in a society of people who feel very little interest in their learned works. And what is still worse, they took it upon themselves last night to declaim loudly against the liberty with which cards are chosen at Cavagnole. They spoke, indeed, in tones to which we are not accustomed, and they were therefore listened to with a quite surprising politeness. I display much less, boring you as I am doing with *ghost* stories. But I have mercy on you when it comes to metaphysics."

Mme du Châtelet was still dissatisfied with the accommodation afforded her at Anet. On the 19th of the month she was moved into another room, the third since

her arrival. "She could not endure the one she had chosen," wrote Mme de Staal on the 20th; "it was noisy, there was smoke there although no fire (no bad emblem of herself, it seems to me). It is not at night that the noise inconveniences her, she told me, but in the day, when she is at work. It deranges her ideas. She is reviewing her Principles. She repeats this task every year; without this precaution they might escape her, and perhaps vanish to such an extent that she would never recover them. I think her head is more like their prison than the place of their birth; it is necessary to guard them with care. She prefers this occupation to every form of amusement, and persists in not showing herself until nightfall. Voltaire has composed some gallant verses, which do something to repair the bad effect of their peculiar behaviour."

The visit of the inspired couple was not a long one; and Mme de Staal felt relieved at the prospect of the household at Anet resuming before long its accustomed calm. "You will know that our two ghosts, drawn away by M. de Richelieu, will disappear to-morrow," she wrote on the 24th. "He cannot set out for Genoa without first holding a consultation with them, and they cannot make up their minds to disoblige him. The comedy, which was arranged for to-morrow, is to be played to-day, to hasten their departure. I will send you an account of the show, and of the last circumstances of the visit; but I pray you do not leave my letters on your mantelpiece."

Mme de Staal might well have spared herself this expression of precaution, for she knew well that if she wrote anything amusing, all Mme du Deffand's friends would speedily hear of it. On the 27th she added,

“I wrote you on Thursday that the du Châtelets were to leave us the next day, and that the play was to be acted in the evening. That is just what happened. I cannot give you a very satisfactory account of *Boursouffle*. Mlle de la Cochonnière so thoroughly understood the extravagances of her part that I was really much diverted by her acting. But Vanture only put his own absurdity into the part of Boursouffle, which demanded something more. He acted quite naturally in a piece which ought to have been a broad farce. Paris¹ appeared an honest man in the character of Maraudin, whose name expresses that he was a rogue. Motel was very good in the part of the Baron de la Cochonnière, d’Estissac was a knight, and Duplessis² a valet. Upon the whole it was not badly acted, and one can say that it went off very well. The author added a prologue, which he declaimed himself, and did it very well, being assisted by our du Four, who, without this brilliant part, would have hardly done credit to Madame Barbe. She was not dressed with the simplicity necessary for this character, nor did the principal actress show more wisdom in this respect. Preferring to suit her own style rather than that of her part, she appeared at the theatre with all the show and elegance suitable for a court lady. She had several quarrels with Voltaire on this point, but she is the sovereign and he is her slave. I am very sorry they have left, although I was tired to death of their caprices. Still her folly was amusing. But the pleasure of making other people laugh besides those who you say were diverted by my letters, would make me put up with some more of her idiosyncrasies; but the curtain has

¹ Secretary of the Duchesse d’ Estrées.

² Officer of the household of the Duc du Maine.

dropped, and the drama is ended. They have left some absurdities behind them, which I may collect for you at the first leisure moment, but I cannot say more to-day." Mme du Deffand was invited to Anet as soon as Voltaire and Emilie left; and she was offered the room vacated by the latter; but she was unable to avail herself of the invitation.

"An excellent apartment is reserved for you," wrote Mme de Staal—"the one that Mme du Châtelet fixed upon after examining all the others in the house. It will not be quite so full of furniture as she left it, as she brought something away with her from every room she had occupied to garnish the latter. Six or seven additional tables had accumulated there as she required them, of all sorts and sizes—immense ones for her papers, a solid one to support her writing-desk, some of lighter make for her knick-knacks and jewels. Yet all these excellent arrangements did not preserve her from a misfortune similar to that which happened to Philippe II, who, after having spent the whole night writing, found a bottle of ink had been spilt all over his despatches. The lady did not put herself about to imitate the forbearance the prince showed on this occasion. He had only written about affairs of state, whereas damage had been done to her algebraic calculations, which was a loss far more irreparable.

"But enough upon a subject which is pretty well exhausted, though I cannot consign their ghostships to oblivion without telling you that the day after their departure I received a letter of four pages and a note enclosed in the same packet which disclosed a great disaster. It appeared that Voltaire had mislaid the manuscript of his play, and had forgotten to collect the various

parts of it, and had moreover lost the prologue. He enjoined me to discover the whereabouts of all these, to send the prologue as soon as possible, but not by post, *because in that case it might be copied*, to keep the separate parts, for fear of the same thing happening to them, and to lock up the piece itself *under a hundred locks*. I should have thought a latch sufficient to guard this treasure. But I have literally and duly executed the orders received."

Thus ended the visit of this "heroic-comic and tragic-gallant" couple at Anet, where they arrived with the *Comte de Boursouffle* and the *Elements of Newton* as the two most important items of their luggage. Wherever they went they created a sensation; whatever they did was bizarre or unconventional. They quarrelled and were temporarily bitter enemies, or they were friendly and no pair could be more devoted. They considered nobody's comfort but their own, and annexed the furniture, arranged the meals, and did everything to suit themselves. At Sceaux, where they stayed later in the year, they were even more at home than at Anet. It was time for the Court to pay its annual visit to Fontainebleau, and it was Mme du Châtelet's usual custom to go there and pay her respects to royalty. Her travelling experiences of the previous year were not repeated. This time she was accompanied by Voltaire, and they lodged at Richelieu's hôtel. Longchamp followed three days after their arrival. He was no longer *maître d'hôtel* to the fair Emilie, but had now accepted a post in the capacity of secretary to Voltaire. There were drawbacks to the situation, as he was speedily to find out. After snatching a few hours' rest after his journey, he went to Voltaire's rooms, and found the poet

still in bed, complaining angrily that there were no servants to be had, and that he was freezing with cold. Longchamp set to work to make a fire. Then the poet asked him to find his writing-case, and grew very impatient because Longchamp could not at first discover what had become of this important article, which was lying concealed in semi-obscurity on a chair in an unexplored corner. Voltaire became more and more excited, and raising himself in bed, cried loudly, "Can't you see it, blockhead?—it is there." When it was brought to him, he begged Longchamp to copy the beginning of his *Essai sur les Mœurs et les Arts de Nations*. In the meantime he dressed himself and went to breakfast with Mme du Châtelet. He had hurt the sensitive feelings of his secretary.

Neither Voltaire nor Mme du Châtelet returned during the day, and Longchamp, divining that in the evening they would be playing cards at the queen's tables, stayed up until half-past one in the morning to wait for them. When they appeared at length, both wore an anxious and troubled look. Mme du Châtelet begged Longchamp to find one of the servants, who would inform her coachman that she wished to have the horses put into the carriage, so that they could take their departure immediately. Longchamp was obliged to deliver the message himself, and when the carriage was ready, Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire, accompanied by a single *femme de chambre*, who had hastily collected one or two small packages, drove off, leaving the astonished secretary to wonder what on earth could have taken place to upset them in this manner. He did not discover the truth until after his return to Paris. All the trouble had arisen from Mme du Châtelet's love of gambling. She had lost

enormous sums at the card-tables. Before leaving for Fontainebleau she collected all the money she could conveniently lay her hands on, knowing that high play was in vogue at Court. Her treasurer had supplied her with 400 louis, and this she had lost at the first sitting. She sent an urgent messenger to town for fresh supplies, and in the meantime borrowed 200 louis from Voltaire. That amount soon followed the other. M. de la Croix sent her an additional 200, which he had obtained at a heavy interest, and 180, provided by her companion, Mlle du Thil. But Mme du Châtelet seemed destined to have no better luck. In a very short time she had lost 84,000 francs. Voltaire, who had been watching the game, became convinced that these enormous losses were not only due to chance. He bent over her and whispered to her in English that she had not observed that she was playing with cheats. Although he thought his remark was inaudible, it was overheard and repeated. The courtiers were naturally enough extremely indignant at this impeachment of their honour, however well deserved it may have been. The rumour of what had taken place reached Marie Leczinska and Louis XV. Mme du Châtelet warned Voltaire that the consequences to him might be serious, and hence the midnight flitting from Fontainebleau. On the drive back they were delayed by a little accident to the carriage, and having no money to pay for repairs, they were obliged to wait until some friends, also driving that way, came to extricate them from their dilemma. Longchamp, who had been left behind to pack their trunks, followed in due course to Paris.

Still afraid of consequences, Voltaire wrote in haste to the Duchesse du Maine informing her of his indiscretion,

and begging her to afford him an asylum at Sceaux. The episode was one which appealed very strongly to her love of adventure and mystery. She sent him a gracious message, arranged for him to arrive after dusk, to be met by her faithful official Duplessis, and smuggled into the castle by a secret staircase. He was given a room in a retired corner of the building which looked out into a secluded garden, and there he remained confined night and day, behind closed shutters, writing and working by candlelight. His only time of release came at night, when, after the guests were in bed, he slipped down to Mme du Maine's room, and supper was served to him there by one servant who had been taken into their confidence. During the hours of the night they chatted, or Voltaire read aloud some verses or romances he had been composing during the day. He had sent for his secretary, and kept him busy during this period of retirement from society, for during his captivity he wrote *Babouc*, *Scarmentado*, *Micromégas*, and *Zadig*.

If he required anything from Paris, Longchamp was sent there secretly by night : in this manner the mystery of his seclusion, so dear to Mme du Maine's heart, was fully sustained. M. d'Argental was the only one of Voltaire's friends who was in the secret ; with d'Argental friendship was a profession.

In the meantime Mme du Châtelet busied herself in raising the funds to pay off her debt. Then she came to Sceaux and informed Voltaire that everything was safe and that he could come out of hiding ; the storm had blown over. To show his appreciation of Mme du Maine's kindness the couple agreed to stay on at Sceaux, and a number of plays and other entertainments were arranged for the benefit of the guests.

It was during this visit that Voltaire, who was occupying Sainte-Aulaire's room—the gallant marquis had then been dead some five years—paid his hostess the graceful compliment of composing the following lines :

J'ai la chambre de Sainte-Aulaire
Sans en avoir les agréments ;
Peut-être à quatre-vingt dix ans
J'aurai le cœur de sa bergère :
Il faut tout attendre du temps
Et surtout du désir de plaire.

No one was more delighted by the changed aspect of the situation than Longchamp, who had found his master's enforced seclusion irksome. "This caused us great rejoicing," he wrote of Voltaire's release, "but we were not yet allowed to return to Paris. Mme du Maine insisted that Mme du Châtelet and M. de Voltaire should remain at Sceaux and add by their presence to the number and brilliancy of the guests then assembled there. From that time no one did anything else except to arrange fêtes at the castle for Mme la Duchesse du Maine. Every one desired to take part in them and to contribute to the general amusement of this illustrious patroness of the fine arts. One can easily guess that Mme du Châtelet and M. de Voltaire were not the last to distinguish themselves among the crowd. The diversions were varied day by day. There were comedies, operas, balls, concerts. Among other comedies they played *La Prude*, which Mme du Maine had already had represented on the stage at Anet. Mme du Châtelet, Mme du Staal, and M. de Voltaire had parts in it. Before the performance the latter came on the scene and declaimed a new prologue, specially appropriate for the occasion. Among the operas there were some acts from M. Rameau ; the pastorale *D'Issé* of M. de Lamotte, put to music by

M. Destouches ; an act from *Zélindor, Roi des Sylphes*, words by M. de Moncrif, music by MM. Rébel and Francœur. The nobles and ladies of the court of Mme du Maine took all the principal parts. Mme du Châtelet, who was as good a musician as actress, acquitted herself perfectly in the rôle of Issé, and that of Zirphé in *Zélindor*. She played still better, if that is possible, the part of Fanchon in *Les Originaux*, comedy by M. de Voltaire, composed and played previously at Cirey. This part might have been expressly written for her, her vivacity, sprightliness, and gaiety being quite natural. Her talents were ably seconded in all the pieces by those of M. le Vicomte de Chabot, the Marquis d'Asfeld, the Comte de Croix, the Marquis de Courtanvaux, etc. Other gentlemen played a very good part in the orchestra, with some musicians from Paris."

Longchamp's account must not be taken too literally. *Les Originaux* was probably *Le Comte de Boursoufle*, which appeared under a number of titles, and *La Prude* was said to have been played for the first time at Sceaux, and not at Anet, as he states ; but, apart from minor inaccuracies, his story agrees with that of others. *La Prude* was played on December 15. "Mme du Châtelet sang Zirphé with justice, and acted with nobility and grace," wrote Voltaire to Moncrif, and her appearance as Issé gave rise to his verse :

Charmante Issé, vous nous faites entendre,
 Dans ces beaux lieux, les sons les plus flatteurs.
 Ils vont droit à nos cœurs :
 Leibnitz n'a point de monade plus tendre,
 Newton n'a point d'*xx* plus enchanteurs.

Another form of amusement at Sceaux was Voltaire's reading of verse and prose in the salon when the whole

company was assembled before dinner, which was voted a great success.

The end of the visit came in rather an odd manner—that is to say, odd for ordinary conventional people. Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire rarely stayed anywhere without creating a sensation of some sort, and this visit was no exception to the rule.

De Luynes gives an account of the matter in his Journal for December 1747 :

“For the last three weeks they have been playing different comedies at Sceaux. They have even performed the opera *Issé* twice. Mme la Duchesse du Maine has always liked to give fêtes at her house. Mme de Malause (Mauban) was charged with the expenses of the opera. Only Mme du Châtelet and Mme de Jaucourt took part. There were so many people at the first representation that Mme du Maine was persuaded to give another. In these two representations Mme du Châtelet played and sang very well ; but the importunity of the crowd was no less great at the second representation than at the first, and Mme du Maine determined to have nothing represented except comedies. This latter decision did not last long. At the last comedy, five or six days ago, the crush was so great that the duchess was disgusted with such entertainments. She wished to see the cards of invitation which had been sent out. She found they were worded as follows :

“New actors will represent on Friday, December 15th, at the theatre of Sceaux, a new comedy of five acts in verse.

“All are invited, without any ceremony. Come at six o'clock promptly, and order your carriage for half-past seven or eight. After six o'clock the doors will be closed to all.’”

Voltaire and the divine Emilie had taken the law into their own hands and invited their own guests! D'Argenson put the matter in its most serious light. "The Marquise du Châtelet and Voltaire," he wrote in his Journal, "have been dismissed from the court at Sceaux on account of certain invitations which they issued to their plays. Voltaire gave five hundred notes of invitation to his friends, in which he said, as an agreeable inducement, that they would not see the Duchesse du Maine."

The wording of the invitation, as quoted by de Luynes, in no way justifies d'Argenson's offensive imputation; but Mme du Maine, feeling that the liberty which had been taken was too great to be overlooked, if she did not actually dismiss the misdemeanants, caused a hint to reach them that they had overstepped the limits of her hospitality. Mme du Châtelet and her poet returned to Paris, and their latest vagary was soon forgiven them.

CHAPTER IX

THE COURT OF LUNÉVILLE

“IT seems as though I remembered the pages of a novel rather than some of the years of my life,” remarked the Chevalier de Boufflers, when, as an old man, he spoke of Lunéville. The Chevalier’s name was Stanislas ; he was the godson of King Stanislas Leczinski, and his mother was the attractive Marquise de Boufflers, a member of the famous Lorraine family of Beauvau-Craon.

The Chevalier danced, painted, played the violin, made little verses, told gay stories, and flirted with fair ladies, day in, day out, at the court of his godfather. All the others did the same, according to their inclinations and their abilities. Life at Lunéville was like life at Sceaux, with a difference—a round of jollity and ease far more like romance than reality. The court was one of those pleasant places where there was but little business to be done, and where every one conspired to forget and make others forget the duties and responsibilities of the outer world. To them Lunéville *was* the world ; they fashioned it after their own pattern, and a very brightly coloured patchwork was the result.

Courts are not built in a day, and to this rule Lunéville was no exception. Nancy, the capital of the province, had been the usual home of the rulers of Lorraine, those proud princes whose brave deeds called

forth a responsive echo in the loyal and loving hearts of their people. But at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the lifetime of Louis XIV and during the war of the Spanish succession, Lorraine became a camping-ground for the Imperialist and French troops.

The reigning duke was at this time Leopold, who in 1698 had married Mademoiselle, daughter of the King's brother, Philippe d'Orléans, and his second wife Elisabeth-Charlotte de Bavière. King Louis accused his nephew by marriage of allowing his Imperialist feelings to get the better of the political neutrality to which he had pledged himself, and he sent French troops into the capital of the province. The duke and duchess fled in the night to Lunéville; and when Louis XIV refused to withdraw his soldiers in response to Leopold's protest, the latter answered proudly that he would never return to Nancy whilst the soil was encumbered by French troops.

At this date there was no castle at Lunéville, and the duke and duchess took up their quarters in an old house in the village; but finding that his exile was likely to prove a lengthy one (as a matter of fact it lasted till the Peace of Utrecht was signed in 1713), Leopold began building a more suitable residence on the site of an old château of the time of Henri II. The natural advantages of the country were excellent. On one side was the forest of Vitremont, on the other that of Mondon. The Meurthe and its tributary Vezouse watered the neighbourhood. Before long the Duc and Duchesse de Lorraine were installed in their new court, and, gathering round them nobles, ambassadors, and ministers, they inaugurated fêtes, masquerades, banquets and balls, with a view to increasing their popularity and

establishing themselves more firmly than before in the affections of their people. Hospitality and entertaining came natural to the duke. He was young, handsome, and knightly. He loved nothing so much as the society of bright and cultured people, especially those belonging to the fair sex. At the same time he was a just and efficient ruler, intent on upholding the traditions of his house.

His wife, Elisabeth-Charlotte, was a quiet and gentle lady, amiable but not beautiful, who sincerely loved her husband. On her wedding-day she scandalised the Lorrainers by shutting herself up in her bedroom and crying her heart out. It was said she did not wish to go to Lorraine, but that she was pleased to leave her somewhat tyrannical mother. The letters of the exuberant Liselotte contain many pertinent remarks about the young duchess, her husband, and their household. It was a great relief to her to get her daughter married, for she had begun to fear that Mademoiselle would have to remain a spinster for want of an eligible match. She thought the Duc de Lorraine would probably marry his cousin, the daughter of the Emperor.

Judging by outward appearances, the marriage was a happy one. The duchess had many children. Her eldest son married the Archduchess Marie-Thérèse, and became Emperor François I. Liselotte's daughter was the grandmother of Marie Antoinette. The chief drawback to Elisabeth-Charlotte's happiness was that she did not come first in her husband's heart. The beautiful and fascinating Princesse de Craon was the object of his passion, and for five-and-twenty years Leopold remained her devoted slave. The garden of the Hôtel de Craon adjoined the park of the château, and a communicating

gate between the estates made it possible for the duke to spend much of his time in the company of the woman he loved without attracting undue notice to his visits. Mme de Craon's son, the Prince de Beauvau, threw scorn upon the idea that the relationship between these two was more than a kind of *culte*. He knew that the duke went to see his mother every day, and usually spent two hours at the Hôtel de Craon. "In this house," he said, "he enjoyed the charms of friendship; there he consoled himself for the difficulties he suffered in the course of a reign as firm as it was beneficent and wise. There he rejoiced in the good he had done, and often prepared that which he intended to do."

The Beauvau-Craons were a very influential family, and were connected with the House of Bourbon. The princess, who was an exceptionally attractive woman, was tall and well-formed. She had milk-white skin, adorable lips and teeth, and a reputation for looking as fresh and pretty as a girl in her teens when she was fifty years old. Liselotte accused this siren of casting a spell upon her son-in-law, Duke Leopold, by means of a love-philter. In the absence of the princess, she declared, the duke was intensely miserable, utterly ill at ease, and presently fell a-shivering and broke into a cold perspiration. He must surely be bewitched, she thought, for in earlier times he had had a passion for the chase, but to-day Silvio had become a lover. "He wishes to hide his passion," she wrote in 1718, "and the more he would like it to be overlooked, the more it is remarked upon. When one thinks he ought to be looking straight ahead, his head turns on his shoulders and his eyes remain fixed on Mme de Craon. It is quite amusing to watch. I cannot understand how my daughter can love her

husband as she does, and that she is not jealous. No one could be more in love with any woman than he is with the Craon."

That year the Duc and Duchesse de Lorraine paid a visit to Paris, and Mme de Craon was in their train, so that Madame had an opportunity of studying the woman who was causing all this anxiety. She had to admit that the siren was a very charming person, and that her beauty had not been overrated. Her carriage was good, and she had a modest air that pleased. "She treats the duke *de haut en bas*," she continued, "as if she were the Duchesse de Lorraine and he were M. de Lunéville. She laughs in a charming fashion, and behaves to my daughter with much politeness and regard. If her conduct in other respects were as exempt from blame as in this one, there would be nothing to say against her." As for the duchess, her daughter, Liselotte had to confess that she had grown appallingly ugly, that her fine skin had been burned by the sun, which had changed her and made her look old. She confessed, too, that she had *un vilain nez camus*, that her eyes were sunken, and that her only good point was her figure, which was well preserved. She still danced gracefully. "I would rather she were virtuous and not lovely than that she were lovely and a coquette like so many others," sighed the upright Liselotte in a half-hearted attempt to console herself for her daughter's defections.

A year later something like a tragedy occurred at Lunéville. On January 3 the new château was destroyed by fire, and its inmates narrowly escaped with their lives, the ducal children being rescued in night attire, and the duchess, hardly clothed and without shoes and stockings, being forced to walk across the gardens in snow two

inches deep. Liselotte added several imaginative details to the story of the fire, which she attributed to incendiarism. She went so far as to accuse Mme de Craon of having instigated it. "These mistresses are a detestable institution!" she declared. "They bring all kinds of disaster in their train, and conduct themselves like incarnate demons. The one my daughter has to deal with is a shameless woman, who does everything she can to draw her husband away from her entirely. I should not like to swear that it was not she who ordered fire to be set to the Castle of Lunéville, for her hatred against my daughter is even stronger than her attachment to the duke." Two days later she praised the duchess for the wisdom or prudence with which she behaved, and declared that she never furnished a pretext for irritating her husband against her. "The fire was certainly started by design," she continued, "because they hindered help being brought or the alarm being given. Everything that goes on in Lorraine is calculated to occasion me much anxiety, for the Craon family directs everything."

Meanwhile the duke lay ill, having caught a severe cold trying to save some of his possessions on the night of the fire. It was said that he had lavished so much wealth on his mistress and her children that his own family appeared in a fair way to be ruined. At his death, which occurred in 1729, it was found that he was greatly in debt, and that his revenues had been forestalled by some years. It was thought that the power of the Craon family was at an end; but the duchess showed little inclination to avenge herself for past annoyances, and after depriving M. de Craon of the post of grand equerry, was content to allow her rival to remain at Lunéville. The new generation

was growing up. Mme de Craon had twenty children, of whom twelve were daughters. Four of them were to play an important part in society at Lunéville, and one was to follow in her mother's footsteps and become the presiding genius at Court.

Marie-Françoise-Catherine de Beauvau-Craon had inherited much of her mother's charm, her dazzling complexion and lovely hair. She had a natural gaiety and sweetness of manner which made her many friends. Born in December 1711, one of all these brothers and sisters, she was sent at an early age to the somewhat worldly convent of Remiremont, where she remained until she was twenty-three. Her hand was then demanded in marriage by the son of the Marquis de Boufflers, who was three years younger than the proposed bride. The wedding took place in April 1735. The Boufflers belonged to an old family of Picardy, and the alliance was regarded as worthy of the Craon family. At first the newly-married couple lived quietly on their estate, and paid but few visits to Nancy or Lunéville; but Mme de Boufflers was not destined to bloom unseen for long. A new prince was to appear at the Court who was quite as susceptible to beauty as his predecessor, and who took more pains to gather round him all who could respond to his taste for wit, learning and the arts.

King Stanislas, the new ruler of Lorraine, had been a pawn in the political chess game of Charles XII of Sweden. Born at Lemberg in 1677, he had paid diplomatic visits as a young man to the Courts of Vienna, Paris, and Rome. As Voivode of Posen, he was despatched in 1704 by the Assembly of Warsaw as ambassador to Charles XII. This king thought so highly of Stanislas that he recommended him to the

Diet as a suitable candidate for the throne of Poland, left vacant after the deposition of Frederick Augustus, Elector of Saxony. His accession took place on July 12, 1704, but his coronation and that of his queen, Catharina Opalinska, were not celebrated before October 1705. Four years later Frederick Augustus was restored after the battle of Poltava, and Stanislas was compelled to flee the country. For a period of five years he wandered about Europe, and then settled at Zweibrücken, under the patronage of Charles XII.

In 1718 the King of Sweden died, and Stanislas removed to Landau, and then to Weissenburg in Alsace. There he lived with his wife and daughter, Marie Leczinska, until 1725, when the latter, by a series of strange intrigues, married Louis XV and became Queen of France. Stanislas and the fair Opalinska removed to Chambord. When Frederick Augustus died, in 1733, the Poles requested Stanislas to return as their king. Three years later, having fled to Dantzic, and escaped thence in disguise to Prussian dominions, he was obliged to abdicate, but was allowed to retain his title. The duchies of Lorraine and Bar were granted to him, and for a rental of one million five hundred livres Stanislas gave to Louis XV all the rights of sovereignty over his domains.

By this treaty, which was called the Declaration of Meudon, and was signed on September 30, 1736, it was stipulated that at the death of Stanislas, Lorraine and Bar were to belong to France. The change of government was not welcomed by the people, who regretted their approaching loss of independence. When Duke Leopold died, his son François had returned from Vienna and been proclaimed François III of Lorraine ;

but his German manners and erudition, to say nothing of his German wig and coat, did not add to his popularity with those who had loved his gallant and debonair father.

In 1736 he returned to Vienna to marry Marie-Thérèse, and his mother, who declared she was too old to learn German, and who would gladly have stayed at Lunéville (had not this been the only possible residence for Stanislas) was installed at the neighbouring château of Commercy.

Commercy had been built by Leopold Durand, and had formerly belonged to the Cardinal de Retz. On her way thither, the Duchesse de Lorraine stayed at the beautiful Château d'Haroué, newly built at that time on the site of the castle in which Marshal Bassompierre was born. The château belonged to the Prince and Princess Craon, and why the Duchesse de Lorraine accepted her rival's offer of hospitality is uncertain. Probably it was by far the most suitable halting-place on the route. Mme de Craon was not there to receive the duchess, who was accompanied by the Duchesse de Richelieu. The latter's presence was in itself enough to prevent a meeting between the Duchesse de Lorraine and the princess, for the Duc de Richelieu had killed the de Craon's son-in-law, the Prince de Lixin, in the notorious duel referred to in Chapter II.

After the death of the Duchesse de Lorraine, in 1744, Commercy fell to the lot of the fortunate Stanislas, who, delighted with the general aspect of the buildings, forests, rivers, and position, turned it into a palace. The chief external features of this residence were a fine avenue of trees, a horseshoe staircase, a terrace commanding a view of the park, a kiosk, pavilion, fountains,

cascades, lakes, and a bridge which was lit up at night by lights enclosed in globes of crystal.

Lunéville was also brought to a state approaching perfection by its new master. Duke Leopold had partly restored the château after the destructive fire of 1719, but his death had prevented its completion, and it was left to Stanislas to put the finishing touches to this delightful residence. One of his ideas was to erect a grotto on which nearly three hundred moving figures, constructed by the mechanic François Richart of Nancy, were placed, which gave forth simultaneously "a concert of different instruments, human voices, cries of animals, the warbling of birds, the noise of thunder and of cannon, which both surprised and charmed." Nothing could be more descriptive of the curious kind of enjoyment in which these pleasure-loving people revelled.

The luxurious king, who was only king in name, had still another string to his bow. Besides Lunéville and Commercy, there was Malgrange, which he had reconstructed, near Nancy, and turned into an ideal resort during the heat of summer. Malgrange was close to the Church of Bon-Secours, where Stanislas never failed to communicate on days consecrated to the Virgin Mary. Sometimes he stayed at Jolivet, at Einville, or at Chantelieu, farm-mansions belonging to him in the neighbourhood. He embellished the little town of Nancy, erected a bronze statue of his royal son-in-law on a marble pedestal in the Place Royale, and adorned every part of his possessions, as far as money could achieve and skill devise, with gardens, parks, orangeries, cascades, lakes, menageries, fountains, conservatories, bridges, sculptures, frescoes, and all the ornate decorations



STANISLAS LE CZINSKI, KING OF POLAND
His Court of Lunéville was famous in art, letters and gay society

beloved of the period. He had a number of architects, painters, and sculptors always at work for him. Building was his great delight, and he did for Lorraine what François I. did for France, only that, unlike the latter king, he employed local workmen, and was unselfish in allowing others to share in the enjoyment of his possessions.

At the beginning of April 1737 Stanislas made his entry into the dominions which were soon to become beautiful under his transforming touch. Queen Opalinska followed him to Lunéville within a few days. At first they stayed at the Hôtel de Craon whilst the palace was under repair. The Craon family had no objection to continue the important part they had played under the rule of Duke Leopold.

As soon as he was settled in his new domains Stanislas sent M. de Craon to announce this fact to Louis XV; and his ambassador, accompanied by Mme de Craon, then travelled to Florence, where they continued their allegiance to the old dynasty by allying themselves to Duke François, whose tutor the prince had formerly been, leaving their children to carry on the traditions of the family in Lorraine. Many people of rank were in a similarly difficult position. Some followed their prince abroad, others attached themselves to the new régime. A few of them—the Comte de Choiseul-Stainville was one—tried to pay a compliment to both parties by putting one son in the French army, another in the Austrian.

Stanislas did his best to propitiate the Lorraine nobles, and gave many of them posts in his large household, which numbered four hundred people. Although an autocrat as far as his personal affairs were concerned, Stanislas had no real power, for it was vested in

Louis XV's myrmidon, the Chancellor de la Galaizière. La Galaizière was a distinguished and courteous gentleman, who ruled the province wisely, and never let his nominal master feel his touch on the reins of government more than he could help. Whenever Stanislas heard rumours of discontent among the people, he silenced them speedily with a word. "I shall be so good to them that they will weep even more for me than for their former princes," he said.

Deprived of the cares of government, yet enjoying its privileges, Stanislas threw himself heart and soul into the arranging of his court, from the social point of view as well as into philosophical studies and patronage of the arts. His personal suite included the Comte de Choiseul-Stainville, the Marquis du Châtelet, the Comtes d'Hunolstein and de Brassac. The Comte de Béthune was his grand chamberlain; the Comte d'Haussonville, the master of the hunt; the Marquis de Custine his grand equerry. Behind the four "grands chevaux" de Lorraine, already mentioned, pressed the crowd of the "petits chevaux" de Lorraine, the minor nobility. A German element was added by the de Raigecourt and the Gournay. Some appointments were given by Stanislas to those old friends who had shared his dangers and adventures during exile. Among these were the Duc Ossolinski, husband of his favourite; the Chevalier de Wiltz, lover of the Princesse de Talmont; and the Chevalier de Solignac, his secretary, who was a pupil of Fontenelle and contributed not a little to the vivacity of the Court. He was called the King's *teinturier ordinaire*, and he loved literature and the arts.

Stanislas required great tact to weld these different national elements into one harmonious household and to

silence the grievances of the Lorraine nobles. He succeeded because he had a delightful manner, a generous heart, and a broad mind—unlike his queen, who was cold and kept every one at a distance.

Catherina Opalinska had married Stanislas in 1695, when she was a girl of fifteen. She loathed and detested Lorraine, and grumbled at everything that happened at Lunéville. On the whole she had little to complain of. The household was almost as important as that of the queen, her daughter, or the Dauphine of France. She had a *chevalier d'honneur*, a lady of honour, *dames du palais*, *maîtres d'hôtel*, almoners, and so forth in as large numbers as the royal ladies at Versailles. As at the French Court, her women were chosen from among those beauties who charmed the eye of the reigning lord, and in this case many of them were members of the noblest of the Lorraine families. Mme de Linanges was her lady of honour, and it was rumoured that the king looked at her with ill-concealed admiration; the Comtesses de Choiseul-Stainville and de Raigecourt, the Marquise de Boufflers and presently two of her sisters were among the *dames du palais*. The Beauvau-Craon family received many favours at the hands of Stanislas. Mme de Boufflers' husband was made Captain of the Guard in the place of Lambertye. In 1738 Mme de la Baume Montreval, her sister, was appointed *dame du palais*, and the widowed and dowager Princesse de Lixin was married under the auspices of Stanislas to the Marquis de Mirepoix and also received an appointment at Court. The Prince de Beauvau, their brother, was made Colonel of the Regiment of Guards.

Mme de Craon, it was said, never returned to Lunéville, because she was jealous of her own daughter, who had

usurped her position at Court under the new régime. Certainly her daughter was upholding the family traditions. But the princess had never had a rival in the heart of Leopold, whereas the marquise had had for an immediate predecessor the fascinating Duchesse Ossolinska. This woman was the King of Poland's cousin, and had married his former treasurer in 1733. She was her husband's second wife, and he was thirty years older than she was. Her sister was the Comtesse Jablonowska, who fell in love with the Chevalier de Wiltz, and for this reason was refused as a match by the Duc de Bourbon. The Prince de Châtelherault-Talmont showed more confidence in her, and married her, on the strict understanding that she should forget his rival in her affections. She promised to do her best, but no sooner became the Princesse de Talmont than she broke her word. The husband and the lover fought a duel; Stanislas intervened, and the Prince de Talmont left Lorraine, vowing never to see his faithless wife again. In 1738 Wiltz died, and a reconciliation was brought about between the prince and princess. Mme du Deffand described this strange woman with her usual felicity, and Walpole, who was "carried by force to see her," made the most of her peculiarities, and thanked the stars that she could not find a syllable to say to him, and begged nothing worse of him than a lap-dog.

"She fancies herself an absolutely perfect being," wrote Mme du Deffand of the Princesse de Talmont. "She makes no scruple of telling you that she does, and she requires you to believe her. Upon no other terms can you enjoy even the appearance of her friendship—I say the appearance, as she cannot bestow any real regard upon others, she is so very fond of her own dear self. Yet she

would wish to be beloved, but merely out of vanity. Her heart is absolutely devoid of feeling. . . . Neither her manners nor her looks are easy or natural. She carries her chin too high and her elbows too far behind her. Her looks are always studied. She wishes by turns to appear tender, disdainful, proud, and absent ; her countenance never wears the expression of her feelings, but she affects to be more touching, more imposing, etc., than she really is."

The duel fought on account of the Princesse de Talmont was not the only scandal at the court of Lunéville. Several were unfortunately connected with the convent of Remiremont ; and when one of the *chanoinesses* shot herself under distressing circumstances, Stanislas determined that appearances at least should be respected, even though he did little to improve morals. For this reason perhaps he was careful that there should never be *maîtresses déclarées* at the court of Lunéville as at Versailles, although in many other respects the court of Lorraine was modelled on that of France. Voltaire said that going from one to the other was hardly like a change of habitation. Perhaps at Lunéville letters were held in higher honour, and etiquette was less severe, whilst in licence there was little to choose between them.

Declared or not, there is little doubt that the charming Mme de Boufflers was none the less mistress because she did not bear the title. Nor was she only mistress to Stanislas. There were rumours of other liaisons quite as discreditable. There was Panpan Devaux, concerning whom Mme de Graffigny ran risks because she played mother to so handsome an adopted son. There was the little saint, Saint-Lambert, who was *à la mode* with all the ladies, and who bristled angrily because Voltaire said the

fair marquise was the king's mistress when he regarded her as his own. With both Devaux and Saint-Lambert she was friendly for years and years. There was besides the chancellor Chaumont de la Galaizière, of whom it might have been said, as it was in fact said about Fouquet, "Jamais surintendant ne trouva des cruelles." Was there nothing in the famous story, told as well by Horace Walpole as by anybody else, and quotable only because it is his? Collé had one version of it in his Journal. Chamfort made it apply to Mme de Bassompierre, Mme de Boufflers' sister; and M. de Sainte-Aulaire fathered it upon her niece, Mme de Cambis. Walpole wrote it to Sir Horace Mann many years later, in 1764, from Strawberry Hill :

"I love to tell you an anecdote of any of our old acquaintance, and I have now a delightful one, relating, yet indirectly, to one of them. You know, to be sure, that Mme de Craon's daughter, Mme de Boufflers, has the greatest power with King Stanislas. Our old friend the princess goes seldom to Lunéville for this reason, not enduring to see her daughter on that throne which she so long filled with absolute empire. But Mme de Boufflers, who, from his Majesty's age, cannot occupy all the places in the palace that her mother filled, indemnifies herself with his Majesty's Chancellor. One day that she discovered half-way up her leg, the lively old monarch said, 'Regardez, quel joli petit pied, et la belle jambe ! Mon Chancelier vous dira le reste !' You know this is the form when a king says a few words to his Parliament and then refers them to his chancellor."

It was Walpole, too, who remarked, "'Tis surely very wholesome to be a sovereign's mistress," because when Mme de Boufflers' mother was ninety she had travelled

to Frankfort and Prague to be present at the coronation of the Archduke Joseph, grandson of her former lover.

Mme de Boufflers retained her youth and her freshness until she grew old ; and if she was too gay, and earned for herself the title of “dame de Volupté” because of her gracious ways and pleasure-loving soul, at least she was honest about it, and that may be told in her favour when comparing her with many of her contemporaries. She chose a characteristic epitaph :

Ci-git, dans une paix profonde,
Cette dame de Volupté
Qui, pour plus grande sûreté,
Fit son paradis dans ce monde.

She admitted that she was wanting in religious faith, even as she was wanting in faithfulness, but she neither tried to excuse nor did she parade her faults. They were part of her—and she was part of the contemporary social system. That explained everything. When she tried to cure her deficiencies she failed. At the age of fifty she desired to be converted, but she found it not at all easy to believe. Disappointed, she explained to her son, the Chevalier, that she had done everything she possibly could, but had not grown devout. “Je ne conçois pas même comment on peut aimer Dieu, aimer un être que l'on ne connaît pas : non, je n'aimerai jamais Dieu,” she said earnestly and regretfully. “Ne répondez de rien,” replied the Chevalier to comfort her ; “si Dieu se faisait homme une seconde fois vous l'aimeriez sûrement.”¹

He was fond and proud of his mother, this graceless Chevalier, who judged others as leniently as he desired to be judged himself. He wrote a delightful picture of a

¹ Collé's *Journal*, vol ii.

woman who, in spite of all her faults, had many good gifts.

“Her face, even in the flower of her age, had never been, properly speaking, either beautiful or pretty, but she was to the prettiest what the prettiest are sometimes to the beautiful: she was more attractive. The sparkling whiteness of her complexion, the peculiar beauty of her hair, the perfection of her figure, the lightness of her carriage, the nobility of her bearing, and, above all, the expression, the vivacity, the singularity of her countenance, were sufficient to distinguish her from all the other women of her day.”

Nor was she wanting in intellectual gifts: “she spoke little, read much—not for instruction, nor to form her taste gradually, but she read as she played—to forgo the need of speaking. Her reading was limited to a few books, which she frequently read again. She did not retain all she read, but the result was, nevertheless, a source of knowledge which in the long run was the more precious, because it was coloured by her own ideas. That which transpired from it resembled in a manner a book, perhaps slightly incoherent, but above all amusing, and from which was wanting nothing but useless pages.” This portrait is attributed to the Comte de Tressan. Putting the two descriptions together, we get a fascinating woman with a charming figure and baby face, burdened by no grave intellectual tendencies, but with sufficient culture to keep abreast of the literary and artistic pretensions of the Court; intent on the enjoyment of life, pleasing others by the sheer force of being always pleased herself, and flitting lazily, like a bee for honey, from flower to flower.

It is easy to understand that she and Mme du Châtelet



THE MARQUISE DE BOUFFLERS
Star of the Court of Luréville

were good friends from force of contrast. Mme de Boufflers was too easy-going, her position too assured, her mind too uncritical, for great rivalry or discord to arise between them. That some unpleasantness did occur was inevitable under the circumstances, but in spite of it Mme de Boufflers remained the closest woman friend of Mme du Châtelet's last years.

Meanwhile she was Queen of the Court of Stanislas, and as much the *Idole de Lunéville* as her namesake was the *Idole du Temple*. Confusion arose among the biographers because there were so many ladies of the name of Boufflers. The *Idole du Temple* was a countess, friend to Walpole and mistress of the Prince de Conti. The Duchesse de Boufflers changed her name to Luxembourg, and was the heroine of a story told by Longchamp, in which she communicated to all the courtiers a discourse composed by Voltaire for Richelieu, which she had read in Mme du Châtelet's boudoir. When the unfortunate duke entered the presence of Louis XV, he heard every one near him murmuring fragments of the speech he had prepared. There was also Amélie de Boufflers, who was granddaughter of the old duchess, and the dowager Marquise de Boufflers, mother-in-law to the heroine of Lunéville.

When the young marquise was taken on a first visit to Paris to stay with her husband's mother, she was terribly disappointed to find that lady still mourning the husband she had lost many years before. Her house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain was hung with black, the windows were all darkened, and the prospects of a delightful holiday being all shattered at a blow, the visitor burst into tears and refused to be comforted. After a time, however, she learnt to love her mother-in-law, who

was kind and gentle. One day she spoke disparagingly of the marquis, her husband. "You forget he is my son," remarked the elder lady, drawing herself up rather haughtily. "So I did, maman," replied his wife. "Just for the moment I fancied he was your son-in-law." The gloomy abode being unendurable to the pleasure-loving marquise, she soon went to stay with the Duchesse de Boufflers, who introduced her to the gay society life of Paris. She was presented at Versailles, entered into many brilliant circles, and met several of the clever men whom she was to see later at Lunéville. Among them were Voltaire and Montesquieu. She did not pay frequent visits to Paris, but when she was in the capital she sometimes stayed at the town house of her brother, the Prince de Beauvau, sometimes at that of her sister, the Duchesse de Mirepoix. On the whole she preferred Lorraine, and said of it, "It is there that I wish to live and to die!"

She was entirely happy at Lunéville, and felt for old King Stanislas an affection which his affability and generosity compelled. She ruled at the court because she ruled its master by force of her gaiety, originality, and variety. She gathered her own little circle round her. Perhaps the chief figure in it was Mme de Mirepoix, her sister. Mme du Deffand said of this lady when she neared the age of sixty, that although her face and figure aged according to the usual process, her mind had grown younger, and was barely fifteen.

"She never speaks of herself," she wrote, "never takes upon herself to decide upon anything, very seldom disputes with anybody—it is sufficient to see her to think her amiable and interesting, but one must have lived with her to be able to appreciate her worth. . . . She is very

timid, but never seems embarrassed—never loses her presence of mind, nor what we style *l'apropos*. Her countenance is charming, her complexion dazzling ; her features, without being absolutely regular, are so well suited to each other, that no one has a greater air of youth or can be prettier. Her desire to please bears a much greater resemblance to politeness than to coquetry ; therefore the women are not jealous of her, and the men dare not fall in love with her. . . . The love which she feels for her husband satisfies her heart.”

Her great friend was Montesquieu, who wrote her portrait in verse ; and Walpole said of her that she even concealed the blood of Lorraine without ever forgetting it. She “is *the* agreeable woman of the world when she pleases,” he wrote—“but there must not be a card in the room.” Mme de Mirepoix was something of a gambler. Her brother, the Prince de Beauvau, also thought her one of the most amiable women of the century, wise and refined, and, above all, with a mind just as a woman’s mind should be. The Prince and Princesse de Beauvau were themselves in Mme de Boufflers’ train. These two were such a happy couple that a story is told to illustrate an exceptional state of conjugal felicity. Their daughter, who was married at the age of seventeen to the Prince de Poix, was forbidden to read sentimental romances, which might have given her wrong views on the subject of conventional marriages. “But,” she cried to her advisers, “if you don’t want me to know anything about such things you will have to forbid my seeing papa and mamma !”

This niece of Mme de Boufflers was too young to be much at Lunéville during the lifetime of Stanislas, but two other nieces were there, the daughters of Mme de

Chimai : Mme de Caraman, who Walpole said was a very good kind of woman, but had not a quarter of her sister's parts ; and Mme de Cambis, who had an elegant figure, grace and coquetry. "This Cambis pleases me," wrote Mme du Deffand ; "truly her character is cold and dry, but she has tact, discernment, truth, and pride. I am animated by a certain wish to please her. She could never be a friend, but I find her piquante." Mme de Cambis liked the Comtesse de Boufflers more than she liked her aunt the Marquise. Her sisters, with their husbands, also helped to swell the numbers of Mme de Boufflers' court. Mme de Bassompierre, one of them, was so beautiful, and at the same time so disagreeable, that Tressan said of her : "Fie ! how lovely she is !" One of Mme de Boufflers' most intimate friends was Mme Durival, wife of the Secretary of the Council. She painted, she played the violin, she broke hearts, she ignored the existence of her husband, all in the most approved fashion of the day.

It was Mme de Boufflers who obtained for Panpan the post of Reader to the King. Stanislas was surprised at her request, and would not accede to it at once. "What shall I do with a reader ?" he asked. "Ah, well, he will be as useful as my son-in-law's confessor," and Panpan was appointed at a salary of two thousand crowns. He was an amusing youth, this Panpan, and in his society the favourite never knew a moment's ennui. He was useful, too, to fetch and carry, to give her little presents, accompanied by pretty verses, to make plans for her enjoyment, and keep pleasant surprises up his sleeve. He wrote his own portrait in verse, describing his countenance as open, his hair as well placed, two little eyes without fire, but without malice, which closed up

whenever he laughed, his laugh spreading to his vermilion lips and showing teeth "mal en bataille," and so on, taking his physical charms and dissecting them one by one. It was quite in the spirit of Panpan and of Lunéville.

Mme de Boufflers kept her two sons and her daughter with her at Lunéville, which showed that she was a good mother, though perhaps not altogether a wise one. The eldest son was destined to go into the army, and was presently sent to Versailles to be brought up with the dauphin. The younger, the Chevalier, who passed under the nickname of "Pataud," was educated by a tutor, the Abbé de Porquet, who became an acquisition to the court. Mme de Boufflers, seeing how amiable, entertaining, and witty he was, made a friend of him, and forgot to treat him as though he were merely a preceptor for her son. She had to find him a court appointment before she could enjoy much of his society. She bethought her of the position of almoner. No sooner said than done. Stanislas, amiable as he was when favours were to be bestowed, did not care to have new retainers who did nothing for a living, so he used to set them a task. The one he chose for the Abbé was a very natural one to choose, but at the same time rather an awkward one as it turned out. He asked him to say the *Benedicite* at the royal table. The Abbé stuttered and stammered, could not remember the prayer, and subsided into silence. Mme de Boufflers, pleading on his account, prevented his dismissal.

But the Abbé could be so amusing that much was forgiven him. When one day he read the Bible to Stanislas he fell into a doze, and, waking with a start, read, "God appeared to Jacob *en singe*." "What!"

cried Stanislas ; “ you mean *en songe*.” “ Ah, Sire,” replied Porquet quickly, “ is not everything possible to God ? ” He was so free in thought for an Abbé that when he complained to Stanislas that he was not promoted quickly enough, the king replied, “ But, my dear Abbé, you yourself are to blame for that. You are far too free in your speech. They say you don’t believe in God. You must moderate your manner. Just try and believe. I will give you a year to do it in.”

No wonder that his pupil, the gay Chevalier, was a flippant youth. Saint-Lambert called him Voisenon le Grand, because he had Voisenon’s frivolity and was far more lovable. The Prince de Ligne said of him in after-years, that he was abbé, soldier, writer, administrator, deputy, and philosopher by turns, and that the only one of these rôles which did not suit him was the first. He forgot to say that he was a great traveller too. Tressan, who met him one day *en route*, greeted him cheerily : “ Hullo, Chevalier, how delightful it is to find you at home ! ”

Another Chevalier, who was also a favourite at Lunéville, but somewhat different in character, was the Chevalier de Listenay, afterwards Prince Beauffremont, who was called the Incomparable Prince. He was good, gentle, facile, and easy-going. It was said of him that when he opened his mouth his listeners thought he was going to yawn and make them yawn, but were surprised to find that what he said was not at all dull.

One of the most beautiful women at court was the Comtesse de Lutzelbourg, who took part in the play-acting with Mme du Châtelet. A foil to her was Mme de Boisgelin, of whom Lauzun said she was “ a monster of ugliness, but amiable enough, and as coquettish

as though she had been pretty." Like most of the other women at Lunéville, she had a goodly share of wit and vivacity. Besides these were Mme de Lenoncourt, and Mme Alliot, wife of the Intendant of the palace and Grand Master of the Ceremonies of Lorraine, who did wonders with the king's modest revenue, and kept Voltaire on such short commons when he was ill that he had to write a letter of complaint denouncing him to Stanislas as having refused him bread, wine, and a candle, under the pretext that he was a demon of the kind it is necessary to exorcise through hunger.

When Queen Catherina Opalinska died the king no longer feared a stern and intimate critic of his tastes, and a number of beautiful women and literary men were added from time to time to the court, or paid flying visits there. "His house was that of a wealthy private person," said Condorcet of Stanislas, "but no private person could have won the fame near, far and abroad, that was won by the Court of Stanislas. An intimate picture of the Lunéville interior was drawn in the Memoirs of the Prince de Beauvau. "He [Stanislas] loved the letters and conversation of enlightened men. He honoured serious merit, but he wished to live with amusing merit. In the family of M. de Beauvau, and in the friends of this family, he found society which pleased his tastes and his character. This good company gathered every day at Mme de Boufflers'. Then the king went there and spent several hours. Sometimes there was music, more often readings, which were not discontinued until gay and interesting conversation rendered them useless.

Mme de Boufflers had a penetrating mind, and, as Montaigne says, impulsive. She was intelligent, as

one must be to appreciate belles-lettres, the arts, and society.

Another picture of the court is from the pen of Mme de Ferté-Imbault, daughter of Mme de Geoffrin, who passed through Lunéville on her way to Plombières in 1748 with Mlle de la Roche-sur-Yon, aunt of the Prince de Conti. They believed themselves "to be in fairyland," and though they had meant to stay only three days, three weeks had passed before they realised that it was time to go. The king, who was nearly seventy, made love to his charming guests as though he were only of their own age, which they thought delightful. He called Mme de Geoffrin's daughter "son Imbault," or "sa chère folle," and seriously contemplated the idea of marrying Mlle de la Roche-sur-Yon. Mme de Boufflers knew better than to be jealous. She was good friends with Mme de Ferté-Imbault, who described her as "très drôlesse, fort spirituelle, aimant l'argent, le jeu et les galants."

Another visitor at the same time was Montesquieu. "I was loaded with kindnesses and honours at the court of Lorraine," he wrote to the Abbé de Guasco. He afterwards became a member of the Academy instituted for Stanislas by Tressan. Helvétius also paid a visit to the court, and there won his wife, Mlle de Ligniville, who was "a poor heiress" of one of the best Lorraine families. At that time it was an astonishing thing for a man of finance to marry into an old family, but through the influence of Stanislas, and under the wing of Mme de Graffigny the deed was done; and it was thought very tactful on the part of the husband that he avoided wearing mourning when the death occurred of the illustrious Prince de Craon, who was connected with his wife.

Président Hénault was another visitor, and described his host as "a model for all princes." Poncet de la Rivière belonged to the King's Academy, and Voltaire said, with more rashness than accuracy, that he was packed off because he fell in love with Mme de Boufflers. Mesdames, the king's daughters, who were still young, and not yet uninteresting, sometimes went to see their maternal grandfather; and a very important individual at the court of Stanislas was the dwarf Bébé, aged five years, and fifteen inches in height, who amused himself by breaking the king's china ornaments, and got completely lost one day in a crop of lucerne.

Into this gay and busy throng came Voltaire, smiling and urbane, le philosophe-roi chez le roi-philosophe. He told the story in his Memoirs of his first visit with Mme du Châtelet, which took place in 1748. His account has been much disputed, and Saint-Lambert made several comments which are significant enough to be quoted in full.

"My connection with Mme du Châtelet was never interrupted; our friendship and our love of literature were unalterable. We lived together both in town and out of town. Cirey is situated upon the borders of Lorraine, and King Stanislas at that time kept his little agreeable court at Lunéville. Old and fanatic as he was, he still had a friendship with a lady who was neither. His affections were divided between Mme la Marquise de Boufflers and a Jesuit, whose name was Menou—a priest the most daring, the most intriguing I have ever known.

"This man had drawn from King Stanislas, by means of his queen, whom he had governed, about a million of livres, nearly 42,000 pounds, part of which was employed

in building a magnificent house for himself and some Jesuits of Nancy. This house was endowed with twenty-four thousand livres, or a thousand pounds a year, half of which supplied his table, and the other half to give away to whom he pleased. The King's mistress¹ was not by any means so well treated ; she scarcely could get from his Polish majesty the wherewithal to buy her petticoats ; and yet the Jesuit envied what she had, and was violently jealous of her power. They were at open war,² and the poor king had enough to do every day when he came from Mass to reconcile his mistress and his confessor. Our Jesuit at last, having heard of Mme du Châtelet, who was exceedingly well-formed and still tolerably handsome, conceived the project of substituting her for Mme de Boufflers.

“ Stanislas amused himself sometimes in writing little works, which were bad enough ; and Menou imagined an authoress would succeed with him as a mistress better than any other. With this fine trick in his head he came to Cirey, cajoled Mme du Châtelet, and told us how delighted King Stanislas would be to have our company. He then returned to the king and informed him how ardently we desired to come and pay our court to his majesty. Stanislas asked Mme de Boufflers to bring us ;

¹ “ Omit the word mistress, it is false, and insert friend. The Marquise de Boufflers was a most disinterested friend and seldom used her interest but in the service of her friends ; and the expression *wherewith to buy her petticoats* is not at all applicable.”—SAINT-LAMBERT.

² “ Mme de Boufflers never was at variance with father Menou, who, all-intriguing as he was, never thought of giving Stanislas Mme du Châtelet for a mistress. That lady and M. de Voltaire never were at Lunéville, except when invited by M. de B * * *, whom they often visited and found very amiable. They never went as guests to the King of Poland. If Menou really proposed the journey to Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet, it was when he was informed they were coming, and to make a merit of it with the king.”—SAINT-LAMBERT.

and we went to pass the whole year at Lunéville. But the projects of the holy Jesuit did not succeed; the very reverse took place: we were devoted to Mme de Boufflers, and he had two women to combat instead of one.

“The life led at the Court of Lorraine was tolerably agreeable, though there, as in other courts, there was plenty of intrigues and artifice.”

The suggestion that Menou desired to supplant the “dame de Volupté” by the imperious and erudite Emilie has been much disputed by the authorities. Certainly there was no love lost between the king’s confessor and the king’s mistress, but the priest who had been friendly in earlier days with Mme du Châtelet’s father must have known Milady Newton too well to have laid any such schemes. He may have let fall a word of invitation when he visited Cirey at the beginning of 1748, leading Voltaire and Emilie to believe that the King of Poland was desirous of their company at his court, and on his return to Lunéville have told Stanislas that the poet and his marquise were dying to come and pay him their respects; but there seems no foundation for the statement that after a consultation with the king, Mme du Boufflers set out for Cirey to fetch the illustrious couple to Lunéville.

De Luynes made a note in his Journal of February 24, 1748, that he had just been informed that Mme du Châtelet, who had already played *Issé* at Sceaux, had repeated the opera at Lunéville with Mme de Lutzelbourg, and stated that Emilie left Versailles at the beginning of the year to go to Cirey with the Marquise de Boufflers and Voltaire, and that from thence they went to the court of Stanislas. But this account does not

agree with that of Longchamp, who described the night journey in January from Paris to Cirey on snowy roads and through hail and sleet, when the hind-spring of the carriage gave way, precipitating the divine Emilie, her maid, and a mountain of handboxes and parcels on top of the unfortunate poet, who lay almost smothered until extricated from the débris by the servants.

The accident was to be deplored, but it was responsible for a glimpse of Emilie, full of revelation of character, which is worth much.

“M. de Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet were seated side by side on the cushions of the carriage, which had been placed on the snow,” continued Longchamp. “There, almost transfixed with cold in spite of their furs, they were admiring the beauties of the heavens. The sky was perfectly calm and serene, the stars shone brilliantly, neither house nor tree was within sight to break the line of the horizon. Astronomy had always been a favourite study of our two philosophers. Overcome by the magnificent spectacle spread out around and above them, they discussed, whilst shivering, the nature and courses of the stars, and the destination of the vast worlds hanging in space. Only telescopes were wanting to their perfect happiness. Their minds soaring in the profound depths of the sky, they saw nothing of their sad position on earth, amidst snow and icicles.” At that moment she was truly great. Passionless and calm, her intellect was in the ascendant. So she should have lived and—so died.

No Mme de Boufflers was present then, nor afterwards. On the contrary, they were so much alone that they grew tired of arranging the library and the laboratory, and of playing tric-trac; and Emilie wrote to

Mme de Champbonin, inviting her as a last resource from too much solitude. The lady arrived with a schoolgirl niece, and for their benefit Mme du Châtelet composed farces, proverbs, and riddles, and enlisted her servants to act in the little theatre, because there was no one else to take part in her plays. Still no word of Mme de Boufflers; though Longchamp is inaccurate in another respect, because he says that four months passed thus in pleasant amusement, when it was decided to accept the invitation of Stanislas to Lunéville, whereas in reality they went there in February. He also says they went to Commercy first.

None of the letters elucidate these points, but it is quite clear that neither Mme du Châtelet nor Voltaire required much persuasion to pay the visit in question at this juncture of affairs. The former was longing to find a lucrative post for her husband; the latter had offended Marie Leczinska, and a visit to her father seemed to him to have about it all the charm of defiance. The queen's anger had been aroused in two ways—first by his laudatory verses to Mme de Pompadour, secondly by an apparently trifling misdemeanour, which to those at court appeared more serious; indeed, it struck a blow at one of their treasured institutions. Hearing Marie Leczinska was angry, Voltaire asked what was his latest offence, and was informed that he had written a letter to the dauphine in which he had made the statement that cavagnole was a boresome game. Was this a mere excuse to veil her real annoyance? "I quite understand," he wrote on this point to Président Hénault from Lunéville, in February 1748, "that if I had committed such a crime, I should merit the most severe chastisement; but, in truth, I have not the honour of being in

communication with Mme la Dauphine. But he had made verses much in the same spirit :

On croirait que le jeu console,
Mais l'Ennui vient à pas comptés,
S'asseoir entre des Majestés,
A la table d'un cavagnole,¹

Voltaire should have expressed himself on the point some thirty years later. Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, whatever she felt in private, was too exemplary a princess to express her opinions on cavagnole openly. The dauphine who succeeded her, Marie-Antoinette, loathed the game, and would have sympathised with the author to the utmost. As a matter of fact, Voltaire, in a letter to d'Argental, indignantly denied having addressed the dauphine on the subject. He had sent the verse to "quite a different princess,² whose court was four hundred leagues away," and was quite indifferent as to whether he had been guilty of *lèse-majesté* or *lèse-cavagnole*.

The visitors arrived at Lunéville on February 13, late in the evening, and were received with great enthusiasm at court. Mme du Châtelet was given a suite of rooms on the ground floor of the château which had belonged to the queen, and Voltaire was on the first floor. Voltaire celebrated his arrival by falling seriously ill—too ill to express his usual conviction that he was on the point of death. Stanislas sent his own doctors, and paid a visit to the philosopher's bedside. Never had he been better attended. As soon as he was restored to health, a

¹ One would imagine that card-games were a solace,
But Boredom, stalking grim,
Seats herself between their Majesties
At the cavagnole table.

² This was the Princess Ulrica, sister to Frederick.

series of festivities was arranged to amuse him and Emilie. Plays were acted in which Mme du Châtelet, Mme de Boufflers, and Mme de Chabot took part. Emilie arranged concerts at which she sang herself, and her husband, the marquis, who passed through Lunéville on his way to rejoin the army, was enchanted at his wife's popularity.

"My divine Angels," wrote Voltaire to d'Argental and his wife on February 14, "I am here at Lunéville, and why? King Stanislas is a charming man, but when one adds King Augustus to him, stout as they are, in one scale and my angels in the other, my angels weigh heaviest.

"I have been ill—but Mme du Châtelet is wonderfully well. She sends you the most tender regards. I do not know if she will remain here throughout February. As for me, who am only a small satellite, I shall follow in her orbit *cahin-caha*. . . .

"It is true I have been ill, but it is a pleasure to be so at the King of Poland's. There is certainly nobody who has more care of his invalids than he. It is impossible to be a better king or a better man."

This letter he followed up with another, to the Comtesse d'Argental, on February 25 :

"My supposed exile would be delightful if I were not so far from my angels. Truly the visit here is delicious; it is an enchanted castle of which the master does the honours. Mme du Châtelet has discovered the secret of playing *Issé* three times in a very fine theatre—and *Issé* has been a great success. The king's troupe played *Méropé*. Believe me, Madame, they cried here as much as at Paris. And I, who address you, I forgot myself sufficiently to cry like any of the others.

“We go every day into a kiosk, or from a palace into a cottage, and everywhere are feasting and liberty. I think Mme du Châtelet would gladly pass the remainder of her days here, but I personally prefer the charms of friendship to all fêtes.”

In spite of his remarks to the contrary, Voltaire liked to be well entertained, and Emilie was in the seventh heaven. “We have had a very charming carnival at Shrove-tide,” she wrote to d’Argenson on March 2. “The King of Poland has loaded me with kindness, and it is difficult to leave him.” Voltaire summed up the court of Lunéville in a phrase—“Lansquenet and love.” The last word was to bear a terrible significance. An atmosphere of love is infectious, and Mme du Châtelet was not immune. Already, at that hour, busybodies were coupling her name with that of Saint-Lambert, but no whisper reached Voltaire’s ears as yet.

CHAPTER X

LOVE AND SAINT-LAMBERT

THE gaiety, the festivities, the successes and triumphs of Mme du Châtelet's life were almost over. Tragedy was to follow, all the more pathetic because it was fraught with flashes of sardonic humour—a tragedy that inspires awe and silences criticism. It is difficult to condemn the ill-considered actions of the dying; when the death is the direct result of such actions it is almost impossible. Mme du Châtelet's fate was so peculiarly the outcome of uncontrolled passion that pity for the manner of it is uppermost, and judgment is temporarily suspended.

What kind of man was he for whom she staked her all without restriction, without reserve, to whom she offered heart, mind, and body, to whom she sacrificed her position, her future, her children, her husband, even her friend of long standing? Words do not make Saint-Lambert live again. They seem as unable to give him charm or worth as those beautifully arranged by himself in his poem of *Les Saisons* were to secure for it a place in the hearts of his readers. Grimm said of this poem that if the author desired his name to be known to posterity he must destroy the whole of his work except one or two short passages. A man of artistic taste coming across these fragments in after-years would point out their beauty to a whole nation, and, judging by what he had

found, expatiate upon the terrible loss that had been sustained. "He would reason justly, but be completely deceived," concluded Grimm.

So it seems with Saint-Lambert himself. Were nothing known of him but the passionate love for him of Mme de Boufflers, of Mme du Châtelet, more than all of the sweet-natured and tender-hearted Mme d'Houdetot, it would be easy to endow him with all the noble and attractive qualities, with all the warmth of feeling and generous, if too lavish, affections that might appeal to women who greatly differed in character and tastes. But to do so is likewise to be wholly deceived. The romantic side of Saint-Lambert's career is qualified by the prosaic exactness of his other characteristics. From his poems, from his letters, from his long and detailed will, in which he turns neat phrases about many of his friends, it is obvious that the graces, elegances, and charms he possessed were of superficial value only; no impulsive heart beat beneath that calm exterior, no nobility or depth of purpose inspired him, no unselfish motives led him into indiscretion. What he did was done in an ordered manner, because he chose to do it, or saw in it some chance of benefit, some hope of being thought a wonderful man and a fine man.

"Saint-Lambert, with a delicate politeness, though a little cold, had in conversation the same elegant turn, the same acuteness of mind that you remark in his writings," said Marmontel. "Without being naturally gay, he became animated by the gaiety of others; and, on philosophical or literary subjects, no one conversed with sounder reason or a more exquisite taste. This taste was that of the little court of Lunéville, where he had lived, and the tone of which he had preserved."



THE MARQUIS DE SAINT-LAMBERT
Author of "Les Saisons"

But no man is good because his taste is exquisite. Madame Suard said, "One might esteem him, but one could not love him." She may have seen below the surface, which some did not, for many women falsified her words. At any rate, he was well liked, as such men always are, by those who do not seek for deeper qualities or genius in reserve. He was good to look at, tall and well set-up, with markedly handsome features, and had eyes that seemed to utter all that his soul failed to speak. His bearing was the military bearing of a good guardsman, his intellect the cultured mind of a drawing-room poet. He had a seductive manner, and women were impressed by such advantages, and did not wait to analyse the other qualities before bestowing approbation.

With a man like Saint-Lambert, once approve and the rest is fatally easy. Where there is so much glitter it is difficult to believe that real gold does not exist. After all, Saint-Lambert, allowing for his limitations, was a very impressive person indeed.

And Mme du Châtelet was duly impressed. She met him for the first time during the visit to Lunéville in the early spring of 1748, and he was never out of her thoughts again in this world. Infatuation, obsession, call it what you will, was allowed to master her, to carry her away, and she bowed low to the god of the period and the place—which was passion—and imagined she was worshipping at a holy shrine.

And Voltaire saw nothing then. He liked Saint-Lambert well enough. He thought him a promising writer. When he saw the first verses of *Les Saisons* he believed they were good, rather in the style of Boileau, but distinctly good. He called him his "terrible pupil," and hoped posterity would be grateful. Mme du Châtelet

sent some lines by Saint-Lambert to d'Argental from Commercy: "I cannot help sending you some verses written by a young man of our company here, whom you already know from *l'Épître à Chloé*. I feel sure they will please you." And then she proceeded to tell him that Saint-Lambert was anxious to make his acquaintance, and was entirely worthy to do so; that she was bringing the young writer to Cirey, and hoped they might meet there; that Voltaire liked him, and wished to befriend him. She begged d'Argental's protection also for this young man of good birth, a man of Lorraine who had no means worth speaking of.

There seems some doubt as to the exact place of the soldier-poet's birth. One authority says at Affracourt, another at Vezelis in 1717.¹ He was eleven years younger than Emilie. By his own account in the preface to *Les Saisons* he was brought up in the country among agriculturists. He had studied nature, and thought he understood and loved her. His temperament was poetic, and he desired to sing of the things he loved, to tell of the beauty of the world around him. Mme du Deffand made by far the best comment on the manner in which he fulfilled this ambition. "Sans les oiseaux, les ruisseaux, les hameaux, les ormeaux et leur rameaux il aurait bien peu de choses à dire." Nor was she satisfied with this, for she declared the author "un esprit froid, fade et faux." Walpole agreed with her. The poem was somnolent, "four fans spun out into a Georgic," and the poet, he declared, was a great jackanapes and a very tiny genius. Perhaps the best criticism of *Les Saisons* was that it was equally impossible to find fault with it in parts or endure it as a whole.

¹ Puymaigre, Comte de. *Poètes et Romanciers de la Lorraine*.

For more than fifteen years the poet worked on this, his *chef d'œuvre*. It was published twenty years after Mme du Châtelet's death, and was dedicated to Mme d'Houdetot, under the name of Doris. Rousseau's Sophie was the exact opposite of Mme du Châtelet. She possessed no pretensions, no coquetry; nothing could ruffle her temper, nothing could chill her childlike trust. The liaison between them lasted half a century. In his will he left her a clock, which she was to place in her room, and when she heard it strike she was to recall to mind the fact that for fifty years he had consecrated to her with pleasure a large proportion of the hours of his life.

Saint-Lambert was in the fashion. Was he not the successful rival in love of a Voltaire and a Rousseau?

Even as she went to him with both hands full of love, Emilie realised that she must not expect complete surrender in return. Her bitterness was in learning that it was not in his power to love her as she loved him. At first she had hoped for everything. Ever since the first meeting at Lunéville she threw herself with a will into the affair; she treasured every glance, every word of his that promised her affection. They played at being young and sentimental lovers, these two, who were man and woman of the world, and who abandoned all restraint because they saw no necessity for exerting any. They wrote little notes every few hours to one another, and chose romantic hiding-places in those great rooms of the château which were convenient to conceal a post-box. Hers were warm, passionate, and full of tenderness, the letters of a woman infatuated by a man much younger than herself, who knew she was throwing the last die in the game of love, and who was convinced that the game was the one most worth playing in life. "Yes,

I love you. Everything tells you that ; everything will always tell you. . . . I adore you, and it seems to me that when one loves one can do no wrong," she wrote in the little notes that were hidden in a harp ; and the glances they exchanged were cautious glances ; neither Mme de Boufflers nor Voltaire were to pierce the masks they wore, to realise that they loved with a delight that was none the less attractive because of the need of mystery and concealment.

What a contrast was this love to that she had lavished on Voltaire ! She had had so much that was intellectual from him that she rejoiced in an affection of the heart. It was simpler, less exacting, even more compelling. She reasoned that she had been faithful to a man who had long ceased to love her as a lover should, that she had found it impossible to live without something warmer and more personal than companionship and intellectual interest. She wrote her *apologia* to d'Argental :

"God gave me one of those tender and constant natures which can neither moderate nor disguise their passions, which know neither weakening nor distaste, and of which the tenacity resists everything, even the certainty of not being loved. For ten years I have been made happy through the love of him who has subjugated my affections, and I have passed these ten years entirely in his company, without a moment of disgust or languor, when age, sickness, perhaps even satiety, lessened his affection for me. I was a long time without perceiving it. I loved enough for both of us. I passed my life wholly with him ; and my heart, free from suspicion, rejoiced in the delights of loving and of believing myself beloved. It is true that I have lost this happy condition of mind, and that I have only lost it at the cost of many tears.

“There have to be terrible blows struck before chains long-fettered fall away, and the wound in my heart has bled for a long while. I might have complained; instead I pardoned all. I felt that perhaps mine was the only heart in the world that was so constant, the only one that could defy the power of time; that if age and illness had not destroyed his passion it would still have been mine; that love would have restored him to me; that his heart, incapable of anything warmer, held for me the most tender friendship. The certainty that it was impossible his inclination and passion should return—for I know such a thing is not natural—brought my heart by degrees to feel only a calm sentiment of friendship, and this sentiment, joined to a passion for study, rendered me happy enough.

“But can a heart so tender be quite filled by so calm and feeble a sentiment as friendship . . . ?”

When she wrote that letter she was still reasoning, still trying to justify herself. Before long reason was silenced, feelings alone spoke. She ceased to struggle. She gave herself up to the charm of this novel emotion as though she had never experienced anything like it in her life before.

The harp seemed but a poor and slow repository for secret vows. Hers were penned on lace-edged paper tied with a ribbon of pink or blue. The lovers must needs take into their confidence before long his valet and her maid. They were both kept busy carrying letters, running errands, even bearing verbal messages. Saint-Lambert fell ill. The marquise did not attempt to hide her anxiety. She advised this remedy and that; she sent him tea, soup (to be taken an hour after his medicine), a wing of partridge, a morsel of chicken—any delicacy her mind could devise which might help him to regain

strength. He must open the windows and ventilate his room, she said. She sent him sweet-smelling pastilles to make the air pleasant. She played the nurse to him better than she had ever played it to Voltaire; she would kill her patient with kindness if she could. But at all costs she must see him, or she would die. Disguised in a large cloak she went to his room, where she stayed the greater part of the night nursing him.

All this devotion touched him. His affection grew a little warmer. "You have never been more tender, more lovable, more adored," he wrote; and he composed a little verse for her, which she thought delightful. Her letters, on the other hand, were full of passion. Each one breathed the same adoration, each ended in the same refrain: "I love you; with all my soul I love you." As Saint-Lambert improved in health he became less demonstrative, he recovered his dignity a little. He was his natural self, "froid et galant"; she preferred him to be "colère et tendre." She expected him in vain in her rooms. His soup awaited him there, and was growing cold—far colder than she, who was waiting too. "The greatest sign of indifference one can give is not to be with those one loves when it can be done without fear of discovery." When he arrived she reproached him with his absence, and then reproached herself for giving way to anger. "Forgive me," she wrote. "Believe that I only desire to be amiable, gentle, estimable, and to be loved and esteemed by you. . . . I know my faults, but I wish you to ignore them. . . . You wrote me five letters yesterday. What a day! I did wrong to spoil the end of it."

All too soon the parting came—an unavoidable although only temporary separation, delayed to the last possible

moment. At the beginning of March the Lunéville visit was broken by a few days at Malgrange. Then Stanislas left for Versailles to see his daughter, Mme de Boufflers, and Voltaire accompanied him to Paris, and Mme de Châtelet returned to Cirey to look after the farmers there. This was the arrangement she preferred. Saint-Lambert had left for Nancy to rejoin his regiment. With a lover's ingenuity she managed to have business to do in Nancy, and spent some days there with her lover. Before they parted she begged him to come to Cirey. He promised to do so, but his promise did not ring with enough sincerity to please her. She felt a little chilled as she left the spot where they had been together, and as she travelled away from the object of her adoration she felt it necessary to pour out to him all that was in her soul.

She wrote to him from Bar-le-Duc, after they had parted at Nancy: "All my mistrust of your character, all my resolution against loving you, cannot save me from that love with which you have inspired me"—she was not quite blinded then. "I no longer attempt to combat it—I feel the futility of that. The time I spent with you at Nancy has increased it to a point which astonishes myself. Still, far from reproaching myself, I feel an extreme pleasure in loving you, and it is the only one which can lessen the pain of your absence." And then she told him that only when she was with him could she be completely contented, because she knew that though his inclination was strong he did not yet know how to love. "I feel sure that to-day you will be more gay and more *spirituel* than ever at Lunéville, and this idea is afflicting apart from all other anxiety. If you cannot love me otherwise than feebly—if your heart be incapable of giving without reserve, of being occupied

wholly with me, of loving me without limit or measure—what good will my heart be to you? I am tormented by these reflections, but they occupy me ceaselessly.” And then in a spirit of contradiction she suddenly burst out with the truth: “I am afraid I am doing wrong in loving you too much.” Her reflections, her struggles, all that she felt, proved this to her. As she gave more, he might vouchsafe her less. “Come to Cirey and show me that I am wrong. . . . I shall expect you there, do not doubt it.” Saint-Lambert spoke of going to Italy, but she begged him to sacrifice the journey and stay with her. “Without such a sacrifice I should not have believed in your love for me.” And yet she was afraid that even whilst they spoke the same language they could not fail to misunderstand one another. That would be the penalty of marked differences in their respective natures; they could not give the same rendering to the word “love.” Yet her passion for him effaced every other consideration. Agitated as she was, she saw the man she had to deal with clearly, and judged him with perspicacity.

By chance her passionate letters were delayed in reaching Nancy, and her silence awoke in Saint-Lambert a renewal of his devotion to her. “Why,” she replied, “should I owe the most tender letter which I have ever received from you to the grief you felt in not hearing from me? It is necessary not to write to you, then, in order to be loved? But if that be so, you will soon not love me any more, for I must tell you of the pleasure your letter gave me. . . . See how much power you have over me, and how easily you can appease the rage which at times is aroused in my soul.”

Thinking himself temporarily forgotten, Saint-Lambert

had reproached her for inconstancy, for having mistaken an attraction for a great love ; such attachments, he thought, she must often have felt. In reply she assured him that for fifteen years her heart had turned only in one direction, and that he alone had shown her she was still capable of loving in another. "If you love me as I wish to be loved, as I merit it, and as it is necessary to love in order to be happy, I shall only have thanks to render to love. . . ."

As he travelled back to Lunéville, he wrote to her *en route* :

"I only left Nancy after the post, because I had written to the postman to send your letters there to me. I awaited, then, this morning the treasures which I ought to have received on Wednesday.

"I received them. I enjoyed them on the journey. Alas ! they could not prevent my feeling that I had put five leagues more distance between us. Here I am then, *mon cher amour*, in a spot where I have lost that precious liberty which each day becomes more precious.

"The king received me with his usual kindness. He is certainly the one I like the best of all his court. I am more than ever determined to give my time only to him, and not to take more distraction during my journey than that which my health absolutely demands. I return to your letter. I must have been very much in despair to have only written you four words on the day I left you. I had to tell you all that I usually say to you, all that I make you understand, and then all my regrets. Be sure of it, *mon cher amour*, they have never been more keen, as true, and less susceptible of being weakened or scattered. The journey tired me without making me forget you."

He told her that the melancholy he felt was natural to him, and that it grew more overwhelming in her absence. Existence was painful to him, and he only valued it when he remembered that she loved him. *Mon cher cœur*, he called her, *mon cher amour*; and begged her to tell him everything she did and what her husband did, and to take the greatest care of her health. Never had he felt a more impassioned interest nor a more tender one in all that she was, that she felt, that she did, or that she might become. . . . "If you only knew what a treasure I possess in you, you would look after yourself well. Feel assured that all the keen and delicious impressions which I have received from you are preserved in my heart, are even increased, will always be preserved. It is impossible that anything but you can encompass my happiness. I shall always be filled to the brim with my tenderness for you and content to experience it."

This letter is a characteristic one. It defines Saint-Lambert's limitations admirably. His personal charm did not lie in his mental equipment, and therefore eludes the biographer, who can only fail in trying to give life to physical perfection.

To all her expressed wishes that he should come to Cirey he gave undecided answers. He hinted that so far Voltaire lived in the perfect ignorance that was bliss. It would be a pity to risk undeceiving him. Besides, he spoke again of the contemplated journey to Tuscany with the Prince de Beauvau. Mme du Châtelet gave vent to a storm of indignation. She assured him that there were no fears to be entertained on the score of Voltaire, who was too busy to take notice of what went on—so, at one time, she had assured Voltaire that the Marquis du

Châtelet would have nothing to say against his presence—and that on no account must he think of leaving Nancy for England or Tuscany. “I demand this sacrifice of you,” she repeated. Nor could she bear the thought that Mme de Boufflers was privileged to see more of her lover than she herself. She knew something of the affection there had been once between these two, and she feared lest in her absence it might be renewed.

It was the oft-told tale : the woman whose love is her whole life, the man to whom it is an episode. Although played by two very different characters and in quite other circumstances, the same note of tragedy is in Mme du Châtelet’s prayers as in those of Mlle de Lespinasse. They both gave their all ; they both received a shadow in return. Saint-Lambert was not playing the double game of the Comte de Guibert, nor was Mme du Châtelet’s remorse on Voltaire’s account half as poignant as that of Mlle de Lespinasse for Mora. Mme du Châtelet was better balanced, more masculine, less fettered by convention or scruples than the highly-strung neurotic adopted sister of d’Alembert. Yet both of them were in the grip of the uncontrollable passion which was to carry them remorselessly to the tomb.

Saint-Lambert gave of his best. He turned his happiest phrases and bared his tenderest thoughts for her ; but no woman of her temperament could fail to see the want of spontaneity, of life in his protestations.

When at last he paid the promised visit to Cirey, it was to spend but twenty-four hours there ; but at least in that brief spell of happiness all their differences were temporarily forgotten.

In after-years the author of *Les Saisons* put his own words into the mouth of his friend the Prince de Beauvau,

and gave an impersonal description of the woman who for a time had held him in the thrall of reflected passion. With the help of the Princesse de Beauvau he wrote her husband's life. Mme du Châtelet and the brother of Mme de Boufflers were naturally enough good friends ; but the following portrait is probably largely the work of the man who had known its subject far more intimately than the Prince. It is chiefly interesting on that account.

“ Much in the society of the Duchesses de Luxembourg, de Boufflers, and de la Vallière, the Prince de Beauvau met Mme du Châtelet at their houses. He appreciated the merit of her intelligence, which delighted equally in the truth of science and the beauties of art. The studies, in truth, which occupied her the most were not those in which M. de Beauvau sought to instruct himself ; but Mme du Châtelet brought into society the desire to know men, and that keenness of observation which becomes the habit of philosophy. This philosophy she hid with care in the frivolous circles by which she was surrounded. She never appeared to have more knowledge than the others. It was necessary to have a great deal, before she cared to show hers. Nevertheless some of it was perceived, and enough to rouse vanity and envy. That which M. de Beauvau particularly liked in Mme du Châtelet was her simplicity, her candour, a facility for pardoning all those who gave her cause for complaint, and finally the heart which had never known hatred except for the enemies of her friends, the heart which made her think well of all individuals, although she believed much evil of the race.” Saint-Lambert's powers of cold analysis are very apparent in this description.

In May Voltaire and Emilie spent a short time at

Cirey, and went on to Paris, where they stayed throughout June.

Mme du Châtelet was more in love than ever. This time Panpan was taken into her confidence and charged with her voluminous letters, which he saw safely to their destination. Mme de Boufflers was staying in Paris, and this was a relief; but the stay was a short one, and no sooner had she returned to Lunéville than Saint-Lambert left Nancy for the Court, and all Mme du Châtelet's jealous fears were renewed. His letters were never so long from there as from Nancy, nor so tender. It seemed to her an odd coincidence. "Why do you not love me as much when you are at Lunéville as you do at Nancy?" she asked, and the answer did not altogether dispel her misgivings.

And so the sad story went on. She was dissatisfied, doubting, unhappy; he careless, lax in writing, and indifferent. "You love to torment my soul," she cried; "you are unpardonably capricious." When he addressed her as "my dear mistress," this tenderness filled her momentarily with joy.

At last he informed her that he had given up all thoughts of going to England or to Tuscany. "You are not going to Tuscany, and you are not going on my account?" she repeated over and over to him. "If you knew how that rejoices my heart. I adore you, I adore you!"

She sent him a portrait concealed in a watch. He liked it none the less because Voltaire possessed a similar one. All he had asked was that in the portrait she should be dressed the same as when she acted in *Issé*. Another present was far less romantic; it consisted of a bottle of special hair-oil, which she assured him would

have marvellous results. If he thought she ought not to have sent it, he might return the compliment if he liked by sending her a bottle of lamp-oil, which was exactly the same price!

Knowing that Saint-Lambert was writing a poem on the Seasons, she was troubled because the Abbé de Bernis had chosen the same subject. She therefore invited the latter to supper, and listened to all his verses. When she found that Saint-Lambert knew of them already, she was disappointed that her sacrifice had been in vain.

To her distress Saint-Lambert informed her that he had had a quarrel with Mme de Boufflers. She was afraid of being drawn into it, and she would have been grieved if a shadow should come between herself and Mme de Boufflers, whom she sincerely loved. Saint-Lambert, however, was not well pleased that they should be intimate, and something of this she read in his letters. "I will not dislike Mme de Boufflers, whatever you may say to me. Her letters always contradict yours. I am much more content with her friendship than with your love. . . . Mme de Boufflers cares for me more than you do."

She was anxious at this time to obtain a post for M. du Châtelet at the court of Stanislas, and expected both the marquise and Saint-Lambert (whose influence was very little) to help in securing the appointment, which meant much to her, because it would facilitate her being at Lunéville with her lover more frequently. Her anxiety made her restless and quite ill, and her lamentations bored Saint-Lambert, who failed to write regularly. This rendered her case still worse, and her complaints increased.

The marquis had a serious rival in the Comte de Bercheny, whose father had been of service to the King of Poland. On June 5 Emilie wrote to Saint-Lambert that if Bercheny should receive the appointment it would be impossible for M. du Châtelet or herself to set foot in Lorraine again, since nothing could make it supportable for them to endure the sight of a Hungarian and a junior commanding in his place. "My friendship for Voltaire alone renders this thought unendurable; judge, then, how it affects me, when I dream that I might have spent my life with you there, and that we should have had other voyages to Cirey together."

Voltaire wrote to d'Argental on the same subject on June 20. "Mme du Châtelet has met with a thousand terrible disappointments with regard to the appointment in Lorraine. It has been necessary to fight for it, and I joined in the campaign. She won the battle, but the war still continues. It is necessary that she should go to Commercy, and I shall go as well."

The desired appointment was confirmed in November of that year. De Luynes mentions it in his Journal of the 24th of the month: "About a week ago the King of Poland created the post of Grand-Marshal of the Household with a salary of two thousand crowns for M. le Marquis du Châtelet-Lomont, a man of good rank but not rich."

Bercheny was made Grand Equerry to Stanislas and Governor of Commercy.

Emilie's visit to this château was fixed for the beginning of July. She left Paris with Voltaire on June 29. She had spent a sleepless night, being overcome with joy at the prospect of meeting her lover. She was ill and agitated, but her love had increased beyond all bounds.

At five o'clock that morning she was writing to him. "I do not know if your heart is worthy of so much impatience . . . but I am dying of impatience to tell you how much I love you."

When the travellers arrived at Châlons, Mme du Châtelet, who was feeling fatigued with the journey, stopped at the Bell Inn to order a cup of soup. The landlady, discovering the identity of the illustrious travellers, brought the refreshment to the carriage herself, armed with a serviette, a china plate, and silver cover. She demanded a louis in payment of the modest repast ; an argument ensued, a crowd collected, and the disputants grew more and more heated. Voltaire paid the gold to close a disagreeable scene, but woe to him who thereafter mentioned the bouillon of Châlons in his presence !

When the travellers at length arrived at Commercy, to Mme du Châtelet's intense disappointment her lover was nowhere to be found in the château or in the village. She sat down and wrote an angry letter, abusing him for his coldness. "I suppose I have come too soon. I did not expect to pass the night in scolding you, but I scold myself far more for having shown you my extreme eagerness. I shall know how to moderate my transports in future, and to take your coldness as a model. Farewell. I was much happier yesterday evening, for I was expecting to find you loving."

When Saint-Lambert arrived on the scene next day he was speedily forgiven.

There was far less restraint at Commercy than at Lunéville. At the latter château the court was so crowded that the lovers had to take the utmost precautions to prevent their secret becoming known to every one. At Commercy, however, the restraint of prying

eyes was removed. Mme du Châtelet had rooms on the ground floor. Voltaire was on the first floor. Mme de Boufflers, who was frequently with the king, was lodged close to the orangery. Intimate gatherings took place every evening in her private apartments. Sometimes Voltaire read his works, sometimes there was music. Stanislas never supped, and retired to his own rooms early. After he had disappeared the others grew more lively. Saint-Lambert had not been invited to Commercy because the king was jealous of his friendship for Mme de Boufflers, and therefore did not like him. But he was staying incognito at the house of the *curé*, which was not far from the orangery. It was possible to see the windows of Mme de Boufflers' rooms from those he occupied. A light placed in one of them informed the young guardsman when the King of Poland had gone to his room and the coast was clear.

Saint-Lambert, who had the key of the orangery and a dark lantern, needed no other invitation than this signal to join the merry company. Supper was served without the knowledge of the royal host by some of Mme de Boufflers' trusted servants, and the festivities were often prolonged well into the night. Occasionally, unknown to Mme de Boufflers and Voltaire, Saint-Lambert did not wait for the beacon of light to welcome him before making his way to Mme du Châtelet's apartments before the hour of the evening meal. The lovers made many opportunities of seeing each other. The grounds were large and secluded. They picnicked in the forest ; they rowed on the grand canal ; together they fed the swans. Sometimes they stayed out until late at night. Once, as she was crossing the gardens in the dark, Emilie fell into a ditch and bruised herself.

But Voltaire saw nothing of what was going on. He was occupied with his ill-health and his work.

Love-making was not Emilie's only occupation at Commercy. She threw herself with wonderful energy into the usual fêtes and spectacles she always enjoyed. She played in Dufresny's comedy, *Le Double Veuvage*, in the *Sylphe*, a comedy by Saint-Foix, and in opera. It was suggested that the d'Argentals, who had spent June at Plombières, should stay at Cirey, but their hosts could not arrange to return there in time, and Voltaire invited them to Commercy instead, an invitation they refused. By the middle of the month Stanislas left for Versailles to see the queen, and Mme de Boufflers and Mme du Châtelet went to Plombières. It was the king's wish that Emilie should go there. Personally she would rather have stayed at Lunéville with Saint-Lambert. The Vicomte d'Adhémar, a friend of Mme de Boufflers, accompanied them. Mlle de la Roche-sur-Yon was there taking the waters. Marie Leczinska had been known to say that Plombières was the most horrid place in the world. Emilie endorsed this opinion.

"Think of our contrary destiny," she wrote to d'Argental. "Here am I at Plombières, and you are here no longer." Mme de Boufflers fell ill, and the stay lasted far longer than she had expected. She was restless and unhappy, hardly able to endure what she called "cet infernal séjour." To smother her discontent she worked ten hours a day, and wrote humorously to Saint-Lambert that they were lodged like dogs, and she regretted that there was no room for him in the house in which they were staying, because there were already fifty people there, and also it was dear enough to ruin him. The sleeping accommodation was so bad that rooms were divided off

by hanging tapestry, and the next compartment to hers was occupied by a farmer-general. Every word could be overheard, and there was no privacy at all. "When any one comes to see you every one is aware of it," she wrote; "they can look into the room." Life seemed very monotonous at Plombières. Coffee was served at two o'clock, and she took it in the company of Mlle de la Roche-sur-Yon; then she saw her again at supper, which was at eight o'clock. At eleven every one went to bed. Mme de Boufflers was happy enough. She was better in health, and had M. d'Adhémar to amuse her.

From Saint-Lambert there were grumbling letters. Why had not she stayed with him? Or if she could not do that, why could he not have gone with her? But though they both grumbled they were as much in love as ever. "Do you love me with this ardour, this warmth, this transport which is the charm of my life?" she asked him. "It is a long time till Monday—but on Monday I shall be happy. . . . Every day I bless the love with which I love you and you love me. It seems to me that a love so tender, so true, can bear anything—even absence." As she continued to write, her letters grew more animated, more extravagant. Never were written words more impassioned. The separation was nearly over: four more days, two more days, thirty-six hours—and then a disappointment. Mme de Boufflers, finding Plombières very agreeable, refused to leave. Emilie communicated this distressing news to her lover. "You would pity me if you could see my extreme discomfort and boredom. . . . Imagine me left alone in a pigsty day after day." Even her work had failed her. She could settle down to nothing. "Mon Dieu, how unhappy, sad, cross, and odious I am to myself and every

one else! It is awful! I might be with you, and I am still here."

Nor did the letters she received from Saint-Lambert tend to put her in a better frame of mind. She read them and re-read them, but to no avail. She could not put passion into words that had been written without it. "The third page is ridiculous, offensive," she wrote of one. She could see no tenderness in it. "I do not know whether it would not be better not to be loved at all, than to be loved by some one who reproaches himself for his love." Moreover, her lover was careless enough to mention the names of several other women in whose society he endeavoured to make time pass more pleasantly. He was having a flirtation with a Mme de Thianges, with a Mme de Bouthillier. It was outrageous, insupportable. Why was not he fully occupied with thoughts of her? If he had the slightest idea how unhappy she was, he could not have possibly enjoyed the least distraction or coquetry. In the hope of bringing back his whole heart into her keeping, she poured out more amorous phrases, more protestations of eternal affection.

Then a little incident happened which caused unpleasantness between her and Mme de Boufflers. The latter received a letter addressed in Saint-Lambert's handwriting. Emilie saw so much. When the recipient had read it, she tore it into fragments. The next day he wrote again to Mme de Boufflers, but sent the letter unsealed under cover of one to Mme du Châtelet. In the letter he had used the words that he loved her madly, and that he would never cease to adore her. Mme du Châtelet was thunderstruck. She could not well have been otherwise. "What do you mean by it?" she asked him. "Is such a thing tolerable? You have deceived me.

But I cannot believe that you love her. If I believed it, I should believe you a monster of deception and duplicity. Still, *one does not adore one's friend, nor love her madly!*"

Everything seemed clear to her at that moment. Her suspicions were poisoning her life. She suffered terribly, more especially because she had confided in Mme de Boufflers, had spoken constantly to her of Saint-Lambert. If only she could leave Plombières! But when she appealed to Mme de Boufflers on this matter, she learnt that the latter was still in no hurry to move. In a temper she decided to leave without her. There was a scene between the two, and not till September 6 did the stay at Plombières come to an end.

In the meantime Voltaire was once more setting out from Paris (where he had been superintending the production of *Semiramis*), for Lunéville. At Châlons—the unlucky stopping-place—he was taken so ill that he could proceed no farther. As usual, he imagined he was dying. This time Longchamp believed him, and sent word to Mme Denis and Mme du Châtelet. The latter, who was back at Lunéville, despatched a courier post-haste for news, but did not go herself. After a few days' illness, Voltaire insisted on finishing his journey, and joined Emilie at the Court of Stanislas about September 14.

Mme du Châtelet had many causes for anxiety. Not only was she deceiving Voltaire, but Saint-Lambert was not as devoted as she could have wished, and Mme de Boufflers was showing unmistakable signs of jealousy, and was no longer friendly. "I love your injustice," she wrote to Saint-Lambert, on October 8, from Commercy, "but not hers. . . . I fear her because it is in her power to separate us."

This second visit to Commercy disclosed to Voltaire the nature of Mme du Châtelet's infidelity. Longchamp told the story of his surprise and resentment. Leaving his room before he had been told supper was ready, Voltaire entered Emilie's apartments without being announced, as he found no servant in the antechamber. He crossed the room without seeing anybody, and in the little boudoir at the end he found Mme du Châtelet and M. de Saint-Lambert on a sofa, "talking of things that were neither poetry nor philosophy." Overcome with astonishment and indignation, he was unable to control his temper. He burst into violent reproaches. M. de Saint-Lambert, still calm and unmoved, asked him how he dared to question his conduct. Any one who did so, he said, had only to leave the room and the castle too, and he would follow to justify his actions in a more suitable place. Voltaire withdrew. He was beside himself. He went straight up to his room, ordered Longchamp to get a carriage immediately at all costs, as he had decided to return to Paris at once.

Not being able to understand the cause of this sudden decision, Longchamp appealed to Mme du Châtelet, hoping she would be able to throw some light on the matter. She told him that Voltaire had been annoyed at finding Saint-Lambert in her boudoir, and that everything possible must be done to hinder his departure and prevent gossip. She asked him not to carry out the instructions given him by his master in a moment of anger, and assured him she knew how to manage and appease Voltaire. First of all, he must be allowed to get over his worst anger. It was only necessary to keep him at Commercy until the following day. At two o'clock in the morning Longchamp informed Voltaire that it was

impossible to get a carriage in the village for love or money. He ordered him to obtain one from Nancy at the earliest possible hour in the morning. This decision Longchamp communicated to Mme du Châtelet, who was still sitting up writing. She asked whether Voltaire had quietened down, and said she would go to see him herself.

Longchamp admitted her into Voltaire's room, lit candles, and discreetly withdrew. Mme du Châtelet seated herself at the foot of Voltaire's bed, and spoke for a long time to him in English, calling him by a pet name she had often used. She explained that she was fond of him still, but that she felt the need of a warmer sympathy than he could give her, and that she had found it in the heart of one of his friends. She appealed to his reason; she begged him not to come between her and her chance of happiness; she made him admit at last that there was much to be said on her side. "But since things are as they are," he added, not without bitterness, "at least do not flaunt your infidelity before my very eyes."

Voltaire found it necessary to summon all his philosophy to his aid. In addition to jealousy roused by the knowledge that a friend had robbed him of the affections of his mistress, he was conscious of many sacrifices for her sake—amongst them the refusal of favours offered by the King of Prussia. All this counted for nothing, then, in her eyes. The wound she had dealt him was a sore one.

What would Emilie have done if Voltaire had abandoned her for a younger and better-looking woman? It would be painful to call up to the imagination her cries, her pleadings, and her recriminations. One thing is certain, however. She could never have taken a defection

on his part in so generous a manner as he took the blow she had dealt him. It was decided at that strange interview that the intellectual intimacy which meant much to both of them should be continued as though nothing at all had happened to disturb it.

The reconciliation between the former lovers being sealed by an embrace, and the new relationship between them having been clearly defined, Emilie had still a difficult and disagreeable task to perform. She had to console Saint-Lambert, who felt aggrieved at the manner in which Voltaire had treated him. She persuaded him to take the first steps towards a reconciliation with Voltaire ; and the next day the young guardsman went to the philosopher's room and apologised for the angry words which had escaped him in a moment of agitation. Perhaps at no moment does Voltaire appear more generous than when he shook hands with Saint-Lambert and said, " My dear fellow, I have forgotten all that. I was in the wrong. At your age you should still love and be loved. The years of youth pass all too quickly. An old invalid like myself has done with such things."

That evening all three actors in this strange drama supped with Mme de Boufflers.

Voltaire was soon calm enough to make verses on what had taken place. They are reckoned among his finest :

Saint-Lambert, ce n'est que pour toi
Que ces belles fleurs sont écloses :
C'est ta main qui cueille les roses,
Et les épines sont pour moi.¹

Even though it may have been partly true, as has often been suggested, that Voltaire had of late found the

¹ Only for thee, Saint-Lambert, lovely flowers bloom ; thy hand gathers the roses, the thorns remain for me.

bond between himself and Mme du Châtelet irksome, that he was wearied by her exactions, her tantrums, her jealous claims upon his time, that there had been many painful scenes between them, many fresh beginnings, many hours of regret, perhaps even of remorse, it cannot be doubted that in the main they were well mated. They had loved each other with a wild, unreasoning delight in each other's intellectual gifts—a delight born of highly strung, imaginative temperaments—but none the less sincerely because not always harmoniously. The problem Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire endeavoured to solve was a problem involving strife between claims of intellect and claims of sex—things quite as incompatible in their way, and as hard to mingle satisfactorily as true love and pecuniary considerations. In their case it was the woman who allowed the claims of sex to master her, and spoil the calm relationship of many years' standing.

In spite of the upheaval in his life, Voltaire was busy with his history of the campaigns of 1741; he was fighting against the appearance of a parody on *Semiramis*, and repudiating, somewhat uselessly, his authorship of *Zadig*. "You speak as though I had a share in it," he wrote to d'Argental; "but why I? Why do they name me? I do not wish to have anything to do with novels." On the other hand, Mme du Châtelet wrote that she wished all this "*Zadig* business" might end. She was giving herself up more and more to the delight of the Indian Summer of her life. At times the thought crossed her mind that she was not doing all she had been accustomed to do in Voltaire's best interests. D'Argental had said he ought to be in Paris. "He has given you his reasons for staying here," she replied. They were that he was rather ill, and very necessary to Mme du Châtelet's

affairs. "I swear to you I have no part in them, and that I would gladly immolate myself for his sake ;" and then she makes the rather lame excuse that, as it was impossible to hinder the parody of *Semiramis* being played, at least it would never do for them to arrive in Paris on the evening of the representation. Having thus salved her conscience, she threw herself with renewed gusto into all that life had to offer—opera, comedy, comet, and—love.

By the close of October there was talk of a return to Paris. "Mme du Châtelet," wrote Voltaire, "promises more than she can perform in speaking of an early journey." In November he penned an English letter to Falkener, to tell him that he was at Lunéville "with the same lady," and sent a verse to Hénault to a similar effect :

Je coule ici mes heureux jours
 Dans la plus tranquille des cours,
 Sans intrigue, sans jalousie,
 Auprès d'un roi sans courtisans,
 Près de Boufflers et d'Emilie ;
 Je les vois et je les entends,
 Il faut bien que je fasse envie.

On November 10 he said : "The arrangements of Mme du Châtelet do not allow us to depart before December." It was true that Emilie was prolonging the visit to the last possible moment. But she was no longer so happy. She thought Mme de Boufflers was trying to separate her from Saint-Lambert, and influence Stanislas against her. Several quarrels occurred between the lovers. She accused Saint-Lambert of being cold, of neglecting, even of forgetting her. She asked him to come and see her at one o'clock ; he did not come till four. They were about to part, and she would perhaps

never see him again. "I do not know what will happen to-morrow ; but I can bear anything, except the unworthy manner in which you treat me." He was cold, and took no notice of her. He did not make chances of seeing her. She thought it would be better to be alone in Paris than near to him while he was so unkind. But before they parted they spent a few happy moments together. She allowed herself to be dragged away only in time to reach Cirey on Christmas Eve.

As usual there was an adventure at Châlons. Emilie refused to go to the Bell Inn of bouillon fame, and to this decision Voltaire was willing enough to agree. Instead they went to the bishop's house, at which they arrived at eight o'clock in the morning, after travelling all night, as their custom was. An excellent breakfast was served. Then Emilie had a few minutes' business to transact with a farmer in the neighbourhood, and the horses were ordered for half-past nine. In the meantime she suggested a game of cards. The carriage was ready, but the game went on ; the postilions grew impatient, and the horses were led back to the stable. They were ordered out again after dinner. The game was continued. It rained. Back went the horses. Mme du Châtelet was losing, and demanded her revenge. It was eight at night before they left Châlons. No wonder Voltaire made remarks about her love of comet !

Emilie was unable to justify herself in the sight of the "angels," although she did her best. To their repeated demands that Voltaire should come to Paris she could only reply that if she thought for a moment that his presence in the capital was necessary, she would leave everything to accompany him thither. Then she enumerated the affairs which kept her at Cirey. There

were forges in the neighbourhood of the château, and one manager was leaving; she had to see a new one installed. She had to visit every part of the estate, and settle disputes among the farmers. These labours could not be dismissed before the end of the month. But she said nothing of the more important work of writing a preface to the translation of Newton—a *chef-d'œuvre*, Voltaire called it—and love-letters to Saint-Lambert.

Nor did she say a word of a fear that haunted her, that became insistent when it was time to depart for Paris. She had to confide in some one. It was natural to turn to Voltaire, and she told him that she was expecting to become a mother. That which should have been a joy to her was only an embarrassment. They talked the matter over, and decided that a consultation should be held between herself, himself, and Saint-Lambert. It was difficult to know what course to take. Appearances must be respected; that was one of the laws of society in eighteenth-century France. At first it was hoped that the whole thing might be kept from the knowledge of the Marquis du Châtelet. Voltaire joked. There are some men who must joke if only to save themselves from tears. Since the child was to claim no father, he said it should be classed among Emilie's miscellaneous works. On second thoughts, however, it was found wiser not to leave M. du Châtelet out of the affair, but to draw him into it as well as they could without disclosing the truth. The barefaced plan they arranged was to make him believe himself the father of the unborn child. He was invited home. Amidst feasts and caresses he thought himself beloved, regarded himself as the chosen one, and was told news which made him inexpressibly happy.

That such a plan could ever be conceived and carried

through as Longchamp described it is astounding enough, but that it could deceive a society which prided itself on knowing all that underlay appearances, and often knew far more than there was to be known, was hardly to be expected. The truth was whispered abroad, the daring of the scheme thrilled those who heard of it, the actors in the little comedy that was a tragedy leapt into fashion. It was France and the eighteenth century!

Midst laughter and tears the plot went on; the laughter was on the lips, the tears in the hearts of Voltaire and Emilie. The latter tried to make the best of what appeared to her but a poor business. She wrote to Mme de Boufflers from Paris asking her to befriend her in her coming trial. She feared for her health, even for her life; she thought it would appear ridiculous to give birth to a child at her age, and seventeen years had passed since the little son that died had come into the world. As for her other son, she was afraid lest his interests should be prejudiced, and decided to keep the news secret from him awhile. And then she hinted that she would wish her child to be born at Lunéville, in the smaller apartment formerly occupied by the queen, since the large one was too noisy, too smoky, and too far from Voltaire and Mme de Boufflers. She hoped King Stanislas would agree to her plan.

Saint-Lambert, it would appear, took the news which concerned him closely with his usual, or perhaps, with assumed, imperturbability. Judging from Mme de Châtelet's letters, he was not nearly as considerate as he should have been. A day passed without a line from him; it was abominable, barbaric.

Stanislas arrived at Versailles, and she went to see him, and wrote angrily to Saint-Lambert from the Trianon,

because he had spoken of leaving Lorraine to take up active service in Flanders, and she thought she might never see him again. Although he talked of "treating her in this cavalier fashion," he nevertheless chose to interfere in her affairs, and rashly suggested what she should and should not do, going so far as to be angry because she had taken clothes for the summer to Versailles, when he thought she ought to be in Lorraine. Much as she loved him, it was not likely that she would suffer dictation from a Saint-Lambert, when she had never permitted it from a Voltaire.

At length the matter was settled. Saint-Lambert agreed to stay, agreed to the sacrifice she asked of him, and did the only thing that could give her calm and save her from tormenting herself and him. King Stanislas, too, had taken her request in the very kindest spirit, and made every possible arrangement for her comfort during the approaching visit to Lunéville. He offered her the little house at Jolivet, where she could take the air when the weather was favourable. Her mind relieved on these points, she became once more the sweet and loving mistress, unable to express all the adoration she felt for her lover, extremely impatient to rejoin him, and hoping never to leave him for long again.

In May, Voltaire and Emilie were still in the Rue Traversière, where they had been living since the middle of February. Whilst Emilie was writing urgent letters to Saint-Lambert, Voltaire was receiving equally urgent ones from Frederick the Great. Since the November of the previous year the King of Prussia had been pressing him to come to Potsdam. He was jealous because his philosopher-poet preferred "la tabagie du roi

Stanislas" to his own far superior Court. Voltaire had at first replied to these importunities by saying that he wanted to be within reach of Plombières for the sake of his health—an obviously weak excuse, as he had not visited the watering-place since 1730. As time passed he had another reason to give. He confessed that under the circumstances he desired to stay with Emilie. Frederick saw no reason for this decision. "You are not a *sage-femme*," he replied irritably. Voltaire agreed that he had neither paternal feelings nor medical knowledge, but that he could not leave a friend and a woman who might die in September. In October he promised to come. With this Frederick had to be content. "You are like a bad Christian, my dear Voltaire. You put off your conversion from one day to the other. After giving me hopes for the summer, you postpone them till the autumn. Apparently Apollo, as god of medicine, orders you to preside at Mme du Châtelet's bedside. The sacred name of friendship imposes silence on me. I must be content with your promise."

Emilie would have been happy enough had not her thoughts been embittered by the suspicions and anxieties she entertained concerning Saint-Lambert. She thought he ought to love her all the better for the new bond between them; she feared he would love her less. She was jealous of Mme de Mirepoix, of Mme de Bouthillier, and of Mme de Thianges. Instead of remaining with his regiment at Nancy, he was always at Lunéville. Was it Mme de Boufflers who kept him there, she wondered. She taxed him with it: "I spend my days weeping over your infidelity. As a recompense, you make me die of grief, I who ought to be most dear

to you. You can end all this with a word ; it is that you love me. But, if you do not love me, never say that you do . . .”

She wrote to him several times a day, her letters being full of reproaches, incoherence, tenderness, and menace.

“I wrote twenty-three letters and received only eleven. It would be a different proportion if we counted by pages,” she said. “I would rather die than love alone ; it is too great a punishment.”

She asked for her portrait back, but if he sent it she told him that he would be dealing her a mortal blow.

No wonder that Saint-Lambert, wearied, nonplussed, confused, unable to see what to do for the best, wished himself well out of the entanglement. But he had little generosity and consideration for her. When she wrote tenderly he ignored her letters ; if she failed to do so he upbraided her. He accused her of being too much interested in the Chevalier de Beauvau or the Comte de Croix. Everybody was so inconstant in those days that no one could believe in another's constancy. His doubts roused her to make a pathetic reply. “How could I forget you ? How could I neglect you ? You are the beginning, the end, the aim, and the only object of all my actions and all my thoughts. All my feelings are unchangeable. Do you think that the impression which your suspicions have made upon me, your harshness, the thought you had of leaving me, as you wrote me, which affected my health, perhaps my life, without real foundation or cause . . . do you think all these things can be effaced ?”

Meanwhile, besides voluminous letter-writing, both were deep in work. Voltaire was writing a tragedy.

Mme du Châtelet was burying herself in mathematics. Study alone eased her fears and forebodings. She was working on Newton. "Do not reproach me with it," she cried to Saint-Lambert. "I am punished enough without that. I have never made a greater sacrifice to reason. I *must* finish it, though I need a constitution of iron. . . . I cannot really love anything which I do not share with you, for I do not love Newton—it is a point of honour with me to finish it." She had gone far, indeed, since the old days, when her interests were Voltaire's interests and his hers.

All through May she was studying with the help of her old friend Clairaut. She rose at nine, sometimes at eight. She worked until three, when she took coffee. She started work again at four and did not stop till ten o'clock, when she had a light supper, while Voltaire chatted to her. Their talk continued until midnight, when she began work again until five in the morning. She gave up all society life, and saw none of her friends. At this time Mme du Deffand was numbered amongst the closest of them. In spite of everything, she was strong and well, and only living to see her lover again.

In June they paid a rush visit to Cirey, which lasted only a fortnight. Then they went on to Commercy. It was sad, said Voltaire, to leave delightful apartments, books, and liberty to go and play at comet at the court of kings. There was no help for it. He must follow to the last in the train of Emilie, who was as gay as ever. Stanislas employed his mornings with his plans for building; in the afternoon there were cards, concerts, comedy, and opera. *Nanine* and *La Femme qui a Raison* were played. In the evening there were surreptitious supper-parties as before.

Work was not neglected. Voltaire wrote his tragedy ; Emilie did her mathematics. At times she was *distract* and troubled, and she sent for her companion, Mlle du Thil. Voltaire wrote many letters to his friends, treating the event to come lightly, as a joke, refusing to see risk or danger. He was concerned at this time about Diderot, who had been imprisoned at Vincennes for writing *Philosophical Thoughts*, and a *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those that See*. On July 30 he wrote to Abbé Raynal, to tell him that Mme du Châtelet had interceded for Socrates-Diderot with the governor of the prison, who was a relative of hers and brother-in-law to Richelieu. The petition was successful, and his prison life was considerably ameliorated.

Mme du Châtelet had nearly done with letter-writing altogether. It was one of her last efforts that effected a deed of mercy. Only two more of her letters are on record after that date, both written in August, both to Saint-Lambert, both upbraiding him. He had treated her cruelly ; she had been in his presence, but he had never once glanced in her direction. She knew she should thank him for it. She realised that his action had been prompted by discretion, by an attempt to keep up appearances. But it was, nevertheless, more than she could bear. " I am accustomed to read in your charming eyes, every moment of my life, that you are thinking of me, that you love me," she wrote. " I seek them everywhere, and assuredly I find nothing that resembles them ; there is nothing else for mine to look at. . . . One day spent with you is worth an eternity without you," and so on. Passion and turbulence were poured wholesale upon the head of the calm Saint-Lambert, who could no more appreciate the torrent than he could fly. He did

not mean to be cruel—he only prayed that the flood might be stemmed ; he asked himself what had he done to arouse in any woman so fierce and so inconvenient a turmoil.

He was accustomed to the sweet and delicate loves of those eighteenth-century women who could play with their emotions, and thought it vulgar to bare them in all their primitive savagery. He was a man of taste. “Do not judge me by what I have been—I will not show you such excessive love,” she added, perhaps a little contritely ; “if you do not love me less, if my wrongs have not weakened this charming love, without which I cannot live, I am sure that there is none in the world so happy as I.”

What, then, were her fears, her trembling forebodings of the future, her premonitions of death ? They had nothing to do with shame, with regret for her abandonment, or dread lest the child that was coming should be unloved and have no place in the world. It was none of these things that cut her to the heart and made all effort appear futile, but the knowledge that none of it was worth while—that he did not share with her, could never share, that wonder of loving which sweeps every consideration but itself into nothingness. Who could understand that better than she ? And now her sacrifice—mistaken in the eyes of some, unpardonable in the eyes of others, unwise in the sight of most—was at an end. She felt, she knew it was at an end. She had written her last letter ; it was not as pleasant as the one that preceded it. “Not that I love you less,” was her last sigh, “but that I have less strength to tell you so. I conclude because I can write no more.”

It was left to Voltaire to tell the rest. At the

beginning of September a daughter was born to Mme du Châtelet, baptised in the parish church, and then put out to nurse. Voltaire hastened to send the news to all his friends—to d'Argental, to the Abbé Voisenon, to d'Argenson. One feature of these letters is that as he repeats his news he gives more and more careful details, and the story grows in the making. He was so proud of his inventiveness that in the end it mastered him. It appeared that when the little girl was born its mother was at her writing-desk, scribbling some Newtonian theories. The child was laid temporarily on a quarto volume of geometry. The mother was taken straight to bed. After all, she has only given birth to an infant incapable of uttering a word, whilst he in producing a tragedy had to make live a Cicero, a Cæsar. So he wrote on in hopeful, exaggerated strain; so he repented of writing only a few days later.

Within the week Mme du Châtelet was dead. Seeing her in extremities, a servant was sent to warn Mme de Boufflers. The latter, the marquis, Voltaire, all, rushed from table to her room. At the last Voltaire and Saint-Lambert remained alone by her bedside. Voltaire, overcome by grief and stupefied, stumbled out into the passage when all was over, and with difficulty reached the castle door without knowing what he had done. Outside was a stairway, down which he fell, knocking his head upon the flags at the bottom. Saint-Lambert had followed him, and hastened to help a lackey, who was already on the spot, to pick him up. His eyes swimming in tears, Voltaire, recognising in Saint-Lambert the original cause of his grief, said, "My friend, my death, too, lies at your door." And then, gathering reproach and despair in his tone, he cursed him for what

he had done. The bitter words fell upon a silence which gave force to the reproach. And so, for a time, they parted.

“Mme du Châtelet,” wrote Voltaire in his *Memoirs*, “died in the palace of Stanislas after two days’ illness ; and we were so affected that not one of us ever remembered to send for priest, Jesuit, or any of the seven sacraments. It was we, and not Mme du Châtelet, who felt the horrors of death. The good King Stanislas came to my chamber, and mingled his tears with mine : few of his brethren would have done so much on a like occasion. He wished me to stay at Lunéville ; but I could no longer support the place, and returned to Paris.”

He wrote the sad news to the same friends with whom he had shared his rejoicing but a few days earlier—to d’Argental, to Voisenon, to d’Argenson, and to Mme du Deffand. He was utterly broken. “Alas, madame,” he wrote sadly to the last-named, “we made jokes about this event, and in this unfortunate tone I wrote of it to her friends. If anything could increase the horrible condition in which I am, it would be the having taken with gaiety an adventure of which the conclusion will render the remainder of my life miserable. I did not write to you about the confinement, and I announce her death. It is to the sensibility of your heart that I have recourse in my despair. They are taking me to Cirey with M. du Châtelet. From there I shall return to Paris without knowing what will become of me, and hoping soon to rejoin her.”

He took no interest at all in the infant to which Mme du Châtelet had given birth, and which soon followed its mother to the grave. To d’Argental he said : “I have not lost merely a mistress, I have lost

the half of myself—a soul for which mine was made, a friend of twenty years' standing whom I saw born. The most tender father does not love his only daughter more truly."

The few days he spent at Cirey were little less than torture. M. du Châtelet found him clearing out his furniture. Then a move was made to Paris, and he took up his abode in the hôtel, Rue de Traversière, where they had lived together. "She was a great man whose only fault was in being a woman," he wrote to Frederick the Great, who, now that he was rid of his rival, wished to entrap his poet. "A woman who translated and explained Newton, and who made a translation of Virgil, without letting it appear in conversation that she had done these wonders; a woman who never spoke evil of any one, and who never told a lie; a friend attentive and courageous in friendship,—in one word, a very great man whom ordinary women only knew by her diamonds and cavagnole,—that is the one whom you cannot hinder me from mourning all my life."

"The most severe vexation for the moment was the death of the Marquise du Châtelet," wrote Marmontel, describing Voltaire's state of mind. "To be sincere, I recognised on this occasion, as I often had done, the nobility of his soul. When I went to express to him the part I took in his affliction, 'Come,' said he, on seeing me; 'come and share my sorrow. I have lost my illustrious friend. I am in despair; I am inconsolable.' I, to whom he had often said that she was like a fury that haunted his steps, and who knew that in their disputes they had more than once been at daggers-drawn, let him weep, and seemed to sympathise with him. Solely to make him perceive some motive

of consolation in the very cause of her death, I asked him what she died of. 'Of what! Don't you know? Ah, my dear friend, he has killed her. He was the father of her child.' It was Saint-Lambert, his rival, of whom he spoke; and thus he continued to exhaust language in praise of that incomparable woman, redoubling his tears and sobs." At that moment Chauvelin walked in, told a ridiculous story, and made Voltaire burst out laughing. Marmontel laughed too, to see the great man pass with the facility of a child from one extreme of emotion to another.

Her obsequies were worthy of Mme du Châtelet's rank. King Stanislas sent his principal officials, and all the distinguished people of Lunéville were present.

The record of her death, in which there is a curious error of age, is given in the civil registers in the following terms :

MORTE

Gabrielle-Emilie de Breteuil, etc.

Très haute et très puissante Dame, Madame Gabrielle Emilie de Breteuil, épouse de très haut et très puissant seigneur messire florens Claude, marquis du Châtelet Lomont, baron de Cyrey, et autres lieux, lieutenant général des armées du Roy, Commandeur de L'Ordre Royal et militaire de Saint-Louis, gouverneur de Sémur et Grand Bailly du pays D'Aunois et de Sarlouis; Grand Maréchal de Logis de sa Majesté le Roy de pologne, Duc de Lorraine et de Bar, etc., âgée de cinquante-deux ans aux environs, morte le dix à une heure du matin, enterré le onze dans le cavau (*sic*) de Messieurs les chanoines.

Two sad offices remained to be performed. One concerned a ring Emilie had been wearing. Mme de Boufflers asked Longchamp for it. In the presence of Saint-Lambert he saw her remove the guardsman's portrait from the bezel. Then she returned the ring to Longchamp and asked him to give it to M. du Châtelet. A day or two later Voltaire inquired about the ring, which had once contained his portrait. Longchamp told him what he had seen. "Ciel!" cried Voltaire, "women are all the same. I supplanted Richelieu, Saint-Lambert ousted me"—and then he added Brantôme's old remark about the mistresses of François I, "ainsi qu'un clou chasse l'autre."

Before her death Mme du Châtelet had put all her papers in order, made them up into different parcels, and instructed Longchamp to deliver them as addressed. There was one for M. du Châtelet, consisting of a casket and a packet of papers. A note accompanied them, asking her husband to burn them all without looking at them.

When Longchamp delivered these things to the marquis, his brother was with him. At first M. du Châtelet wished to look at the papers, but his brother dissuaded him, saying he ought to respect his late wife's wishes. Among the papers were many of Voltaire's writings, which were thrown into the grate and burnt. Longchamp managed to save the *Traité de Métaphysique* from the flames.

As for Voltaire's letters to his mistress, their exact fate has never been determined. They were referred to by Voisenon.

"Mme la Marquise du Châtelet had eight volumes, in 4°, manuscripts and well bound, of letters which he

wrote her. One could not imagine that in love-letters, one could concern oneself with any other divinity than the one which fills the heart, and that one could make more epigrams against religion than madrigals for one's mistress. But that was what happened to Voltaire.

“Mme du Châtelet hid nothing from me. I often remained *tête à tête* with her until five o'clock in the morning, and there was never anything but the truest friendship between us, which gave a charm to our vigils. She told me sometimes that she was quite detached from Voltaire. I made no answer. I drew out one of the eight volumes, and I read some letters. I noticed her eyes grew moist with unshed tears. I closed the book promptly and said, ‘You are not cured yet.’ The last year of her life, I attempted the same proof. She criticised them. I was convinced that she was cured. She confided to me that Saint-Lambert had been her doctor. She left for Lorraine, where she died. Voltaire, anxious because he could not find the letters, believed they had been deposited with me, and wrote to me about them. I never had them. I was assured they were burnt.”

Mme du Châtelet's death was the signal for an outburst of epigrams and *bon mots*. Collé wrote in his Journal, “It is to be hoped that this is the last of her airs. To die in childbed at her age is to wish to be singular, and to have pretensions to do nothing like other people.”

A typical example of the kind of verse which was thought clever is the epitaph written by Frederick the Great :

Ici-gît qui perdit la vie
 Dans le double accouchement
 D'un traité de philosophie
 Et d'un malheureux enfant.

On ne sait précisément
 Lequel des deux nous l'a ravie.
 Sur ce funeste événement,
 Quelle opinion doit-on suivre ?
 Saint-Lambert s'en prendre au livre,
 Voltaire dit que c'est l'enfant.

A new and distinct epoch opened in the life of Voltaire after the death of Mme du Châtelet. He was then fifty-five, and though no longer a young man, had still thirty years to live. He was to succeed, he was to be fêted far and wide, he was to be "stifled with roses"; but he was never again, perhaps, to have hours more poignant than those he had spent with the woman he had sincerely loved, nor to write verses that awoke more echoes in his memory than his last tribute to her, which, as far as her place in his world was concerned, should have been written many months before :

L'Univers a perdu la sublime Emilie ;
 Elle aima les plaisirs, les arts, la vérité ;
 Les dieux, en lui donnant leur âme et leur génie,
 N'avaient gardé pour eux que l'immortalité.

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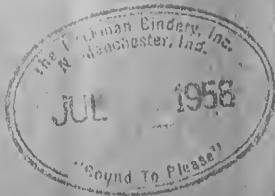
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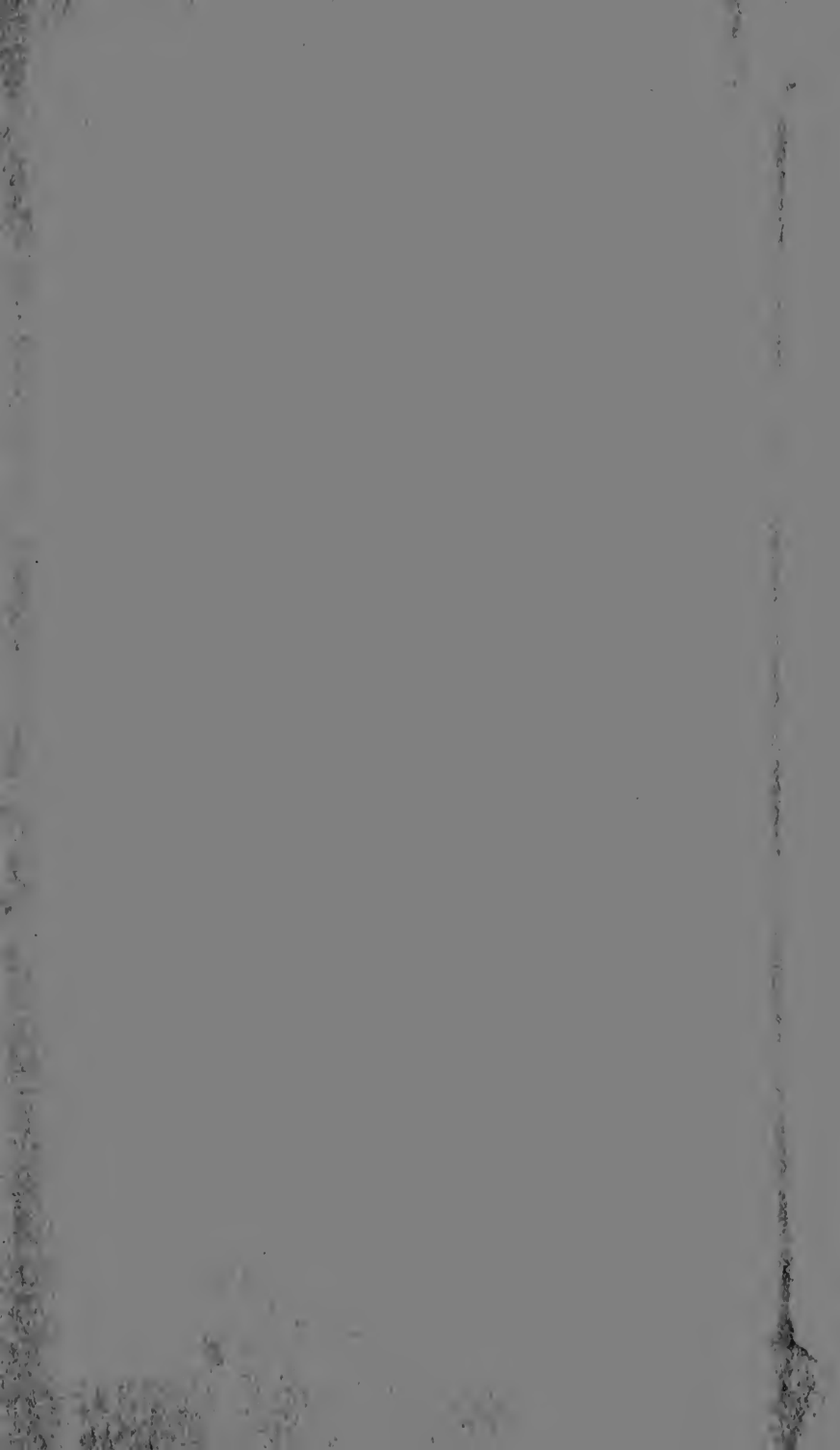




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