STORIES FROM FRENCH HISTORY

BANNIÈRE DE JEANNE D'ARC EN L'HÔTEL ROUEN

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France, beloved of every soul that loves its fellow-kind!

RUDYARD KIPLING

The Terror

Orway McCannell, R.B.A.

STORIES FROM FRENCH HISTORY

BY

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"ANGELOT" "THE QUEEN'S MAN" "CARDINAL DE RICHELIEU" ETC.

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CÆSAR AND VERCINGETORIX

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AT the beginning of what is known as French history stands the great fact—one of the greatest in the annals of civilization—that Rome invaded and conquered Gaul.

That triumph is bound up with the name of Julius Cæsar; but it had really begun long before he crossed the Alps, about the year 58 B.C., to enter on the first of the eight campaigns that his conquest cost Rome. Something like a hundred years earlier the people of the ancient lands and settlements of Southern Gaul, where the mountains descend in sun-bathed loveliness and glory of colour to the Mediterranean Sea—the lands whose seaboard we call the Riviera, *the* coast beyond all others—had asked for help from Rome against enemy tribes. The Romans came, and remained; these regions were too like Italy to be lightly returned to their original owners. Aix and Narbonne, the first Roman colonies, soon became chief cities in the territories later called Provence and Languedoc, 'the Province' ruled by Roman power which stretched across the river Rhône from the Alps to the Pyrenees.

Here was the favourite seat of the Romans for something like six hundred years, long after the whole of Gaul had been more or less colonized—down, indeed, to the fall of the Empire and the sweeping barbarian invasions from the North and East, which for the time being destroyed civilization and by more lasting changes transformed Gaul into France. In old Provence, where it was once supreme, are the chief visible relics of that Roman power whose hidden vital influence will last to the world's end. Here in the clear dry air, above the blue tideless sea, far removed from the mud and mist of the North, among the palms and vines and figs and olives, the red rocks, the dry white stony beds or winter torrents of the streams, the Romans built their villas of dazzling marble and set their stately gardens with statues and fountains. Here were and still are the great aqueducts, such as the Pont du Gard, marvellous works of engineering to bring water from the mountains; the triumphal arches, the pillared temples on the hill-sides, the baths, the amphitheatres, the streets of tombs such as the Alyscamps (Elysian Fields) of Arles. In many cities of France, as well as in Britain and other countries colonized by Rome, mighty remains are to be found in their age and decay; but the bones of the Roman Empire, a writer on Provence has strikingly said, "pierce through Provençal soil in many places as though that giant grave were still too narrow for the skeleton of a past than can never wholly die."

The Romans brought law and order, justice and good government. Theirs was the idea of the one ruling state, yet of the freedom, dignity, and independence of each member of that state. That these doctrines did not exclude tyranny and slavery is a fact leading to questions too deep to be discussed here. But one answer may be given: the Roman Empire at its greatest knew nothing of Christi-

anity. When the knowledge came, bitter persecution followed it; for the freedom of a Christian was seen to be something different from that of a Roman citizen and was mysteriously alarming to the rulers of a heathen state.

Rome did not destroy the countries she conquered, but added them to her Empire, giving their people the advantages enjoyed by her own citizens. She imposed on them, willing or not, her language and her laws, and organized their trade, education, and local government. Splendid roads ran from point to point of the Empire, mountains were crossed, forests pierced, rivers bridged; thus there was constant communication by chariot, horse, or running post between the cities, and regular intercourse with Rome. The Roman settlers intermarried with the natives of their colonies. The Latin strain is strong in France to this day: in the south, women's classical Roman faces often show descent from the conquerors of two thousand years ago.

Cæsar found in Gaul a large and beautiful country guarded by mountains and seas, its plains varied by hills and valleys, among which a thousand lesser rivers and streams flowed into the great four that were then, as now, the characteristic boundaries of its provinces and populations: the Seine, the river of Paris, in later centuries the chief waterway of French civilization; the wide and winding Loire, river of the west, flowing to the Atlantic through a land of fertility and romance; the Garonne, rising in the Spanish mountains, and in Cæsar's days better known and more navigated than any except the noble Rhône, that divides the southern provinces in his magnificent course from the Alps to the Mediterranean Sea.

Gaul was a wild country in Cæsar's days, largely covered with forest, and inhabited by Celtic tribes with a certain civilization of their own not unlike that of the ancient

Britons. They were ruled by their Druids; but a religion of terror did not crush the independence of mind, the restlessness, the curiosity about nature and man, or weaken the love of fighting and the obstinate courage which in former centuries of wandering had made these Gauls a dread to Southern Europe and Asia. Cæsar found a more stationary people, in a country whose rough divisions were marked then, as now, by striking differences in character. The men of the south were the most prosperous and the most talkative; those of the west the most imaginative and least practical; those of the north and east the strongest, bravest, most industrious. There was no general government of the country, such as the Romans brought and imposed upon it: the towns, large thatched villages, often fortified, on hill or river-bank, among cultivated fields or hidden away in a forest clearing, were independent communities of quarrelsome folk, constantly fighting among themselves or with each other. The difficulty of bringing these tribes into obedience to the supreme power of Rome may be measured by the eight years' campaign of Rome's most brilliant commander.

Tall and splendid men these Gauls were: fair, blue-eyed, red-haired, with long fierce moustaches, of which they were amazingly proud. The chiefs were gorgeous in gold-embroidered garments, with collars and bracelets blazing with jewels. When mounted on great horses, brandishing swords or javelins, and wearing on their helmets the skull of some bird or animal with stag's horns or falcon's wings extended, their height and appearance might well strike terror into ordinary foes. The small, dark men of Italy, running and driving into battle with shining armour and short Roman sword, might seem overmatched by these tremendous warriors. Cæsar, with his bald head and thin, aquiline face, keen, grave,

and thoughtful, appeared a mean opponent for such a magnificent young chieftain as Vercingetorix.

And in fact this famous leader of the Gauls made a fine defence against the Roman invaders, for he had military genius as well as dauntless courage, and he was a real patriot, even though his country meant little more than a group of tribes and scattered communities. His own tribe, called by Cæsar the Arverni, inhabited the mountains of Auvergne, the beautiful central province of France which takes its name from them; the dwelling of Vercingetorix was a hill stronghold called Gergovia. The story goes that his father, a great chief, was murdered here by the partisans of a jealous brother. This brother was ruling in his stead when the resistance of Central Gaul to the Romans broke into flame.

It was mid-winter. From the high plateau where Gergovia stood—all grass and brambles now—mountain and plain lay wrapped deep in snow. The thatched roofs of the little town were heaped with it; all the warmer for old men, women, and children, who crowded together round central fires in the large huts, sleeping or drinking heavily or singing songs and telling ancient tales of the glory of the Gauls long ago when they stormed over the known world and, led by their brave chief Brennus, took Roman senators by the beard. The name of Rome had a different sound for them now, in spite of their boasting, and the chief of Gergovia wagged a prudent head of disapproval over the talk of the young men, led by his nephew Vercingetorix. What were these foolish, fiery dreams of resistance to Rome? They would end by bringing fire and sword on the whole country. They would end in the extermination of the Gauls. Why not make terms with the invader and live side by side with him in trade, as many Gaulish cities were already doing? These young

hot-heads should be stabbed or burnt alive, or at least driven away into the forests to live with the wild beasts, their brethren !

Even while the old man grumbled, gulping down his strong drinks and stretching his feet to the crackling fire, the young men with their leader were out in the snow, watching the northern sky, listening for a voice that should travel along the hill-tops to bring the message they expected, signal for a general rising. Through the stillness of the winter night under the stars it came, the shout handed on from man to man over a hundred and fifty lonely miles. In the town of Orléans on the Loire, called by the Romans Genabum, where they had made one of those trading centres which the old chief approved, the Gauls had risen that morning and had killed all the Roman colonists.

With rage and terror the chief received the news, brought to him triumphantly by Vercingetorix. What vengeance would not the Romans take for such a so-called victory ! That they might have no excuse for destroying Gergovia, his innocent self, his followers, and his property, he ordered that Vercingetorix should be driven instantly from the town. Had not the young men of the tribe stood behind Vercingetorix his life would have been in peril.

The little band dashed away into the mountains, and for a few days or weeks Gergovia heard no more of them. Then they returned with a troop of fierce young spirits like themselves, and took the place by storm. There was slight resistance, for Vercingetorix was more popular with the tribe than his cowardly uncle could ever be. History does not tell of the chief's fate, but life was of small account in those days, and revenge was a duty. He disappears. We know that his nephew was proclaimed chief, and that Gergovia became the formidable centre of a rebellion

against Rome, led by Vercingetorix, which spread quickly through the central provinces of Gaul. One after another the strong places where the Romans in the course of several campaigns had established themselves fell into Gaulish hands again. Cæsar and his legions had gone south before winter set in, leaving garrisons in the new colonies. These were easily overwhelmed by the warlike Gauls and their leader. From south to north, from the Garonne to the Seine, his countrymen followed Vercingetorix. The tribes flocked to his standard in such numbers that he divided them into two armies, sending one southward and marching northward with the other, designing thus to free the whole of Gaul. And he might have done it, had his opponent been any man but Cæsar.

The Roman general heard the news in Italy. Travelling day and night, crossing the Cévennes, the south-eastern barrier of Auvergne, through many feet of snow, and driving the southern army of the Gauls before him, he burst upon the province and began to lay it waste with fire and sword. Vercingetorix hurried back to its defence, and saw but one course to take with these terrible enemies: the land must be made desolate before them, the towns and villages burnt, the cattle driven away, the women and children carried off into safety. His men would swoop on their communications, seize their convoys, starve them in the bitter weather, and thus force them to retreat. The desperate plan was carried out, but not entirely. Vercingetorix had not the relentlessness of Cæsar. When the Bituriges, the inhabitants of Bourges, prayed on their knees that their beautiful town might be spared—twenty of their settlements having gone up in flames, surely a sufficient sacrifice for one day—the young chief listened to their prayers. But with a doubtful mind; and they soon had cause to regret their attempt at self-preservation.

There were forty thousand people in Bourges when Cæsar besieged it, building towers and raising mounds of earth against the ramparts. Cold and hunger weakened his army, but after twenty-five days he stormed the town in spite of a heroic defence. Then there was a massacre so vast that only eight hundred escaped from Bourges and fled to Vercingetorix, Cæsar with his legions pursuing them. For a time fortune favoured the Gauls. Their chief made so fierce a stand beneath his own walls of Gergovia that the power of Rome was driven in disorderly flight to the north, harassed by rising tribes and pursued by Vercingetorix. In one of the rearguard actions Cæsar even lost his sword and narrowly escaped with his life.

But Rome after all was invincible, and the tide was not long in turning. The tribes agreed in making Vercingetorix, their one great soldier, paramount chief in Gaul. Now we find him at the head of his army, fighting unequal battles with the legions and finally holding out for many weeks in the citadel of Alesia, on the Mont Auxois in Burgundy, waiting till the whole of Gaul, urgently summoned, should hurry its two hundred thousand warriors to his relief. They came at length: sweeping clouds of horsemen, hordes of archers and javelin-throwers, attacked the Roman army where it lay entrenched round about the hill, imprisoning the fortress within miles of earthworks and ditches thirty feet wide. To sally out was impossible. Vercingetorix and his friends, faced with imminent starvation, watched from Alesia the great battle between Romans and Gauls, which raged for days in valley and plain. The end was doubtful till a body of horsemen in Cæsar's pay, summoned from the Rhine, fell suddenly on the rear of the Gauls. Roman soldiers before, strange barbarians behind, the men of Gaul were seized with panic:

they fled, pursued for miles by death-dealing enemies, and there was no more hope for the citadel of Alesia.

To save his army from certain starvation or massacre, Vercingetorix offered himself as a captive to Cæsar, who accepted the sacrifice, knowing well that without their hero-leader the resistance of the tribes would soon crumble into nothing. Then came the wonderful scene handed down by story through twenty centuries, in which Vercingetorix took leave of the history of his nation. Splendidly armed, flashing with steel and gold and jewels, crested with falcon's wings, he mounted his war-horse and rode alone out of the gate of Alesia. Cæsar in his camp awaited him. The young warrior rode round the open space, once more waving lance and sword. Then the thunder of hoofs ceased suddenly: he threw himself from his horse, cast down helmet and weapons before Cæsar, and waited in silence for his fate.

It was hard. They loaded him with chains and led him to Rome. Six weary years he spent in prison, and was only brought out to walk through the streets behind Cæsar's triumphal car, long after the whole of Gaul had been conquered and pacified and made a Roman province. Then, in some black dungeon, dagger or rope ended the gallant life of this noblest of the Gauls.

In granite or bronze he still watches over the scenes of his brave doings of old. In the square at Clermont, in Auvergne; on the grass-grown site of Gĕrgovia; on the Auxois hill, where he made his last stand and gave himself to save his comrades; here and elsewhere his grand figure reminds modern France of that ancient invasion. And surely now, as then, the valiant spirit of Vercingetorix leads the armies of his country.

CHAPTER II

A CITY, A SAINT, AND A KING

Comme elle avait gardé les moutons à Nanterre,
On la mit à garder un bien autre troupeau.
. . . . . .
C'est elle la savante et l'antique bergère.

CHARLES PÉGUY

THE city was Paris; the saint was Geneviève the shepherdess; the king was Clovis the Frank. The Roman power was gone. Only a small part of Gaul south of the Somme remained under the rule of a dying Empire. Two hundred years of strength and magnificence had been followed by two hundred more of internal decay and external pressure of Barbarian invasions. Pride and patriotism were gone, and the subjects of Imperial Rome, in Italy as well as in the colonies, crushed with taxes, deprived by selfish despotism of the wish or the means to defend themselves, had fallen an easy prey to the armed hordes that swarmed across the mountains and the Rhine. All the Roman world went down before them; the glory and grandeur, the beauty, luxury, and culture. Ruin was everywhere: Goths, Vandals, Visigoths, Burgundians, Franks, either as enemies or auxiliaries of the Empire, overran Gaul, and through the chaos of the time we can see that great country, toward the end of the fifth century, broken up north, south, east, and west into separate dominions ruled by independent kings, having little in common with Rome or with the older world she had conquered.

They were not all heathen: the Burgundians, for instance, and the Visigoths, who ruled South-western Gaul, had a form of Christianity of their own. Nor were they savage: once established in their beautiful new lands, the ancient influence of Rome was not lost upon them, and they developed a kind of civilization. But this was hardly universal; and these gentler peoples were not those with whom the future of France lay. The help of a more warlike race was needed to beat back a last invasion of Barbarians, the fiercest and most horrible that ever came storming from the East, before whom Goths and Vandals were flying when they themselves invaded Gaul. This warlike race was that of the Franks, and it was the people called Huns from whom they saved Gaul.

These people came from the Far East and were as hideous as they were strong and cruel. A Roman chronicler called them 'two-legged wild beasts.' Led by Attila, 'the Scourge of God,' they carried devastation through the land, and there came a day when the city of Paris was threatened by them.

Paris was a small city, but even then an attractive and important one. The Romans called it Lutetia Parisiorum —the white town of the Parisii, a tribe settled there on an island in the broad Seine when Cæsar took the place and made it a military station. It was then a cluster of thatched huts, with some kind of fortification, surrounded by woods and marshes. As years went on the Romans had built a town of brick and white stone, the island being still the centre, bridges connecting it with the suburbs on the mainland and the defences on the northern and southern hills. On the island, where the cathedral of Notre-Dame now stands, there were palaces and temples: on the south bank was a great palace with baths and an amphitheatre. The remains of buildings and walls, their

masonry fifteen hundred years old, may still be traced in Paris to-day.

The later Roman rulers had made the city their residence: the Emperor Julian, artist and philosopher, loved 'darling Lutetia' and spent much of his time there. The city was one of those, like Soissons, which remained longest under Roman dominion, and it long preserved the order and beauty of ancient Roman rule.

It became a Christian city. The Church, which had first grown and lived in the heart of Rome against Rome's will, persecutions and martyrdoms only leading to more complete triumph, was in these barbarian days the one organization that stood, representing in the general chaos the reign of righteousness and law. Among the heroic phalanx of her pioneer bishops we need only mention the names of Denis of Paris and Martin of Tours. In the fifth century, when the Huns invaded Gaul, two of the most distinguished leaders were Bishop Remy of Reims and Bishop Germain of Auxerre.

And now we come to the marvellous story of the peasant woman who, according to old records, was the chief defender and ruler of Paris for nearly seventy years. Nanterre, the village where Geneviève was born early in the fifth century, and where she watched her father's sheep as they fed under the willows, was a small settlement near the river where it doubles and winds to the north-west of Paris. Hither came, so the story goes, Bishop Germain of Auxerre on a missionary journey into Britain, probably to travel by boat down the Seine and from its mouth to venture across the narrow seas. Preaching at Nanterre, he noticed the refined sweetness and devotion of the little shepherd girl and gave her a special blessing, prophesying that this child would one day do great things for God and her countrymen.

Meanwhile, spinning by the river and watching the sheep, Geneviève grew into a tall, beautiful girl. A certain stately dignity united with her gentleness of bearing to remind the neighbours of her Gallo-Roman descent. During these years no hungry wolf, they say, dared to steal a lamb from her flock, and no evil person on river or shore by word or deed disturbed her peace. But the day came when she was to leave her little meek flock to take charge of a far larger and very different one: no less than the whole people of Paris, folded between their hills.

No such thought as this can have been in Geneviève's mind when, after her father's death, she left Nanterre to live with relations in the city. Though even in these early days she seems to have been deeply reverenced for wisdom, sincere religion, and generous charity, it was not till the year 451, when she was about thirty years old, that either she or the Parisians knew the extent of her powers. In that year the Huns entered Gaul and advanced toward Paris. Their coming would have meant massacre and utter destruction, for resistance was hardly to be thought of: little of the Roman strength now lingered, even in cities still ruled by Roman law. The people had no real leaders and were distracted with terror, even while the Huns were many leagues away. They snatched up their treasures and were ready to fly in crowds to the forests to escape from the terrible enemy. But Geneviève stopped them. Standing on the bridge over the Seine, this young, slight woman of no authority opposed herself to the panic-stricken mob of fugitives and turned them back to their homes.

"Our Lord God has shown me," she said, "that if the men of Paris will pray to Him, sorrowing for their sins, and will be ready with boldness to fight for their city, He will Himself be their defence and guard."

Legends say that a heavenly vision had shown Geneviève the Hun forces retreating from her borders. Whether this be true or not, news came that Attila had turned south-westward and was marching toward Orléans: then, that a great army of Franks and Visigoths, with such Roman legions as remained in Gaul, had fought a tremendous battle with the Huns on the plain of Châlons and had driven those dreadful hordes back finally across the Rhine.

In those unsettled years of no fixed government, when a certain sense of public order, handed down from Rome, chiefly represented by the Church, was all that kept citizenship alive, it was to some strong character that people turned for guidance; and this explains the long trust and dependence of Paris on its beloved saint, ruler, and defender, Geneviève.

There came a time when the city was menaced again by Barbarian armies; not, indeed, so inhumanly terrible as the Huns had been, but fierce and alarming enough, worshippers of Odin and the warlike gods of the North. Mérovée, King of the Franks, had helped in the defeat of Attila at Châlons. His people were already settled on both banks of the Rhine and had spread through the north-eastern provinces to the North Sea, Cologne and Tournay being two of their principal towns. From Tournay came Childeric, son of Mérovée, with an army of restless warriors eager for spoil, sweeping like a cloud round Paris and laying siege to the ruinous Roman walls of a city that had grown rich and quiet in years of peace.

Now starvation threatened, and the flock looked to Geneviève for food. Their shepherdess did not fail them. Trusting herself alone, they say, to a small boat on the Seine, she slipped past the besieging force and made her way up-stream to distant towns and villages, from whence

she brought back a whole convoy of boats laden with corn. And when the Frank chieftain at last entered the gates, when Paris was trembling before the wild invaders who thronged her streets and stared around at her faded splendours, it was Geneviève who faced Childeric at his triumphal feast and obtained from him the sparing of the city which he already dreamed of making his capital. No scene in the shepherdess's life can have been more marvellous than this. No wonder that, as old age crept upon her, the reverence of her flock deepened almost to adoration.

Geneviève was between seventy and eighty years old when she, representative of Gaul and Rome, at last resigned her guarded city into the hands of the Franks, whose power had now spread through the north of the country that may be henceforth called France. Clovis, son of Childeric, became King of the Tournay Franks as a boy of sixteen. No Frank was stronger or fiercer than he, but he had great intelligence and generous instincts, and his actions must be judged by the moral standards of his own time.

To his twentieth year and his first campaign belongs the famous story of the Vase of Soissons. A precious silver bowl or vase had been taken, with other treasures, from a church, and the spoil was brought to Soissons to be divided by lot among the chiefs and warriors. A messenger came from Bishop Remy of Reims to ask for the return of the vase. The young King—still a heathen—laid the request before his companions. All consented, except one man. Crying out to the King: "Thou shalt have nothing more than the lot gives thee!" he lifted his battle-axe and smashed the vase in two. The King governed himself, says the chronicler, took the broken vase, and gave it to the Bishop's messenger. But a year later, when inspecting the weapons of his soldiers, he found that man's battle-

axe stained with rust. Snatching it from him, he threw it on the ground, and as the warrior stooped to pick it up he cleft his skull with one blow. "Thus didst thou," he cried, "to the vase at Soissons!"

Many legends gathered round the name of Clovis. In them and in more sober history he shows throughout his life two characters: the pagan chief, fierce, ambitious, cunning, and cruel to his enemies; the Christian champion and defender of the Faith, he who cried: "Had I been there with my Franks!" when the story of the Crucifixion was read to him.

The story of the ford belongs to the campaign against the Visigoths, in which the southern provinces of old Gaul were conquered for France and for the Church. On their march southward Clovis and his army arrived on the banks of the Vienne, not far from Chinon, to find the river swollen by flood so that a passage seemed impossible. As the King sat under a tree in the forest, much discontented, and watched the dark water swirling by, a slender, snow-white hind stole out from the thicket and stood a moment with lifted head, listening to the sounds of war that had invaded her sanctuary. The King beheld her in silence. She stepped daintily down the bank, entered the river, and crossed it to the farther side. She did not need to swim; her graceful head was high above water and her little feet trod the pebbly bed over which the flood rippled so fast. When she had reached the other side and disappeared again into the forest, Clovis thanked God and called to his men. Where the hind had crossed, they could cross: she had shown them the ford. She seemed a creature of miracle, sent from heaven to lead the King on his way.

When Clovis was still very young he married a Christian princess, Clotilde of Burgundy, and she, beautiful and much beloved, converted him to her religion. The actual

St Geneviève, Clovis, and Clotilde

M. Meredith Williams

turning-point was a victory over the Allemans, a German tribe who were bent on depriving the Franks of their conquests in Gaul. This great battle was fought at Tolbiac, now called Zülpich, near the Rhine. For the first time Clovis prayed to Christ for victory, promising to be baptized. He was victorious, and kept his word. He was baptized at Reims by Bishop Remy, with three thousand of his warriors.

The young King and Queen entered Paris, where they were received by Geneviève, still the ruler of her half-Roman flock. We may imagine her, erect in great age, dark-robed, black-hooded, stately and wise and kind, advancing along the streets of low, red-tiled houses and gardens to meet this final inroad of the Franks, and welcoming them in Latin, her own language, now well understood by them. Historians have tried to show us how it all looked; the white city with its island centre, divided by the silver Seine, set in a frame of hills and forests and old Roman villas and tombs, the northern hill of Montmartre already crowned with a Christian church built by Geneviève over the grave of St Denis.

The tall young warrior, Clovis, was handsome and stern. Both he and Clotilde wore their long fair hair in twisted braids hanging below the waist. His cap was circled with a plain gold crown. A long royal mantle hung from his shoulders; beneath it, over his short garments of linen and leather, sword and axe were slung from a heavy jewelled belt. He wore also bracelets and rings and neck-ornaments set thickly with precious stones. The Queen's crown was more elaborate; her jewels too were splendid; her under-dress of fine gold network, girded with a long sash, was covered by an embroidered robe falling to her feet. Her face, with the hair parted on her brow, was lovely and proud and full of character. If Paris and the

kingdom were Clovis's conquests, he was hers; it was through her that he came, a Christian king, to his new Christian city.

King, Queen, and Shepherdess, followed in long procession by the royal escort and the people of Paris, crossed the city from north to south, winding over the bridges and the island to the Roman palace of Julian on the southern hill. From there, on some not distant day, Clovis and Clotilde went forth to lay with Geneviève the first stone of a great church which became the abbey-church of Sainte-Geneviève—rebuilt about 1770 and later called the Panthéon—where King and Queen and Shepherdess were buried side by side.

For many centuries, when flood or war or pestilence or any great alarm threatened Paris, the shrine of Sainte-Geneviève was carried through the streets and people begged for her prayers that the old flock she had kept so long might once more be saved. But the time came, thirteen hundred years after her death, when men of the Revolution, far-off, forgetful descendants of that first flock, melted down the rich shrine and burned her bones.

CHAPTER III

ROLAND AND ROLLO

Hélas! toute puissance est à peine élevée
Qu'elle s'ébranle; où sont les fils de Mérovée?
Où sont ceux de Clovis?—Que deviendront les tiens,
Charlemagne? HENRI DE BORNIER

Dieu! que le son du cor est triste au fond des bois!
ALFRED DE VIGNY

IN the line of long-haired Merovingians—Thierrys, Clotaires, Childeberts, Chilperics, Cariberts, Dagoberts, Sigeberts, Clodomers, Gontrans—who followed Clovis through two hundred and forty years and preceded the race of Charles the Emperor, exceptions were too few to make the general title of *rois fainéants* an unjust reproach. There were good men among them: Clodoald, a grandson of Clovis, retired from the miseries of a cruel and sinful world, and is not forgotten in France under his name of St Cloud; Dagobert I left behind him a tradition of justice, strong government, and generosity to the Church and the poor. But the partition of the kingdom, which began with the sons of Clovis, led to constant quarrels and anarchy. Terrible women, such as Brunehaut, wife of Sigebert, and her rival Frédégonde, deluged France with blood in a private war of their own. Kings and princes dwindled to the mere succession of vicious sluggards against whom the nobles of France at length rose in judgment. Those rulers of kings, for a hundred years actual viceroys under the name of Mayors of the Palace, cut off the long royal locks of the last Merovingian and shut him

up in a monastery. Pepin the Short, grandson of the greatest of the Mayors and son of Charles Martel, the first hammerer of the Saracens, was crowned king by Bishop Boniface at Soissons in 752. Thus began the Carolingian dynasty, taking its name from Pepin's splendid son, but destined after another two and a half centuries to go down before another race of great nobles, these to rule France, for good or ill, four times as long.

"A marvellous man is Charles!" says the old poet of the *Song of Roland*. Modern writers hardly attain the glorious simplicity which has suggested a comparison between the medieval monk Touroude and Homer himself. They chronicle, as best they may, Charles's "Imperial grandeur, his stately Court, his energetic rule, his supremacy over Europe," his victories over the Mohammedan armies that came swarming from the East and the South to invade Christendom. But they can show too how Charlemagne and his paladins, the immortal Roland at their head, foreshadowed a thousand years ago the Christian chivalry of the Middle Ages which ennobles Europe still; how their deeds, truer in history, share with those of Arthur and his knights the dawn of modern romance and poetry; how from their battles with the Saracens arose not merely the Crusades, but all fighting for right and truth and justice in the modern world.

This greatest of the Franks, in his reign of more than forty years, conquered Europe from Italy to the Elbe, from Spain to the Danube, so that France, anciently Gaul, lay in the very centre of a new empire of the West. He was crowned Emperor by the Pope in St Peter's at Rome on Christmas Day in the year 800: and from that day forth—to quote a recent charming writer—"he made an immense and glorious effort to pull the car of empire out of its Barbarian rut and set it rolling down the roads of Rome." In the course of this effort religion and learning

were everywhere encouraged, though the prince who founded schools and listened with bent head and tugged beard to long arguments on Christian philosophy—so anxious was he to keep pace with his army of well-paid teachers—could never read or write without difficulty.

Eginhard, the chronicler of Charles's reign, who lived at his Court and knew him well, describes him as tall, strong, and fair, with flaxen hair and large bright eyes; his whole appearance manly and dignified. He had a generous charm that attracted both men and women; he was reverenced by the Church, feared by evildoers; in court and camp a noble example. Not without human weaknesses; but one of those royal characters, so rare in history, who govern mankind of their own natural right.

It was not alone as a mighty warrior, a wise ruler, an inspirer of art and learning, that the men of his own day glorified Charles for all time as 'Charlemagne.' He was also their unquestioned leader in all the great sports of their race. The Franks were the boldest riders and most famous hunters in the world. Hubert, the patron saint of French hunting, was of royal Merovingian blood, and his amazing adventure was modern history in the days of Charlemagne—how he was converted from a careless life by meeting in the Ardennes a stag of marvellous size and beauty, bearing a crucifix between his horns; how he fell on his knees and vowed obedience to the Faith, becoming later Bishop of Liège and dying, very old, a dozen years before Charlemagne was born.

The Emperor was a strenuous follower of St Hubert. He was a daring horseman, and the chase was his chief pastime, carried on splendidly with packs of swift fierce hounds that feared no quarry; wolf, wild boar, or even bear, plentiful then in the southern mountains. The deer and the fox were easier game. The vast tracts of forest-

land were still wild and pathless as in Cæsar's days ; more so than in the later Roman time ; for the Merovingian rule had neglected or destroyed roads and bridges, so that the country was what it long remained, uncultivated and difficult of communications.

The merry greenwood of old England was in old France the dark, wolf-haunted, immemorial forest, where much of the mystery of the known and unknown world had its home : gay in spring, to be sure, with birds and blossoms, and beautiful at all times, but with a wilder, more remote and solemn beauty : a forest where men saw visions as they rode down enchanted ways ; where strange presences lurked among the leaves, for the fairy Morgane and her like might still deceive unwary knights in the time of Charlemagne, as in the time of Arthur.

There were no parks, no warrens, no specially preserved enclosures : the Imperial hunt swept over a country where every man might chase what game he pleased, for feudal lords with their privileges did not yet exist, and there was more freedom under Charlemagne than under Philippe-Auguste. Women rode out with falcons perched on their pearl-embroidered gauntlets, and found hawking fine sport if they were too lazy to gallop after the stag. But those of the Emperor's Court were seldom left behind, and even the clergy, the one restricted class, found means to rouse the forest echoes with the foremost. Archbishops and bishops and abbots obeyed the blast of Count Roland's horn as he hunted the glades, and followed him with equal joy against wolf or Saracen.

Roland is said to have been Charlemagne's nephew, conqueror and Count of the Marches of Brittany. His magic horn, the *olifant*, made of a great carved tusk of ivory set in gold, rings through early French history as it did through the thick forests of the Pyrenees from the valley

of Roncesvalles. To the ears of Charles the King—not yet Emperor—that blast brought the most terrible news that ever darkened his reign. He was returning with his army from an expedition against the Saracen invaders of Spain: sad enough, for the victory had not been complete, ending in fair promises from the enemy and an attempted treaty which vexed the King's soul. In long, winding columns his forces wended their way back through the rocky gorges of the mountains; by rushing streams and pathless woods of pine and beech and chestnut. He was himself with the vanguard; in the rear, leagues away, were the larger number of his famous *preux*, the valiant men whose names live with his own. There were Roland and Olivier, Yvon and Yvoire, Gerin and Gerier, Engelier, Berenger, Othon, Samson, Anseïs, the old Duke Gerard of Roussillon, Archbishop Turpin of Reims, and many more.

Under the high peak of Altabiscar, where a torrent runs down through the narrow wooded valley of Roncesvalles, a terrible noise in the thick forest announced the coming of an enemy. If we follow the *Song of Roland* we shall believe that this sudden attack was made by Marsilis the Saracen king to whom the traitor Ganelon, Charles's ambassador, betrayed the route of the army. History will have it that the wild Basques, whom Charles had conquered, seized this occasion for revenge and spoil. A Basque poem, the *Song of Altabiscar*, describes how the mountaineers, hidden far above among the clouds and the rocks, listened to the tramp of the advancing army and at last, as the shadows of evening fell, saw the gorge below them full of lances and banners and gleaming armour. Then they rushed down in their thousands to attack with swords and arrows, some rolling great stones from the heights; and so sudden was the surprise, so furious the onset, that of all Roland's gallant companions not one was left alive.

Roland, with his shining sword Durandal, fought to the end: his swift horse Veillantif was killed under him: he was wounded nearly to death: but with his last strength lifting to his mouth the famous horn, the *olifant*, he blew so great a blast that the rocks carried the sound and echo repeated it thirty leagues away. Charles and his army heard it and the King said: "Our men are fighting. It is the horn of Roland."

He rode hard and returned to the fatal valley. The enemy had retired and there was an awful silence in the mountains, broken only by lamentation over the heroes lying slain among the marble rocks, under the trees, along the course of the stream.

Roland lay dead on the green grass, under a pine-tree, his face to earth, still grasping horn and sword. A cleft rock showed how he had vainly tried to break the fine steel of Durandal. He had confessed his sins, and with clasped hands commended his soul to God. So died Roland, with a last thought for 'sweet France,' his friends, and his lord Charlemagne.

The King is heard crying all those names aloud. "Where are you—and you—and you? My twelve peers who were following me?" But alas! none answered. The King tore his beard and wept in fury and grief. All his knights wept with him.

Charlemagne long survived that tragedy; but in the poems and chronicles of his later life, with the account of his glorious activities there sounds an undertone of weariness and disappointment. The last lines of the *Song of Roland* describe how the summons to a new war came to the Emperor one dark night, as he lay in his vaulted room. The summoner was the angel Gabriel: "Charles, Charles, assemble thy armies!"

A city of a fabled dream-name was besieged by Paynims.

"Christians, loud crying, appeal to thee."

With convincing, inimitable simplicity the old poet ends: "The Emperor did not want to go: 'God!' he cries, 'how painful is my life!' His tears run down, he rends his white beard."

One of those *chansons de gestes* of which our forefathers were never tired, for they were the popular histories of the time, shows Charlemagne in his last days, desiring to see his eldest son Louis, Duke of Aquitaine, crowned in his lifetime as his successor. But the great nobles who now surrounded the Emperor were very different men, as to loyalty and truth, from Roland and his marvellous brethren. They suggest the coming of feudalism, the system under which each great vassal would fight selfishly for his own hand, rather than as the friend and follower of his king.

There was a great gathering at Aix-la-Chapelle. Four crowned kings, twenty-six abbots, a large company of bishops and nobles, attended Charlemagne in the cathedral. The Imperial crown, a gorgeous mass of jewels, was laid upon the altar, and an archbishop spoke to the assembled Christians, telling them of the Emperor's intention for his son. All the congregation lifted their hands, crying their joy to heaven. Then Charlemagne spoke from his throne to the young Louis.

"Thou seest that crown," he said. "On certain conditions, I give it to thee. Thou wilt avoid luxury and sin. Thou wilt betray no man. Thou wilt not rob the orphan or the widow. My son Louis, behold the crown. Take it, and conquer the heathen world. But if thou wilt not keep these conditions, take it not, for I forbid it thee."

Three times, ever more solemnly, the Emperor repeated his words. But the young prince neither moved nor spoke, nor stretched his hand to take the crown; and many

Ships of the Vikings
M. Meredith Williams

brave knights wept, seeing the boy's timidity; for he was but fifteen years old. But the Emperor was very angry.

"This is no son of mine. This is some coward's son," he cried. "It would be a crime to crown such as he. Cut off his hair. Let him go and ring bells in the monastery yonder. Make him a clerk there, that he may not beg his bread."

The story goes on to tell how a magnificent personage, Count Arneïs of Orléans, intereeded for the boy with his father, pointing out his extreme youth and offering to take charge of him for three years. When Louis should be old enough for knighthood, and had proved himself a worthy heir to the Empire, his guardian would restore him in all honour and prosperity.

Charlemagne agreed to the specious plan, which was loudly approved by the Count's many friends and followers. But he and they were traitors at heart, for he had great power with the people of France, and desired to be himself their king.

Then a new champion enters on the scene. William, Count of Orange, a vassal of young Louis in the South, was away hunting. His nephew met him with news of the treacherous bargain just made, and guided him to the monastery where Arneïs had already imprisoned the boy, and where, royally dressed, he was holding a kind of court of those nobles who desired to see him King of France.

William, his sword half drawn, pushes his way through the throng. His desire is to kill the traitor: but he remembers that it is a heavy sin to kill a man, and pushes back his sword. Then, face to face with Arneïs, he forgets his scruples, and with blows from his two fists lays the deceiver lifeless at his feet. "I meant to correct thee, liar and glutton, but thou art dead, and not worth a farthing."

Again the great assembly in the cathedral; but this time William of Orange takes the crown from the altar

and places it on the head of the boy. "There, my good lord! May the King of Heaven give thee grace to judge justly!" And the father rejoiced and said: "Lord William, I thank you greatly: your house has restored mine." And thus Louis le Débonnaire became the successor of Charlemagne.

"One of the most picturesque and romantic figures in the history of mankind": such was the King-Emperor. Also in a sense one of the most tragical: for his lofty dream of a united Christian world died with himself. Again the Barbarian forces of anarchy and disorder came sweeping over a bewildered Europe, and the Empire fell to pieces, divided among his descendants and the powerful vassals who shared their rule. Already, before Charlemagne's death, the heathen vikings from the North were beginning to harass his dominions, their pirate ships attacking every coast; and it was under the threatening shadow of these new invasions that he died.

Just a century after his death his great-great-grandson, Charles the Simple, King of France, was forced to make peace with Rollo the Northman, who had devastated the country and nearly taken Paris by storm. Becoming a Christian, Rollo married the King's daughter Gisela and received the great fief known later as the Duchy of Normandy. Too proud to do homage as Charles's vassal in the usual way, by kissing the royal foot, Rollo is said to have employed one of his followers as deputy. This fierce man, far from kneeling humbly down as courtly usage prescribed, seized the King's foot and lifted it so rudely to his lips that King and throne toppled backward amid shouts of viking laughter, which neither Charles nor his Frankish courtiers dared to resent.

We may well ask, with Master François Villon:

Mais où est le preux Charlemaigne?

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF THE CRUSADERS

Il faudra, pour tirer la chrétienté occidentale de sa langueur, la secousse héroïque de la Croisade. ÉMILE GEBHART

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed?
R. BROWNING

THE Fat, the Bald, the Stammerer, the Simple, the Foreigner, the Do-nothing, etc., descendants of Charlemagne and nominal kings of France, with small territory and little power, were ruled and frequently deposed by their great vassals the Dukes of Burgundy, Normandy, and Aquitaine, the Counts of Paris, Flanders, Champagne, Toulouse, and the many formidable nobles who held fiefs depending on these. The most actively powerful of all were the Counts of Paris, also called Dukes of France. Their ancestor, Robert the Strong, was a half-legendary hero of fights against the Northmen early in the ninth century: we may remember, by the way, that King Louis-Philippe's gallant grandson, the Duc de Chartres, fought for France in 1870 under the name of 'Robert le Fort.' Eudes, the son of Robert, defended Paris against the Northmen in an eighteen-months siege. The crown of France fell to his descendant Hugh Capet, by agreement among the great nobles, on the death in A.D. 987 of Louis le Fainéant, the last Carolingian king. "Not by hereditary right, but by noble blood and by ability," said the Archbishop of Reims, himself one of the chief men of the kingdom. The race of Charlemagne was not extinct, but degenerate and unworthy. Under

the race of Capet France became herself, and marched on through near a thousand years of her immortal history.

It was a terribly distressful land over which the first Capet kings were called to reign. Civilization and learning had declined since Charlemagne; the law and order of old Roman days were buried deep and forgotten. The early tyrannies of the feudal system had succeeded that still worse state of things which followed the breaking up of the Empire, when bands of armed robbers patrolled the country, seizing what lands and goods they pleased, forcing the poor inhabitants, the defenceless peasants, the humble proprietors and farmers, by sheer violence into slavery. In those days no roads were safe: no crop could be peacefully gathered in: even the Church, the protectress of the poor, could not always provide refuge and sanctuary.

When Hugh Capet became king, the feudal system was at its height of power, a new rule of the strongest, little better for the weak than the old savage anarchy. The lord lived high and safe in his new castle with his household of armed men. His tenants and serfs were crowded in their dark hovels, in the steep streets of the little town, or, more lonely and unprotected, in scattered huts of the village that rambled off into borders of forest or moor. Duke or count or baron, they were his men; they worked and fought for him, and he was supposed to guard them from the inroads of fierce neighbours. He was usually at war with those neighbours whose castles overhung river or valley a few leagues away. No moonlight night was safe from raids, the thundering feet of horses, the clatter of arms, the blaze of thatch, often the violent death of poor innocents, whose only crime was their enforced loyalty. But they were avenged: the next night might

see the neighbour's village in flames and his wretched vassals flying for safety to his walls and gates. In either case, if the lord and lady were humane, life was bearable; if they were hard and cruel, there was always a better world beyond. In those days the earth was a flat surface, we remember: above the blue sky was paradise with "harps and lutes" for poor Christian souls; far underground the boiling cauldrons of hell awaited the wicked.

Toward that thousandth year of Christendom, several causes combined to bring misery on France. Ignorance and materialism had their universal consequences: selfishness, cruelty, and greed. It was prophesied and believed that the world would come to an end in the year 1000, and this belief, while adding desperation to wickedness, brought a new terror into lives already afflicted beyond bearing by the will of God or man. An awful gloom brooded over provinces desolated by war, famine, and pestilence. About ten years before the fated A.D. 1000 began a series of appalling famines, caused by perpetual rains and floods, cold summers, bad harvests or none at all, which lasted with intervals of a year or two till nearly A.D. 1040. People ate grass and the bark of trees. Starvation brought on epidemics in which the mortality was frightful, and it was often impossible to bury the dead. The forsaken bodies were devoured by hungry wolves. Worse still, the ruffians who ranged the roads were not satisfied with robbing and murdering helpless travellers, but became cannibals and roasted them for food. Many horrid stories of this kind are told in the chronicles.

The wonderful changes in that eleventh century, the reawakening of an older ideal which meant new birth for Christendom, may be sketched or half imagined from the traditions of one of the great French houses.

Let us suppose the young son of such a house returning with his servants and hounds from an autumn hunting in the forests and marshes of Poitou. It is a year of famine, and he has seen painful sights enough : skeletons lying by the roadside ; men and women and children hardly more than skeletons creeping from their dens with outstretched hands into which the old huntsman, at his master's command, throws pieces of gold. Of what use, when there is nothing to buy ! But in the course of that ride the hounds have disappeared one by one, and the dead deer that the hunters had flung across their horses have been snatched away by sudden raids from the thicket. The men's bronzed faces are pale and anxious ; they close round their young master, for these are dangerous days, and the expedition was a rash one. Young Amaury had set out against his mother's judgment ; but she, though a learned and powerful woman, could not resist his prayers.

His father was absent at a council of nobles and bishops, important affairs being on hand ; for the end of all things had not come to pass in the year 1000, and now there was a great uprising of spiritual enthusiasm. If this old world was indeed to live, cried the Church, it must be a life of new religious fervour. And the world sprang to meet the challenge. Old historians say that it flung off its ancient rags to clothe itself with a "white robe of churches." Cathedrals and churches which had fallen into ruin were rebuilt ; many new ones arose in splendour ; new abbeys and convents showed the active reawakening of a faith that had slept but not died. People set out on pilgrimages, no danger or difficulty hindering them : they went in crowds to the tombs of the saints, even as far away as Rome. Some began to dream of visiting Jerusalem, leaving their bones there, possibly. What did that matter

if their eternal salvation might thus be made sure? The Church helped the weak and poor by imposing a 'Truce of God' on the quarrelsome and strong: men were forbidden to take up arms from Wednesday to Monday in each week, through the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter, in the month of May, and on all great festivals: a counsel of perfection not always observed, but its general acceptance showed the change in the minds of men. All this was the light of dawn: the sun of a new age of religion, chivalry, poetry, and art had not yet risen upon France when the young Count Amaury rode back from his hunting on that autumn afternoon.

He drew rein on a high moorland from which his father's castle could be seen, the watch-tower gleaming tall and slender against a background of shadowy, threatening clouds. Stretches of forest and a river lay between. Amaury and his men stared at the castle. Suddenly pale, he turned to the old huntsman who rode nearest him.

"What is that?"

"I do not know. God knows! Let us ride on."

But his thin hair bristled on his head. Was it a cloud, hovering on the watch-tower, or was it rather a woman's shape, white arms waving, long grey draperies floating and fluttering in the October wind? And did not that same wind, blowing in from the western sea, bring the cry of a voice wilder and more sorrowful than its own?

The men whispered among themselves. It was already a legend, though few generations old, that the fairy lady from some northern land who had founded the family and the castle might still be seen and heard lamenting on its towers the death of a descendant.

Now they rode down under the copper-coloured woods

and crossed the flooded river; perhaps by the same ford wonderfully shown to Clovis five hundred years before. They climbed the stony way to the gate of the village that crouched beneath the castle; and now Amaury saw the wraith of his ancestress no more; she had melted into the dusky evening.

Within the walls there was a sound of wailing: but at long tables a hundred famished folk were being fed. Amaury's mother in black robes, a very real woman, awaited him in the torch-lit hall.

"My son, your father is dead—slain treacherously at Poitiers on the Lord's Day, by a vile enemy who thus broke the Truce of God. You are lord of this castle. But you are my son, of tender age, and you will obey me."

Amaury kissed his mother's hand. He had not loved his father, a hard man of the old fierce world to whom modern changes were contemptible. But the Countess was of a different spirit.

Now she could follow her own way and that of her brother, a saintly bishop from the north of France, who visited and advised her. From this day religion and chivalry—the two were one—laid their influence on the young Count Amaury. He grew up in the light of ideals which sprang from early Christianity, existed among the best of the Franks, were glorified by Charlemagne, and were almost extinguished in the breaking-up of his empire.

Chivalry at its best was active Christianity. A young knight's vows made him the soldier of God, the defender of the honour of Christ, the champion of the faith and of weak humanity. Unselfish, fearless, pure and true, courteous to women and to his equals, gentle and charitable to his inferiors: in short, all that goes to make a gentleman. Such became Count Amaury.

In those days the old ideal had its practical consequences. The people of Christendom awoke and looked round. They saw a world invaded ever more widely by the Saracens, the disciples of Mohammed, their Master's fiercest enemy. They saw "those holy fields" trampled by pagans, Jerusalem and Bethlehem and Nazareth with their sacred memories subject to slavery and outrage. As the ideas of chivalry grew in Europe, and more especially in France, men's grief and anger deepened. It was bitter shame to Christendom and to every individual Christian that such things should be. A flame of faith, of literal belief and passionate loyalty, burned through the eleventh century till it caught half Europe and blazed high in the First Crusade.

Count Amaury's saintly mother did not live to see that climax of her faith and hope ; but while he was still young and unmarried she undertook with him the dangerous pilgrimage to Jerusalem, returning safely to found a church for the good of their people and the repose of her husband's soul.

Amaury was an old man in the year 1095, when he rode white-haired with his sons and grandsons to the Council at Clermont in Auvergne and was among the foremost of those nobles who listened to the sermon of Pope Urban II, summoning France to arms against the profaners of the Holy Sepulchre. There too he heard passionate words from the monk Peter, mean, wild-eyed, dressed in sackcloth, thin and weary from those long journeys on ass-back through the length and breadth of France in which he called Christians of all ranks to fight for their Lord.

Amaury needed no persuasion. He was not too old to take the Cross ; he had long worn it in spirit. His voice, if weak with age, was the first to cry "God wills it!" in

The First Crusaders in sight of Jerusalem
M. Meredith Williams

that assembly. His sons and grandsons would well represent him in Palestine, should his years forbid him the actual Crusade. So he would remain in his castle, old and lonely and poor, having sold broad lands to send forth his family and vassals on the great adventure which carried all France on a wave of enthusiasm eastward. Men, women, and children, noble and peasant, strong and helpless, wise and foolish, they flung themselves into that holy war from which many were never to return.

The ignorant multitude would not wait for any arming or preparation. They set out in frantic haste, led by Peter the Hermit and Walter the Penniless, a knight from Normandy. This was a piteous affair; for many thousands of these poor creatures, the first to carry the Cross into Eastern lands, knew little or nothing of what they undertook, and in the hope of escaping from misery at home, expecting miracles which did not happen for them, only marched to disaster. Of the children who cried "Is this Jerusalem?" at the first view of every town on their weary journey, scarcely one lived to see France again. The bones of that forlorn vanguard which never reached Palestine whitened the way before the organized armies that followed it.

In that great host of mixed elements, led by the highest type of religion and chivalry in the valiant Godfrey de Bouillon, the fine flower of the nobility of France fought their way to Palestine. And among the first of those who raised the banner of the Cross on the walls of the Holy City were the sons and grandsons of Count Amaury. Their fame, earned in this First Crusade, caused his later descendants to figure on the long romantic roll of kings of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER V

THE MAKING OF THE MONARCHY

Ce n'est pas en vain que la monarchie française a reçu en dépôt, pendant de longs siècles, la grandeur, la gloire, la puissance et la majesté nationales. . . . C'est une joie noble et salutaire de saluer avec respect ces institutions mortes qui ont si longtemps gardé le patrimoine commun de la grandeur française.

FERNAND LABORI

THE old chronicles tell a quaint story of Philippe-Auguste, seventh of the Capet line. One of the royal bailiffs or officers of justice coveted some lands, the owner of which had lately died. Having bribed two labourers to help him, he dug up the dead man under cover of night, summoned him to sell his estates, and named a price for them. Silence giving consent, he laid money in the hands of the corpse and buried it once more. He then attempted to take possession of the domain. But the dead knight's widow appealed to the King. The bailiff, summoned to appear, brought his two witnesses to swear that the land had actually been sold to him. As usual with the early kings, Philippe-Auguste was sitting to dispense justice "simply, without intermediary"—as M. Funck-Brentano shows him in his book on the kingly office in France—in his city of Paris, in the great hall of the palace on the Island, from whose windows he could watch the flowing Seine. A number of people, as usual, were present.

In this case, for some reason, the King suspected fraud. He rose from his chair of state and beckoned one of the witnesses apart from the crowd, so that words spoken low

were not audible. He then ordered him to recite the *Paternoster*. While the fellow muttered the well-known prayer, the King repeated in a loud voice, more than once, "That is well; you say it rightly." Then he dismissed him and called the other witness aside. "Come, you too will repeat it rightly!" The second labourer, terrified, and believing that his comrade had told the whole truth, hastened to tell it himself. The bailiff met with the punishment he deserved, and the chronicler, according to M. Funck-Brentano, echoed public opinion when he wrote that the King's judgment was a match for that of Solomon.

This clever king was not a hero of romance. He had little of the crusading spirit of his time: his desires and ambitions were nearer home. But he will be remembered among the greatest of French kings, for he made the monarchy. He was a boy of fifteen when he succeeded his father, Louis VII, and had already been crowned in the cathedral at Reims according to the royal custom of assuring the succession. He was still very young when tradition tells us of the tall, fair boy leaving his courtiers to brood by himself, gnawing a twig, staring with absent eyes and scarcely hearing what was said to him, but at length confessing the absorbing thought—would grace be given him and his heirs to make France again great, following in the steps of Charlemagne?

Once the rulers of an empire, her kings were now little more than lords of a small state surrounded by the immense fiefs of their nominal vassals. The king stood, indeed, on a different footing from these vassals, even the strongest of them. He was supposed to be the independent spiritual power, the central authority, the supreme administrator of justice, the official protector of religion and the poor, 'the father of his people.' Louis VI, the

Fat, Philippe's grandfather, had to some extent lived up to this ideal of royalty by fighting the oppressions of the nobles, claiming the right to judge their quarrels, and granting charters to the towns—which were now beginning to rebel against feudal masters, whether dukes or bishops, and to demand a civic life of their own. And Louis VI had done even more. He had begun to solidify the monarchy by actual force of arms. In his struggles with the great Crown vassals, whose feudal rights were virtually the law in France, the King was often victorious. His son, Louis VII, a much milder personage, a devout but unsuccessful crusader, the unlucky husband of Eleanor of Aquitaine, carried on this policy. With the advice of Abbot Suger, his wise minister, he became the champion of many towns and abbeys against fierce lords whose grasping greed mocked at justice or chivalry.

When young Philippe was crowned at Reims, the actual royal domain was a narrow slice of territory extending north and south of Paris, from Senlis nearly to Bourges and from Dreux to Meaux. This tiny centre of France where the King ruled in person was bounded on all sides by duchies and counties practically independent. In the north, the county of Flanders ; in the west and south-west, Normandy and Anjou, hereditary possessions of the Norman-Angevin kings of England, to whom the Duke of Brittany paid homage ; in the east and south-east, the county of Champagne and the duchy of Burgundy. South of the Loire were the duchies of Aquitaine or Guienne, including Poitou, and of Gascony ; these, again, an appanage of the English Crown through the remarriage of their Duchess, Eleanor, with Henry II. The Count of Toulouse held Languedoc and part of Provence : most of the old Roman province, still foremost in civilization and in natural beauty, hardly belonged to France at all, but

was ruled then and for three more centuries by a semi-royal house of its own, closely connected with the Spanish kingdom of Aragon. It is necessary to look at a map of the old provinces of France if one is to realize what Philippe-Auguste fought for and what he won during the forty-three years of his reign.

It will at once be seen that the vast English possessions were the most formidable barrier in Philippe's path to supreme monarchy; the path along which his advance was slow, life-long, and gradually victorious. Many startling episodes in his life and reign, each a chapter in history, were to him of slight importance compared with that dream of following in the Imperial footsteps of Charlemagne.

There were Crusades. Philippe-Auguste joined in one of them, but without enthusiasm, for his shrewd mind had little faith in these holy wars and "he knew well," says an historian, "that his right place was at home." There were persecutions in France: first of the Jews, at a later time of the Albigeois, the Christian heretics of the southern provinces, where fanciful minds were always ready for daring and advanced thought. Philippe took no personal part in that terrible and bloody war, which arose from feudal as well as religious causes, and almost destroyed the separate independence and civilization of the South. But its results were to his advantage, and he did not desire another quarrel with the Pope, who had already placed France under an interdict to punish the King for his unjust and cruel behaviour to his second wife, the forsaken Ingelburga of Denmark. We may note that in this affair twelfth-century public opinion was strongly against Philippe and in favour of Pope Innocent III.

The King's first marriage with Isabelle of Hainault brought him Artois, the Vermandois, Amiens, and the

district of the Somme. These and other small conquests were not gained without fighting, for his wife's uncle, the Count of Flanders, was a powerful personage. But the chief struggle of the reign was with the chief vassal and rival, the King of England; and the chief triumphs over him and his allies were the siege of Château-Gaillard and the battle of Bouvines.

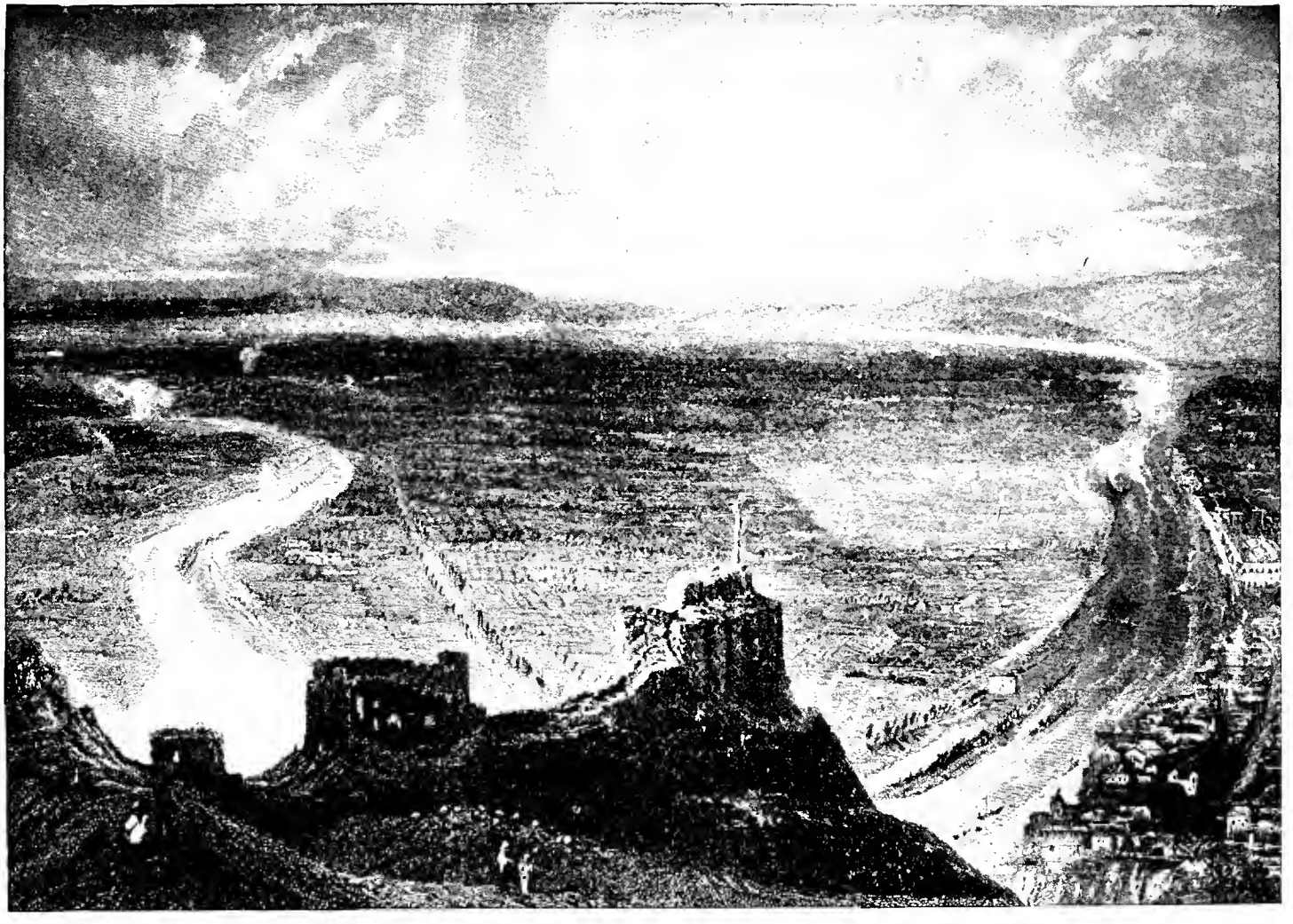
The history of Richard Lion-heart and his magnificent new castle must be read elsewhere: how he and Philippe-Auguste set out on the Third Crusade as friends; how Philippe seized the first excuse for returning to the land of his thought and hope, and there, while Richard lay in an Imperial prison, allied himself with the traitor John Lackland to despoil and divide Normandy; how Richard, being set free, returned to France, and how John, warned by Philippe—"The devil is loose; take care of yourself"—easily gained a pardon from his generous brother. Then, in that splendid position, where its ruined walls, at each hour grey, or pink, or apricot-yellow, still with a 'saucy' air command the winding Seine, Richard built his Château-Gaillard to defend Rouen, his Norman capital, against the French king. The story goes that Philippe cried: "I will take it, were the walls of iron!" and that Richard retorted, hearing this: "I would hold it, were the walls of butter!" He had no chance. The arrow at Chaluz ended his heroic life when his castle, his 'daughter,' was but one year old. The defence was left to John, his unworthy successor.

Philippe took up the cause of young Arthur, son of Geoffrey, the rightful heir, and on the boy's mysterious death cited John to answer before his suzerain for the murder. John refused. Philippe declared his fiefs confiscated to the French Crown, and marched into Normandy.

Château-Gaillard was not a castle only; it was a great fortress, including the villages of Les Andelys, an island in the Seine, and the peninsula formed by the sudden bend of the river. A stockade of piles, three deep, stopped navigation, so that it was next to impossible for an enemy to approach Rouen by the river or by either of its banks. The castle itself was supposed to be impregnable; the walls of the keep were nine yards thick, and the outer defences were planned with extraordinary skill. Richard Lion-heart was an engineer of genius. But he was not there to guard his glorious work. John was a luckless coward, and Philippe was a clever and resolute soldier. To him the taking of Château-Gaillard was a necessary step in the making of the monarchy.

He invested the fortress in August 1203. He soon destroyed the river defences, having seized the peninsula without interference from John; it was indeed scarcely defended. After some weak opposition, which soon ceased, John allowed the island and the village of Petit-Andely to fall into the hands of the French. Then he retired, leaving the castle and its brave garrison to their fate.

In the shortening autumn days provisions became scarce, and the English men-at-arms were not the chief sufferers. Twelve hundred miserable people, inhabitants of Petit-Andely, chiefly women and children, were driven out of the village and attempted to take refuge in the castle. But the English governor could not keep them. Shut into the narrow space between the chalk cliff on which the castle stood and the river, refused leave to pass by English and French alike, these poor creatures died by hundreds of cold and starvation. At length, when half were dead, King Philippe took pity on the survivors, sent them food, and allowed them to escape through his lines. Then he



The Château Gaillard

From the picture by J. M. W. Turner in the "Seine et Loire" series

established his camp round the walls for the winter, and it was not till February 1204 that he began the actual attack on the castle from the high ground on the south-east which finally decided the fate of Château-Gaillard and of Normandy. The garrison made a most gallant defence, but after a month's hard fighting and storming the great keep itself was taken and the siege was at an end. After that a few months saw Normandy, Anjou, Poitou, Touraine, and other important fiefs added to the territory of the kingdom of France.

Ten years later, in the summer of 1214, Philippe had to defend himself against a strong coalition of all his enemies. John of England landed at La Rochelle to invade Poitou. The Emperor Otto IV, with Ferrand, Count of Flanders, and other north-eastern magnates, discontented French nobles and citizens, men of Lorraine, German and Italian mercenaries, an English force under the Earl of Salisbury, altogether an army of some 50,000 men, marched through Flanders on their way to Paris, the heart of the kingdom—the way of many invasions since that time. And these were not days when all France stood together, sure of herself, faithful to her rulers. Several of the nobles who now led their fighting followers against the King were Crown vassals in rebellion against his new and growing power.

Philippe sent his son Louis to oppose King John in the west, and advanced to meet his eastern enemies with a smaller but most valiant army of his own. The Duke of Burgundy rode with him; many counts and barons; "great store of other good knights"; warlike bishops and abbots who broke heads and limbs gladly, though their calling forbade them to shed blood; best of all, a crowd of brave citizens, the militia of Amiens, Beauvais, Compiègne, Arras, Soissons, and other towns, in whom the

spirit of patriotism was already beginning to burn with a clear flame.

In the August heat this French army rode forward through the forests and over the plains we now know so well. We can imagine the heavy horses with their gay trappings jostling in the roads, the chain armour of the knights, their pointed shields, coloured plumes, surcoats blazoned with some device, pennons on bright lances shaking in the sun. In advance rode the Sire de Montigny, representing the abbey of Saint-Denis and bearing folded about his neck its famous banner, the *oriflamme*, which led the French armies for three hundred years, from Louis VI to Charles VI and the fatal day of Agincourt. Displayed on a gilded lance at the onset of battle, the *oriflamme* was of flame-red silk without embroidery, cut in three long points and tied with knots of green.

The armies met at the bridge of Bouvines, a village between Lille and Tournay; and the story goes that the King rested beneath an ash-tree, in the shadow of a small chapel, before leading his men into combat. It appears from tradition that he doubted even now the loyalty of some of the nobles who followed him. The power of these feudal magnates was still formidable; their pride and ambition were immeasurable. The foremost of those whom Philippe distrusted—not without cause, as his grandson knew—was Enguerrand the Great, Sire de Coucy, the builder of the splendid castle it was left for modern Huns to batter down, and the author of the proud saying:

> Je suis ni Roy ni Prince aussy:
> Je suis le Seigneur de Coucy.

They say that after Mass that morning Philippe laid his crown upon the altar in the sight of his barons ready for

battle, and, standing near by, proclaimed aloud that the worthiest among them had only to advance, take, and wear it. No man came forward. Then the King caused a loaf of bread to be cut into pieces and invited his true friends to eat with him, remembering the Apostles who ate with Our Lord. But if there were any traitors present, or men of evil thoughts, they were forbidden to draw near. The barons rushed as one man to take the bread, those whom the King had suspected foremost among them; Enguerrand de Coucy first of all. Then the King was 'exceeding glad' and told them how greatly he loved them. And they cried to him to ride boldly into battle, for they were ready to die with him.

They kept their word, and the fight began merrily, while the *oriflamme* fluttered in the sunshine and the King's chaplains sang psalms in the rear. On both sides of the bridge the warriors attacked each other, fighting with swords, daggers, and pikes in a furious *mêlée*. At first the knights in the Emperor's army were too proud to measure weapons with the gallant militia of the French towns, but soon they were forced to do so and the fighting became general. The Bishop of Beauvais fought like a lion and felled the Earl of Salisbury with his episcopal mace. Both the Emperor and the King were unhorsed and narrowly escaped death by stabbing. The Emperor fled from the field and his dukes and princes galloped after him. The Counts of Flanders and Boulogne were taken prisoner. The English force held out longest; but in the end the coalition was thoroughly beaten, and Philippe-Auguste, in this battle of a few hours, had not only gained glory for himself and his dynasty but had proved to France that she was a nation, and as such able to defy her national enemies. And by the way, the English Great Charter was a direct result of the battle of Bouvines.

Philippe returned to his city of Paris with all the triumph of a conqueror: bells ringing, country roads strewn with flowers, folk running from the villages to stare and rejoice. Even more attractive than the sight of the King and his battered warriors was that of the "fat and mournful" Count of Flanders as they carried him, chained in a horse-litter, to his prison in the new royal fortress.

> "Lors fut Ferrand tout enferré
> Dans la tour du Louvre enserré!"

sang the witty citizens of Paris.

For the capital, Philippe-Auguste did very much the same as for the kingdom: he guarded and completed it. Paris had grown in size during these centuries, spreading over the northern and southern hills. The University was already founded; the cathedral of Notre-Dame was in progress of building. But the city was neither enclosed nor fortified; it was a confused labyrinth of unpaved streets and lanes, straggling among fields and gardens, here and there a church and a burial-ground, farther out a great monastery, such as St Germain of the Meadows, standing in its own wide domain. The city had suffered terribly from visitations of storm and flood during the early years of the thirteenth century. In 1206, the chronicles tell us, it was entirely inundated, and its foundations so shaken that the houses became a peril. Even the one stone bridge, the Petit-Pont, was half destroyed and—so we are told—only remained standing to allow of the passage of the shrine of Sainte-Geneviève and the weeping, praying procession that followed her. In a former flood two of the bridges were carried entirely away; overweighted with houses and shops as they were then and for many later centuries, they could not stand against the

great pressure of the water: on that occasion King Philippe had to fly from his palace on the Island to the Hill of Sainte-Geneviève.

His works and buildings, if they could not ensure the city against such ravages as these, gave it much strength, security, and beauty. His new castle of the Louvre, a solid keep with corner towers—

> Le vieux Louvre,
> Large et lourd

—was really for defence, a chief bastion, it seems, in the long mòated wall he built all round central Paris, with towers at intervals—of which traces still remain—a beautiful wall of stone, with a gate at the end of each principal street, formerly unguarded from suburbs and country. He also paved the streets, and between his new wall and the mass of buildings he left space for market-gardens to supply the city. It was said—and it was a wonderful thing for those times—that every man received fair compensation whose house or property was interfered with by the royal improvements.

Learned men, poets, writers of romance and of history, builders, and masters in all arts flourished in France under her first really great king. Though at the infinite distance of inferior character which no cleverness could bridge, Philippe-Auguste fulfilled something of his youthful aspiration—to follow in the footsteps of Charlemagne. Under him France became France, and the old feudal system of unjust privilege began slowly to give place to national law.

CHAPTER VI

A MOTHER AND SON

That daughter there of Spain, the Lady Blanch,
Is niece to England. SHAKESPEARE

At the end of the First Renaissance, France was fairer, richer, freer than she had been for a thousand years, full of liberties, poems, and cathedrals. MARY DUCLAUX

WE all know "the Lady Blanch," paragon among princesses, suggested by the blunt yet diplomatic First Citizen of Angers as a bride for Louis of France. Perhaps we do not always picture that same lady as "Blanche of Castile," best of mothers to the best of men and kings, Louis IX.

The Citizen spoke freely of her "beauty, virtue, birth," and one may notice that she showed wit and wisdom beyond her years—for she, like the young son of Philippe-Auguste, was a mere child at the time—in the opinion she formed and expressed of her future husband:

> Further I will not flatter you, my lord,
> That all I see in you is worthy love,
> Than this: that nothing do I see in you,
> Though churlish thoughts themselves should be
> your judge,
> That I can find should merit any hate.

Shakespeare knew the character of Louis VIII, oddly surnamed 'the Lion'—some historians say 'in derision,' others because of his stoutly obstinate copying of Philippe-Auguste. Perhaps his youthful invasion of England may have inspired flatterers. He marched up and down his kingdom a good deal, led another crusade against the un-

lucky Albigeois, conquered more territory for the Crown and appointed royal officers to overawe the nobles. To this colourless Capet prince, whose chief merits were loyalty to his father and entire trust in his wife, the Lady Blanche was married for twenty-six years. Her husband reigned for only three of those years. She became Regent of France in the year 1226; the mother of six children, of whom Louis, the eldest, was then eleven years old.

To the Spanish-Angevin princess, the granddaughter of the great King Henry II and his brilliant wife from Aquitaine, whose daughter Eleanor married Alfonso the Noble of Castile, France owed her glorious St Louis, in whom "chivalry received its crown." From her grandfather Blanche inherited her resolute mind and statesmanship; from her grandmother, not only the beauty and attractiveness that even her enemies could not resist, but perhaps the less charming qualities of which her daughter-in-law was to have experience.

Suddenly, for her husband's death was unexpected—and not without a touch of mystery—Queen Blanche found herself the ruler of a country far from peaceful or united, in spite of the foundations so strongly laid by Philippe-Auguste and his son.

On the surface the advance was splendid: there were prosperous cities that held great fairs and whose merchants travelled to and from all lands, trading with the East, with Spain, Italy, England. The crusaders had brought back the secrets of Eastern manufactures, beautiful things in glass, silk, linen, jewellers' work in gold, precious stones, and enamel; rare fruits and flowers. The University of Paris was even now not alone in attracting thousands of students, an unruly crowd but passionate for learning; Orléans had begun to teach Roman law, a marvellous revival, and chemistry, medicine, alchemy, astrology,

even magic, could be studied at other local universities. These latter arts were not encouraged by the Church; but if she looked suspiciously on such gropings of the human spirit, her own work at this time was magnificent. The cathedrals, glorious in carving and colour, were the proofs and homes of a religious enthusiasm never equalled later; the many abbeys and convents, especially those of St Benedict, were centres of study, charity, and work; and by this time the followers of St Francis and St Dominic, in all their fresh fervour, were travelling the roads and preaching the Gospel. Famous poems, romances, and chronicles were being written; the civilized arts and manners of daily life, no longer a monopoly of the South, where the Courts of Love and the music of the troubadours fell silent in the cruel Albigensian wars, had spread themselves over France. There was luxury in castle and town; but still the feudal barons watched all changes grudgingly, catching at any chance of recovering their power, and still the roads were unsafe, and still, though thousands of serfs had been freed by royal decree, the poor cultivators were at the mercy of their lords. For the frowning castle was but a hundred yards away; Paris and the king's justice, perhaps a hundred leagues.

Such was the country through which the Lady Blanche and her boy rode hard for Reims, where all the great Crown vassals were summoned to assist at his coronation on Advent Sunday, 1226. But they did not come. Only three hundred knights attended the little King to the cathedral, all in its new splendour, for the crowning of the best ruler France ever had. The great nobles held aloof, determined to show at once that they would yield no obedience to a woman. And now France might have proved the truth of the Preacher's saying, "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child," for she

would have fallen back under the selfish tyranny of a thousand masters, had the Regent been of a weaker strain.

The rebellious barons assembled themselves, Henry III of England, holding the fief of Aquitaine, being their nominal head. They were strong enough without him. The splendid Count Thibaut of Champagne was their leader, and among the foremost were Enguerrand de Coucy—Bouvines forgotten—Hugues de Lusignan, who married the widow of King John, Raymond VII of Toulouse, chief magnate of the South. They gathered an army and attempted to cut off the young King from his capital.

At first, it would seem, Queen Blanche was hardly strong enough to meet them in the field. But she had other weapons, readier to her hand than swords and cross-bows. It was not now, one can well believe, that the Count of Champagne, Thibaut le Chansonnier, chief of *trouvères*, successor of the troubadours, was first attracted by the most beautiful and cleverest woman of her day. There is a story that when King Louis VIII lay dying of camp-fever men whispered of poison, and pointed to Thibaut of Champagne.

The Court, with a weak following of loyal nobles, was at the royal castle of Montlhéry, not far south of Paris. The rebel army was strongly posted on the Seine, not many leagues away. From the one to the other a secret messenger rode in dark night. It was a service of danger, for more reasons than one: the Regent risked grave misunderstanding from her own friends, had her plan become known. But in that age of chivalry she had many a gallant young man among her people who would do her bidding without a questioning thought; and one of these proved worthy of her trust.

The King and his mother sat on two high chairs in the vaulted hall, ladies and knights and hooded chaplains standing round, little dogs playing at their feet. Evening had closed in and the light was dim, logs blazing fitfully, gusts of wind blowing the torches. Outside, round about the towers, night-birds shrieked now and then. The Queen's beautiful, dark-browed face was strained with anxiety, which her attendants, naturally, thought they understood. Louis, in purple gown and royal mantle and cap of blue, his light brown hair hanging down on each side of his thin young face, laughed as he listened to a story a courtier told him. But there was a lack of life in the royal party, for Paris was barred to them.

On this scene there suddenly enters a strange minstrel, a minstrel from the South, they say; a dark man dressed in green, with glowing eyes which he hardly lifts from the rush-strewn floor. He is a welcome distraction: they bring him a cushion at the Queen's feet; he touches his small harp and sings in a lovely voice a romance of the southern mountains and sea, of a crusader's return to his castle and his love; somewhat tragical and old-fashioned, unlike the lighter modern nature-music of the *trouvères*, but pleasing to Queen Blanche with her serious Spanish blood. At least, so it would seem; for the stern face softens, a faint rose-flush rises to the pale cheeks, and presently the Queen bends from her height and speaks to the minstrel, perhaps asking for news from the South. And since he appears unwilling to answer aloud, she waves her courtiers back, and while the boy-king, weary of those dismal strains, escapes gladly by her leave with his dogs, she holds a long, low parley under curious eyes with the unknown or disguised singer. Not till after he had left the castle as mysteriously as he entered it did the loyal group there ask itself, had any man in France such a singing

voice, such a faultless touch on the strings as Count Thibaut of Champagne ?

The royal party travelled unmolested to Paris, whither Queen Blanche had already sent messengers. To make the road safe for the King the men of Paris had marched out in thousands to guard it. Years after Louis IX told his friend and chronicler, the Sieur de Joinville, how " the road was thronged with people, armed and unarmed, all loudly praying to Our Lord to give him a long life and to defend him from his enemies." An old illumination shows us the bright face of the boy as he sits opposite his mother in a kind of wheeled chariot drawn by led horses, and looks out on the heads, bare or tall-hatted, the waving, welcoming hands of his faithful citizens.

The war between Queen Blanche and the nobles dragged on for several years ; but Count Thibaut's sudden rally to the King's cause, and the loyalty of Paris and other large towns, made the royal victory finally certain. Under his mother's constant and careful training, the delicate lad grew into the man of strong moral character, wise judgment, unflinching faith, whose plain and humorous speech and fearlessly righteous acts, even in opposition, when necessary, to bishops and archbishops, are written in the pages of Joinville. Blanche, in whom wisdom dwelt with prudence, was the fount and origin of all. She was the chief of her son's tutors : he sat at her feet in the old palace, diligently learning, a bridge only dividing him from the hill of the University and the famous Rue du Fouarre, where the students in their crowds, boys and young men from every province and nation, in later years the great Dante himself, lounged on bundles of straw and listened to their professors shouting Latin from windows in beetling gables above.

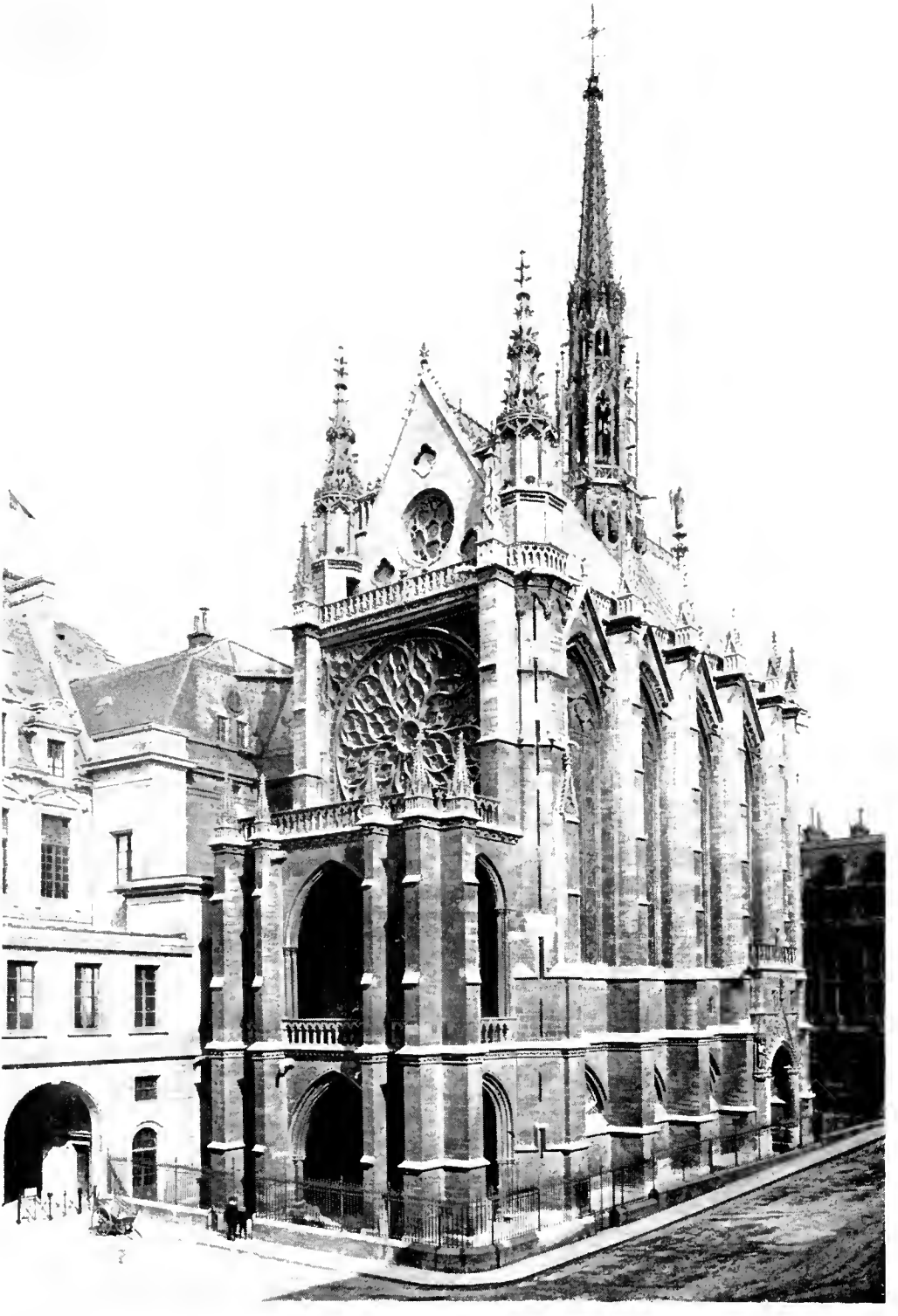
So Louis IX grew up under the shadow of Notre-Dame

—still unfinished—and in the midst of the noisy, eager, independent city that loved him. Those years of his youth and early manhood may well have been, even before she had reduced the number and power of his enemies and victoriously ended the long struggle with the South, the happiest years of life for the Lady Blanche.

Unluckily, to her many and great virtues was added the jealous temperament not rare in women of strong character. It was her duty to find a wife for her eldest son, and in marrying him to Marguerite of Provence, some years younger than himself and childish at that, she perhaps flattered herself that Louis would remain as much hers as ever. And indeed he never failed in devotion to his mother. But he fell in love with his little wife, who was a singularly charming girl, and it must be owned that Blanche behaved as badly as any mother-in-law of fiction, treating Marguerite with excessive harshness and doing her best to keep the two young creatures apart, so that they were actually driven to secret meetings on winding castle stairs.

When King Louis, after a serious illness, undertook the Seventh Crusade, and when his mother, left once more Regent of France, "made as great mourning as though he lay dead before her eyes," it may have been a bitter drop in her cup that the Queen sailed with him. But Blanche had reason to mourn, for she never saw her son again.

The sad, entrancing story of St Louis and his two Crusades ranks high in the Christian romance of the Holy Places. But the aspect of the Seventh Crusade that most concerns French history is the effect of these wars on the King's own character. Always heroic, generous, and utterly unselfish, this earnest soldier of the Cross returned to France after six years, saddened by failure, by the conduct of his brothers, by his mother's death in his absence,



The Sainte-Chapelle 64

X Photo

but with all his noble qualities strengthened, his religion deepened, a keener sense of duty to his people and a higher wisdom in fulfilling it.

Now we see him as the ideal king, whose right to that eminence has not been disputed by the most cold-blooded of historians. It has been said that if Philippe-Auguste created the monarchy, his grandson breathed into it the enthusiasm of life and showed what it could be. The King's justice meant safety for the people; the King's peace meant the freedom of the roads. His officers, like Charlemagne's, were everywhere; his judgments were unquestioned, except by evil-doers; his laws were supreme. The feudal nobles met their match in this delicate, gentle-mannered man, who "could even bear to have the truth told him." Old Enguerrand de Coucy, proudest of barons, had hanged three students in a row for killing rabbits on his domain. He was shut up in the Louvre and condemned to death, being fortunate to escape with a heavy fine and the loss of his baronial rights.

Tradition and Joinville show us the King, that glory of the Middle Ages, sitting in the Forest of Vincennes or the gardens of Paris, dressed in a blue camel's hair coat and a cloak of black taffety, "his hair well combed . . . and a hat of white peacock's feathers upon his head," surrounded by citizens and country-folks, who might talk with him and bring him their requests without any go-between. These were his ways with the smaller people; but when he received foreign princes and great barons his Court was splendid and his manner stately.

There were not lacking scornful spirits who complained of the King's religious observances, of the money he gave to churches and abbeys, of the hours he spent on his knees in that exquisite Sainte-Chapelle, the gem of his time, which he had built as a shrine for the great relic, the

Crown of Thorns, sent to him from Constantinople. There is a story that a woman who came one day to plead before him—perhaps under the oak at Vincennes—said to him: "Fie! *thou* King of France! Some one else should be king! Thou art only a king of friars and preachers, priests and clerks. 'Tis pity thou art King of France, and 'tis a marvel they don't put thee out of the kingdom."

The King's sergeants were about to drive the woman forth with blows, but Louis forbade them to touch her, and answered her, smiling: "Thou sayest well. I am not worthy to be king, and had it pleased Our Lord, another might have been king who would have known better how to govern."

Then he ordered that money should be given her, and sent her away in peace.

The King's best friends might have perceived some grain of truth in the woman's complaint when in spite of all their prayers he left the kingdom that needed him so sorely, to embark, already ill, on that last useless Crusade from which he was brought back in sorrowful pomp to his tomb at Saint-Denis.

Joinville in old age lamented that never again, since the good King forsook France, had the country been what it was in his day, "at peace within itself and with its neighbours."

CHAPTER VII

THE PROVOST OF THE MERCHANTS

Cette ville
Aux longs cris,
Qui profile
Son front gris,
Des toits frêles,
Cent tourelles,
Clochers grêles,
C'est Paris!

VICTOR HUGO

A YOUNG prince rode from Poitou to Paris in the early autumn weather.

France was at her loveliest in those 'crystal days,' as they call them in the South-west, the woods touched with gold, not so much spread under a blue sky as bathed in an immeasurable height of blue air. The low green valleys of the streams were already cold, but on the heights, the purple and almost trackless moors, the bare stony hills, there was glorious September sunshine. Now a long bridge crossed a wide river creeping among sand-banks, and a fortified lane climbed from its head to some white town or city. Now the road dived through narrow lanes edged by stone walls, above which vineyards, ready for the vintage, but neglected and straggling, climbed chalky slopes to the sky. Now a winding track through marshy country full of reeds ended in a forest so thick that the turrets of a castle hidden among the bronzing oak-boughs rose a sudden apparition. Then a wide plain with distant shining towns, with scattered villages and some

attempt at cultivated fields, spread to the horizon. But in all that ride through the pleasant land of France hardly a man, woman, or child was to be seen. For it was not very long since the Black Death had destroyed a third part of the people: and now also on every side, in ruin and loneliness, were the signs of desolating war. No corn, no cattle: and any human being that peered from cover, any labourer, armed with his scythe, who glared when the hoofs clattered by, expected to see yet another band of brigands, French or English or foreign, the dreaded Free Companies, ready to tear the last morsel from his children's mouths and to drive his last thin beast from its straw shelter.

For France was in the seventeenth year of the Hundred Years War; and the prince who rode to Paris was Charles the Dauphin flying from the battle-field of Poitiers, where his father, King Jean le Bon, had been taken prisoner by Edward the Black Prince, and where the rashness of the chivalry of France had lost the day for their unhappy country.

A heavy task lay on the shoulders of this lad of twenty, now Lieutenant of the kingdom. In later years he was known as Charles the Wise, and was probably the best King of France since his ancestor St Louis. But it was a dismal, thin-faced, unhealthy youth who now, slouching on his horse's neck, galloped with a few followers to Paris to meet the hurriedly summoned States-General, hoping by their means to raise money for his father's huge ransom and to carry on the war. A truce with England would give him time: and France surely would not be content with threatened terms of peace which would leave her a smaller and weaker country than in the days of Philippe-Auguste. Yet who could tell? Most of her great men were dead; many of the living, released on hard conditions by the English, thought of nothing but how to

grind out of the bones of their poor neighbours the ransom they owed. And the towns, the one hope, the merchants, the traders, the hated Jews with their money-bags—would they pour out gold to save France? That depended on the humour of the Three Estates, first convoked by Philippe le Bel, for his own ends, in 1302. They were not too friendly in these days to the claims of royalty. They had already quarrelled with King Jean as to a fresh levy of taxes; and at the head of the opposition stood a strong man called Étienne Marcel, the Provost of the Merchants of Paris.

Approaching the city by the old road between the south-western hills—partly clothed with vineyards and studded with a few of that ring of windmills which surrounded old Paris—Charles the Dauphin called to his side his two chief counsellors, both high officers of the Crown, Robert de Clermont, Marshal of Normandy, and Jean de Conflans, Marshal of Champagne. To these men, speaking with his nervous, twisted smile, he confided his fear of Marcel and his influence with the Estates. They were a pair of splendid nobles, fierce and gay; the usual pattern of French knighthood in the mid-fourteenth century, which flaunted in bright colours and played at war as a game. One can well believe that they laughed the boy's uneasiness to scorn.

A great crowd had gathered at the gate of the spired and gabled city: there were clergy and lawyers in procession; there were the trade guilds with their banners, a solid company; there was a prodigiously noisy and pushing mass of University students, for once taking a holiday from fighting the monks of Saint-Germain-des-Prés for the enjoyment of their pleasant meadows; and surging from every lane, filling the narrow streets where dogs fought and pigs squealed and routed in the gutter, were the low people

of Paris in their thousands; squalid, diseased, with faces as of creatures only fit for the vast, overflowing Cemetery of the Innocents on the other side of the river.

It was not a kindly welcome that this varied crowd offered to the Prince who had fled from Poitiers. It might be outwardly respectful; but the meaner sort snarled and hissed, and many bitter words were smothered in the general hubbub and drowned by the booming and jangling of bells from a hundred steeples. And the temper of the Parisians was mirrored in the face of the ruler of Paris, the Provost of the Merchants, Étienne Marcel.

He met the Dauphin, riding on a mule: a dark, tall man, with heavy features and an obstinate jaw. There may have been something of the old Roman in his square brow and frowning eyes; for it has been suggested that his ancestors were the Marcelli of Rome; but this seems to be no more than an instance of the imagination which plays a delightful part in history. Be that as it may, this chief of the citizens of Paris reminds one of popular leaders in an age before France was a nation, and the type has often repeated itself since his day.

Marcel received the Dauphin in the city's name and attended him to the palace—still, though enlarged, the old royal palace on the Island, the centre of the city, its windows looking down the river, where Philippe-Auguste judged and St Louis studied and prayed. The Louvre, little altered in these two centuries, was still a fortress-prison rather than a residence; and now, farther east, on the Place de Grève, a fine old building called the Maison des Piliers was being transformed by Marcel into the first Hôtel de Ville, the Guildhall of Paris and the heart of her later history.

In successive sittings of the States-General through that autumn and winter of 1356 the Dauphin Charles tried

vainly to gain his ends with a most troublesome assembly. For the First Estate, the nobles, were few and weak; the Second Estate, the clergy, were divided; and the Third Estate, the burghers of Paris and the large towns, under Marcel's guidance, were bent on flouting the royal authority.

This younger, Valois branch of the House of Capet, which, through a revived law of the Salian Franks barring women from the possession of land, had succeeded the sons of Philippe le Bel—hence the Hundred Years War—hardly ever gained the nation's confidence to the same degree as the old kings before them. To a frequent strain of wildness that displeased the rising *bourgeoisie* they mostly added forgetfulness of the doctrine, preached and lived by St Louis, that a true king must reign as the father of his people.

The Estates replied to the Dauphin's requests by demands of their own, covering all the discontents and miseries of the kingdom. In the spring, as the only means of obtaining his needed money, Charles was forced into an empty assent to drastic reforming ordinances which neither he nor his father could ever have carried out. For they were so far in advance of the times as to amount to revolution; they made the Estates masters of France, destroyed the privileges of the nobles and restricted those of the King.

Marcel was in bitter earnest, and reforms were desperately needed. Yet he was hardly patriotic; for that moment, France lying at the feet of the victorious English King, was one for realizing old duties rather than claiming new rights. Apparently France thought thus, in spite of her sufferings, for Marcel's tug-of-war with the Dauphin had not lasted many months when the Provost began to know that he and his burghers were almost alone in their

obstinate bargaining. A few bishops, especially those of Paris and Laon, were of his party, and one or two nobles; but the larger towns did not care to be ruled by Paris, the country people were dumb, and the royal cause, on the whole, held its own.

The doubt of final success seems to have lashed Marcel to fury. He set to work to fortify Paris, digging ditches and building the new wall, finished later by Charles V, to enclose the city, which had far outgrown that of Philippe-Auguste. He allied himself with Charles le Mauvais, King of Navarre, the Dauphin's imprisoned cousin and enemy, fetching him to Paris, where his clever tongue harangued the people in the interest of the Third Estate and in his own. This and other steps led on to a desperate deed by which Marcel meant to terrify the Dauphin, but only advanced his own failure and ruin.

Paris was growling, as her way is; stormy crowds capped with the Provost's colours, red and blue, were building barricades at the head of the streets. News ran round that the Dauphin was betraying the city; that there would be no reforms; that things were growing worse, for the coin of the realm was to be thinner; that Charles of Navarre would be a better king than Charles of Valois, who listened to evil counsellors and did not trust the people. This at least was not true, for the young Prince had ventured almost alone among the angry crowds to plead his own and his captive father's cause against Étienne Marcel.

It was a day in February 1358; a pale sun shining, the river running fast and full. The Dauphin had removed for safety to the Louvre and was holding his small Court there, a few bishops and nobles standing round him, nearest of all his two staunch friends, Robert de Clermont and Jean de Conflans. They were consulting on the perils

of the situation. Some advised the Prince to leave the city, where he was half a prisoner, but Charles said nay to that. He was not willing to surrender Paris utterly to the Provost of the Merchants. Paris had been evilly led, but might come to a better mind, he said, and smiled on his friends; the sickly youth was far-sighted, with a kind of nervous courage. The two marshals applauded him: the very thought of giving way to a set of greasy shopkeeping knaves was odious to their proud spirits.

Then a great noise without announced the Provost of the Merchants, and Étienne Marcel entered the Dauphin's presence, attended by a number of burghers and hired men-at-arms.

There he stood, a big, tall figure in his gown of office, flushed face and dark threatening eyes shaded by the hood of red and blue. The pale Prince on the daïs, in gold brocade and ermine and velvet cap circled with gold, shrank before him; the little Court stared, defiant yet anxious, at the fierce following ready to enforce any demands this insolent Provost might make.

But the day of demands was over, except as disguising a violent resolve. Marcel attacked the Dauphin with sharp words of reproach. Why did he not take heed to the affairs of the kingdom? Why did he suffer France to be devastated by robbers, by the Free Companies, by the soldiers of two nations? He had inherited this realm: why did he not defend it?

"Right willingly would I defend it, had I the power or the means," the Dauphin answered him. "But I have nothing. Those who take the riches of the State must defend it."

Under the terrible eyes of Marcel his courtiers echoed his words; especially, we may well believe, the two nobles

whom the people's leader had already condemned. A few moments of bitter speech brought the scene to its tragic end.

"Do quickly what you came to do!" Marcel cried to his hired assassins.

They were ready, with swords drawn. As appointed, they rushed upon the two marshals where they stood at the Dauphin's side, cut them down, and killed them as they crashed at his feet, with such fury that their blood splashed on his brocaded robe. None of the Court dared defend them; the odds were too heavy; otherwise Marcel might then and there have met the death that awaited him a few months later. The young Prince fell back, sickened and terrified. Was his turn the next? The Provost told him he had nothing to fear; these men were evil traitors, slain by the will of the people. Snatching off his own parti-coloured hood, he flung it on Charles's head as a sign of protection. On his own head he placed the royal cap with its circlet of gold; and thus the King of Paris stalked forth to the Hôtel de Ville to boast of his deed to the Parisians assembled in the Place de Grève.

The Dauphin could not avenge the death of his friends; they say, indeed, that Marcel forced him publicly to acknowledge it just. One would like to disbelieve this; but Charles the Wise was a prudent personage, and it may have been the only way of safety.

Civil war followed the Dauphin's escape from Paris; the angry city and her Provost, with Charles the Bad as an ally, against the royal troops, such as they were, and the towns and castles of France. The chief sufferers, as always, were the poor folk of the country-side. And now, in the month of May, 'Jacques Bonhomme' in his thousands poured out from every village, every lonely forest hut and little hidden farm among burnt walls and

plundered fields, and began on his own account to spread death and ruin throughout the north-eastern provinces. War between the nobles and the burghers gave the peasants their opportunity: feudalism met its doom at the hands of a savage *jacquerie*. Many castles were stormed and pillaged and burnt; their inhabitants, even if only women and children, were massacred with awful cruelty.

As it happens so often in history, the innocent meet with punishment earned by the guilty. The wild bands, armed with scythes and forks and knives and iron-shod sticks, come stealing through the woods; their sudden horrid yells warn the frightened women; but no defence is possible; doors are burnt and battered in; the end of all things is upon them. They pay most pitifully for the tyrannies of their fathers, husbands, sons; for oppression and robbery by men-at-arms and companies; for all the losses and sorrows of 'Jaeques' and his children in these terribly troubled years.

Six weeks saw the end, though the great Provost held out a friendly hand to the peasants and even sent a small force to help them when they marched on Meaux. But the nobles, with the Dauphin at their head, and with the help of Charles of Navarre, who now began to see on which side his interest lay, defeated them so thoroughly that the leaders lost heart and the revolt was soon crushed. Not without a slaughter which was almost extermination. The wretched peasants were hunted like wild beasts through the forests. In a miniature of the time we are shown the details of their destruction at Meaux. From walls and bridge they are hurled dead or alive into the swirling waters of the Marne, while women crowd staring to street doors, giving God thanks in horror and pity for deliverance from that terror.

Six weeks more, and the stormy career of Étienne Marcel

was ended. Things were going badly in Paris ; there was no money and no food. The Provost saw his power dwindling : the Dauphin and the King of Navarre were at the gates. Knowing that Charles of Valois would never forgive the slayer of his friends, Marcel offered to receive Charles of Navarre into the city, to make him Captain of Paris and King of France. Le Mauvais, false to every cause but his own, was ready enough, and the last night of July was fixed for his secret entry by the fortress-gate of Saint-Denis.

Thither came the Provost in the darkness, and there, with the keys in his hands, he was met by a citizen named Jean Maillard and two others, these being loyal to the Dauphin, while Maillard, till now, had been on Marcel's side. Thus the plot had come to his ears, and he at least had no wish for a change of dynasty.

" Étienne, Étienne, what doest thou here at this hour ? "

" Jean, I am watching over the city that is in my care."

" Nay, thou art here for no good end. See, friends, he bears the keys and would betray the city ! "

" Thou liest, Jean Maillard."

" Thou liest thyself ! Treason, treason ! Ho ! help, friends ! "

There was a short but sharp struggle, for a party of Maillard's men were hidden behind the buttresses and now rushed forward and flung themselves on the Provost's guard. They say that Marcel would have fled, seeing that all was lost. But Jean Maillard struck him on the head with an axe and there he fell and died ; a strong figure in history, who in more peaceful times might have done much for the liberties of France.

So it was Charles the Wise, not Charles the Bad, who triumphantly entered the royal city in that August dawn of 1358.

CHAPTER VIII

A VANISHED PALACE

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate.
(Ah, let us mourn!—for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him desolate!)
And round about his home the glory
That blushed and bloomed,
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

EDGAR A. POE

THE historical romance of the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, years along which the war with England stretched its slow length, is centred in the wonderful dwelling made for himself by Charles V and called the Hôtel Saint-Paul—"the solemn hotel of great Diversions"—of which two hundred years later hardly anything remained. It pleased the King's fancy; he regarded it with "singular pleasure and affection." It was adapted from several large houses belonging to certain counts and archbishops, which formed a stately turreted group on the north bank of the Seine between the city boundary and the river-gate of Saint-Paul; stretching northward to the Rue Saint-Antoine and the newly built fortress of the Bastille, so that it included the old church and cemetery of Saint-Paul within the sweep of its garden walls.

A pleasant and delightful place it was; not a single or formal building, but a group of beautiful houses connected by galleries and trellised walks shaded with vines. The

wine made from the royal grapes was famous. The gardens and orchards supplied the palace: there were "apple, pear, and cherry trees, beds of rosemary and lavender, peas and beans, long arbours and fine bowers." There were towers for pigeons and yards for poultry brought from the royal farms to be fattened here for the royal table. There were also cages of wild and rare animals.

Within, the palace had all the richness of a time that in spite of wars and tumults had become luxurious; carved panelling, thick tapestries and curtains; high emblazoned chimney-pieces, painted and gilded beams, windows of coloured glass, with wire lattices to keep out the birds; furniture of leather and silk, beds ten or twelve feet square. There were music galleries and a library: in its quiet peace, shut away from city noises, sat Charles the Wise among shelves of precious manuscripts. His weak health kept him a prisoner; he cared little for riding and hunting, he hated battles, and did not even care to watch the tournaments with which his fighting nobles filled up the intervals of real war. Study was what he loved; history, philosophy, mathematics, astrology, and other sciences as then taught. These were his recreations. The Parisians outside his gates, curious about a King they seldom saw and could not understand, whispered strange things and gave him credit for dealings with the devil. Few men of his own time understood either Charles V or the quiet work for France that filled his reign.

At his accession a third of France was in English hands. When he died, the clever mode of warfare carried on by his favourite free-lance leader, the famous Bertrand du Guesclin, the sturdy Breton to whom war was a science, not a game, had almost driven out the invaders for the time. And at home Charles V reformed the whole system

of law and government. If the country was heavily taxed, its poor cultivators were left in peace, except for an occasional band of robbers; the Free Companies were driven away to fight elsewhere. The towns gained much that Étienne Marcel had demanded; they prospered, managing their own finances; their municipal officers were often ennobled, thus strengthening their rivalry with the feudal lords, who now found their master in the King. The Parliament of Paris became a high court of law, sitting permanently at the palace on the Island. These and other ordinances raised France to her feet, even in the midst of the Hundred Years War.

The Court of Charles V at the Hôtel Saint-Paul appears to have been quietly held, yet peaceful and gay. His Queen, Jeanne de Bourbon, was a good woman, in sympathy with her husband's tastes. Her ladies flitted about the gardens, the labyrinth of lovely rooms and galleries, like a number of bright-winged birds. It was the fashion to wear parti-coloured gowns, half red, half blue, with the family arms embroidered on each side in heraldic colours. The head-dress stood up in tall horns studded with jewels, a white veil flying; the sleeves of the short upper coat dangled from the shoulders in long ends like scarves.

The dashing nobles of France were not too welcome at Court, it seems; and they more willingly followed the King's brothers, the powerful Dukes of Burgundy, Berry, and Anjou, *les sires des fleurs-de-lys*. But all these had their lodging in or near the Hôtel Saint-Paul; and at times we hear of the King's stately rooms crowded with knights and barons, with foreign princes and ambassadors, so that there was scarcely room to turn. And among them moved the King's own valued counsellors, the red-robed lawyers and Parliament men, scornfully described as *les marmousets* by the party of the princes. Once at least princes

and barons and *marmousets*, in spite of their jealousies, had to join in doing honour to Bertrand du Guesclin, the ugly, rough, scientific little soldier whom Charles V placed above them all, making him Constable of France. This was in 1370. Ten years later the King buried the Constable in the royal abbey of Saint-Denis. A few weeks, and he was himself laid there. At a perilous time France lost both her wise King and her famous leader.

Among the younger women whom we may fancy haunting that magical Hôtel Saint-Paul, with her own songs on her lips, meeting, with love and laughter, in all the *douceur du joli mois de Mai*, the *riants verts yeux* of some beautiful young knight who had surprised her heart, was Christine de Pisan, daughter of the King's chief astrologer—some said wizard—who brought her from Venice as a child of five years old. She married a gentleman of Picardy—him of the laughing green eyes, possibly—and in later years, a widow, and known as a writer of genius, she wrote the best account that exists of the daily life of Charles V.

The King rose between six and seven, was combed and dressed, joking with his servants the while. After his private prayers he attended Mass at eight, with "solemn and melodious singing." Then, like St Louis, he received all manner of persons, rich and poor, many widows among them, and listened kindly to their requests, granting those that were reasonable. When not detained too long, he held his council before dinner, at which he ate and drank little, listening to the softest of music. Then during two hours he attended to business, received ambassadors, and gave every necessary audience; then slept for an hour; then amused himself and his friends among his special treasures, manuscripts, and curiosities, especially jewels, of which he was passionately fond. After vespers in summer he walked in the garden with the Queen and his children;

in winter he sat by the fire and listened to reading, historical, philosophical, scientific, till supper-time; then, after a short recreation, perhaps in the company of Master Thévenin, his favourite fool, at nine o'clock he went to bed.

It does not sound like an exciting life; but there was little strength of nerve or muscle in Charles the Wise; care and quiet only kept him alive to the age of forty-four. He did his best for his country, and it was much. On his death-bed he told his brothers that the condition of the poorer people weighed on his heart, and begged them to carry on his work by lifting off, as soon as might be, the heavy burden of the taxes.

Charles could not have spoken to men less likely to obey his wishes or to follow out his policy. The Duke of Burgundy, Philippe le Hardi, who had earned that appanage by fighting beside his father at Poitiers when Charles the Dauphin rode away, was the first of the line of bold, proud, ambitious princes who were to drag France down again into those depths of civil war which left her, after all the heroic work of du Guesclin and all the wise statecraft of Charles V, an easy prey to her enemies.

Burgundy's chief desire was to assure himself a strong dominion in the eastern provinces; Louis of Anjou, having seized the royal treasure, set out to conquer the Kingdom of Naples; Jean of Berry ruled the south of France. Each robbed the country, fighting for his own hand. And the two young boys, Charles VI and his brother, Louis of Orléans, motherless, for Queen Jeanne had died before her husband, were brought up in a vicious society, varied by the furious quarrels of their uncles, new oppressions of the people, riots in Paris, war on Flanders, futile attacks on England.

Paris had welcomed her handsome young King after

his coronation with decorated streets and fountains that poured out wine, milk, and rose-water. Now she rose in fury against the men who governed in his name, stormed the Hôtel de Ville, and murdered the tax-collectors. When the royal army returned victorious from Flanders she was punished like a captured city. Her strong gates were thrown down. An old writer says that Paris became like any village where folks could go out and in at any hour of the day or night. Added to this, enormous new taxes were imposed on the citizens. Paris became hungry and miserable, her streets filthy and pestiferous, while every kind of extravagant luxury reigned in the palaces within her walls.

Yet Paris loved Charles VI. He seems to have attracted men's hearts as Henry IV did, by kind looks and courteous, chivalrous manners. All through the long tragedy of intermittent madness, brought on by wild living, which clouded his reign of more than forty years, people never forgot that during four of those years he tried to be a good king. Young and ignorant, lately married to that white-faced, black-eyed woman from Bavaria, who was compared, as she passed through Paris, to a fairy from the old romances, a goddess from some pagan heaven, or a Virgin from the painted page of a missal, and who was to prove the curse of his life—Charles VI had the courage to shake himself free of his uncles and to recall his father's ministers, the *marmousets*, to power. Four years, and any small chance of peace and prosperity for France vanished one summer day in the glades of the forest near Le Mans, where the sight of a tall man rushing to his horse's head, crying out, "King, you are betrayed!" and the sound of a lance accidentally striking on armour, transformed the excitable prince of twenty-three into a raging madman who turned upon his brother and his suite, killing four men

before he could be tied down in a cart for the journey back to Paris. From this attack he seems to have recovered, but a year later the terrible affair known as the *Bal des Ardents*, a masquerade in which several of his companions were accidentally burnt to death, threw his weak brain into hopeless disorder.

Up to this time the Hôtel Saint-Paul was a place of delights; "great Diversions" indeed, though hardly 'solemn,' for it was here that Queen Isabelle held her scandalous *fêtes* and gathered round her the worst men and women in the kingdom, among whom Louis, Duke of Orléans, handsome, agreeable, and interesting, took a foremost place. Now the Hôtel became the home of a mad and melancholy king: men and women looked shuddering at its graceful towers and shining roofs and sunny spaces of greenery, and shed tears of pity for the unfortunate prince who still, through thirty miserable years, remained their *Bien-aimé* and in his lucid intervals desired their happiness.

In those days brain disease was more feared than understood, and though the King was not, like meaner patients, chained in a dark cellar on straw, but had a beautiful palace for his prison, he was treated with all the precautions of terror. If he refused to take off his clothes and go to bed, which was sometimes the case during several months, a dozen men with blackened faces would rush into the room, seize him, and undress him by force, he being too much frightened to resist them. At these bad times the Queen entirely deserted both him and her children, who went without food and clothing, they say, while she spent the royal revenues on herself and her favourites. Charles's one protecting friend was his sister-in-law, the good and unhappy Milanese lady Valentina Visconti, Duchess of Orléans, who never forsook him till a false accusation of

sorcery drove her away from the Court. Card-playing was his chief entertainment. Cards were printed for him —almost the first use of printing—by a certain Parisian painter named Gringonneur; "three packs of cards, gilt and variously coloured, with several devices, to be laid before the said Lord our King, for his amusement."

Through darkened windows the Hôtel Saint-Paul looked upon the long succession of tragical events which led Paris and all France down an ever-quickening descent to the worst years of the nation's history: the desperate quarrel between Louis of Orléans and his cousin Jean sans Peur, Duke of Burgundy, which ended one November night in the murder of Orléans by hired ruffians in the street; the Duke of Burgundy's successful bid for power and popularity, posing as the friend of the people; the rising against him of the Armagnac faction—named from the Comte d'Armagnae, whose daughter married the son of Orléans; the long struggle between these two parties, actual civil war, and terrible bloodshed, both in Paris and the country, till matters were forced to a clear issue by the English invasions under Henry V and his conquest of Normandy, the last blows which laid ruined France at the feet of her enemy.

Those darkened windows saw half France conquered, the Dukes of Burgundy, Jean sans Peur and his son Philippe le Bon, allying themselves with the English and accepting an English king in succession to Charles VI, the triumphal entry of Henry V into Paris, now his city, and his rejoicing Christmas there while the streets, not long since running with the blood of furious factions, were deserted and silent; no food, no fuel, pestilence slaying its thousands, wolves creeping through the broken walls, haunting the cemeteries, devouring children and the dead; church bells silent;—and then, within the walls of the palace itself, a

poor mad king signing the treaty which gave away his son's royal inheritance to an English child a few months old; his grandson, indeed, but with little right, beyond that of conquest, to the crown of France.

The conqueror did not live long to enjoy his glory. Henry V died at Vincennes in August 1422. Seven weeks later, within the walls of the Hôtel Saint-Paul, Charles VI left this troublesome world. Not a prince of his own family followed those sad remains to Saint-Denis; the curious, high-nosed visage of the chief mourner was that of John, Duke of Bedford, Regent of France and uncle of her new baby-king. The coffin was lowered into the vault; the broken staves of the attendants clattered down upon it. Then a loud proclamation rang through the arches of the old abbey-church, where so many kings already slept:

"God have mercy on the soul of the most high and excellent Prince Charles, King of France, sixth of the name, our natural and sovereign Lord! God grant long life to Henry, by the grace of God King of France and of England, our sovereign Lord!"

Charles the Dauphin, the true King of France, was wandering with a small army of friends in the forests of Berry and Poitou, nearly all France north of the Loire being now lost to him.

Jeanne d'Arc was ten years old.

CHAPTER IX

THE STORY OF THE MAID

Et maintenant voy, dont j'ai desplaisance,
Qu'il te convient maint grief mal soustenir.
Tresrestien, franc royaume de France.

CHARLES D'ORLÉANS

Gardant son cœur intact en pleine adversité ;
. . . . . .
Tenant tout un royaume en sa ténacité,
Vivant en plein mystère avec sagacité,
Mourant en plein martyre avec vivacité,
. . . . . .
La fille de Lorraine à nulle autre pareille.

CHARLES PÉGUY

FROM desolated cities and mournful palaces, from faction fights, murders, and betrayals, it is a refreshment to turn to that quiet village on the borders of Lorraine where the marvellous girl was born who restored the spirit of France and saved her country. Jeanne d'Arc stands, it has been said, at the confines of two ages. A double light shines upon her ; she "is bathed in the latest gleam of the dying Middle Ages, gilded by the first rays of the rising Renaissance." Her story is at once "incomparable legend and simple truth."

Brought up in a plain and kindly home like other little maidens of Domremy, Jeanne worked in house and fields and sometimes, like St Geneviève, kept her father's sheep. She never learned to read, but her mother, who taught her to weave and to sew, taught her also to believe and to pray. She loved her village church ; when its bell

rang far over the meadows the little shepherdess would kneel devoutly and say her prayers, like St Geneviève a thousand years before. But never, throughout her short life, would Jeanne have dreamed of comparing herself with anyone so ancient and so venerable. She would certainly have found it incredible that history would place her name even higher than that of the shepherdess of Nanterre.

Domremy lay near the frontier and on the highroad. News going and coming that way between Flanders and Italy, between North and South, passed constantly through the village, borne by travellers, soldiers, messengers ; thus the inhabitants heard of the desperate condition of France, the civil wars, the English victories, the conquest of Normandy, the occupation of Paris, the proclamation of an English king, the despairing struggle of Charles VII in the western provinces against English and Burgundians allied to take his crown and devour his country. And the village had its own experience. Its politics had always been royalist, therefore Armagnac. In 1428 it was attacked by a roving company of Burgundians, and the farmer, Jacques d'Arc, fled with his family into Lorraine. The little farm escaped destruction, though the church and most of the village was burnt. The home of Jeanne is still there, a place of pilgrimage, with its long sloping roof and low beams and shadowing fir-trees.

But Jeanne had known her mission several years before the adventure of 1428, which only served to make her more certain and more resolute. Ever since she was a child of thirteen the gardens and oak-woods of Domremy had been for her sacred ground where she saw great lights and visions of saints, St Michael, St Catherine, St Margaret, and heard their voices commanding her to go into France, to join the young King, to help him against his enemies,

and now especially to deliver his city of Orléans from the English, who were closely besieging it.

Such a mission, laid upon a young peasant girl, was sure to meet with the anger and derision of her family when declared to them. Her father's fury may be well understood. So may the rude laughter of Robert de Baudricourt, captain of the town of Vaucouleurs, when Jeanne appealed to him for an armed escort to make her journey possible. He told the friendly uncle who accompanied her that what the child needed was a good box on the ears! Nevertheless, when she came to him again early in the year 1429 he supplied her with the men and the arms she asked. Leaving parents, brothers, sisters, friends, and the old village with its garden full of unearthly lights and its fairy-haunted woods, Jeanne rode forth to cross France from the Meuse to the Loire, like a young knight on a Crusade, dressed as a boy, shepherdess turned soldier, a daily amazement, in her courage, modesty, charity, and religious devotion, to her rough companions on that dangerous ride.

The long yellow ruin of the castle of Chinon, where Charles VII then was, still crowns the ridge above the little town on the Vienne. Thither came Jeanne on an early day in March 1429. This is how she is described by one who loved her: "She was clad very simply, like the varlet of some lord of no great estate, in a black cap with a little silver brooch, a grey doublet, and black and grey hose, trussed up with many points; a sword of small price hung by her side. In stature she was something above the common height of women, her face brown with sun and wind, her eyes great, grey, and beautiful, beneath black brows, her lips red and smiling. In figure she seemed strong and shapely, but so slim—she being but seventeen years of age—that, were it not for her sweet girl's voice, and for the beauty of her grey eyes, she might

Jeanne d'Arc
Henri Chapu
Photo Alinari

well have passed for a page, her black hair being cut *en ronde*, as was and is the fashion among men-at-arms."

It was evening, and the castle hall glimmered with torches, when Jeanne was admitted to the presence of the King and Queen. Charles VII, a dismal, lethargic young man of six and twenty, withdrew himself among his lords and ladies; he would try the discernment of this mysterious maiden, who like some prophetess of old declared a threefold mission—to raise the siege of Orléans, to see her King crowned at Reims, to drive the English invaders from her country. It all sounded like a presumptuous dream in the ears of Charles and his Court. But the emergency was great, for the loss of Orléans would have been the last stroke of ruin. There could at least be no danger in hearing what the maiden had to say; and first, would she recognize her King among the crowd of nobles, many handsomer than himself, and one, the Sieur de la Trémoille, bigger and more gorgeous than the rest? That question was soon answered. Disregarding all others, Jeanne went straight to Charles, knelt at his feet, and addressing the uncrowned King as "gentle Dauphin," wished him long life and told him of her mission.

The accusation of witchcraft, fatal in the end, when joined with envy, hatred, and malice, to the wonderful career of the Maid, was not to be escaped even in these early days. Some of Charles's followers, and especially the churchmen, who could seldom understand any inspiration beyond their own, were inclined to say that she was a witch. But her courage, purity, nobleness, faith, and devotion disarmed all suspicion at this time. Theologians pronounced that there was no evil to be found in her; the common people and the soldiers acclaimed her as a saint.

And so the Maid rode with the royal army to Orléans.

She was clothed in white armour and carried a banner of white satin powdered with *fleurs-de-lys* and emblazoned with a picture of Our Lord holding the globe and worshipped by two angels bearing lilies: the device was *Jhesus Maria.* Her arms were a small axe and a consecrated sword marked with five crosses, which was found, by her direction, behind the high altar of the church of Sainte-Catherine de Fierbois, where she had stopped to pray on the journey from Domremy. That shining sword was never stained with blood, for Jeanne, always in the forefront of battle and more than once wounded, never killed a man. But it did not long remain with her, for she broke it, after the fruitless siege of Paris, in driving evil-doers from the camp; one of those ill omens which announced the tragic end of her mission.

During the march to the relief of Orléans no such fiery discipline was needed; in its enthusiasm for the saintly maiden the army reformed itself. Fierce old soldiers ceased to rob and swear, and became humble Christians, submissive to her every wish. Michelet describes how on the banks of the Loire, before an altar set up in the open air, in the lovely springtide of Touraine, the whole army heard Mass and confessed their sins. They became young as the Maid herself, he says, full of faith, ready to begin a new life. She could have led them wherever she would; not to Orléans only, but to Jerusalem.

Jeanne entered Orléans by the river on 29th April, and rode through the streets, waving her white banner aloft. It was evening, and torches flamed under the shadow of the old beetling houses on each side of the way. She had brought in a convoy of provisions, and the starving people, long besieged by the English, thronged upon her so that her horse could hardly push his way. They were wild with joy, sure that God would save not only Orléans, but

all France, by means of this miraculous Maid. And the besiegers without the walls did not deny the miracle-working power which had so suddenly changed the spirit of an army and a nation. But for them Jeanne was a witch, a sorceress, assisted by the Evil One, and two years later it was as a witch, alas ! in English eyes, an apostate, a worshipper of demons, that she met her martyrdom at Rouen.

For the present she was invincible. Inspired and led by her heroic courage, the royal army attacked the besiegers in their strongest posts, and by 8th May the English commanders had been driven with great slaughter from these defences and were retreating northward. Orléans was free, after a siege of a hundred and ninety days. Jeanne was wounded in the last attack, but she made nothing of this, though the arrow had pierced her neck through. The wound had hardly been dressed when she was on horseback again, encouraging her men. Five days later she was with the King at Tours, urging him to ride straight for his coronation at Reims, disregarding the fact that the English, with their allies the Burgundians, held most of the country he would pass through.

"In this counsel the Maid was alone, and this heroic folly was wisdom itself," says Michelet. But the cool-headed politicians who surrounded the King, La Trémoille and others—even the Duc d'Alençon, Jeanne's 'fair Duke,' as she called him, always her supporter—thought it advisable to go slowly, besieging small towns and driving out the English by degrees ; in other words, giving them time enough to organize resistance. In vain Jeanne warned the King, foretelling that twelve months would see the end of her own career.

Further successes silenced her enemies ; their jealousy could not stand against the enthusiastic crowds who came

hurrying from the South, as if on crusade or pilgrimage, eager to see the famous Maid and with her to lead their King to his coronation. Henry VI, King by conquest, had not been crowned within the sacred walls of Reims; and in French eyes that ceremony conferred a right divine.

It appears to have been the victory of Patay which convinced timid souls and discredited those who wished to linger on the Loire. The English under Talbot had retired from Beaugency and were on the plain of the Beauce, not then an expanse of waving corn, but a wild tract of country covered with low woods and bushy undergrowth in which the army could be and actually was hidden. Jeanne and her captains, the famous La Hire, Xaintrailles, Alençon, and the rest, rode up from the victorious assault of Jargeau in pursuit of an invisible enemy. And then occurred one of those magical incidents which so often throw on medieval French history a light from Fairyland and seem to link Jeanne the Maid with Clovis and Charlemagne. A stag, startled from his lair by the advancing French, fled in among the English and betrayed their position before the archers had had time to drive their protecting stakes. A furious French attack rode them down. The gallant Talbot surrendered to Xaintrailles, saying: "Now King Charles is master." Jeanne, dismounted and kneeling on the battle-field, comforted the dying and wept over the dead.

Sixty leagues of country in enemy occupation still divided the royal army from Reims. But town after town submitted or was easily taken; even Troyes, from which the prudent and the jealous once more counselled retirement to the Loire. On 17th July the Maid, holding her white banner, stood by the high altar in Reims Cathedral and saw her King anointed and crowned as successor of Charlemagne, and heard the shout of the great crowd that

filled the nave: "*Vive le Roi à jamais!*" They wept too, that crowd, when the girl-knight in her white armour knelt to pay homage, saying, with tears: "O gentle King, now is fulfilled the pleasure of God, who willed that I should raise the siege of Orléans and that I should lead you to this your city of Reims for your sacred coronation, showing that you are the true King to whom rightly belongs the kingdom of France!"

This was to be the zenith, the highest point, of the Maid's career of earthly victory. And she knew it. In that hour of triumph, when she had saved Orléans and all France south of the Loire, had crowned her King and discouraged his enemies, we meet with a pathetic touch of humanity. She is once more the country girl, the home child, the *petite bergerette* of Domremy. Reims was not very far from her home: she found herself in the old country, even among the old folk, for her relations and neighbours came to Reims to see the wonderful sight there.

"Ah!" she said, "if it were God's will that I might return to serve my father and mother, to keep the flocks once more with my sister and my brothers, who would so gladly see me again!"

But this was a mere dream, for her work was not done. France expected far more from "the Judith of the time," who was already honoured with medals, portraits, and statues, and was even mentioned in the services of the Church. It was rumoured that Jeanne, having saved France, would save Christendom, end all heresy and schism, and lead a final crusade against the Saracens. But first she must accomplish her mission of driving the English out of France. Her spirit, her influence, her personal leading were of inestimable value to the newly crowned King. She must remain with him, and he offered her any reward she chose to ask. Jeanne begged one favour, not

for herself, but for her native village: that Domremy might be made free for ever of the taxes which weighed the people down. This was granted. Till the Revolution destroyed all past privileges, however honourable their origin, Domremy's contribution was marked on the register of each succeeding year: "Néant, à cause de La Pucelle." This was the only solid recompense that Jeanne received from her countrymen.

The campaign continued, and on the whole with success. Jeanne's 'heroic folly'—again, probably, the truest wisdom—would have made a straight dash for Paris, but she was hindered by the intrigues and jealousies that surrounded the King. His courtiers, like Joseph's brethren, hated her dreams and her words, and envied her glory; and Charles was too lazy and self-indulgent to resist them. They played at truces with the English and Burgundians, and the fighting men were discouraged by their hesitations and delays; yet many of the northern towns were ready to open their gates to the King. When at last, in spite of the Court, Jeanne made her attack on Paris, it failed: she was wounded, and forced by royal orders to retire.

A few sad winter months, spent by the Court in inaction on the Loire, and then the Maid rode forth in spring to relieve Compiègne, threatened by the Duke of Burgundy. There, fighting heroically at the head of the tiny faithful troop who were all that was left to her by the commanders of the royal army, she was surrounded by the Burgundians and taken prisoner. Then, after a few months' captivity, she was sold to the English for ten thousand crowns in gold. A solemn *Te Deum* was sung in Paris, and the 'witch,' already condemned by the doctors of the University, was conveyed to Rouen and given over to the judgment of the ecclesiastical courts.

That long trial, that wicked condemnation, that awful

scene in the old market-place at Rouen on 30th May, 1431, are among the unforgettable things in history. Jeanne died at the stake; she died at the hands of the English; yet we may be glad to remember that when she begged for a cross it was an English soldier who made one by tying two sticks together, and that another English soldier cried out at the last terrible moment: "We are lost: we have burned a saint!"

He spoke more truly than he knew, and after five hundred years the world has come to think with him. The canonization of Jeanne d'Arc in St Peter's at Rome on 16th May, 1920, with all the ancient and splendid ceremonies of the Catholic Church, while adding a saint to the calendar, was a fine if tardy act of reparation for the injustice committed long ago.

As to her King and his nobles, they made no effort at the time to save the heroic girl, the incarnation of all that was best in France, the martyr for her country. It is true that in Jeanne's own century a new trial and complete vindication made her fame some amends. But it was left for much later generations to pay highest honour to "the gentlest of the gentle, the bravest of the brave, and the truest of the true."

CHAPTER X

A PATRIOT

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it my loving friends to keep!
Nought man could do, have I left undone:
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

ROBERT BROWNING

AVAILLANS cœurs rien impossible.

This was the motto of Jacques Cœur, the greatest merchant prince of the fifteenth century, through whom the French middle class carried on the work of saving their country, so gloriously begun by her peasantry in the person of Jeanne the Maid.

During the earlier years of that century the ancient provincial city of Bourges was the centre of France. Charles VII was proclaimed there, and until his coronation at Reims men knew him scornfully as 'the King of Bourges.' There he convened his first States-General, and there his eldest son, Louis XI, was born.

In those years a young man had grown up at Bourges, the son of a merchant furrier, in whom a genius for trade and finance matched a temper of ardent loyalty and patriotism. Jacques Cœur was brave, romantic, adventurous; in the dying Middle Ages he had the spirit of the Renaissance, the spirit that invented printing and discovered America. While still young he was dealing with "all kinds of merchandise," had travelled round the Mediterranean, visiting Egypt and Syria, and had estab-

lished many trade centres in France and abroad; in France at least, torn and exhausted by war, there were few rivals to be feared. His success was swift and brilliant. A trading fleet in the Mediterranean, agents in a hundred ports, spread the name of Jacques Cœur round the known world; like Venice, he held "the gorgeous East in fee." His skill in finance gained him the appointment of banker (*argentier*) to the King. This was in 1436. At another time, and to a man of other character, such a post might have meant a still greater fortune. Jacques Cœur took the royal finances into his hands with a single eye to the service of his country.

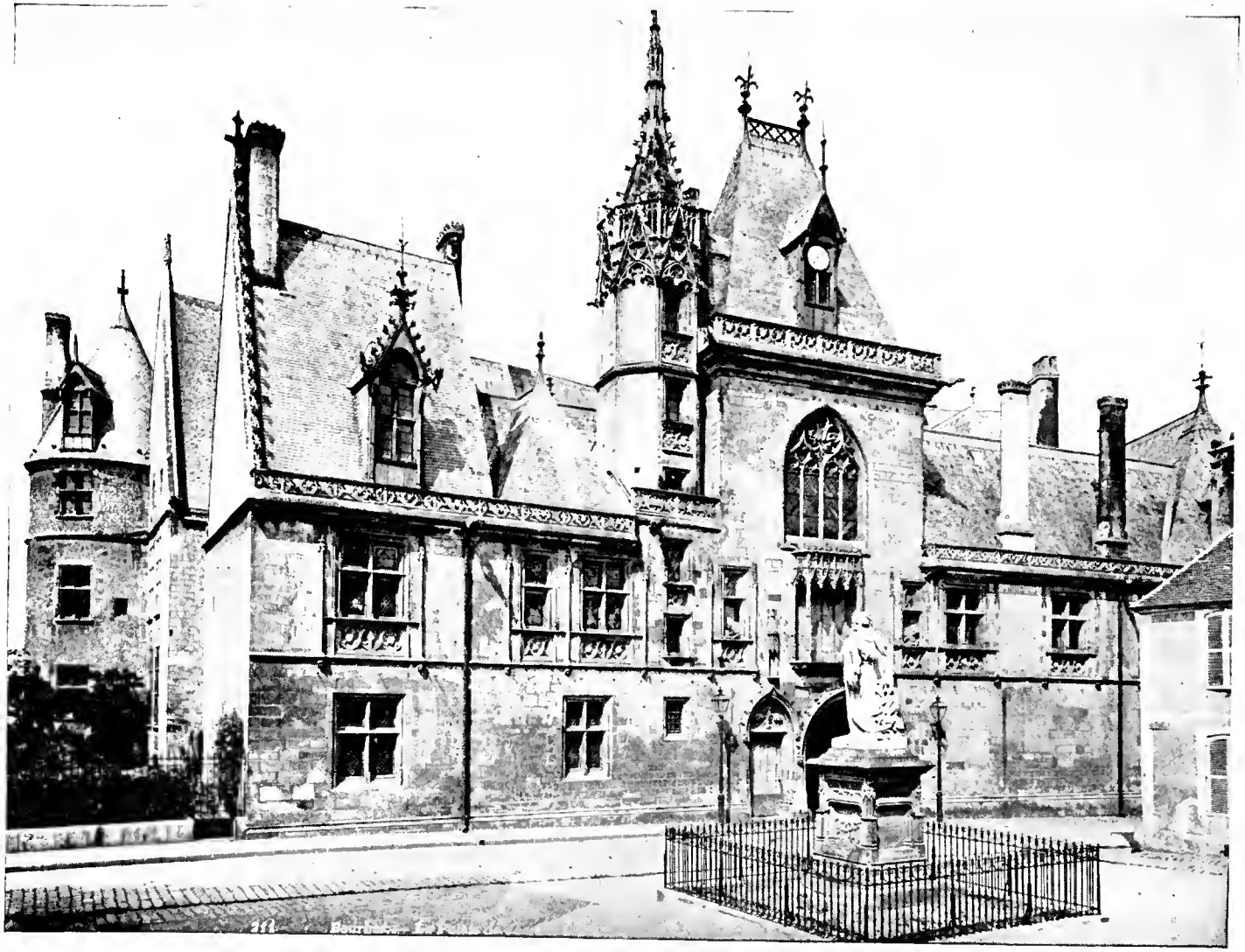
Those were years of hard struggle. Though Paris had been taken from the English, the Hundred Years War was not yet over. The King had no money to carry on the necessary campaigns; it was Jacques Cœur who paid the armies from his own coffers, saying to Charles: "All that is mine is yours." Four armies were equipped and paid at his expense; and his crowning effort was the conquest of Normandy in 1449, which almost completed the freeing of France from her foreign invaders. The King and the country owed Jacques Cœur a tremendous debt, a debt of honour. We shall see how it was paid.

Fifteen years of devoted work and generous spending brought Jacques Cœur to the height of his fortune. He was the richest man in the kingdom, the most honest and the most honourable, with a capacity for affairs far beyond trade and finance, fully recognized by the King, who sent him as president to the Estates of Languedoc and as ambassador to Genoa and to Rome. In France this merchant held his own among the nobles; they feared his power indeed, for they were a needy, extravagant race, and many vast estates were mortgaged to him. He was not in any way ostentatious, but he lived with a certain

simple splendour, having houses in Paris, Lyons, Marseilles, Montpellier, and he possessed a refinement of mind and taste, a sort of daring originality cultivated by travel and adventure, which set him apart from most of his contemporaries.

To appreciate all this we need only fly to the old city of Bourges and imagine Jacques Cœur in the stately house which was his real home, and which is still, as the Palais de Justice of Bourges, among the artistic glories and historical monuments of France. He began to build it in the year 1443, and it shows his personal fancy in every detail. It was built on the ramparts and enclosed towers of the old wall; thus one side overhung the valley, while the other faced on the street where Jacques Cœur's statue now stands. With its square-headed windows, elegantly soaring roofs, towers and slender staircase-turrets, carvings and quaint devices, the house was a perfect example of late Gothic beauty.

The builder's famous motto, in tall letters of stone, may be still read on the gateway façade; everywhere is his device, a heart, with a pilgrim's scallop-shell. The space over the chief doorway once held a statue of Charles VII on horseback, placed there in the days when Jacques Cœur was the King's strongest supporter and most trusted friend. A curious feature of the front of the house still remains in the two stone figures that lean forward, as if from windows, on each side of the doorway; watchers at the gate, they seem, set there by a mind aware of danger from without. Between a selfish King and his greedy favourites on one side, and a rebellious young Dauphin and a mob of envious nobles on the other, Jacques Cœur in his most splendid days was never safe. As true patriot and honest financier, he had a difficult game to play, requiring great courage, great skill in affairs, untiring industry, and



The House of Jacques Cœur at Bourges

X Photo

penetrating knowledge of men and women. Perhaps the valiant heart to whom nothing was impossible took too little account of this last need, trusting princes and familiar friends too far. Or rather, perhaps, while aware of the dangers that beset him, he met them too frankly and fearlessly.

With the beautiful house as a background, we may imagine a family group met together to celebrate the master's *fête*-day, the Feast of St James, 25th July, 1451. They were gathered in a large upper room, its timbered roof shaped like a boat, for Jacques Cœur loved the sea. A curious carving above one of the great fireplaces of a man and woman playing a game of chess gives another personal touch, for these were portraits in stone of Jacques Cœur and Macée de Léodepart, his wife. Here on that summer day sat these two, playing their favourite game once again.

Both were richly dressed in the fashion of their time. Jacques Cœur, with his keen, eager, delicate face, smiling and absorbed, had pushed back from his brow the silken head-covering, hood and scarf combined. Down from his shoulders fell his crimson loose-sleeved gown, and a gilded money-bag hung from his belt. Dame Macée, known for careless spending which often exceeded even the limits set by her generous husband, wore on this day a green and gold net which quite hid her closely braided hair, crowned with a little cap of rose-coloured velvet from which floated a gauzy white veil; a short gown to her knees of pale green silk edged with rose-colour and gold, the sleeves long and full to the wrist; a sweeping under-dress of purplish grey, and rose-coloured shoes. Round her neck she wore a double row of priceless rubies. Had Dame Macée been merely the wife of a rich *bourgeois*, this costume would have been not only against custom, but

against law. But the King of his favour had granted letters of nobility to Jacques Cœur and his wife and children, so that they had their privileged place at Court, and their only daughter Perrette was married without obstacle to Jacquelin, Seigneur de Marville and Vicomte de Bourges, of the smaller provincial aristocracy.

Perrette and her husband—she, a nun at heart, as simple as her mother was gorgeous—were present that day in the group of Jacques Cœur's children. All were young; but two of the four sons, still under thirty, were already high dignitaries of the Church. Jean at twenty-six, having lately finished his studies at the University of Paris, had been nominated Archbishop by the Chapter of Bourges; and though the Pope had hesitated to confirm this appointment, which carried with it that of Metropolitan and Primate of Aquitaine, the persuasions of King Charles VII were at length successful. As Jacques Cœur's biographer remarks, nothing gives a better idea of the honour and credit enjoyed by him. Another son, Henri, was a canon of Bourges and Dean of the cathedral of Limoges; the two younger were mere lads, of whom Ravant, a sulky youth, was inclined to resent Archbishop Jean's airs of authority. Geoffroy, the youngest, the laughing favourite of all, was by future turns of Fortune's wheel to become treasurer to Louis XI, to end his days as a financial magnate in Paris, and to be buried in the chapel of the Collège des Bons Enfans, restored and endowed by his father.

The day was closing in burning heat, the air was sultry in the large dark stone-floored room with its crimson hangings and heavy carved furniture. The faces of that group of young people were pale and shadowed with some haunting fear or distress hardly suited to a festival. There was storm in the air—even now a distant growl announced clashing clouds, thunderbolts, hurricanes—

and neither Jacques Cœur nor his family could be unconscious of the tempest of hatred and envy that might any day break over his own head.

To keep his *fête* at Bourges he had made the long journey from Taillebourg in Southern Poitou, where King Charles VII was visiting the Comte de la Trémoille, and where the " vultures of the Court " were gathered together, waiting for the rich banker's spoils. It is true that the King had lately bestowed fresh favours on Jacques Cœur, so that he was full of confidence, assuring his friends that in spite of certain evil tongues his royal master was still his friend. Yet he could not choose but be aware of dark plots against him, absurd accusations of secret treason, dishonesty, unfair exactions, even a whispered tale more ridiculous and more terrible still, the tale that he had poisoned Dame Agnes Sorel, the King's favourite, whose affairs he had managed, and who had died at the birth of a child some months before. This wild story was trumped up, as all good men knew, to give jealous courtiers a strong occasion against Jacques Cœur and a chance of sharing his vast possessions. Thus they laid their snares for the man whose only crime was success earned by talent and honest work, and who walked among them regardless of mutterings of danger. But his wife and children were not so bold : they feared his ruin ; they felt that he and they were on the edge of a precipice.

And here he was, a happy man at his favourite game, with a clear and proud mind as the deliverer of his country, dreading neither open nor secret foe, and bent on returning to Taillebourg that very night to carry on his master's business. They who loved him were resolved that he must not go.

He had won his game. Looking across the chessboard with merry, satisfied eyes, he tries to console Dame Macée

for her defeat. She had played ill, her thoughts being distracted.

"Thou shalt take thy revenge when these affairs at Court are finished. Nay, what sad looks! Cheer thee! All goes well."

"Must I wait so long? Do me this favour, beloved. Stay with us till the King sends to call you. Or listen—Jean says—is there not some instant need of your presence in the South? What of letters from Marseilles? You would be safe there from your enemies."

Her eyes are full of anxious prayer.

"Your enemies, dear husband!" she murmurs. "Your enemies at Court!"

"What matter they, if the King is my friend! As to Jean's timid counsels—they may need me at Marseilles, but must not my master's affairs come first with me? Archbishop, forsooth! Has he no faith in the guardianship of God?"

With a laugh, Jacques Cœur rises from the table and turns to his children.

Then a chorus of voices arises in remonstrance and eager argument. Jean, the Most Reverend, admonishes him tenderly; Henri reasons with him seriously; Ravant grumbles of the danger to them all; Geoffroy tries to prevail by affectionate coaxing; Perrette looks much that she dares not say, and her husband nods his agreement; while Dame Macée's silent tears are eloquent; they two have played their last game together, and she knows it well. Faithful servants, loudly sobbing, crowd now into the room, all praying against their good master's return to Taillebourg.

Jacques Cœur might have said with St Paul the Apostle: "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart?" for like him he would listen to no entreaties of love, no counsels

of fear and delay. That night, when a storm of thunder and rain had swept over Berry and cooled the air, he left his family and rode south-westward to rejoin his ungrateful King. He had kissed them all and had received a solemn blessing from his son. They of his household and the people of Bourges watched his little troop away under a red moon which would light the forest roads. So he passed through the summer night into the hands of his enemies, and never saw his beautiful home again.

Jacques Cœur was arrested at Taillebourg in the King's name and tried for the murder of Agnes Sorel. In spite of his accusers he was proved innocent, and the charge was withdrawn for very shame: but this did not mean escape and freedom. All those other imaginary crimes were piled up against him: he was a thief, a usurer, a juggler with the finances of the country, a friend of the King's enemies. He had counterfeited the King's seal, he had traitorously sold arms to the Saracens. Another long and most iniquitous trial ended in his conviction on all these points. He was refused any defence, his witnesses were not heard, for this time the greedy vultures had it all their own way, while Charles VII, unworthy master of a faithful servant, looked on consenting. The Pope's intervention saved Jacques Cœur's life, but he was condemned to pay a gigantic fine to the State, all the rest of his possessions being confiscated and divided among his enemies. This meant the complete ruin of his family, who were one and all brought to abject poverty. As to his unhappy wife, the weight of sorrow and trouble was too heavy for her, and she died before the trial was ended.

Thus the patriot had his reward.

After being flung from prison to prison in the West country he was sent by way of exile to the South and shut

up in a fortified convent at Beaucaire, the little city which looks across the Rhône to Tarascon in Provence. Here he was in a land of romance, haunted by saints and dragons, pirates and crusaders: the scene of the lovely old story of Aucassin and Nicolette, world-known since the twelfth century for the great July fair, to which came traders from all Europe and the East. No doubt Jacques Cœur the merchant was a familiar figure there.

And he had powerful friends beyond the Rhône. Provence was not yet part of the French kingdom. The old Roman province still kept its independence under the famous René, titular King of Naples, Sicily, and Jerusalem, Duke of Lorraine and Anjou, father of Margaret, the unlucky Queen of England. In Anjou René was the French King's vassal: as Count of Provence he ruled in his own right. The charming prince, whose mother, Yolande, Duchess of Anjou, had befriended Jeanne d'Arc in the early days of her mission, and who had himself fought for France beside the Maid, knew how to value the generous patriotism of Jacques Cœur.

But the prisoner had a more intimate claim on René's interest and protection. One of his nieces had married a certain Jean de Villages, a native of Berry, an adventurous spirit like himself, whom in happier days he had established as his agent at Marseilles. This man had been appointed admiral of René's little fleet, and the King delighted in him and the strange curiosities he was constantly bringing home from the East. At the time of Jacques Cœur's disgrace his enemies induced Charles VII to demand from René the surrender of Jean de Villages as a confederate in his uncle's pretended treasons. René declined, and Jean de Villages remained at Marseilles. And the story goes that he slipped across to Beaucaire, rescued Jacques Cœur from his convent, and brought him

safely into Provence, where the French king's agents had no right to touch him.

He was too near the frontier, however, to be safe from the men who hated him and had shared his wealth. He passed on into exile in Italy; and we may see him a free man in the sunshine of the South, sailing on the blue sea he loved as 'Captain-general against the Infidels,' commanding the Pope's galleys in an expedition to defend the Greek islands against an attack by the Turks, who had lately taken Constantinople. On one of these islands, in November 1456, a sudden sickness seized him and he died. Thus ended a life as romantic as any in French history.

France made some late amends to the valiant man whose services she had so ill repaid. A small portion of his goods was restored to his family, and the careers of his sons in Church and State were no longer hindered. But Charles VII, the selfish and lethargic, did little: it was left for Louis XI to pay just honour to the name of Jacques Cœur and to crush the men who had been his enemies.

CHAPTER XI

THE DAWN OF MODERN FRANCE

Nations have their Aprils when the world seems to flower with a fortunate novelty. MARY DUCLAUX

The France of Louis XII is the justification of Louis XI. STANLEY LEATHES

AT the end of the Middle Ages and of the Hundred Years War France was passing gradually from an old world into a new. Almost she could call her soil her own. The labourers worked undisturbed; the nobles were lazy like the King, and some of them cared more for heaping up riches, often at the expense of the *bourgeoisie*, than for their ancient trade of fighting, or even for the splendid displays, the tournaments and masquerades, which added joy to life in earlier feudal times. The towns were free to trade and prosper in their own way. For Charles VII, with all his defects, ruled France wisely in these days of her slow recovery. His taxes were not too oppressive, and his standing army was an improvement on the feudal bands, the troops of fierce mercenaries, even the armed companies of the cities, all of whom were wont to fight for their own advantage, robbing, torturing, killing the people they should have defended.

The reforms of Charles VII led the way for those of Louis XI, the son he so heartily detested, the clever, mean-minded, cold-hearted personage whom historians have counted with Henry VII of England and Ferdinand the Catholic of Spain as one of the 'three wise kings' of the

time: the man who made France what she had never before been, a really united and centrally governed country. Louis XI was the best-hated man in his dominions; but under him, in those early years of the French Renaissance, France advanced so fast and so far as to become a great European Power. Louis XI "lifted France into the front rank of nations." How was it done? By a long struggle with the strong feudal magnates who remained, especially with Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy—their quarrel is a history in itself—and by a wise administration that took account of every interest in the kingdom.

So much for the general state of things. One would like to look more closely at the provinces and cities over which this King reigned, and at the daily life of his subjects in hovel or castle, by country roads or city streets. Most interesting of all is Paris at this time: the medieval city on which the Renaissance was beginning to dawn, yet which, in the shadows of its irregular gabled streets, the decay of its old religious buildings and much that they signified, the spirit of strangeness and melancholy mingled with a kind of grotesque mockery that seems to have brooded over its people, was still held by the dying Gothic past that had once given it life.

In these years, since the death of Charles VI and the English occupation, Paris had ceased to be the favourite home of the kings. Necessity had taught Charles VII the charm of the West country, and Louis XI soon began to avoid the old city, still haunted by the spectres of the Hundred Years War. For many years, with terrible regularity, the winter meant starvation and the summer epidemic disease. Forty thousand died of the plague in the year 1450. Wolves appeared again in the streets, and

not always on winter nights, but in the day-time, and in the month of September.

Still, the new laws of Charles VII and Louis XI did much for Paris; ruined quarters were rebuilt, markets were enlarged, and under the hundred swinging signs in various colours that darkened the narrow and muddy streets, criers with their asses and little carts pushed noisily along, sellers of wine, milk, cheese, vegetables, fruit, fish, pies, gingerbread; wood and old iron; all mixed up with chimney-sweeps, mountebanks, beggars, and thieves; fat citizens, soldiers, priests; blind men from the Hospital of the Quinze-Vingts.

This ancient charity, founded by St Louis, was favoured and supported, with many others, by Louis XI for the good of his own soul. The abode of the three hundred blind brethren was a little city within the city: a walled enclosure surrounding a church, an orchard, and large cloistered courtyards, shaded by rows of tall elms. The buildings, which included mills, ovens, kitchens, granaries, even a prison, stood between the two city walls, that of Philippe-Auguste and the newer one of Charles V, between the gates known as first and second of Saint-Honoré, thus near the Louvre and in the very centre of Paris. The church, full of relics and sacred images, famous for its music, was a popular place of pilgrimage. The community of the Quinze-Vingts had many privileges, and for centuries there was no more familiar sight in the streets than the blind men in their brown gowns stamped with the *fleur-de-lys*, carrying sacks and begging from house to house and of the passers-by. Sometimes they were led by a man or woman who could see, but they had a marvellous power of finding their way: indeed, the story goes that in the thick river-fogs which often enveloped old Paris no better guide could be found than a blind man. As

beggars they feared no refusal: their cry "*Aux Quinze-Vingts, pain Dieu!*" was never raised in vain; they begged with authority.

They had their own opportunities for charity. The hospital had the right of sanctuary, often enough needed in the Paris of François Villon. And to those criminals who had not succeeded in escaping the officers of justice, but were led through the streets on their way to be hanged, burned, boiled alive in the Horse-market, or the Pig-market, or the Place de Grève, or farther away at the awful gibbet of Montfaucon, where men hung in rows on cross-beams till their bones dropped asunder—to those miserable victims, *pauvres patients*, as the old chroniclers call them, the Quinze-Vingts had a right to give wine and bread with a blessing as they passed the gateway of the hospital. During this solemn ceremony, we are told, there was silence in the street, and the staring crowd even dropped upon its knees.

Another centre of interest for fifteenth-century Parisians was the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents.

The large old burial-place, largest and oldest of Paris, was surrounded by cloistered walks crowded with monuments, and on its walls was painted that extraordinary *Danse Macabre*, or Dance of Death, reproduced on the bridge at Lucerne and elsewhere, in which the spirit of the later Middle Ages found its tragic and grotesque expression. It was destroyed in the reign of Louis XIV, when all such medieval curiosities were out of fashion. But the lower class of Louis XI's Parisians haunted the Innocents by day and night: the more the cloisters mouldered into age, the greater the number of poor creatures who found shelter and company there. Bones buried under the black earth and the rank grass; bones stacked in the vaulted roofs: it was a place where death

and life met very strangely. The Market of the Innocents, close by, with its crowds and noise, was sometimes a scene of terrible excitement, as when the Duc de Nemours, once Governor of Paris, and rebel against Louis XI, was dragged there in an iron cage from the Bastille to be beheaded in the sight of all. The old morsel of historical gossip which places the children of Nemours beneath the scaffold that their father's blood might drip upon their heads and white garments is probably untrue: even the 'frightfulness' of Louis XI may have paused here.

After all, there was a certain merriment in the life of that old Paris, with all its beggary and romantic desperation. When the King was there, not living at the Louvre, now a State prison, nor at the Hôtel Saint-Paul, with its tragic memories, but at the Hôtel des Tournelles, another fairy palace of turrets and gardens, many fine spectacles and entertainments were held in the city. The King spent little money; but he encouraged the University and the trade-guilds to hold festivals and processions with their banners for the amusement of his guest the King of Portugal or some magnate among the few he desired to honour. His mean figure and hawk-like face, his old hat garnished with leaden images of saints, presided over the few tournaments still held by his rich nobles and the singing dances that followed them. He sat religiously in the square of Notre-Dame to watch the theatrical performances of the *Confrérie de la Passion*. The common people indeed had no reason to fear or to hate Louis XI: it was the taller plants of the kingdom that his relentless scythe mowed down.

On clear summer days, when the broad Seine rippled merrily through the red-roofed, towered city, and trees were green, and bare-legged haymakers worked and sang in the meadows under the walls, and windmills tossed their

The Place de Grève in the Fifteenth Century 110

From a drawing by F. Hoffbauer in "Les Rives de la Seine à travers les Ages"
(Paris, H. Laurens)

wide wings on the hills round about, Paris might sometimes forget her weariness and long distress in the joy of her age-long beauty.

Two popular kings followed Louis XI. Charles VIII, ugly, gay, adventurous, and beloved—whose young life and the elder Valois line ended together when his head struck a low archway in the castle of Amboise—has been blamed by historians for his wild-goose chase after the crown of Naples, claimed by the French kings in succession to King René and the Counts of Anjou. But this and later Italian wars, victorious or not, had great consequences for France: they let in the sunshine of the South and revealed wonders of art to a country where new thought and new love of beauty had already dawned.

The lovely tomb in Tours Cathedral, a gem of the early Renaissance, on which small watchful angels still guard the effigies of two little children of Charles VIII and his wife Anne, Duchess of Brittany, has kept alive the memory of 'le bon petit Roy' through centuries and revolutions.

Then came Louis XII, 'the Father of his people.' He had learnt much in a hard school, the school of heirs-presumptive. He was the grandson of the murdered Louis, Duke of Orléans, the brother of the mad King. His father was Charles, Duke of Orléans, the poet, a prisoner in England for many years after Agincourt. Louis XI kept the young Duke in strict subjection and married him to his daughter Jeanne, a plain little princess with a noble and saintly soul. Under Charles VIII he was first a rebel, then a State prisoner in the great tower of Bourges, then, through the King's generosity, a commander of armies. He succeeded his cousin without question on the throne of France.

Louis XII was a just king, a successful ruler, a good-

humoured and rather magnanimous personage, who forgave his political enemies with the remark that it would ill become the King of France to revenge the quarrels of the Duke of Orléans. His Italian campaigns pleased the fighting spirit of France, so long an invaded and suffering country. He claimed the city and province of Milan from the reigning Sforza in right of his grandmother, Valentina Visconti, Duchess of Orléans, and the history of the time gives us few more striking pictures than that of the conquered Lodovico Sforza, *il Moro*, riding into France on a mule, clothed in black, his white hair streaming, cold and proud of aspect as he passed on to his cruel fate. Louis XII showed little magnanimity here. The captive lingered through his last ten years in one of those dungeons under the Château of Loches that Louis XI had prepared for his own personal enemies; on its walls il Moro's inscriptions and drawings are still to be seen.

The territory of France was now complete. From the Channel to the Mediterranean Sea, from the Meuse to the Pyrenees, she was at last one country. Calais alone was still held by the English. In one way or another, by will, by treaty, by deaths and law-suits, chiefly in the time of Louis XI, the kings of France had become masters of Normandy, Burgundy, Picardy, Artois, Maine, Anjou, Provence, Guienne. One independent feudal state remained. Brittany, under its spirited Duchess Anne, kept its freedom and self-government even after her marriage with Charles VIII; and Louis XII saw but one way of securing the fine old duchy for France: he must marry his cousin's widow. It was no hardship, for he admired her greatly; and she, it seems, was willing enough to be once more Queen of France. There was only one obstacle: Louis had already a wife. But these were matters of policy, easily to be arranged by kings and popes. Cæsar Borgia,

the nephew of Alexander VI, received the French duchy of Valentinois, and the little childless Queen Jeanne, divorced from her husband, retired to a life of religious peace in a convent she had founded at Bourges.

In later years, Queen Anne having died without a son to succeed to France and Brittany, Louis XII married his daughter Claude to his splendid young cousin François, Comte d'Angoulême, head of yet another branch of the Valois line—his grandfather being a younger brother of the poet Duke of Orléans—who was to become King of France at the moment when she in her brilliant Renaissance expected her princes to strike men's imagination.

But the 'Father of his people,' homely, of simple tastes, and old for his years, had no illusions with regard to the future François I. He was tired of young people. His third wife, Mary Tudor, had altered his dinner-hour; feasts and late hours were killing him, and he took a dark view of the prospects of the great nation for which he had worked hard and done his best.

"We have laboured in vain," he said on his death-bed to a friend. "*Ce gros garçon gâtera tout!*"

CHAPTER XII

A GREAT CAPTAIN

Nous qui sommes
De par Dieu
Gentilshommes
De haut lieu,
Il faut faire
Bruit sur terre
Et la guerre
N'est qu'un jeu.

VICTOR HUGO

Le titre de chevalier sans peur et sans reproche, titre plus beau que tous les noms des seigneurs du monde. . . . C'est bien le gentil seigneur de Bayard, le gaillard homme d'armes, le hardi et adroit chevalier, le vertueux et triomphant capitaine.

ARTHUR CHUQUET

THE wars of the Valois cousins with Italy and the German Empire—including Spain under the Emperor Charles V—lasted with intervals for many years. They were necessary to the existence of France and were welcome to the restless spirit of the age. The old fighting families, crushed into dull inaction by Louis XI, gladly followed Charles VIII, Louis XII, and François I on those adventurous campaigns.

There was a great rebirth of romance: the chivalric ideas of the early Middle Ages returned to life. The crusading dreams of Charles VIII would have carried him to Constantinople and Jerusalem. In the first brilliant years of François I, "chivalric tales, chivalric dress, chivalric language became the rage at Court." Much of all this was external and artificial: the true spirit of

knighthood, the spirit of Louis IX the soldier-saint, was very rare in the years of the Renaissance and the armies of the Valois. Yet it was not altogether absent. For Pierre Terrail, Seigneur de Bayard, fought in these armies through all his noble life, the life of a "knight without fear and without reproach."

He was born in the year 1476 at the Château de Bayard, among the mountains and forests of Dauphiné; its ruins still command the valley of the Isère. He came of an old and warlike family; but it was his uncle, the Bishop of Grenoble, who fetched him from home, an eager boy of fourteen, mounted him on a pony, his mother providing him with a small purse of money, a change of linen, and much good counsel, and carried him off to be page to the Duke of Savoy. Riding out thus into the world, young Bayard "deemed himself in Paradise." He is described as small of stature but upright, with dark eyes and a mild countenance, his hair cut straight across his forehead and falling behind his ears. Some say that he never grew a beard, but a portrait by Giorgione at Genoa seems to contradict this. He was, by the universal testimony of his time, the most manly of men, the most daring of fighters, a splendid horseman, an unrivalled leader, a model of magnanimity. He was a perfect warrior, not only as *le preux et le passe-preux* among his peers, but in the sense of understanding war. No one was more resourceful in a difficult place or more popular with the armies; his high spirit and gay good-humour never failed. With all this Bayard was no courtier, and his modest and disinterested temper was little fitted to make its way in a pushing, selfish world. This may explain the strange fact that *le bon chevalier*, the finest soldier of his time, "worth an army in himself," never commanded an army, and after fighting through three

reigns was still no more than captain of a hundred lances.

He passed into the service of Charles VIII and marched with him into Italy. At the age of nineteen he captured an enemy standard in the battle of Fornovo. This was one of the first of a series of brave deeds, *merveilles d'armes*, such as his solitary defence of the bridge of Garigliano against two hundred Spaniards. And his humanity equalled his courage. When the 'Adventurers' under his command in Louis XII's second Italian campaign had shut up a number of enemies in a barn, piled straw against the doors, and set fire to it, so that all perished miserably, he hanged those men in a row as an example to the rest of the army.

It was not always victory. Twice at least Bayard was taken prisoner; before Milan by Lodovico Sforza, who released him with honour; and by the English and Imperialists at Guinegate, after the 'Battle of the Spurs,' where he led the small band of French who declined to fly. And some victories were almost too dearly bought by the deaths of many a noble commander and comrade in arms. Such a victory was that before Ravenna in 1512, and such a loss was that of Gaston de Foix, Duc de Nemours, nephew of Louis XII, one of the most heroic young soldiers in history, who had been given the command of the army of Italy at twenty-two. When his genius and courage had sent the enemy flying, he pursued with a small band of men and was fatally wounded. The cry of "*Gaston est mort!*" rang through the victorious French ranks, and the silence that followed was only broken by "the sound of strong men sobbing and weeping." Above all, the *bon chevalier* Bayard grieved that in the fury of his own pursuit he had not been able to avenge the death of Gaston or to die with him.

One fancies that Jacques de Chabannes, Seigneur de La

Palice and Marshal of France, who succeeded to the command, certainly an older and more cautious gentleman, can hardly have inspired such loyalty. It is not always unfair to judge by contemporary soldier-songs, and this famous one has a somewhat disrespectful flavour:

Monsieur de La Palice est mort,
Mort devant Pavie.
Un quart d'heure avant sa mort
Il étoit encore en vie . . . etc. etc.

It was earlier in this campaign that Bayard, wounded, was nursed back to health in the house of a lady at Brescia. The city had suffered terribly from the French assault, but this house was spared because of his presence there. Before he left his hostess begged him to accept a large sum of money as her thank-offering for being saved from pillage. Bayard was then and always a poor man, but he knew it to be the dowry of her two daughters that the lady offered him, and he refused the money, asking that it might be divided between them. There were many *chevaliers sans peur* in the French army of his day; but few, probably, who would thus have proved themselves *sans reproche.*

François I, the new young King of France, began his reign with another Italian campaign, one of the most picturesque ever fought. All the youth of France was in that army of dashing spirits which flung itself in five days by chamois-tracks over the guarded Alps into Northern Italy. Bayard inspired and directed this wonderful crossing. Seventy-two cannons were dragged by men over the pathless rocks where oxen and mules could find no footing. In the wars of those days guns that fired big bullets of lead or iron were becoming a necessity, though archers, cross-bowmen, pikemen, and cavalry with swords and lances still formed the chief strength of an army.

Before the Italian troops, reinforced by a great body of Swiss mercenaries, were even aware of the French advance, Bayard and a few other daring horsemen had swooped from the mountains and surprised Prospero Colonna, the Roman general commanding the Duke of Milan's forces, with seven hundred of his knights at Villafranca. Then followed the famous battle of Marignano, fought in the late summer heat in the meadows on the road to Milan. Many thousand Swiss poured out of the city at the bellowing summons of their great mountain horns and fell furiously on the French men-at-arms and artillery. The more the Swiss pikemen were mowed down, the more obstinately they pushed forward ; it was fearful hand-to-hand fighting, " a battle of giants," old writers say. Beginning in the afternoon, it lasted till the setting of the moon and was renewed at dawn. King François took no care for his own safety : he and his Scottish guard, twenty-five young men in bright steel armour with plumes and scarves of gorgeous colours, fought in the thickest of the fray. At night he remained on horseback till sleep overcame him, and then lay down for an hour on a gun-carriage, a few yards from the enemy's front line. As to the Chevalier Bayard, darkness overtook him among the ranks of the Swiss, his own fearlessness and the confusion of battle having carried him too far into the *mêlée*. Being as nimble and clever as he was brave, he dropped on his knees and crawled back to his company.

Next day, the victory being won, the Swiss flying back to their mountains, Milan and her Sforza prince once more at a French king's mercy, François I sent for the Chevalier Bayard and asked knighthood from him, thus conferring great honour on his faithful captain in the presence of hundreds of lords and knights of higher degree. Bayard kissed the sword that had touched his King's shoulder.

Bayard working on the Fortifications of Mézières
M. Meredith Williams

"Verily, my good sword," said he, "thou art a treasured relic from this day. I will carry thee in battle no more, save against the Infidel."

One of Bayard's chief titles to fame was his defence of the town of Mézières when France was invaded by the Imperialists in the summer of 1521. He had a small garrison under him, and these men were not of the best, being, we are told, neither brave nor experienced; some of them ran away even before the place was besieged. But on the other hand he had a number of very gallant gentlemen, friends, comrades, and cousins of his own, who were only too eager to fight for France in his company. Bayard wrote to the King that he hoped to defend Mézières as a gentleman should, and to hold out as long as life and honour would permit. In a most practical way he prepared the town for the siege, storing provisions and giving out arrears of pay. His biographers tell us how he and his friends worked with the masons, carpenters, and labourers at strengthening the weak fortifications, digging earthworks, and carrying great stones, besides building high platforms to spy out the enemy, preparing cauldrons of oil and pitch to cast on his head, iron hooks to lay hold on him, traps in ditches to snare him.

The town endured a month's bombardment from the army of Charles V. We are told that in this siege bombs were used for the first time; round bullets that burst and scattered bits of iron: such artillery, such cannons and culverins, had never yet been seen. But as fast as the towers were battered down, Bayard and his brave men built them up again. And he did not scruple to use stratagem, sending out a letter which was intercepted, as he meant it to be, bearing the news of large expected reinforcements. The German commanders decided that the siege of Mézières was hopeless: they withdrew their forces,

and North-eastern France was saved for once from devastation. The collar of the Order of St Michael was Bayard's chief recompense.

The good knight's career ended as he would have wished, on the battle-field: not in the moment of victory, but this was no fault of his. In the spring of 1524 the French army, under a foolish and incapable general, was retreating before the Imperialists in Northern Italy, one of their chiefs being the famous or infamous Constable Charles de Bourbon, traitor to his country. Bayard, in command of the French rear-guard, held back the enemy till he was disabled by a mortal wound. His men laid him down under a tree near Romagnano on the Sesia, with his face to the advancing foe. "I will not begin to turn my back upon them now," he said. He ordered his men to rejoin the army, and lay there alone, waiting for death, his eyes fixed on the cross-hilt of his sword.

Charles de Bourbon, riding by in pursuit of the French, drew rein when he saw the dying hero and spoke a few generous words of regret and pity.

"I am not to be pitied, my lord," Bayard answered him, "for I die an honest man. The pity is for yourself, you whom I behold bearing arms against your King, your country, and your oath."

CHAPTER XIII

A KING OF THE RENAISSANCE

La Loire est une reine, et les rois l'ont aimée :
Sur ses cheveux d'azur, ils ont posé, jaloux,
Des châteaux ciselés, ainsi que des bijoux ;
Et de ces grands joyaux sa couronne est formée.

JULES LEMAÎTRE

Il ne faut s'étonner, Chrestiens, si la nacelle
Du bon pasteur Saint Pierre en ce monde chancelle.

PIERRE DE RONSARD

THE Court of François I was the most gorgeous, the most brilliant, the most elegant and artistic that France ever saw. The stiff splendour and majesty of that of Louis XIV a hundred and fifty years later was to make an even greater impression on men's minds ; but in the first half of the sixteenth century everything was new. The world was full of discoveries and inventions—printing by far the most wonderful—and of bold adventures on land and sea. It seemed made afresh for this handsome and generous young King. His keen enjoyment of life, his love of art and learning, his splendid tastes, made him an incarnation of the French Renaissance in all its daring beauty and gaiety, its free and joyous romance, its "sunshine and storm." He had been educated, adored, and spoilt by two of the cleverest women of their time, his mother, Louise of Savoy, Comtesse d'Angoulême, and his sister, Marguerite, first Duchess of Alençon, then Queen of Navarre, *la Marguerite des Marguerites.*

If François was not always fortunate in his wars with the Empire, and if he was both immoral and extravagant

at home, France did not complain. She was proud of him, of the gallant show he made in Europe and among rival kings. And the nation was aware that the prophecy of Louis XII had not been fulfilled ; this " big boy " did not " spoil all." The greatness of France and her progress were safe in his hands. The royal authority was felt throughout the kingdom : by the Church, the nobles, the Parliament, the provincial Estates, the *bourgeoisie*, whom he trusted, and who loved him. Trade and industry prospered ; new towns were built ; colonizing was begun ; education advanced, and the Court was full of learned men often employed in affairs of State. Artists, French and foreign, found in François I a distinguished patron.

Every one knows the story of his friendship with Leonardo da Vinci, whom he invited to France, from whom he bought the famous portrait of ' La Gioconda ' (*Mona Lisa*) now in the Louvre, and who died at Amboise, if not actually in the arms of the young King, honoured and mourned by him.

But it was the painters and the builders of France whom François employed most largely, though Italians were called in to decorate his new palace of Fontainebleau, and we know from himself that Benvenuto Cellini, the marvellous goldsmith, was a ' man after his own heart.' It is to the genius and taste of the French rather than of the Italian Renaissance that the world owes the châteaux of the Loire country : those great houses, unmatched for beauty and homeliness, in which the sixteenth century lives again. Some of these were built, or altered from their old feudal gloom, under the direction of François himself : he was his own architect and the builders worked after his fancy. And the châteaux built by rich private persons, such as Chenonceaux and Azay-le-Rideau, ' the flower of Touraine,' have the same air of attractive grace

and harmonious elegance: it was the atmosphere of the time.

All this was in some sort a result of the Hundred Years War, which drove French royalty into the West. The rich, luxuriant beauty of Touraine, called even then 'the garden of France,' and the sweet wildness of Anjou, made that country the favourite home of Charles VII and his successors. Chinon, Loches, Tours, Amboise, Blois, were by turns the residence of the Court, and François I added to them his extraordinary Chambord, a hunting-lodge in the woods large enough to hold an army. On all these and more the royal devices are to be seen: the ermine of Anne of Brittany, the crowned porcupine of Louis XII, the crowned and flaming salamander of François, the pierced swan of Claude, his queen.

In the autumn of 1534 the Court was at Blois, resting there after weeks of wandering about France, hunting, dancing, feasting, visiting towns and castles, often camping out in the woods and meadows, a small city of tents, a gigantic picnic by no means enjoyed by everybody who was forced to take part in it. The Court of France at these times was like an enormous gipsy encampment, and courtiers, ladies, foreign ambassadors, and artists who were not, like the King, romantic by temperament, found its discomforts hard to bear. It is certain that he, the most luxurious of princes, did not share them. If he possessed, as M. Louis Batiffol says, the wandering temper of his ancestors, the early Capet kings, he had not their hardy indifference to circumstances. The rustling shade of old mossy woodlands, the pines and purple heather, the green grass and rushes by slow, clear rivers and frog-haunted pools, the sunny slopes of the vineyards, gave him no love for freshness and simplicity. He lived in a village or a forest as in a city, with magnificence. When the

whole Court accompanied him, it meant a train of at least twelve thousand baggage-horses as well as riding-horses, and mules to carry the silk-curtained litters. The King's own personal furniture and ornaments, chiefly of gold, his splendid suits of clothes, brocade, satin, velvet, precious furs, cloth of gold and silver, finest linen and lace, gorgeous jewellery, were the charge of a household of servants. And the lords and ladies of the Court—François was the first French king who insisted on the constant presence of ladies, saying that a Court without them was a garden without flowers—were obliged to ruin themselves in imitation of him and in extravagant rivalry with each other.

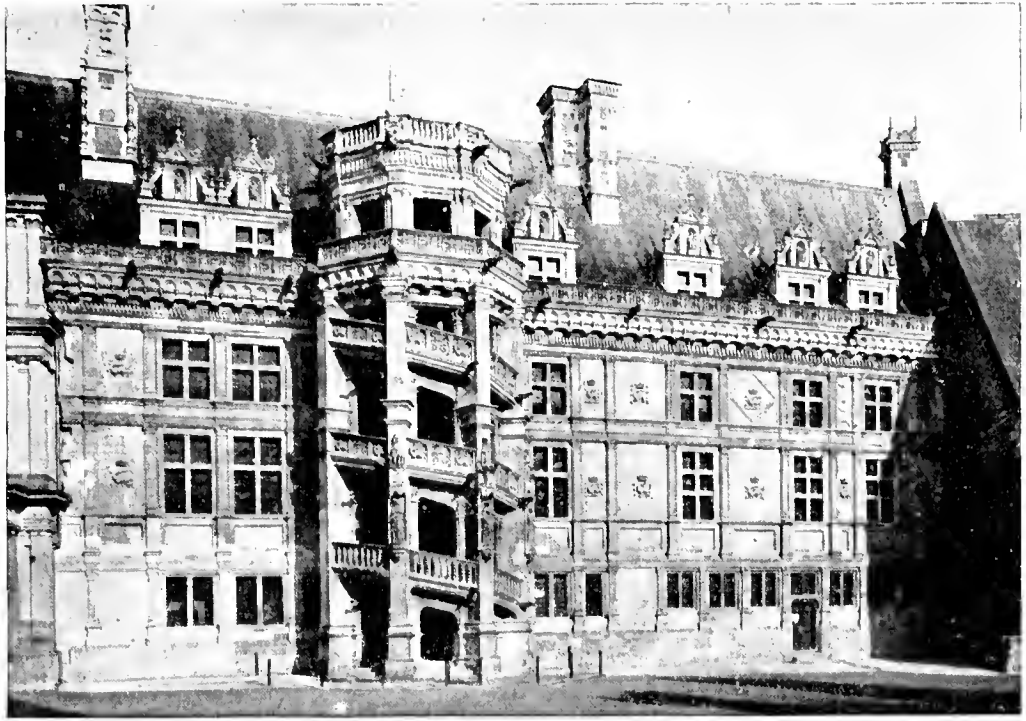
The Château de Blois, waiting on that autumn evening for the King's return from a day's hunting at Chambord, was indeed a beautiful royal abode. It was mostly new, rebuilt by the Renaissance kings on the site of an old feudal fortress. The sunset light streamed through its rich courts, and broad shadows lay on the white paving-stones. The wing of Louis XII glowed in colour of red and purple bricks below shining grey roofs and graceful chimneys: but in those days the sight deemed most admirable, in dazzling cream-white stone all carved and fretted, was the wing built by King François and Queen Claude, with the marvellous open-air staircase that wound upward round sculptured columns, past balustrades and balconies, to open on each storey of the vast palace building. To this day, when you enter the courtyard by the vaulted way under King Louis XII's statue, "the sixteenth century closes round you."

In those days the Château de Blois was the centre of Renaissance Court life, the favourite home of the Valois, the chief scene of a period in history which was to grow steadily darker and more disastrous through the succeed-

ing reigns of the three grandsons of François I, under the fateful Italian influence of Catherine de Médicis and the heavy storm-clouds of religious war. These were already on the horizon, climbing, indeed, half-way up the sky: during the last seven years occasional Protestant uprisings had been put down with a cruel sternness that seemed unnatural in François I. Like his sister Marguerite, he had grown up liberal-minded and tolerant of free thought. But as the absolute king of a Catholic country he did not long endure speech or action that rebelled against the laws of the kingdom or the Church. Possibly a secret inclination to leniency made him the more severe.

But the Château de Blois is at peace on this autumn evening. The King's favourite small greyhounds are playing in the court, gold collars round their delicate necks, in charge of a page in blue and silver, with curly hair and feathered cap. Near the chief entrance the guards go clanking up and down, their black jerkins slashed with white and orange-tawny and embroidered on the back with the royal salamander; a red quilted helmet shadowing a fierce bearded face, a long halberd resting on the shoulder. Servants in gay liveries are slipping up and down the broad twisting staircase, flashing in and out of sight, busy with preparations for the Court banquet and ball. Here and there a light begins to glow in upper windows, where other servants, among heaped glories of Court costume, are waiting for the return of lords and ladies, princes and princesses, splashed and weary from hunting.

The royal party has not arrived when a messenger from Paris flings himself from his tired horse at the gateway of the château. After being examined by the officer of the guard he is led to the presence of the King's chief secretary, the Sieur de Neuville, a grave personage, whose



The Château de Blois 126

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descendants, by the way, were to serve the French monarchy faithfully down to the Revolution.

The secretary bends bristling brows over the contents of the messenger's wallet while this young man watches him with curious, mocking eyes. One would say that he found satisfaction in what was to Neuville vexation or worse.

"These placards, good heaven! Dozens of these heretical placards posted up in Paris!"

"Scores, my lord. They are everywhere, even in the Louvre."

"Insolent blasphemers! And these letters tell me of fresh sacrilege and image-breaking. Have not these rash folk had warning enough? Do they ask for more punishments? Or do they presume on the King's known clemency? They may go too far, young man; they may go too far. His Majesty's humour will not now tolerate attacks on our holy religion. There has been too much indulgence. What say the people of Paris?"

"They are angry. They demand processions to expiate"—the messenger shrugs his shoulders with a smile which escapes notice, luckily for him. Nicolas de Neuville is not in a mood to pardon flippancy.

Dismissed, the messenger presently finds himself waiting in the courtyard for the return of the royal hunting party. He has orders to eat his supper with the grooms, and the time might well drag for a hungry youth, but not so with him. For he has a bold design in his head and a roll of Protestant placards hidden under his clothes. The son of a Paris tradesman from Artois, not yet suspected of heresy, and the godson of Louis de Berquin of that province, burnt for his opinions a few years since, Louis Paulin is one of the most hotly flaming young firebrands of the new Calvinist party. Never so happy as when his head is

actually in the lion's jaws, one day finds him nailing his placards on the gates of the Louvre and narrowly escaping the guard; the next, volunteering to ride to Blois with letters from the Provost of Paris, denouncing the heretics and showing specimens of their work; simply for the opportunity of spreading that work further.

Strolling round the court in deepening shadows, this bold adventurer lays his plans for the coming night, and mingling with the soldiers, eyes and ears wide open and purse-strings loose, is able to judge his chances of getting clear away when the task is done.

Dogs bark: there is a distant shouting in the street, and then, with a noise of talk and laughter, they come pouring through the archway, that gorgeous crew returning from Chambord. It is almost dark now: the rich colours, the trappings and gay jangling harness, are weirdly lit up by blazing torches. The King's long limbs are stretched in a litter; he is wrapped in a great blue velvet mantle lined with white satin and bordered with sable fur; the white ostrich feathers in his velvet hat nod over his cropped hair and long nose. The rest of the party are on horseback: even Queen Eléonore, the Austrian successor of Claude de France, and Princess Catherine of the Medici, wife of the King's second son. In those days, while François the Dauphin still lived, this young woman did not expect to be Queen of France; but she was a personage at Court, brilliant and energetic, if not beautiful, and her father-in-law enjoyed her company. There was beauty enough and to spare in the train of ladies that followed François; and ruffling splendour enough and to spare among his gentlemen. Of a rarer growth in this society were such matters as 'judgment, mercy, and truth' and other virtues one might name.

The palace glows with light and throbs with the music

of harps and viols while feet dance in stately measure. As midnight draws on and heads are heavy with sleep, about the time of the changing of the guard, no one takes heed to certain daring hammer-taps, nor to a slim figure that darts through a momentarily unguarded door. Louis Paulin the messenger has slipped away into the night, leaving defiance behind him.

There was a great cry in the morning, when men woke in the Château de Blois to find these irreverent placards nailed up here and there in the courtyards and buildings, even on the chapel door itself; placards attacking religious abuses in threatening, unmeasured language and calling violently for drastic reform. Rank rebellion against the State, as well as the Church: that was how the Protestant movement struck Nicolas de Neuville as he almost fearfully conveyed this last news, with that of the evening, to François I. The young messenger's disappearance added a puzzling touch of mystery to the dark business, and might almost cast suspicion on those who had sent him from Paris. The affair began to loom like a conspiracy.

"Le Roy prit feu," says a writer of the time, "et partit incontinent pour venir à Paris."

The Court, with all its enormous train, set out once more to labour through muddy roads to the capital. Princes and princesses, courtiers and ladies; one may believe that they bestowed hearty curses on the troublesome religionists whose zeal broke thus suddenly into the pleasant peace of Blois. The Louvre was not then a comfortable abode: the great central prison-keep had been pulled down, but the new palace with its saloons and *entresols*, its wide staircases and stately roofs, was hardly yet begun.

At the Louvre, however, the fiery King took up his

abode and began a fierce crusade against heresy. There were many trials of those concerned in the affair of the placards, many cruel punishments and executions. In an interval of the torturing and burning, François made with his own mouth a long discourse on heresy to the assembled Parliament and University, all men listening with respect to his orthodox views and to the new ordinances he laid down for the checking of that deadly disease in his kingdom.

Paris welcomed and approved his actions, for the Reformers were never popular there. The people in their thousands knelt in the streets at the passing of a more magnificent religious procession than even the Middle Ages often saw, ordered by the King as an atonement to Heaven for the insulting language of the placards.

Immense preparations were made. The streets were cleaned, *un grand luxe*; the stinking mud of Paris was proverbial. The side streets were barricaded and guarded, the procession's route, chiefly the Rue Saint-Honoré and the Rue Saint-Denis, being kept clear and hung with tapestries, a flaming torch at every house-door to light the way: it was mid-winter, and dark even at midday under the projecting gables and hanging forest of signs. In order to prevent 'confusion and tumult,' the University authorities were directed to keep all students under lock and key.

The procession started from the Church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, the jewelled shrines of St Geneviève and St Marcel, a holy Bishop of Paris in the fifth century, having been escorted thither in the early morning by clergy and banners from all the churches in Paris. It was the first time in living memory that these shrines had crossed the bridge north of Notre-Dame. Queen Eléonore led the procession, dressed in black velvet and mounted on

a white hackney draped in cloth of gold. The princesses her step-daughters followed her, in crimson satin embroidered with gold. With them, says the old historian, were many princesses and ladies, gentlemen, pages, and guards. Then—strange contrast to this courtly splendour—the blind Quinze-Vingts in their brown gowns, and the mendicant Orders, all carrying lighted candles; the clergy of all the churches, the monks from all the abbeys, bearing the shrines of their patron saints: that of St Germain had never before been borne through the streets. The shrine of St Eloy, the famous counsellor of King Dagobert, was carried by the guild of the goldsmiths, his own trade. The two great shrines of St Geneviève and St Marcel, each carried by eighteen men in white, were followed by the bare-footed monks of the Abbey of Sainte-Geneviève. Then came the Chapters of Notre-Dame and Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, the heads of the University, the King's Swiss Guard with their halberds; and here was a fine burst of military music, drums and fifes, trumpets, cornets, and hautboys, while a thousand voices sang the hymn *Pange Lingua*. The choir of the Sainte-Chapelle preceded its precious relics, borne by bishops and followed by cardinals. The Host was borne by the Bishop of Paris under a canopy of purple velvet supported by the King's three sons and Charles de Bourbon, Duc de Vendôme, a prince of the blood royal. Behind the canopy walked King François, bare-headed, in black velvet, carrying a large candle of white wax; then a number of nobles and high officers of the kingdom, the Parliament in red robes, the courts of justice and of finance; the Provosts of Paris and of the Merchants; the royal household and the officials of the city.

Thus with loud chanting and pealing of bells, rich in jewels and colour, the procession wound its slow way

through the streets, returning over the bridge to a solemn service at Notre-Dame. No open sign of disloyalty to Church or King disturbed its triumphant progress.

But the pale, defiant face of such a youth as Louis Paulin, the bookseller's son, lost in the crowd, peeping through the barricades, might have warned Authority in Church and State that neither by cruelties nor by ceremonies could it hinder the march of Time or stay the swiftly rising clouds of religious war.

CHAPTER XIV

VALOIS AND BOURBON

Dès longtemps les écrits des antiques prophètes,
Les songes menaçants, les hideuses comètes,
Avoient assez prédit que l'an soixante et deux
Rendroit de tous côtés les François malheureux.

PIERRE DE RONSARD

Tout perissoit enfin, lorsque Bourbon parut.
. . . . . .
Mais Henri s'avançoit vers sa grandeur suprême
Par des chemins cachés inconnus à lui-même.

F. M. AROUET DE VOLTAIRE

ON a winter morning in the year 1553, when the long jagged line of the Pyrenees glittered with snow, a prince was born in the high tapestried room of the castle of Pau.

Through his father, Antoine de Bourbon, Duc de Vendôme, he was tenth in direct descent from St Louis. His mother, Jeanne d'Albret, was heiress to the kingdom of Navarre; a very small kingdom since Ferdinand the Catholic of Spain had possessed himself of all its territory south of the Pyrenees, but still free and proud, with an independent history of seven hundred years.

Its king, Henri II of the House of Albret, ruler of Lower Navarre and of Béarn, and likely enough to be deprived even of these by his other great neighbour France, had been in his youth a splendid cavalier, sharing with François I in many adventures of war and peace. Marguerite, Duchesse d'Alençon, the King's widowed sister, fell in love with Henri d'Albret and married him, though eleven years

younger than herself. Their Court in Béarn was a centre of cultivation and toleranee. There many Reformers, even Calvin himself, found refuge from the dangers that beset them in Catholic Franee. Not that Marguerite and her husband accepted the severities of Calvinism. She was a free-thinker, a daughter of the Renaissance, a kindred spirit of its great writers, and like them, outwardly conforming to the Church. She was approved neither by Catholic bishop nor Protestant pastor, but bestowed her humorous charm and her kindness equally on both. She died in 1549, leaving a world the duller for her loss.

As to Henri d'Albret, he was a native of the South, and from earliest times new opinions and new learning had been welcome there. As years advanced he became a strieter Catholic, partly perhaps from policy: a King of Navarre quarrelled with a King of France at his peril, and Henri II of Franee was a gloomy prince, a more bigoted persecutor than François I had been.

These were the grandparents of the child who opened his eyes at Pau on that winter morning. The story goes that his mother sang when he was born: her father, King Henri, had offered her as a reward a gold chain long enough to twist twenty-five times round her neck and a gold box containing his last will. So the first sound the baby heard was an old song of Béarn. King Henri handed the gifts to his daughter, saying: "Those are yours and this is mine," and carried off the child, wrapped in his furry robe, to present him to the Court. But first he rubbed the little lips with garlic, in Béarnais fashion, and made the baby swallow a drop of red wine from a gold cup, "to make him strong and vigorous": a treatment whieh certainly justified itself.

The little prince was a treasure worth preserving. Two children of Antoine and Jeanne, grandsons of Henri and

Marguerite, had died in infancy, victims of the ignorance and carelessness of the time—one stifled in his cradle, one dropped between his nurse and a courtier, who were playing at ball with him—fun for them, crying 'Catch,' but death to the poor baby. It was not the mother's fault: a wilful, high-spirited girl, very much in love with her husband, she was moving constantly between Court and camp, and no one in that selfish Valois world would expect a princess to give much thought to her nursery. It was her father, furious at these losses, resolving that another child should have a better chance of life, who had summoned Jeanne home to Béarn in the autumn of 1553. In short dark days and stormy weather she travelled from north to south, from Compiègne to Pau, a journey of three weeks, in order to arrive at King Henri's castle before the future Henri Quatre of France was born.

At the time King Henri II de Valois, with four young sons, was reigning in France, and only wise men foresaw the great storm of civil war in which that degenerate House was to go down.

"This is mine," said the grandfather, and acted on his words.

He took the child from his tortoise-shell cradle—still to be seen—and sent him away to a castle among the wild wooded hills between Pau and Lourdes, near the bank of a swift *gave* or stream that had its source in the high Pyrenees. The ruined ramparts of Coarraze still remain. In a cottage under their shelter lived the faithful nurse Jeanne Fourchade and her husband, under whose care, supervised by that of the King's cousin, the Baronne de Miossens, young Henri lived till he was four or five years old: not treated as a prince, not richly dressed or loaded with toys, but clothed and fed like the little peasants

around him and scrambling barefoot with them among the rocks and the pine-trees.

His grandfather's death changed all that. Antoine de Bourbon, the new King of Navarre, at once found himself struggling with the King of France to keep not only his governments of Languedoc and Guienne but his wife's provinces of Navarre and Béarn. By diplomatic weapons, an angry protest from the Estates of Navarre and a veiled threat of calling France's enemy, Spain, to the rescue, Antoine and Jeanne preserved their little country's independence. But in order to ensure for Jeanne and her son the protecting favour of her royal cousin of France, the King and Queen of Navarre appeared in Paris and presented Prince Henri, now five years old, at King Henri II's Court.

There is a pretty portrait of the child, painted at about the time when he first set foot in the Louvre: handsome and curly-headed, dressed in tight jerkin and small ruff, his dark eyes looking out with bright interest into a new world. Here were splendours he had never seen in Béarn; here were boys and girls, cousins older and younger than himself, ready to play with him; here was a fat, olive-skinned, laughing lady, the Queen of France, whose hand he was told to kiss, and who kissed him with an ugly mouth. He did not like her: he preferred King Henri, handsome but grim, who patted his head and asked him if he would be his son.

"That is my father," said the little Henri, in his dialect of Béarn, pointing to King Antoine.

"Well then, will you be my son-in-law?"

"*Oui bien!*"

And a darling dark-haired girl of six years old, Princess Marguerite, *la Reine Margot* of days to come, was led forward to kiss him before the laughing Court.

Weddings were in the air. François the Dauphin was married in this same year to the lovely Queen of Scotland, Mary Stuart, whose uncles of the House of Guise thus became all-powerful at Court: an insufferable state of things to the Bourbon princes and a blow to the cause of Reform.

The King and Queen of Navarre returned to Béarn with their two children—their daughter Catherine was born during this visit to Paris—and it was not till after the death of Henri II and of his short-lived successor, François II, that Queen Jeanne and her little Henri travelled north again. In the meanwhile King Antoine had joined his brother the Prince de Condé and a number of Huguenot gentlemen in a conspiracy to remove the young King from the influence of the Guises. The plot failed and was frightfully avenged by a series of terrible executions at Amboise. Impolitic as well as cruel, these deaths and the persecutions which followed them only served to spread the new opinions and to horrify all humane and generous minds. Even the Queen-mother, Catherine de Médicis, cynically clever and indifferent to questions of religion or humanity, was now in favour of toleration. "These disturbances," she said, "are more political than religious." Personally, at this time, she would have done much to conciliate the reforming faction. As soon as the death of François II made her Regent of the kingdom Protestants were allowed to hold their faith and even to worship unmolested, as long as they forbore to assemble in public, to raise armies, or to trouble their neighbours' religion. It was an experiment in gentleness: the penalty of death and other severities having for thirty years failed to crush Reform.

By way of further conciliation, Queen Catherine called the King of Navarre to rule with her as Lieutenant-General

of the kingdom. Antoine, pleased and triumphant, sent for his wife and son to share in his new dignity.

With a heavy heart Queen Jeanne left her mountains and travelled northward. She hated the luxurious, degenerate Court, the centre of evil talk and immoral living, and justly feared its influence on her husband. She distrusted the Italian Queen-mother, the crafty politician, unscrupulous and greedy of power, whose Bible was *The Prince* of Machiavelli. Jeanne's own religion, as the years advanced, had become more austerely Calvinist. The Huguenots throughout the South looked to her as their protectress, and her encouragement of them went far beyond the easy tolerance shown by her mother, Queen Marguerite. No two women were ever more strangely contrasted than Jeanne d'Albret and Catherine de Médicis. Both were resolute and quick-witted; but Jeanne was morally strong, simple, sincere, and plain-spoken, her mind clearly to be read in her fine expressive face.

There is a characteristic story of the two women at about this time. One day Queen Jeanne had consulted the wisdom of the Queen-mother as to the best way of saving not only her frivolous husband but her kingdom, threatened by Catholic Spain. Catherine advised "outward conformity to Rome."

"Madame," said Jeanne d'Albret, "sooner than endanger my soul I would throw my son and all the kingdoms of the world, if I had them, into the depths of the sea."

Queen Catherine laughed.

The year 1562, ushered in by tremendous storms and floods, was a terrible year for all who loved France or believed in justice and humanity. It was a specially tragic year for the Queen of Navarre.

The hatred between Catholics and Huguenots was far too bitter to be held in check by any decree of toleration,

and a few months saw the kingdom in a blaze of civil war. Begun by the famous massacre at Vassy, where the soldiers of the Duc de Guise attacked a number of Huguenots singing hymns in a barn, this horrible struggle spread like wildfire throughout France. The Huguenots were strong and numerous, fully believing in their mission to uproot idolatry and to convert France by the sword. The Catholics were resolved to make an end of heresy, sacrilege, and rebellion. The leaders on both sides were equally fierce and keen ; and thus poor France entered on the so-called religious wars which lasted, with intervals of truce, for nearly thirty years, and reduced the country to a depth of misery unequalled since the Hundred Years War. Behind the religious quarrel was the rivalry of political factions, Bourbon and Guise ; and also the constant effort of the Queen-mother to hold the balance fairly even and by playing off one party against the other to keep her own power and to defend the monarchy.

In the early months of the war she scored a point by detaching the King of Navarre from the Huguenot party. Antoine de Bourbon was a weak man, and the magical influence of the Valois Court, its wickedness and its charm, proved too much for his faith and honour. It was a man false both to his wife and to his cause who fell commanding the Catholic army at the siege of Rouen in the autumn of 1562.

Queen Jeanne returned to Protestant Béarn, leaving her son at the French Court for a time : he was very popular there and a favourite playfellow of the boy Charles IX, not much older than himself. It must be remembered that while war and destruction were raging in the provinces and even in Paris, the Court was seldom entirely on one side or the other. The Regent feared the ambition of the Guises even more than the rebellious discontent of

the Huguenots. It was the fashion to call theirs the 'intelligent' party, and their opinions on religion were held by many nobles and ladies of the Court. The Queen-mother expected only 'outward conformity,' and sometimes not even that. Little Henri was safe in the care of a worthy tutor named La Gaucherie—odd name for one employed at Court—an original person who did not torment him with 'grammar,' but educated him by word of mouth, making him learn many wise sayings by heart. He was a brilliantly clever child, already trained by his mother in Latin and Greek.

For four years, according to his biographers, the Queen of Navarre left her boy with his Valois cousins, and no one who studies the life and character of Henri can say that he took no harm in that atmosphere of diseased nerves and vicious tendencies. However, he was taken back to Béarn at the age of thirteen, and at sixteen, after the death of his uncle the Prince de Condé at the battle of Jarnac, was made leader-in-chief of the Huguenot armies, his young cousin Condé and the famous Admiral de Coligny being styled his lieutenants. At La Rochelle, now the head-quarters of the party, his mother devoted Henri solemnly to the cause.

To this gallant, light-hearted young prince, as to his forefathers, a war of any kind seemed the most entrancing of games. Though at first kept out of the actual fighting, he soon proved himself a daring leader. His hardy upbringing carried him brilliantly through a long campaign, and it is strange to think of him, twenty years later to be welcomed and loved as the most popular of French kings, merrily helping to devastate his future kingdom with fire and sword, harrying Guienne and Languedoc, sacking small towns and villages, destroying the treasures of churches, burning the outskirts of Toulouse, crossing

the Rhône to take more towns by storm, sweeping down on the Saône, invading Burgundy, even threatening Paris, his army quite undiscouraged by several defeats and growing in numbers as the months rolled on. Coligny, of course, was the actual commander of the Huguenot forces : but it was not only flatterers who praised the martial genius of young Henri of Navarre.

In one of the intervals of peace, breathing spaces for France between the exhausting periods of long-to-be-continued war, Queen Jeanne appeared once more at Court. In the spring of 1572 she yielded to Queen Catherine's wish that the old plan might be carried out, the marriage of her Henri with Princess Marguerite. To the outward eye—and Jeanne was not a deep politician—the Huguenot cause seemed for the time victorious. It did not even matter very much that the unwilling Marguerite flatly refused to change her religion ; nor that she had set her heart on another Henri, the leader of the Catholic party, the young Duc de Guise. Such obstacles were laughed away by Catherine de Médicis ; and after all, Jeanne d'Albret was as wax in those long hands of hers.

But Jeanne did not live to see her son married to one of the worst and most fascinating of the bad Valois race. Was she poisoned by a pair of perfumed gloves, in order that Henri and his cause might be more completely in the Queen-mother's power ? Or did she die of consumption hastened by the heat of Paris in that June ? The mystery can hardly be cleared up now. In any case, she died, and the Prince of Béarn became King of Navarre.

In royal magnificence, having put off his deep mourning for the occasion, Henri was married to Marguerite at Notre-Dame. He was not nineteen, a handsome lad with shrewd eyes, a head of frizzy curls, and the long nose of French royalty : she a little over twenty, tall and majestic,

" her white face flushed with rose-red." She wore the Crown jewels and an ermine cape above her long trained mantle of blue velvet. All the Court was equally splendid, and Paris glowed in crimson and cloth of gold. But it was a strange wedding, with all its grand display. The Huguenot bridegroom was not allowed to enter the cathedral, the marriage ceremonies being performed on a platform outside the great west door. And Paris, full of the followers of Guise, looked askance at the crowds of Huguenot gentlemen who had streamed into the city from every part of France to attend the marriage of their chief. " It will be a blood-red wedding," people muttered in the streets.

And so it came to pass. Six days brought Paris to Sunday the 24th of August, the Feast of St Bartholomew : that day and night of horror which stained the memory of Queen Catherine de Médicis ineffaceably with blood, lengthened the Wars of Religion by nearly twenty years, and sent Charles IX to his death in misery and madness.

CHAPTER XV

HENRI QUATRE

Je chante ce Héros, qui régna sur la France,
Et par droit de conquête, et par droit de naissance,
Qui par de longs travaux apprit à gouverner,
Qui formidable et doux, sut vaincre et pardonner.
. . . . . .
Tout le peuple changé dans ce jour salutaire,
Reconnoit son vrai Roi, son vainqueur, et son père.
Dès lors on admira ce règne fortuné,
Et commencé trop tard, et trop tôt terminé.

F. M. Arouet de Voltaire

PIERRE DE RONSARD, the friend of the unhappy Charles IX, who mourned the troubles of his time and immortalized its romance in exquisite poetry, was also an unconscious prophet of the years to come. In a poem celebrating a royal progress through the provinces made by the Queen-mother and two of her sons, he painted a picture so ideal, so far from the actual facts, that some of his critics can hardly decide whether it is an instance of absurd flattery in a Court poet or the expression of a pious wish.

Morts sont ces mots, Papaux et Huguenots!

So Ronsard assured Catherine de Médicis; and he went on to describe how religion was at rest, how old soldiers stayed peacefully at home, how the artisan sang at his work, how traders went fearlessly to market and labourers to the fields, returning home at moonrise to sit down to their well-earned meal: all lifting devout hands in prayer that she, the bringer of this peace, might live in health a

hundred years. No doubt this poetical epistle was written when the Queen-mother, as Regent, had made some politic advances toward toleration, and the poet's imagination carried him far in advance of his time. Forty years later the prophecy in all its details had been fulfilled by Henri IV. Misery, fear, and persecution were banished from the pleasant land of France.

The story of the long civil war, with all its confusions, the "Bedlam of senseless strife" which was not ended even by the murders of Henri, Duc de Guise, who claimed the crown, and of Henri III, the last of the Valois line, is too complicated to be told here. The Huguenot King of Navarre, shrewd, practical, good-humoured, who conquered hearts as well as armies, and changed his religion for the sake of winning Catholic Paris, no sooner reigned over France than he began his happy policy of healing her wounds.

Those many years of fighting had left the country in a desperate condition. More than a million persons had lost their lives; hundreds of towns and villages lay in ruins, bridges were broken down, rivers had become unnavigable, roads impassable, deep in mud and overgrown with briars and thorns: the land was uncultivated and the people were starving; trades and manufactures had almost ceased. The kingdom, says Archbishop Péréfixe, in his *Life of Henri le Grand*, "was so to speak a den of serpents and venomous beasts," being full of thieves, robbers, murderers, and other vagabonds. In a very few years Henri changed all this, rebuilt the ruins, paved the high roads, and set his people to work and to trade. An excellent book on agriculture, written by a Huguenot gentleman, Olivier de Serres, was his favourite reading. He established in every province manufactures of useful and beautiful things, interesting himself

especially in the great new industry of silk-weaving. It was his desire that open spaces in town and country, even the gardens of Catherine de Médicis' palace, the Tuileries, should be planted with mulberry-trees for feeding silk-worms.

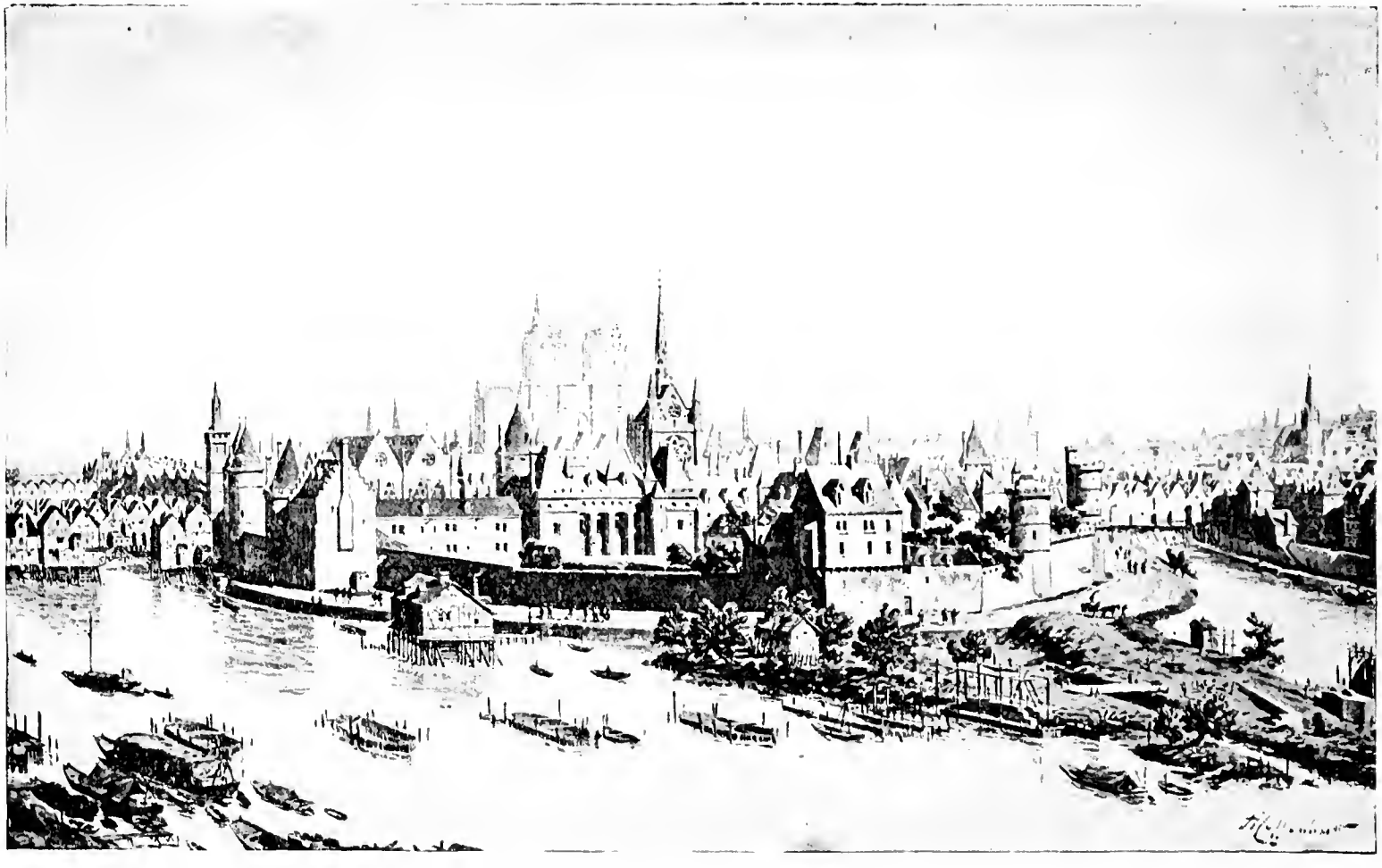
At the same time that Henri IV set men's hands to work he attempted to calm their minds and to check religious strife by the famous Edict of Nantes—more famous still through its unhappy revocation less than a century later—in which he assured liberty of conscience to his people, granting the Huguenots rights of free thought, of public worship in specified places, and of holding office under the State. The King's friend and counsellor, Maximilien de Béthune, Marquis de Rosny and Duc de Sully, was himself a Huguenot, and of an uncompromising type. A rough, honest man, the instrument of Henri's religious and political schemes, which did not please every one, and a fierce guardian of the royal finances, he was naturally unpopular at Court. Wily ambassadors and greedy courtiers found him totally incorruptible and unbearably rude. Comrades in arms and constant friends, two men could hardly have been in sharper contrast than were Sully and his gay, courteous, light-hearted, and pleasure-loving master. Their characters met on a common ground of practical good sense, clear views of reality, and a sincere love of France and her people.

The King and his minister might have been seen walking together in Henri's new building, the immense wing of the Louvre known as the Grande Galerie. Sunshine poured through stately windows looking down on the river, across which Henri's still unfinished bridge, the Pont-Neuf, had been lately thrown. He might well be happy in his Paris, for on every side were the marks of his restoring and creating

hand. The city, like the country, had lain exhausted, her streets grass-grown, ruined, and half inhabited, at the end of the wars. Now new streets and squares were everywhere in building, and Paris, from the Place Royale to the quays of the Seine, the palaces on the Island and the beautiful houses and gardens in the southern quarter, was on the way to the classic splendour, prosperity, and civilization of the age of Henri's grandson, Louis XIV.

The post of confidential adviser to Henri IV was no easy one, for this popular King had weaknesses of character and temperament confirmed by his early bringing up at the Valois Court and the rough soldier life he had led for years. The wearer of the white plume of Navarre did not also wear "the white flower of a blameless life." Sully had something to do in patching up the quarrels between Henri and his second wife, Queen Marie de Médicis, a self-indulgent woman, jealous for her own dignity; who had just cause indeed to complain of her husband, but who irritated him by her narrowness and obstinate stupidity, her devotion to Italian favourites, and her strong bias toward France's enemy, Spain.

In these first days of May 1610 she was to be left Regent of the kingdom during the campaign planned by Henri against the Emperor in consequence of the Imperial claim to the frontier duchies of Cleves and Juliers. At this moment she insisted on being crowned: a ceremony long deferred and now for several reasons distasteful to the King. He did not wish to increase her authority, or rather, that of the unpatriotic clique surrounding her; he disliked the great expense of the function at Saint-Denis and the State entry into Paris, as well as the delay of his expedition. And there were other more hidden reasons, strongest of all.



View of Paris in the Sixteenth Century

From a drawing by F. Hoffbauer in "Les Rives de la Seine à travers les Ages" (Paris, H. Laurens)

After dinner that day at the Louvre, Henri played as usual with his six children, whom he dearly loved; from Louis, a solemn boy of nine dressed like a little man, with cropped dark hair and plumed hat and a toy drum slung round his neck, to the tight-capped baby Henriette Marie, the future Queen of England, one day to be known as 'la Reine Malheureuse.' A gay and loyal courtier, the Baron de Bassompierre, was in attendance. The Duc de Sully being announced, Henri dismissed them all and began to pace the gallery, leaning on his minister's arm.

They were very unlike in appearance, these two on whom the welfare of France depended. Henri was a man of fifty-seven, of middle height, thin and active, with worn nutcracker face, long nose, and pointed chin. His curly hair and beard were grey, but he had a wonderful look of youth and an irresistible smile, even in his worried moments. Sully, though six years younger, seemed, with his ponderous figure and bald brow, the older of the two. All the affairs of the kingdom, so lightly borne by the King, weighed heavily on him; and now new royal troubles of mind were added to the load. For the Queen was to be crowned within a few days; and the nearer the ceremony the stronger became the King's dislike and dread of it. Not for the first time he poured into Sully's ear those presentiments and fears of treachery and death which sounded to his friend almost unworthy of a brave man.

"I tell you," he said, "I shall never leave Paris. The foreign party—Austria—Spain—they have their army of traitors here, and they will stick at nothing to stop this war. I tell you, they will kill me. This accursed coronation will be the signal for my death. Ah, Sully, my heart fails within me!"

"What ideas, your Majesty! What words from the hero who never turned his back on cannon-ball or musket-shot, pike or sword!"

Thus growled Sully: and yet he was not a stranger to his royal master's misgivings. Rumour had long been busy with conspiracies against the King's life; in many countries the report of his death had been already spread. Astrologers had dared to speak openly in warning: and certainly, says Péréfixe, there had been signs in heaven and earth that the reign was approaching its end. A total eclipse of the sun; a 'terrible comet'; earthquakes; a rain of blood, visitations of plague; strange visions and appearances, church-bells tolled by unseen hands: such things were whispered throughout France and had reached the ears of both minister and King. Henri had laughed at the astrologers, yet had listened to them. When a certain Thomassin, famous in his time and suspected of darker studies than astrology, warned him to beware of the month of May, and especially of Friday, the fourteenth day of the month, Henri seized the wizard by his long hair and beard, dragged him round the room, and flung him out with shouts of laughter. But he did not forget Thomassin's words, nor the older prophecy that he would die in a coach during the most magnificent function of his reign.

Leaning on Sully, the King reminded him of all this, and ended with the same despairing cry: "Ah, accursed coronation! It will surely be the cause of my death!"

His old comrade, who loved him, was terribly distressed. Would not the Queen, he asked, knowing of these fears, consent even at the last moment to delay her coronation? Or would not the King ride off to-morrow to the wars, leaving ceremonies and coaches behind?

Henri shook his head. "Willingly would I do so! But my wife has set her heart on this affair—and my absence would offend her mortally. No—I must go through with it. If I die, I die, and the merry crew of the Court will find that they have lost a good master."

"Sire, I cannot endure to hear you speak thus. Drive away these dark thoughts. You are in the prime of life, in perfect health, a great King and beloved by your subjects. My dear master, God numbers our days! And I would have you place no faith at all in lying prophets and star-gazers, paid doubtless by your enemies to torment your noble spirit and to spread terror in France."

"As you say, God numbers our days," the King repeated thoughtfully. "Yet prophets are not always proved liars. Stars are of God's universe: they cannot deceive. I hear you mutter that their interpreters may: 'tis true, and make money out of fools. But what of omens? Come here, old friend, and see."

He led Sully across the gallery to a window which opened on the inner courtyard of the palace. Down on the paving-stones, its decorations trailing in the dust, lay the tall pole which was set up there with religious ceremony on every first of May. Workmen were now silently removing it.

Hung with green boughs, garlanded with flowers and ribbons, adorned with banners and religious inscriptions, the 'May' had its modern origin in offerings made by the guilds of Paris in honour of Our Lady. But probably the Druids welcomed spring in some such fashion.

"You see our 'May'?" said the King. "It fell yesterday, without a breath of wind or a moment's warning. I was in the gallery, returning from the Tuileries, with Bassompierre and others. I bade them stay here while I visited the Queen in her cabinet to hurry her dressing,

that she might not keep me waiting for dinner. From this very window they saw the fall of the 'May.' And it fell, as you see, right against my private staircase. When I returned to them Bassompierre was saying: 'God keep the King, for this is an evil omen.' I mocked at them and called them fools. But, Sully, what say you?"

"They are fools, your Majesty. The pole was rotten, and some one deserves to be punished."

But Sully was so far impressed by the King's presentiments that he appealed to the Queen to put off her coronation till Henri's return from the wars. For three days, he says, he pleaded with her Majesty in vain. Marie would not listen to him: and the suggestion of the King's absence, as he had foreseen, pleased her still less. So Henri, with the merry kindliness that was natural to him, laughed his own fears away.

The coronation took place at Saint-Denis, with great magnificence, on Thursday, the 13th of May. It was noticed that the King was "extraordinarily gay." The Queen was to make her state entry into Paris, attending a grand service at Notre-Dame, on Sunday the 16th. On Friday afternoon the King ordered his coach and drove out to visit the Duc de Sully, who had been taken ill suddenly at his lodgings in the Arsenal. Before leaving the Louvre he appeared nervous and restless, so that the Queen, now in high good-humour, begged him not to go. For a few moments he was irresolute, and before stepping into the coach asked his servants the day of the month. When they told him he laughed, and said impatiently to the coachman: "Drive on! Take me out of this!" (*"Mettez-moi hors de céans!"*).

Several gentlemen sat with him in the coach, which was unguarded, except by a few running footmen. It was open on both sides, the leathern curtains rolled up, for the

day was fine, and Henri wished to see the triumphal arches in the streets, already adorned for Sunday's ceremony. The four horses pranced and plunged on the cobble-stones as they passed from the Rue Saint-Honoré into the Rue de la Ferronnerie, close to the Cemetery of the Innocents, and here the royal coach was brought to a stand by two carts, one loaded with wine-barrels, the other with hay, which came lumbering along and blocked the street, its narrow thoroughfare already cumbered by stalls of ironmongery and tin goods along the cemetery wall. The royal footmen turned in at the cemetery gate and ran along the cloisters in order to rejoin the coach at the end of the street. Two only remained near it, one running forward to deal with the carts, the other lingering behind to tie his garter. Thus, except for the coachman, the postilion, and a few passers-by, Henri and his companions were left alone in the street.

A man from Angoulême, a mad, fanatical schoolmaster named François Ravaillac, had followed the royal coach from the Louvre. For days past, whether tempted by the Spanish party or inspired by a demon within himself will never be known, he had been watching his opportunity to kill the King. He now seized it. Slipping in between a tin-stall and the open coach, with one foot on the curb-stone and the other on a spoke of the wheel, he leaped up, and with a long, sharp knife stabbed the King twice to the heart.

"I am wounded—it is nothing," the King said: those who were with him scarcely heard the last faint words.

Thus, on Friday the 14th of May, 1610, in his coach, in the midst of the most splendid ceremonies of his reign, died Henri of France and Navarre; best loved of men and kings, the father of his people and the restorer of his country.

CHAPTER XVI

THE IRON HAND

Richelieu nous intéresse comme un homme fort et courageux qui se livre à tous les dangers et se confie à sa fortune. Sa vie est un combat éternel. . . . Tout dans Richelieu imprime l'étonnement et commande l'admiration. LOUIS MARCELLIN DE FONTANES

Voilà l'homme rouge qui passe!
VICTOR HUGO

A YOUNG man in episcopal purple, of middle height, very thin, with black hair, a delicate, pointed face, keen dark eyes under a broad brow full of intelligence, quick to catch and respond to every slightest glance from royalty."

Such was Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu at the Court of Henry IV, by whose influence with the Pope this young Poitevin noble had been consecrated Bishop of Luçon at the age of twenty-two. Henri called him 'my Bishop,' laughed at stories of his travels in Italy, was entertained by his witty, fearless talk, and certainly never guessed that this boyish ecclesiastic, who would so willingly have been a soldier, was to carry on his own royal work as a leader and ruler of men; that this ambitious courtier was to make the glory and unity of France his sole objects, and to prepare the way for what has been called "one of the great magnificences of the world," the Golden Age of France under Louis XIV.

Fourteen years after the death of Henri, having gone through chequered experiences during the regency of Marie de Médicis and the rule of Italian and French

favourites in her name and that of the young Louis XIII, Armand de Richelieu, already a proved statesman, became a cardinal and First Minister of France. The purple cassock of a bishop is changed for the red flowing robes of a prince of the Church : he moves to his front place on the stage of history as we know him in Philippe de Champagne's great picture, still slender, pale, and keen ; bright and flexible, as M. Hanotaux has said, like a sword that wears out its sheath. The sword did indeed wear out the sheath ; and Cardinal de Richelieu's career seems all the more remarkable when we know that he was never really well, and that even in the earlier years, before disease had laid its cruel and final hold upon him, he suffered constantly from feverish headaches, writing to his friends : "My pain is excessive. . . . I am so persecuted by my head, I know not what to say."

The death of Henri IV was a frightful blow to the peace and prosperity he had done so much to establish in France. When Richelieu took up his heritage of power these blessings had again vanished from the land. He would willingly have restored them : but a rich and happy France could not exist without the external and internal security which had vanished with Henri. In the last few years the power of Spain and the Empire had grown prodigiously and threatened the frontiers of France. Her provinces had fallen into the hands of great nobles and princes of the blood, who governed in the King's name, it is true, but ground down the populations, made enormous fortunes, and behaved like independent sovereigns. The Huguenot party, grown very strong, with leaders among the chief men of the kingdom, was now in constant rebellion against the royal authority, and its friendship with England was a growing danger to France.

Louis XIII was not the man to deal with such a state of

things. No son could be a greater contrast to his father than he to the clever, resolute, popular Henri IV. He had all Henri's personal courage as a soldier, and was a splendid sportsman, caring indeed for little else. He was dignified and conscientious, shy, gloomy, and persevering, of weak health, and married to a childish, frivolous little Spaniard. Such a King needed a minister of genius, and Louis was wise enough to know it, and to place his entire trust in Cardinal de Richelieu. It has been truly said that the reign of Louis XIII may be more correctly styled the reign of Richelieu. For eighteen years, from 1624 till his death in 1642, the *Eminentissime*, as they called him, was the greatest man not only in France, but in Europe.

It was not religious intolerance that inspired Richelieu in his fierce campaign against the Protestants of France. He was ready to ally himself with the Protestants of other countries against the Empire and Spain. But this was a political question, affecting the unity of the kingdom and its central doctrine, loyalty to the King. Louis XIII could not—Richelieu was determined that he should not—share his authority with the leaders of the Huguenot party. In their present temper of hostile and disloyal discontent, now at boiling point in a few privileged cities, they were a greater peril to France than her foreign enemies. Even after the King had fought and crushed them in the South their daring seamen put out from La Rochelle, their chief stronghold on the coast, attacked ships sailing under the French flag, and sank or captured them: losses ill to be borne by a navy which hardly existed in the early days of Richelieu's rule.

"We must destroy this wasps' nest of La Rochelle!" said the Cardinal.

Before he was ready—for he had to build forts, provision an army, and create a navy—the Duke of Buckingham

sailed one summer day from Portsmouth and attacked the French troops already stationed in the Isle of Ré outside the harbour of La Rochelle. If he had made straight for the city and the royal forts on its seaward side, the campaign might have ended differently. But the royal governor of Ré and his little garrison held out bravely, though almost starving, until after several months Richelieu was able to send in provisions and reinforcements. Then, after serious losses in men and guns, Buckingham renounced his enterprise and sailed away.

The people of La Rochelle watched from their walls the English ships disappearing on the dark November horizon. The winter fogs were closing in on them ; the great grey sea was empty of their friends. The islands that sheltered the harbour and all the sandy or marshy coast of the mainland were occupied by the royal armies, whose entrenchments, seven or eight miles long, were connected by a string of forts : no relief by land was possible. But the "proud city of the waters," her harbour still open to the Atlantic Ocean, the home of so many of her bold sons, was not at all ready to give up the fighting independence of centuries. Her thirty thousand people were as one in their will to hold out against the King to the last. If England had failed them, they would defend themselves. When the siege was a few months old, they elected as mayor a sturdy sea-dog, by name Jean Guiton. Laying his dagger on the council-table, he said to the citizens : "If you elect me, remember that this steel is for the heart of him who first talks of surrender. You may plunge it into my heart, if the word is mine." The dagger lay there till by no fault of Guiton or his burghers the siege was ended.

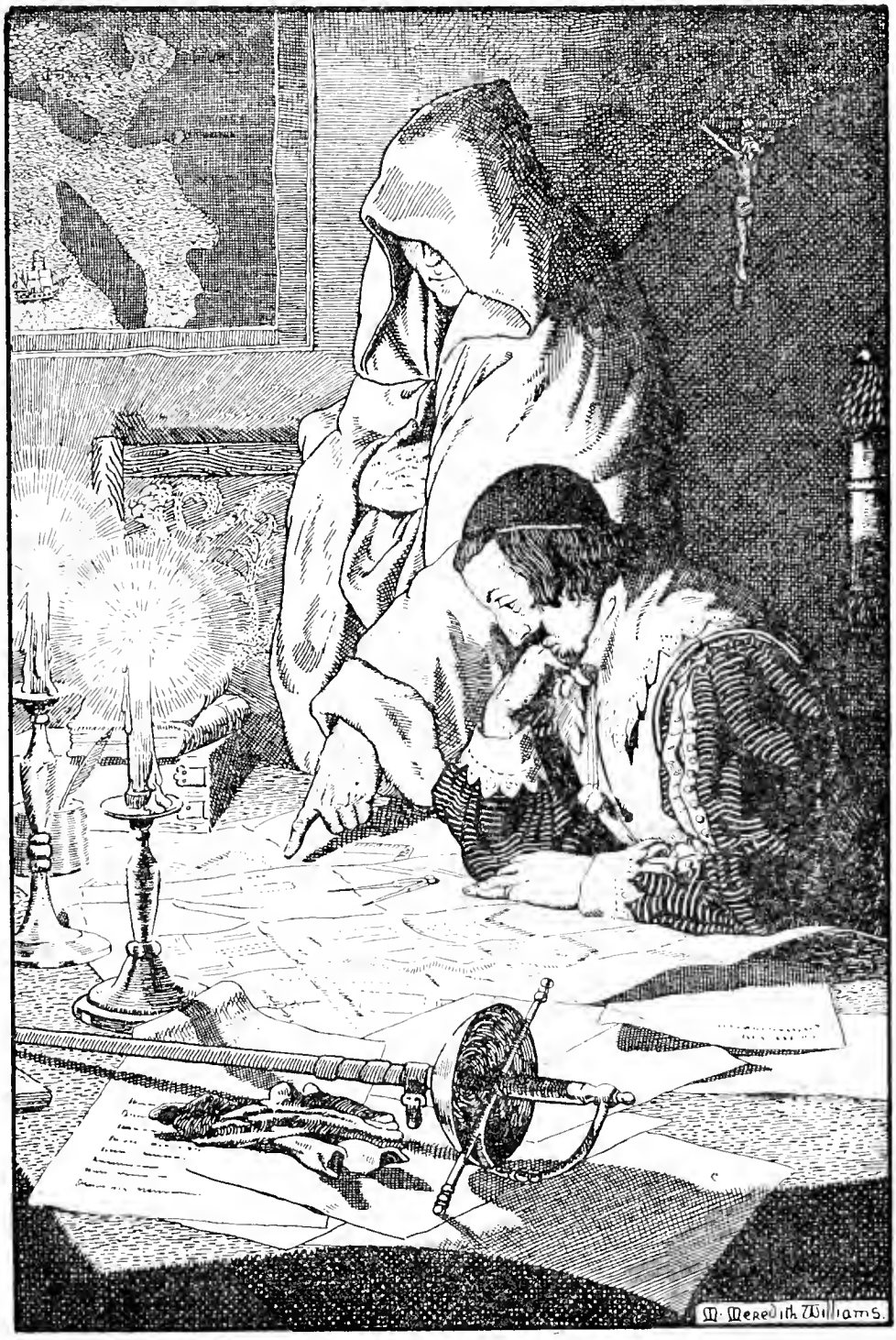
It dragged its slow length through the winter of 1627 and the spring and summer of 1628. The unhealthy, fever-laden marshes and the barren sand-dunes north, south,

and east of the city became an extraordinary spectacle of military activity, for the fighting strength of France was assembled there in a vast camp of tents and wooden huts, the King, the Court, and the Cardinal being lodged in little fortified manors or farms, country retreats of the merchants of La Rochelle. There, in the short, dark days, while Louis XIII rode up and down with his nobles " in tempest, wind, and rain," reviewing the troops or watching the bombardment of the city, Cardinal de Richelieu was the head and centre of all the siege operations.

Look at him as he dismounts at the door of his quarters in the December twilight. He has spent the day with his engineers at the far point of the bay, where his own plan of a gigantic mole to close the harbour against ingress from the sea, and thus, completing the blockade, to starve the city into submission, has already begun to take formidable shape. Atlantic storms are fighting for La Rochelle; wild seas have torn down masons' and carpenters' work, carrying away masses of stone and the heavy beams hewn and dragged with enormous labour from forests in the north. But winds and waves are not almighty when matched against Cardinal de Richelieu, and the work on the great mole is but begun again.

He dismounts at the low doorway, slight, tired, and pale, leaning on a page's shoulder. This is indeed a soldier-priest, with pistols at his saddle-bow and a sword by his side, plumed hat, scarlet embroidered cloak flung over a steel cuirass. He walks wearily into the room—its rugged bareness veiled by rich hangings and furniture—where his secretaries await him and logs blaze in the wide chimney.

No rest for him here. Messengers from all parts of France demand immediate audience: letters must be read, consultations held with warlike bishops, the Cardinal's lieutenants, and with commanders of the army.



Richelieu and Father Joseph
M. Meredith Williams

A deputation of anxious peasants implores his Eminence to remember his promise that the soldiers shall not molest the country-folk in their farm work or carry off their goods without payment. These are unceremoniously pushed out to make way for a group of splendid courtiers in velvet and fur, with long curled hair and deep lace collars, who bring a message from the King to his tired minister, excusing him from attendance that night at the royal headquarters and bidding him good rest. The Cardinal's words in reply are all of humble and grateful duty to his Majesty; his manner to the royal envoys is haughty and icily cold.

"We shall be mad enough to take La Rochelle!" says the Baron de Bassompierre to his comrades as they ride away along the dunes.

"Why mad? The sooner the siege is ended the sooner shall we escape to Paris from this wilderness. I know his Majesty is already weary of it."

"Mad!—Do you not see that when this man has crushed the Huguenots, our turn will come!"

When the Cardinal is at last alone a shadow advances from the shadows, a thin figure like his own, disguised in the habit and cowl of a Capuchin friar. This is the famous Father Joseph, Richelieu's most intimate friend and counsellor, a man of noble birth and brilliant talents, but keeping himself ever in the twilight, the power behind the throne. For years men knew him as the *Eminence grise*, and if he had lived a cardinal's hat might have been the reward of his political services.

Late into the night the friends talk, while great gusts from the sea shake the strong walls of the little old manor. Sometimes there is a terrible cry in the wind: it has swept over the streets and towers of the doomed city and may well echo the voices of her already hungry people. But

no such thought affects the stern designs and the steeled resolution of Richelieu and his shadow.

And so through winter and spring the siege dragged on. After a time the King found it unbearably tiresome, and the Court returned to Paris, greatly to Richelieu's indignation. For a moment he wavered: should he follow the King and leave the siege to shift for itself? Constant attacks of fever were weakening him; and meanwhile all the men who hated him must wax stronger, having his royal master's ear. But Father Joseph advised him to hold to the task, hard and cruel as it might be, which he believed to be necessary for the greatness of France.

Through tremendous difficulties the mole was finished. By the month of May its two arms stretched nearly across the harbour entrance, ships laden with stones being sunk in the deep and narrow passage between them, and other armed ships moored outside. The people of La Rochelle, still watching from their walls, saw their last hope of relief proved vain. For the English fleet, returning more than once in the fine weather, found it impossible to break through. Besides Richelieu's fortifications by sea and land, his fleet was now strong enough to be an effectual guard.

The heroic mayor and citizens of La Rochelle held out through the summer months in spite of frightful sufferings from famine. Fifteen thousand of the weaker inhabitants died and many lay unburied in the streets, for those who were left had not strength to remove them. A few escaped from the city and begged food from the King's soldiers; many 'useless mouths,' old men, women, and children were driven out of the gates by Guiton, and, not being allowed to pass through the royal lines, perished miserably between friends and enemies. Richelieu, the man of iron, did not imitate the humanity of Philippe-

Auguste before Château-Gaillard or of Henri IV before Paris when fighting for his crown. He was determined that for the sake of France La Rochelle should learn her awful lesson.

Once more, in late September, an English fleet appeared, only to be driven away by storms and gales after an attack that utterly failed. Then at last La Rochelle surrendered to Louis XIII. He and the Cardinal, followed by a large convoy of provisions, rode through streets full of the dead and the dying, while a few weak voices murmured: "Long live the King!" A few days later, too late to save the city, the Cardinal's great mole was destroyed by furious Atlantic storms.

Thus ended the rebellion of the Huguenots. Richelieu, as wise as he was strong, treated them with no unnecessary severity, but pardoned their leaders and granted them the free exercise of their religion as far as it might tally with loyalty to the State.

Jean Guiton, the mayor, the soul of the city's defence, was asked by the Cardinal whether he wished to become a subject of the King of England. "My lord," he answered, "I would rather serve a king who could take La Rochelle than one who could not save her." He was given the command of a French man-of-war.

And now, as Bassompierre had foreseen, Cardinal de Richelieu was free to throw his whole strength into the struggle with the great men of France which had already begun and which lasted through his whole ministry—that is to say, his whole life. As long as he could keep the confidence and in a certain degree the affection of the King, he was fairly sure of victory; it was the constant fear of losing these that made the fighter an old man before his time. More and more the nobles hated his restraining hand. He forbade duels, and the unlucky men who dis-

obeyed the order lost their heads. So did those who plotted against him at Court, where even the Queen lived in terror of his jealous severity. So, perhaps with a better excuse, did men of the best blood in France, such as the Duc de Montmorency, who allowed themselves to be goaded into open rebellion. Indeed, before his death the reign of Richelieu had become a reign of terror as far as the princes and nobles were concerned. Their fortified strongholds were levelled; their power in the provinces was replaced by that of the King's Intendants. Many of them were driven into exile. But at home and abroad the greatness of France grew: her arms were victorious; her unity was her strength; and she owed this unity to the strong hand and resolute soul of Cardinal de Richelieu.

CHAPTER XVII

THE VELVET PAW

Men have called me cruel :—
I am not ;—I am just.'—I found France rent asunder—
The rich men despots, and the poor banditti ;—
Sloth in the mart, and schism within the temple :
. . . . . .
I have re-created France ; and from the ashes
Of the old feudal and decrepit carcase
Civilization on her luminous wings
Soars, phœnix-like, to Jove!

EDWARD, LORD LYTTON

IT would be a mistake to imagine Cardinal de Richelieu as entirely the red-robed ogre described by history and his enemies. He had a very human side ; a faithful heart for his few constant friends and servants ; a desire to please women and children, often defeated by the awkward pedantic stiffness which helped to make him unpopular in society, but appreciated by his own family. His nieces adored the generous uncle who not only planned splendid marriages for them—these were State affairs of doubtful future happiness—but took the trouble to choose such toys as a doll's house, beautifully furnished and inhabited by a whole family who could be dressed and undressed. Mademoiselle de Maillé-Brézé, the Cardinal's sister's child, afterward the wife of the great Prince de Condé, was the lucky owner of this newly invented treasure.

In the earlier days of his power, when the Court had not yet learned to hate and to fear him, Richelieu tried hard

to make himself agreeable to the young Queen, Anne of Austria, and her lovely and mischievous ladies. At the Queen's wish he even consented to give her an exhibition of his Spanish dancing; strange accomplishment for a prince of the Church! Dressed for the part in green velvet and silver bells, with castanets in his hands, he danced before her Majesty. She was supposed to be the only spectator, except the Cardinal's own fiddler; but there were those who peeped and listened behind a screen, and the eminent dancer's airs and graces convulsed them with laughter that he never forgave. Queen Anne and her chief lady, the beautiful Duchesse de Chevreuse, paid dearly in after years for their mockery of the Cardinal.

His chief passion was the love of power to be used for the glory of France. But he had also a passion for magnificence in all his own surroundings: splendid houses splendidly furnished; paintings and statues by the first artists of the day, whose works were brought to him from Italy at enormous expense. He was a great collector of curiosities and rarities of every kind. Not content with posing as a patron of authors and artists, he was both a critic and an amateur.

It seems amazing that a statesman with the affairs of Europe on his hands, in constant danger from personal and political enemies, should have found time to write plays and to superintend the acting of them; more amazing still that he should have been jealous of the great writers, his contemporaries, especially of the mighty tragedian Corneille. So envious was he of their fame, so afraid of their independent influence, that he devised the plan of bringing them together in an obediently formal society under his own 'protection.' In this way was born the French Academy, the famous literary tribunal which has held its own for nearly three hundred years. It was

not altogether the fault of its members if one of their first corporate acts was to condemn *Le Cid* and to refuse election to Pierre Corneille.

Stiff poetry and high-flown romances, discussed at extreme length and with considerable affectation, were the fashion in Cardinal de Richelieu's time. The centre of these discussions was the Hôtel de Rambouillet, a fine house near the Louvre, built to please her own fancy by Catherine de Vivonne, Marquise de Rambouillet, after the old town house of her husband's family, the Hôtel d'Angennes, had been pulled down to make room for the new Palais Cardinal. The early seventeenth century in France cannot be understood without some reference to the work of Madame de Rambouillet. In the domain of manners and taste she was as great a leader as was Richelieu in that of home and foreign politics. She withdrew from the Court at an early age, being sickened by a coarseness of speech and ways no longer veiled under Valois elegance, and collected a society of her own in which refinement was the first and chief requisite, with birth, beauty, and talent to follow. Much has been written about the influence of French *salons*, which lasted more than two hundred years, till past the middle of the nineteenth century. Madame de Rambouillet was the first Frenchwoman to hold a *salon*: the Hôtel de Rambouillet in its palmy days was far more of a social centre than the Court of Louis XIII and Anne of Austria.

Madame de Rambouillet designed her house herself, as a temple for conversation. She set the fashion, and many new houses in Paris and in provincial towns were built after her pattern. Some of them remain to this day. The old town houses of an earlier date had no large rooms for receiving company. Visitors were shown into any room, we are told, according to the hour or season. Nor

was there any special dining-room. A table was brought into one room or another, sometimes a bedroom, according to the number or intimacy of the guests. Madame de Rambouillet built a suite of lofty rooms undivided by passages or staircases; doors and windows high and dignified; the whole effect so stately, so well suited to society and its receptions, that the Queen-mother, Marie de Médicis, sent her architect to study it while building the Luxembourg, her new palace beyond the river.

In the finest of these rooms, hung with blue velvet, a pleasing change from the old fashions of red and tawny—looking out on the gardens and orchards, towers, great *hôtels*, and narrow streets which divided her domain from the Louvre and the Tuileries to the south and south-west, the Rue Saint-Honoré and the Palais Cardinal to the north—Madame de Rambouillet held her famous assemblies. She, "the incomparable Arthénice"—an anagram on her name, Catherine—sat or reclined in an alcove, shaded by screens; her eyes could not bear a strong light; and further, this little air of ceremony had a restraining effect on the mixed company that visited her. They saw her like a goddess in a shrine, surrounded by crystal vases full of flowers richly bound books, and miniature portraits of her friends. They were led up in small parties for a few minutes' quiet talk: voices were low, for she could not endure noise. Women made polite curtseys and took chairs or stools according to their rank; men kissed their hostess's hand and stood flourishing feathered hats, playing with jewelled sword-hilts. The hair of the ladies was curled in soft clusters; they were dressed in shining satin with strings of pearls. And among all these fine folk came poets and novelists and divines in sober black, with plain white collars, carrying manuscripts under their arms; members of the new Academy,

Corneille in his manly independence, Bossuet, a young lad just learning to preach. And Madame de Rambouillet entertained all these people, listened to their poems, their plays, their romances, their sermons; and the more worldly of her company, dukes and counts, a gay cardinal or two, the beautiful Princesse de Condé with her young son and daughter, and other delightful girls and boys who were to lead the society of a later day, smiled in the background and gossiped and flirted and told malicious stories; sometimes, wildly daring, of the *Eminentissime*, Cardinal de Richelieu. For though he was never bodily present at these assemblies, his spirit of universal suspicion and the shadow of his red robe were never far away. And since not much more than the width of a street divided the Hôtel de Rambouillet from the Palais-Cardinal, it was easy for spies to slip from one to the other.

While rebuilding and beautifying Paris on both banks of the Seine, Cardinal de Richelieu had bought the Hôtel d'Angennes. It faced south on the Rue Saint-Honoré and west on the wall of Charles V, which for three hundred years had bounded the city on that side. He pulled down the house and others near it, buying out unwilling owners, and demolished the wall to make his gardens, much to the public discontent. Then he built the strange, squat palace which he left to the Crown; we know it in its deep decadence as the Palais Royal. Here he lived in almost kingly state, with a strong guard at his gates, with a number of gentlemen and pages in attendance, with chaplains, doctors, secretaries, musicians, and a large household of servants, to whom he was a generous if exacting master. Hither came his numerous spies, stealing in with their reports from France and abroad; hither also came many beggars and poor pensioners, for Paris knew well that his charity was large. Poets and pamphlet-writers crowded

his labyrinth of galleries: the learned writer Théophraste Renaudot displayed the first copies of the first newspaper, the *Gazette de France*, founded by him under the Cardinal's protection.

The gorgeous rooms of the palace, richly coloured and gilded, splendidly furnished, hung with portraits of famous people, looked out through windows of crystal framed in silver on stiff courts and gardens, shaven lawns, clipped alleys and glowing flower-beds: an army of gardeners saw to it that nothing grew astray.

Twilight on a March afternoon: a bitter wind howling through the streets, whirling clouds of dust as poisonous as the winter mud, clattering the painted signs, the pride of the Rue Saint-Honoré. The sentries shiver, clashing their halberds on the stones; the blind men of the Quinze-Vingts, the Cardinal's almost opposite neighbours, come trotting back with their laden sacks from all parts of the city and slip in gladly under their own archway.

He sits wrapped in a furry gown, one favourite cat on his knee, another on his shoulder, by the fire in his small and luxurious inner cabinet. The face under the red cap is yellow and worn. At his elbow is a table covered with plans and drawings of another of his palaces, the Château de Richelieu in Poitou, not yet finished, and the little new town outside its park gates. All is his creation and very near to his heart, an old river-fortress there being the original home of his family. He dreamed of reigning there in his old age, but fate would not have it so. One gains some idea of his strenuous life from the fact that he never visited château and town, though their building and furnishing constantly filled his thoughts and letters.

"Yes—pale colouring, such as fits the landscape—wainscots and ceilings painted in *grisaille*, touched with gold—what is it, Joseph?"

His dreams of peace in the old home province, of the running river now chained in canals to ornament his new park, of the mother whose tenderness had never failed him through a sickly childhood, were suddenly broken through. He was the nervous, watchful ruler of France, every man's hand against him.

Joseph du Tremblay the Capuchin comes gliding through a door hidden behind the hangings.

"The Marquise de Rambouillet's windows are ablaze with light," he says. "Her guests are on the point of departing. Is it your Eminence's wish that they should be observed?"

"Ah!" The Cardinal is still slightly absent-minded. The cats lift their heads and stare displeased with stony eyes; both he and they are sphinx-like. His long hand with its brilliant ring caresses them into purring peace.

"Ah! Yes. And especially if Madame la Princesse de Condé is there. I am told that she talks aside with my enemies—a group of confederates."

"She is a stupid woman. And her husband is a worthless fool, very fearful of you."

"I am not fearful of him." The two men's eyes meet in a smile like the flash of swords. "But if Madame la Princesse be stupid, friend Joseph, as you discourteously say, she is also beautiful, and knows how to conquer the silly minds of men. Nor is she too stupid to listen secretly to my enemies. And I would know certainly who they are that talk with her at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Have you at this moment a man or woman you can trust?"

Father Joseph hesitates.

"It is a service of delicacy. The doors of Madame la Marquise are very well guarded. We can watch the

guests coming or going—but to enter the *salon*—to shadow Madame la Princesse—that is another matter."

"Ah! If managed indiscreetly it might make a scandal and set them all on their guard. No; I have thought of another plan: bolder, therefore safer. You shall go, Joseph; you shall go yourself from me to Madame de Rambouillet, and you shall make her understand that if she will serve me in these affairs I will do far more for her worthy husband than I have done for him yet. I gave him the Embassy to Spain. I will give him his choice of the richest governments in France. But not for nothing. It is for the safety of myself and the State that I should know the intrigues of those who dare to plot against me at the Hôtel de Rambouillet—who they are and what they say. Especially Madame la Princesse and her friends. Why do you shake your head?"

"Because Madame la Marquise is above suspicion."

"Did I say the contrary? Is not that the reason?"

"Pardon me! She is loyalty itself, and utterly disinterested."

The Cardinal smiled. "The richest government in France, remember. Begone, friend Joseph! I wait your report here."

The little *Eminence grise*, his cowl pulled well over his face, slipped through the guard like a shadow. Past the chilly splashing of the fountain in the square, under the garden walls of the Rue Saint-Thomas du Louvre, to the gateway of the Hôtel de Rambouillet: who would think of noticing a grey friar in the dusk, bent on some religious or charitable errand? Some idlers knew him well enough and shrank aside. Late guests of the Marquise rumbled by in their coaches, lighted by running torch-bearers; groups of gentlemen, followed by armed servants, laughed and gossiped as they strolled along; some of the talk

reached Father Joseph's ears and made him frown. He did not concern himself with the chatter of the literary folk trailing modestly behind.

Five minutes later he had sent in his name to Madame de Rambouillet and was ushered into her presence by an awestruck man-servant.

The Marquise was tired and a little worried; her assembly had been large; and though conveniently deaf to much of its talk, she had known enough to make Father Joseph's visit slightly alarming. She observed him under heavy eyelids and waited anxiously, though with perfect outward calm.

He began by compliments, for Joseph was a man of the world. He talked of her husband and the important mission on which he was employed and the high opinion held of him by Cardinal de Richelieu. He said that his Eminence would do much to show his esteem for Monsieur de Rambouillet—very rich and important governments might be vacant—but these were difficult times, and the Cardinal desired to ask a little proof of friendship—oh, a mere nothing!—from Madame la Marquise. In short, would she inform him—of course in strict confidence—as to the political intrigues carried on in her *salon* by certain persons—the Princesse de Condé and others whose names the Cardinal wished to know—persons who permitted themselves to speak ill of his Eminence or even to conspire against his authority?

Madame de Rambouillet's pale fair face flushed slightly and her fan fluttered as she listened to the string of promises and threats, bribes and warnings. When the friar paused at length for an answer it was ready.

"I do not believe, *mon père*, that Madame la Princesse is concerned in any political intrigue—certainly not with any other of my guests. My respect and regard for his

Eminence are well known, and no one in my presence or in my house would venture to say a word against him. But in any case, the vocation of a spy is not one which commends itself to me."

With formal bows and curtseys the friar and the lady parted.

Seldom indeed had Father Joseph returned from a special mission confessing failure. But on this occasion, undoubtedly, the great Cardinal and his shadow were defeated by a woman's loyalty.

"Did I not tell you so, my lord?"

"True, Joseph. We must try other means. But remember, no more preferment for our unlucky friend Monsieur de Rambouillet."

The cats stretched their claws and yawned.

CHAPTER XVIII

FIGURES IN THE FRONDE

Un vent de Fronde
S'est levé ce matin :
Je crois qu'il gronde
Contre le Mazarin.
Un vent de Fronde
S'est levé ce matin.

J. DE BARILLON

Vous allez joindre, essaim charmant et fol,
La farce italienne à ce drame espagnol.

EDMOND ROSTAND

A LOVELY lady, fair and tall, eyes turquoise-blue, long soft ringlets twisted with loops of pearls, ropes and clusters of pearls about her white neck and satin-draped shoulders: thus appeared Anne Geneviève de Bourbon, Duchesse de Longueville, to a great crowd assembled in the Place de Grève on an afternoon in January 1649. She was the centre of a brilliant group assembled at the Hôtel de Ville. She and her friend the Duchesse de Bouillon, beautiful too, if less irresistible, came forward on the high steps of the building, each holding a little child in her arms, appealing with smiles to the crowd. They had moved voluntarily from their own houses to the Hôtel de Ville, the home of the citizens of Paris, giving themselves as hostages for the good faith of their husbands, brothers, and friends, who had deserted the Court and offered their swords to the Parliament of Paris in its fight with Cardinal Mazarin. Not without reason the Parliament

doubted the disinterested patriotism of these princes and lords.

The Place de Grève was a wonderful sight on that wintry afternoon. The crowd was so immense, an eye-witness tells us, that it covered even the roofs of the houses. Men shouted and women wept, hardly knowing why. Well-clothed workmen and shivering beggars in rags, the sight of those shining forms on the *perron* roused all alike to wild enthusiasm. So royally beautiful, so like angels, hair and pearls shimmering among torches early lit! They were ready to give themselves for Paris: surely they would protect Paris in these evil days, when the Queen-Regent had fled away with the boy-king, and the royal army was beginning to blockade the city.

The noise in the wide square had a growling background of curses: curses of Cardinal Mazarin, the clever Italian who was carrying on the work of a great and patriotic Frenchman. Richelieu had been hated and feared: but the heavy taxes that financed his wars had at least been spent for the glory of France. Mazarin had gained victories in war and in diplomacy, and the burden of the taxes went on growing. He was insatiably greedy; his hands clutched money: his handsome face and soft manners were found irresistible by the Queen-Regent, who was entirely controlled by him. The princes and nobles, so sternly checked in Richelieu's days, rejoiced at first in the Regency, for Anne of Austria gave with both hands whatever they chose to ask; but after a time their jealous detestation of Mazarin drove most of them to take the side of the Parliament of Paris when it refused to register the royal decrees for taxes yet more oppressive.

In such opposition, the Parliament of Paris had before its eyes the striking example of a very different Parliament beyond the Channel, which for the time being had

laid royalty low. The fugitive Queen of England, a French princess, daughter of Henri the Great, was at this very moment shivering in fireless rooms at the Louvre.

But the leaders of the Parliament of Paris, though giving themselves the airs of Roman senators in their tussle with Mazarin, and talking eloquently of the sufferings of the people, must have known that their hereditary assembly of judges, magistrates, and councillors did not, like the English Parliament, represent the nation. Only the seldom-convoked States-General could do that. The duties of the Parliament of Paris and of the provincial Parliaments of France were chiefly to register royal ordinances, to hear important appeals, and to carry on local government under the King's officials. This war of the Fronde, begun by the Parliament and carried on by the princes, was the uprising of a discontented *bourgeoisie* and a furiously restless nobility against a hated minister. It owed its name to a witty Parisian who compared the Parliament in its first attempts at rebellion to a party of schoolboys slinging stones in the city ditches, running away at sight of the watch, and beginning again when the coast was clear. In old French, the word *fronde* means a sling.

Curses of Mazarin were drowned in the thunder of drums and squealing of trumpets as a band of armed men in the Parliament's pay forced their way through the crowd. Then some unhappy wretch who had failed to join in the shouting was set upon and hustled down a side street with savage cries of "A Mazarin!" Lucky if he escaped with his life. Then again the crowd pushed and thrust nearer to the Hôtel de Ville, for a high window stood open and the most popular man in Paris, Paul de Gondi, the Archbishop's coadjutor, better known as Cardinal de Retz, was emptying bags of money and flinging handfuls of coin into the square. It was not always

the most miserable who scrambled and fought for the money. Some of it found its way into the pockets of hawkers who with shrill cries of their own were selling hat-bands, neckties, collars, gloves, all *à la Fronde.* Even baker-boys' baskets were piled with long looped rolls *à la Fronde.*

Monseigneur de Retz, his almsgiving finished, turned back laughing into the saloon. This little dark man, an eloquent preacher, a restless, fiery demagogue, had made himself the soul of the Parliament's resistance to the Regent and Mazarin. His activity was astounding. He spent these days in hurrying from one quarter of Paris to another; in the dark dawn he was at the Porte Saint-Honoré, persuading the populace to admit the great men they suspected, the Prince de Conti and the Duc de Longueville, brother and brother-in-law of their enemy the Prince de Condé. That young military genius, the victor of Rocroy, with several thousand men under his command, was now devising means of cutting off the city's supply of bread. Then there was the difficult business of bringing about an understanding between these princes and the Parliament; journeys between the Hôtel de Longueville and the palace on the Island; haranguing the Parliament, haranguing the angry people in the streets; advising and hurrying nobles who never took advice and never hurried themselves. Finally, Monseigneur de Retz had been inspired to appeal to the ladies; to Madame de Longueville and her court of admirers. Beauty, charm, a passion for adventure and excitement, a strong hatred of Mazarin: thus came about the scene at the Hôtel de Ville and the enthusiasm of conquered crowds. Though she was Condé's sister, her name of Geneviève was surely a good omen for the Parisians!

It was a gay scene in that stately room at the Hôtel de

Ville when Monseigneur de Retz rejoined the company. Madame de Longueville and Madame de Bouillon, their chilly ordeal over, had handed their children back to the nurses and were sitting with their friends near the blazing fire. Round them were grouped ladies and gentlemen splendidly dressed, some fully armed, polished steel flashing back the firelight, blue scarves fluttering. Some had begun to dance to the low music of violins. Readers of the romances then so popular were reminded of a scene in the famous *L'Astrée*. Madame de Longueville talked languidly with her handsome but deformed young brother, the Prince de Conti, whom the Parliament had appointed Generalissimo, and with her friend the Prince de Marcillac, the future Duc de la Rochefoucauld, the brilliant, attractive, cynical personage whose fame was to rest on his *Maximes*. Farther off, the centre of a group of great nobles, stood a middle-aged and very perfect gentleman, Henri d'Orléans, Duc de Longueville.

Let us fancy that Monseigneur de Retz was approaching this group, talking eagerly by the way with one of his friends, when a slight commotion near the door drew his quick attention. The guards there had made an attempt to stop the entrance of a figure that looked strange in that company: the figure of an old priest in a rusty cassock. But the old man waved aside their halberds with an air of authority, and they did not persist, for every one in Paris knew Vincent de Paul, the apostle of the poor, who was held in such honour that the Queen-Regent had long ago appointed him a member of the 'Council of Conscience' which advised her on Church appointments and charities.

"What is your old master doing here?" said the friend of Retz. "He looks furious. Have you displeased him, and has he brought a rod to chastise the wilful boy in public?"

Retz laughed: but he walked quickly to meet 'Monsieur Vincent,' as Paris called him. The old man had been tutor to his brothers and himself and the trusted friend of his saintly mother, Madame de Gondi. Retz knew well that only a matter of conscience could have brought him, whose maxim was that priests should not interfere in politics, to the Hôtel de Ville on such a day of stormy political adventure.

He drew Monsieur Vincent into a window apart from the gay and restless crowd. We may imagine that the priest frowned as his eyes wandered over it.

"These lords and ladies," he said, "what are they doing for Paris? Tell me, Paul! Paris is fighting in the streets, starving in the houses. Death and misery are abroad. Is it to be real civil war? And why are these people laughing?"

"It will certainly be civil war, Father, unless her Majesty is better advised. Let her dismiss her evil counsellors and grant the just demands of these princes and the Parliament: let her return to Paris with the King, to whom all are loyal: let her forbid Monsieur le Prince to blockade the city. It all lies in her Majesty's beautiful hands."

Retz laughed. Monsieur Vincent scowled, still gazing on that gorgeous crew.

"To them," he murmured, "it seems a merry adventure!"

"'Tis better to laugh than to weep," said his old pupil. "The Fronde will win in the end. Surely, Father, you are not a 'Mazarin'!"

"Mazarin!" the old man repeated thoughtfully. "The struggle is with him alone? Were it not for him, the adviser, their Majesties would return to their city? Paris would be saved!"

Retz bowed and smiled. "You are a wise man. I might even say you are a prophet. But the prophets of old did not please every one, and there are those"—he glanced around—"who feel no consuming desire for such a return."

Apparently, Monsieur Vincent paid no heed to the last words. But he walked on past the dancers to the inner group near the fire, and Madame de Longueville rose and curtsied to the ugly, shabby little figure.

"Madame," he said, "this is not the place for one who desired in her youth to lead the religious life and was a lover of Christ and His poor. It is unworthy of you, and of others whom I see here, to find your amusement in the misery of Paris. But as to yourself, madame, your heart is not so hard as you think, and the day of repentance and atonement will yet dawn for you."

Madame de Longueville's lovely smile faded. She shivered a little and looked down: but Monsieur Vincent was gone without another word, and the soft laughter of her friends surrounded her.

We may suppose that the old man went back to his mission-house of Saint-Lazare, where he and his community lived and worked for the poor. The words of Monseigneur de Retz may have suggested to him a way of saving his people and stopping the civil war. For that night, we know, in all the bitter wind and rain, he rode out of Paris with one companion and made his way by dangerous roads and across the flooded Seine to Saint-Germain, where the Queen-Regent and the young King, with Cardinal Mazarin and the Court, were now lodged.

Monsieur Vincent was received readily by the Queen, who supposed that he was acting as an envoy from the rebels in Paris. But he told her Majesty in plain words that he was no man's envoy; and he asked her, for the

sake of her people, to dismiss Cardinal Mazarin, whom they hated, from the head of affairs, to make peace with the Parliament, and to return to Paris with her son. As her answer Queen Anne referred the good man to Cardinal Mazarin himself.

Monsieur Vincent's romantic mission was a failure, though kindly Queen and smiling minister treated him with the respect he deserved. And the consequences to him were painful, for it was rumoured in Paris that he had gone to Saint-Germain, and the people, believing him false to their cause, rose in fury and destroyed Saint-Lazare. It was many months before Monsieur Vincent was able to return to Paris. He wrote in his sad disappointment and humility: "I thought to serve God by going to Saint-Germain, but I was not worthy."

In the end Cardinal Mazarin, and after him the young Louis XIV, triumphed over Parliament and princes. But the crazy struggle in its two long episodes, the Old Fronde and the New, lasted five years and caused great misery in Paris and the provinces. A patched-up peace between Queen Anne and the Parliament brought little satisfaction to royal and noble *frondeurs* and *frondeuses*. As the great ones of France had conspired against the severity of Richelieu, so they rebelled and fought against the gentler methods of Mazarin: the final result being the establishment of absolute royal supremacy.

We see the Prince de Condé turning against the Crown, which he had defended; imprisoned, released; he and other princes storming over the wretched country with an army of mercenaries who recalled the worst times of the Hundred Years War; besieging Paris with great slaughter, and only rescued from the royal troops by the daring energy of his cousin, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, who threatened to tear the beards of the city magnates, and

turned the King's guns on the King's own men. We see the same young princess, *la Grande Mademoiselle*, one of the most romantic figures of her time, riding fully armed and helmeted at the head of her troops; taking possession of the city of Orléans and posing as a new Jeanne d'Arc. We see the Duchesse de Longueville and her friends raising Normandy against the King, while the Princesse de Condé defends Bordeaux. It is all a riot of wild and dashing adventure; a comedy in its desperate gaiety, a tragedy of lost lives and desolated homes; a war without worthy motive or lasting consequence.

The Fronde drove Mazarin out of France, but he soon returned, more powerful than ever. It taught young Louis XIV to dislike Paris, and convinced reasonable men that the welfare of the country needed the strong hand of an absolute ruler. It was the last flare of the age-long struggle between the monarchy of France and her proud nobility.

Most of the chief actors in that stormy drama ended their days peacefully as loyal subjects of Louis XIV. Monseigneur de Retz became a wise and respected cardinal. Many heroes and heroines consoled themselves with literature and the arts. Monsieur Vincent returned to his flock and died at Saint-Lazare. The lovely lady of the Hôtel de Ville gave up the world and its splendours for a life of religious devotion twenty-seven years long. She divided her time between the famous convent of the Carmelites, where she was educated as a child, and the persecuted nuns of Port Royal. By her powerful protection of those good women she earned from Madame de Sévigné the title of 'a Mother of the Church.'

CHAPTER XIX

THE RISING OF THE SUN-KING

Ce siècle, semblable à celui d'Auguste, produisoit à l'envi des hommes illustres en tout genre, jusqu'à ceux même qui ne sont bons que pour les plaisirs. DUC DE SAINT-SIMON

Dame Irène
Parle ainsi :
—Quoi ! la reine
Triste ici !
Son altesse
Dit :—Comtesse,
J'ai tristesse
Et souci.
VICTOR HUGO

IN a delightful book called *La Fleur des Histoires Françaises* M. Gabriel Hanotaux has helped us to realize the advance from medieval times to that which is known as the 'Great Century,' the 'age of Louis Quatorze,' by a comparison between the Gothic cathedral of Notre-Dame and the classic hôtel and church of the Invalides. The cathedral, he says, was built in years of trouble and unrest; its architecture strains with painful effort toward heaven. The Invalides, planned by Henri IV and built by Louis XIV as a home for old soldiers, has the solid, massive unity of a period of settled strength and fulfilled aspiration: it is simple, powerful, and harmonious. We might add, the one dreams of a perfection beyond this earth: the other aims at reaching it here.

The seventeenth century in France was a period of great men; and after the disorders of the Fronde they came to

their own. The names of René Descartes, Pierre Corneille, and Blaise Pascal are immortal in their several ways: philosophy, "the art of just reasoning and clear thinking"; knowledge of the human heart; the theory of real religion. There follows what has been called the Procession of Genius: La Fontaine, the voice of nature itself in his wonderful *Fables*; Molière, the brilliant comedian and satirist of the follies of his time; Racine, the tender and refined dramatist; La Rochefoucauld with his immortal and terrible *Maxims*; La Bruyère, the painter of word-portraits; Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, the great orator and theologian; Fénelon, the religious genius; and many more. Such soldiers as Condé, Turenne, Catinat, and Vauban fought for the Sun-King; such sailors as Duquesne and Jean Bart flew his flag on the seas; such statesmen as Colbert and Louvois administered his realm and organized his wars. The society of his time lives in the unequalled letters of Madame de Sévigné and the graceful novels of Madame de La Fayette. His actual Court was his own creation. No king had ever before gathered round him all the nobility and beauty and intellect of France as Louis XIV did.

Quite early in his reign this magnificent young monarch began to make his nobles understand that their place was round the throne. Richelieu had practically destroyed their independent power: they had struggled with Mazarin, and lost: now they were to figure in a new kind of splendour as members of the most strictly formal, most stiffly gorgeous, yet most brilliant and admired Court ever known.

In those earlier years the Court followed the King, himself a soldier of high spirit, in the wars with Spain and the Low Countries which added territory to France in the north and east and gave her the modern frontiers

which Vauban fortified. In those years, as far as external glory and success were concerned, France stood easily first in Europe. But all the victories and all the splendour had to be paid for: and in spite of Colbert's financial reforms men might see in the sufferings of heavily taxed provinces the other side of that shining shield.

In the late spring of 1670, in a short interval of peace, Louis XIV set out from Saint-Germain with the Court and a large military escort to visit his recent conquests on the Flanders border. We have a picture of the young King as he pranced forth on such a triumphal expedition. Not much here of the sober stateliness, the measured dignity, that marked his later days at the great Château of Versailles, hardly yet existing. All is dash and gallant gaiety: the King's tall horse, in jewelled harness with silver-gilt stirrups, dances beneath its light and graceful rider. Under his large feathered hat the long curls of hair are tied with flame-coloured ribbons. A deep point-lace collar falls over his blue silk jacket; this and his wide breeches, which stand out "like a little petticoat," are a mass of gold embroidery down to the lace-lined tops of his high soft boots. Diamonds glitter on every brooch and buckle. Men and women compare Louis to the god Mars, and worship him accordingly.

Among the King's troops the wearing of uniform was coming into fashion, though far from universal. The Swiss Guards are described as dressed in blue and red frieze laced with silver, with black velvet caps and plumes of red, white, and blue. They marched to the music of fife and drum; tall, fine men carrying halberds. The famous Musketeers, riding on white or black horses, wore blue cloaks with silver embroidery. The common soldiers were in coarse cloth, red, blue, or brown, a black scarf

twisted round the neck. These details may give us an idea of the appearance of the escort which accompanied the King on that progress through the north-eastern provinces.

The troops were commanded by the Duc de Lauzun, a showy little courtier, and among the hundreds of great people in coaches, attended by crowds of servants and wagon-loads of baggage, who accompanied the King and Queen, was that eccentric and very human princess Mademoiselle de Montpensier, whose middle-aged fancy for M. de Lauzun nearly ended in marriage. Some historians declare that after many vicissitudes it did so end; which appears to be more than doubtful.

It is to Mademoiselle that we owe the graphic and amusing story of that so-called triumphal progress of twelve thousand persons—royalties, courtiers, ladies, Court officials, servants, soldiers, and camp-followers, with their trains of coaches, carts, and wagons, and all the horses and mules without which this multitude could not move: a progress in which luxury and splendour were matched by hardship and discomfort to a degree even then unusual.

The Court left Paris on 28th April and journeyed in slow dignity as far as Saint-Quentin, sleeping on the way at Senlis and Compiègne. So far the weather was kind, and Mademoiselle, while attending the young Queen at her card-table, was able to sit in a window and talk to her cousin the King as he strolled with his gentlemen in the garden. Louis invited her to join them. "I was dying to go," says Mademoiselle, "but the Queen would have been angry." For M. de Lauzun was with the King, and people already perceived that *la Grande Mademoiselle*, first cousin of royalty and the richest heiress in Europe, had neither eyes nor thoughts for any other man. Lauzun

Louis XIV and his Court on their Expedition to Flanders
M. Meredith Williams

himself was very discreet and careful, living in terror of the royal displeasure, brave soldier as he was. Mademoiselle was not equally prudent and found her chief interest and delight, during the expedition, in watching the little gentleman in his new dignity of general-in-chief, the object of envy to other nobles who must receive his commands uncovered while he was privileged to wear his hat. This was not always the case, however: one day Mademoiselle saw her hero talking bare-headed with the King in a deluge of rain which soaked his hair unbecomingly and dripped from his ears.

"Sire," she cried, "order him to put his hat on! He will certainly be ill."

This was in the later days of the expedition. Its miseries began with an early start from Saint-Quentin on Saturday, 2nd May. The weather was bad; provisions were scarce; no fish, no eggs, no fresh butter, half-baked bread. Terrible roads; horses and mules foundered and carts buried in the mud. Coaches stuck in quagmires or actually lost in the marshes near the river Sambre, which was in flood and rising every hour; their owners escaping with difficulty on the backs of the coach-horses. Heavy and ceaseless rain; early darkness; night actually closing in before the royal coaches approached the place where they were supposed to ford the Sambre. A desert of mud and loneliness; hardly a village or a farmhouse; gloomy forests on the horizon, the swollen river in front; the heavy wagons and trains of packhorses, laden with the baggage, the food, the cooking utensils, the beds and furniture and all the necessaries of royalty, Court magnates and great officials, straggling leagues behind in the deeply rutted tracks of a half-inhabited country.

The ford proving dangerous, if not impossible, the royal

party were advised to try another two or three miles farther on. They plunged forward through darkness, rain, and mud, the King leading the way on horseback, his effeminate brother, Philippe, Duke of Orléans—known as *Monsieur*—and the majority of the Court clinging to the shelter of their coaches. Queen, princesses, ladies, waiting-maids, jewel-cases, personal luggage: the coaches were crammed. Torches and lanterns were scarce. When the few lights flickered on the black rolling waters of a second impassable ford, all those women took to screaming, Queen Marie-Thérèse and Mademoiselle de Montpensier at their head. One little lady seems to have been the exception, though troubled and ill at the time: this was Henrietta Stuart, Duchess of Orléans, daughter of Charles I of England and Henrietta of France. Louis XIV always honoured and admired his English sister-in-law: in this moment of confusion, when vexed and deafened by the silly clamour round him, he may well have valued her self-control.

The coaches were dragged back to the high road, such as it was, and then into a meadow belonging to a small, poor, empty farmhouse. We may fancy that the peasant farmer and his wife had fled away into the night for fear of that great noisy invasion; rumbling, trampling, shouting, shrieking between their little home and the river, as French or Flemish troops had done in the recent wars. Peace must have seemed to Jacques and Jeanne just as disturbing and full of alarm. So they left their scraps of furniture and their firewood in the two mud-floored rooms, their cows and donkeys tied up in the shed, their skinny fowls on the rafters, and escaped to the village not far off; a village with a church and good houses, where the Court might have found better quarters by pushing on through the rain.

Lighted by one dim candle, the King handed the Queen from her coach into this poor shelter. Marie-Thérèse had the Spanish formality, the reverence for etiquette, of her mother-in-law, Anne of Austria, without Anne's natural good-humour and ease. She was horrified and disgusted. Close on midnight, no bed to sleep in, nothing to eat, half dead with fatigue and hunger, her Majesty's only refuge those four miserable walls! "What pleasure can there be," she groaned, "in such a journey as this?" And then, to make matters worse, her Majesty's train was nearly torn off, for the floor gave way under the stately tread of Mademoiselle, who was holding it, and she descended knee-deep into mud and water.

"*Ma cousine, vous me tirez!*" cried the Queen, stiffly indignant.

The Princess excused herself. "*Madame, je suis enfoncée dans un trou!*"

The King decided that there was nothing for it but to await daylight. The Court must sleep in the coaches; he and the Queen, with her waiting-women, occupying the farmhouse. Mademoiselle retired obediently to her coach, loosened her rich travelling garments, and put on her nightcap and dressing-gown. Being far too restless to sleep, she presently paid visits to the inmates of other coaches, her servants carrying her through the mud. She found her neighbours talking and laughing, but their conversation bored her. Monsieur, for instance, always ill-natured, was making personal remarks on M. de Lauzun. Mademoiselle returned to her coach in an ill humour and frightfully hungry.

A welcome messenger from the King invited her and other favoured persons to supper in the farmhouse. Food had been fetched from a town not far off, and most of the party were too hungry to be critical, though the soup was

thin and cold and the chickens were so tough that the strength of two persons was needed to tear them asunder. King Louis, always cheerful and even-tempered, made the best of it, but the poor Queen was both miserable and angry. She refused to touch the repulsive food; but when the King, Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle had greedily swallowed the last spoonful of soup she complained bitterly: "I wanted some, and they have eaten it all!"

Etiquette did not permit a smile. The Queen's instincts had already been offended by the King's suggestion that mattresses should be laid on the floor for the royal party and various ladies, the one good travelling bed being reserved for her Majesty. A fire had been lighted under the black yawning chimney, and the room, poor as it was, would be warmer than a coach.

"Horrible! What, sleep all together?" cried Marie-Thérèse, her Spanish proprieties outraged.

But the King had his way. They laid themselves down in rows on the mud floor of that smoke-grimed hovel near the flooded Sambre, those personages, a dozen or more, whose names occur to us naturally when we think of the Court of Louis Quatorze. The great King himself, active, capable, full of dignity, with his handsome, commanding looks and cloud of dark curled hair; Monsieur, fat and frivolous; Madame, thin and melancholy; Mademoiselle, large, frank, and masculine: these were the royal Bourbons. Then there were beautiful women with histories of their own: Madame de la Vallière, Madame de Montespan, her witty sister Madame de Thianges; and a few other great ladies specially in attendance on the little Queen, whose fat cheeks and heavy eyelids peeped out under her sheltering curtains. All, including the King and his brother, had put on nightcaps and dressing-gowns over their curls and finery. All were dead tired and ready

to fall asleep; but this was not so easy, for there was a constant tramping in and out of the royal officers, M. de Lauzun among them, who were lodged in the smaller room. These gentlemen's spurs caught in the lace of the ladies' nightcaps as they picked their way among the mattresses, and everybody, except the Queen, was in fits of laughter. The cows and donkeys joined in after their own fashion on the other side of the wall, and at last the comicalness of the whole affair was too much for her Majesty: she also began to laugh. "Which pleased the King," says Mademoiselle, "for he was sorry to see her vexed. And we went to sleep."

Daylight proved most unbecoming. Pale and dishevelled, the ladies missed their rouge: all but Mademoiselle, who rejoiced in her own natural colour. They gladly scrambled into their coaches, returned to the high road, and rumbled on to the nearest town, where an early Mass and breakfast awaited them. The rain still descended in torrents.

Jacques and Jeanne, we may suppose, splashed home in their heavy *sabots* through the mud. Whether they had any reward for their forced hospitality to the Court of France, or any compensation for damage done to the little farm, must be for ever unknown. The broad wheels of the coaches had ploughed up their meadow; their floor was spoilt, their firewood burnt; their skinny fowls had been commandeered, their poor beasts had been robbed of hay to feed the King's horses. If the Court officials were honest men, all may have been well. Louis XIV was a just and kindly man at heart: spoilt, selfish, and blind, no doubt, but fair and generous. It was never his deliberate will that his poor subjects should suffer for him.

CHAPTER XX

VERSAILLES

Grand air. Urbanité des façons anciennes.
Haut cérémonial. Révérences sans fin.
. . . . . .
Tout un monde galant, vif, brave, exquis et fou,
Avec sa fine épée en verrouil, et surtout
Ce mépris de la mort, comme une fleur, aux lèvres!

ALBERT SAMAIN

Versailles, c'est l'œuvre et la volonté de Louis XIV; c'est là qu'il fut vraiment le grand roi.

GABRIEL HANOTAUX

IN those years the great Château of Versailles rose like a dream among the forests and marsh-lands west of Paris. That wild tract of wooded hill and valley, hardly inhabited except by wolf, wild boar, and smaller game, with its deep lonely ponds and impenetrable thickets, had been for many centuries a favourite hunting-ground of the French kings. From its highest points, then as now, the towers of Paris were visible.

Louis XIII had built himself a hunting-lodge of brick and stone in the middle of the forest, where the few houses of an ancient village, with their parish church, clustered round a windmill. In older times there were a priory and a leper hospital at Versailles. The peasants lived as they might on the undrained and sandy soil; but it seems that in the fourteenth century four fairs and a weekly market were granted to them, so that Versailles, not far from at least one high road into the West, must have been a trading centre for other villages and scattered hamlets.

It was also near Choisy-aux-Bœufs, a chief halting-place for cattle on their way from the provinces to Paris, which was swept away to make room for the vast new park of Louis XIV.

Louis XIII was the last King of France who held his Court and made his chief home at the Louvre. His widow preferred more modern and comfortable quarters at the Palais Royal, or, when absent from Paris, at the neighbouring château of Saint-Germain. Louis XIV grew up with a strong dislike of restless Paris with its floods, famines, *frondes*, *émeutes*, barricades. He found Saint-Germain too small and too near, Fontainebleau in its romantic beauty too far away. He determined to build a house of his own, where he could live the life that pleased him: the life of magnificence and luxury which seemed to him due to his position as a great king, the central figure of a great nation, the head of the most splendid Court in Europe. Louis XIV had a genius for the spectacular in life: he was a lover of beauty as he understood it, the ordered, dignified, classical beauty of his time.

Le Vau and Mansart as architects, Le Brun as decorative painter, Le Nôtre as gardener-in-chief, the most famous men in France in their several professions, were employed in the creation of the château and its surroundings; but every sketch and design was submitted to the King and freely criticized by him.

A new town was built. Old Versailles—except the little château of Louis XIII, which was preserved as the kernel of the vast new building—disappeared under the tools of an army of workmen which at one time numbered thirty-six thousand. The forest retired in ordered lines, though a great park of a studied wildness surrounded the immense and formal gardens which fell away from the palace terraces in long sweeps of turf and flights of marble

steps, clipped alleys and avenues and groves, the silver flashing of hundreds of leaping cascades and soaring fountains, and beyond all the broad rippling waters of the Grand Canal, which spread in three arms to west, north, and south. Regiments of tall trees framed the stately scene and its population of statues and groups in bronze or marble, the work of famous sculptors of the age. The wide façades of the château itself, the high balconied windows of its galleries, gazed with regal dignity down this splendid vista to the distant horizon.

Those who know Versailles in these days understand that its real life ended with the old French monarchy. But it will live for centuries yet, appealing to modern minds by its old-world charm, a type of seventeenth-century beauty.

In the earlier and more brilliant years of his reign, long before the works at Versailles were finished, Louis XIV held many gorgeous *fêtes* there. Open-air ballrooms, open-air banqueting halls, open-air theatres, where Molière and his troupe acted comedies, were crowded with the royalty and nobility of France. In those days the King himself rode with his nobles in masquerades borrowed from the *Orlando Furioso*, and competed with them for prizes in the running at the ring. Summer nights, when fountains and parterres were illuminated with coloured lanterns, were often spent with music on the Grand Canal, in gondolas brought from Venice and rowed by Venetian gondoliers in crimson and gold. Thus one might glide on a moonlit track down the northern arm of the canal to a midnight collation at the little palace of Trianon, built first in porcelain, later in marble, on the site of another forest village.

Versailles became by degrees, as the building and decorating of the great château, its town and dependencies,

and the laying out of its wide surroundings advanced to completion, the home and centre of an enormous Court. Some of the nobility built themselves hôtels in the nearer streets, and each morning at the château gates their gilded coaches jostled those of ministers and great men newly arrived from Paris. Royal princes and princesses had their apartments in the palace itself. It was also inhabited by a crowd of officials and of courtiers to whom the King had granted rooms there. Many of these lived in the utmost discomfort in dark kennels under the staircases, stinking and airless corridors infested by beggars and thieves, every corner of space that could be spared from the royal apartments. Even these, except the King's own rooms, were anything but habitable, for all at Versailles was sacrificed to marble and gilding and outward show. But that eager, ambitious crowd of men and women did not complain of hardship; to be near Majesty meant paradise for them. They strutted forth day by day from their stifling or freezing dens, bewigged, painted and powdered, velvet-coated, satin-gowned, bold and gay of air, full of witty and malicious talk, every bow and curtsey and graceful gesture with its special shade of meaning, and all with one object in their lives, to copy and flatter the King.

For as Louis XIV grew older the spirited soldier-prince became the stiffest, most autocratic of formalists. By his own studied manners he judged those of other men, to whom his approval meant advancement and solid gain. Each salutation was a work of art: none was careless or neglected, from the lifting or taking off the hat for every woman, humble serving-maid or great lady, to the mere touch for a nobleman. The same careful regulation of manners ran through the whole of his daily life. The thousand rules of Court etiquette might have been

scarcely endurable, but for the fact, to which his own courtier bears witness, that the natural temper of Louis XIV, his kindness, forbearance, and consideration, equalled in perfection his outward bearing.

There came a time when weariness began to steal over that gorgeous Court life of Versailles. The beautiful *fêtes* were held no longer ; the poor little Queen had died—" the first grief she ever caused me," said Louis XIV ; the lovely ladies who reigned in succession at Court had fallen from favour ; and the King had privately married a handsome, austere, and sanctimonious woman who converted him not only to a more moral and religious, but to a much duller and more monotonous way of living. Still there was the crowd of courtiers, now soberly dressed and fashionably devout ; and still the fountains played and the gardens grew in beauty, for the King never lost his pride and delight in them. The public of Paris were admitted at times to view this marvellous creation, which seemed to all good subjects of King Louis a new wonder of the world.

We may picture to ourselves an afternoon in early summer, when the gardens and park were at their loveliest, when roses and jasmine lightened the green thickets that made a rich background for statuary white from the sculptor's studio—" all heathen gods and nymphs so fair " ; when whiffs of scented air stole over from the clipped lime alleys and rustled the tops of the tall trees ; when the many fountains scattered diamonds of light in the sunshine that glowed on the wide parterres and marble terraces, and birds retired to sing softly in depths of shade, leaving bolder mortals to roast in the glare. Louis XIV had a royal contempt for extremes of heat and cold, and the courtly crowd that waited for his Majesty on the terrace was bound at least to pretend equal indifference.

Monsieur Jean de La Bruyère, the Parisian philosopher, strolling by with his book under his arm, laughed at the crimson faces, the fluttering fans, here and there a silk handkerchief thrown over hat and wig to protect the wearer from sunstroke till the palace doors should be thrown open and with the coming of the King strict etiquette should rule once more.

"I would say, let us walk down to the groves yonder," said La Bruyère to his companion. "But as you, Monsieur Bart, desire to pay your respects to his Majesty, we must not risk losing your moment. You say it is long since you saw him?"

"Years, monsieur."

"You have not shown yourself at Court for years? Is it possible! What rashness!"

The other man laughed. His dark, sunburnt face, his clear blue eyes, slightly narrowed from watching cloudy horizons, his frank mouth, his somewhat ill-fitting wig and coat, his swinging, fearless gait, all seemed to point him out as a sailor home from the sea.

"I have been better employed," he said. "Rashness? On my life, I don't understand you."

"Say rather, *otherwise* employed, for, saving your presence, you do not understand the Court," answered La Bruyère: but his keen eyes and sarcastic lips spoke admiration for the man walking by his side. "Who in this nation does not know Jean Bart!" he said. "Who does not know the gallant corsair who earned his command in the King's fleet by such daring feats of arms that Dutch and English fled before him! Truly better employed than this multitude of needy nobles you see haunting Versailles! But it is they, not men like you, unseen at Court, who have now the ear of his Majesty. May I ask, monsieur, have you secured

the good offices of some powerful courtier to present you to-day ? "

" No, monsieur. The King once thanked me and gave me a gold chain. He will remember me."

" You have a fine confidence ! " La Bruyère gazed at him curiously. " We will hope it may not deceive you. But royal memories are short, and there is always the danger that his Majesty may say of you : ' He is a man I never see ! ' That has been the fate of many a man of standing in the country and many a soldier home from the wars. I have noted it in my book—you have read it, monsieur, by chance ? In my chapter on the Court you might remember these words : ' *Se dérober à la cour un seul moment, c'est y renoncer.* ' "

" I have had no time for reading. I take it from you that this crowd is the Court. My business is not with the Court, but with the King."

" I have warned you, monsieur. The rays of the *Roi Soleil* shine only——"

" Then no wonder that the kingdom is starving, as they tell me, and the armies and the fleets are discouraged."

M. de La Bruyère was on the edge of offence. His book, his famous *Caractères,* that brilliant satire on human nature and society which had already won him a notice not always flattering and was presently to admit him to the Academy —this benighted barbarian from the high seas did not even deign to make excuse for his ignorance of it ! The book was insulted : its author pressed it more closely to his heart. He had carried it from the Prince de Condé's hôtel at Versailles, where he had his lodging as the former tutor of the heir of that House, intending to offer it to the famous sailor Jean Bart, with whom he had made acquaintance by a happy chance, and who had pleasantly accepted his company in this visit to the gardens.

"Nay," thought Jean de La Bruyère, "I do not cast my pearls before swine!"

And yet he was too clever and too honest to be really angry. He guessed in Jean Bart his own scorn of the lying unrealities of the world in which he lived. They were kindred spirits, though the one brought clean sea-breezes where the other used the dissecting knife.

They went on to talk of the gardens, which inspired Jean Bart with more wonder than admiration. Frankly, their perfection of classical regularity was tiresome to him. La Bruyère smiled and marvelled at the bad taste which could prefer a plain of tumbling green waves to the prospect before them—the careless prodigality of Nature to the ingenious, proportioned work of man. He was glad, however, to satisfy the sailor's curiosity as to how the gardens had been made, and how the lavish supply of water supplying these lakes and basins and canals had been brought into this forest country. It was a long story of tremendous labour, perseverance, engineering genius. The work had cost millions in money. Its unhealthiness had cost a terrible sum in human lives. There was a time—the thing had been hushed up and hidden—when every night saw carts laden with dead bodies of labourers on their way from the half-built château and half-made gardens at Versailles.

La Bruyère broke off suddenly. "Monsieur, here is the King!" He thought, but did not say: "Now, Master Corsair, your pride will have a fall!"

All hats were swept off. The bowing and curtseying crowd on the terrace was like a field of tall wheat when the wind blows over it. Down from the château came a small group of noble and princely personages, bare-headed, all but one. He was a man in late middle age, not tall, but graceful and majestic, with the proud profile of some

Roman Emperor. He was plainly dressed in brown, with a touch of gold embroidery; diamond buckles in shoes and hat his only jewellery. His hat, curled round with white feathers, was edged with Spanish point lace.

There were salutations. The King either touched his hat or lifted it; said a gracious word or two. Once at least his manner was of marked coldness, when some courtier, not high in favour, presented an evidently rustic gentleman. "I do not know him," were the words on the King's lips. Nothing was lost on M. de La Bruyère, standing in the background and waiting with an amused smile to see the discomfiture of his late companion.

"What is the fellow doing? Is he mad?"

As the King, crossing the terrace between the fountains and their groups of statues, approached the broad flight of steps leading down to the parterre and fountain of Latona, Jean Bart the sailor advanced suddenly, almost pushing aside bowing courtiers, whose hands flew to their swords, and dropped on one knee before Louis XIV. For a moment the King was startled; his fingers clenched his cane, and the officer of the guard made a hasty step forward.

"Aha! Master Presumptuous!" muttered La Bruyère.

Then—what happened? The King, frowning a little, stared into that face browned by the sea, and the corsair's bold blue eyes stared back. Jean Bart flung open his coat and showed the heavy gold chain and medal which those royal hands had slipped round his neck long ago, after the ocean free-lance with his one small ship had captured for King Louis seventeen Dutch vessels, one a frigate of twenty-four guns.

"My admiral Jean Bart!" said the King, with a smile such as his Court seldom saw: and he gave his hand to the sailor to kiss. "Rise, Monsieur l'Amiral, and join us in

our walk," he said. "You have much to tell me, and I have much to show you. This Versailles, monsieur, has been created since your first victories."

"An amazing creation, sire," said Jean Bart.

"I shall presently show you what you will admire still more," said Louis XIV.

The eyes that followed him and his new courtier were curious, envious, displeased. Even M. de La Bruyère, attending the royal party at a humble distance, knew a touch of disappointment; for no man, certainly no philosopher, likes to be proved wrong.

The King led the corsair all the way down the stately, statue-guarded avenue that led to the great fountain of Apollo and then to the Grand Canal. Among a crowd of elegant boats, white-sailed, richly carved, painted, and gilded, the muzzles of her little brass guns flashing in the sunshine, floated a beautifully built miniature man-of-war. Her silken banners drooping, her high decks and galleries manned by curly-locked sailors in correct costume, she lay there, reflected in the trembling water, waiting his Majesty's commands.

"You see, Monsieur l'Amiral," said King Louis, with a wave of his hand, "the navy is not forgotten at Versailles. My fleet is not all on the high seas."

Jean Bart laughed aloud. The courtiers bit their lips, exchanging glances.

"I see that your Majesty has named your new frigate *The Great Ship*!"

"You have a better name to suggest?"

"With permission, yes, sire. *The Pretty Toy*!" said Jean Bart.

CHAPTER XXI

PEASANTS AND SMUGGLERS

Il y a des misères sur la terre qui saisissent le cœur.

JEAN DE LA BRUYÈRE

Château, maison, cabane,
Nous sont ouverts partout :
Si la loi nous condamne,
Le peuple nous absout !

P. J. DE BÉRANGER

THAT long reign of seventy-two years left France tired. Dark clouds obscured the setting of the *Roi Soleil.* Royal princes died, one after another, and a little child five years old was alone left to succeed his great-grandfather. But long before the King's death glory and prosperity were deserting his kingdom. Most of his great men—soldiers, statesmen, divines, poets, philosophers—were already dead. The disastrous revoking of Henri IV's tolerant Edict of Nantes had deprived France of hundreds of thousands of her best citizens : Huguenot ministers, nobles, merchants and artisans, soldiers and seamen. Foreign wars meant defeat instead of victory. The ever-increasing taxes which supported the whole unwieldy structure of the State in its ever-growing extravagance became harder and harder to raise in a country which afforded such terrible sights as this, beheld by Jean de La Bruyère near the end of the seventeenth century as he travelled the roads of Northern or Eastern France.

"One sees certain wild animals, male and female,

scattered about the country, black, livid, and burnt by the sun ; bowed to the earth which they dig and turn with invincible perseverance. They have a sort of articulate speech, and when they rise to their feet they show a human face : in fact, they are men. At night they retire into dens, where they live on black bread, water, and roots. They spare other men the labour of tilling, sowing, and reaping in order to live, and they deserve some share of the food they have sown."

These were the people who paid the taxes !

Even if La Bruyère's picture was of a specially poor district in a famine year, such years recurred only too often. We know, for instance, that the saintly Archbishop Fénelon dared to say to Louis XIV, in 1709 : " Your people are dying of hunger. Instead of dragging money out of your poor people, you should support and feed them."

And the records of several other years are equally sad. Still, writers of the eighteenth century do show another side—fairly prosperous farms and peasants decently clothed and fed, enjoying life with the merry stoicism of their nation as long as they can cheat or satisfy the absentee landlord and the ravenous tax-gatherer.

It would be a long and difficult task to describe correctly the state of France at this time, each province differing from another in burdens and laws as much as in soil and character. Sometimes a story throws light on something which seems in a way common to all the millions ruled by the French king. Such a story is the famous adventure of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Wandering one day, tired and hungry, among the mountains and woods of picturesque Dauphiné, he asked for food at a lonely cottage. The solitary old peasant who lived there did not refuse to feed the wayfarer ; he

brought him a little skim milk and barley bread chiefly made of straw; but all with a frightened and suspicious air, as if the traveller were an enemy. Watching his guest, he changed his mind: this was no enemy, open or secret, but a frank and pleasant young man, honestly starving.

"I see you are a good youth," he said, "and will not sell or betray me."

At first Jean-Jacques did not understand. When the peasant descended suddenly through a trap-door, reappearing with a loaf of pure wheaten bread, a large ham, a fat bottle of good country wine, and when he proceeded to beat up eggs and butter for an omelette, and to set an excellent meal before the still hungry traveller, and when he finally refused payment with every sign of alarm, Jean-Jacques understood still less.

In a few trembling words the peasant explained matters. He was not so ill off as his neighbours; he had worked hard and his little bit of land had prospered: but if the tax-collectors had any reason to suspect that he was not dying of hunger, and that there was food and wine stored in his cellar, he would be a ruined man.

"I left his house," says Rousseau, "indignant and deeply moved."

This was the effect of the Crown tax known as *la taille*, first levied under Charles VII, from which the nobility and the official classes were exempt.

Another story of the working of this tax comes from Touraine, the province so happy in its rich soil and kindly climate, yet which in those days hardly deserved its familiar name of 'the garden of France.' There, as elsewhere, the people suffered. The Marquis d'Argenson, in his *Journal* of 1750, tells how an assessor of taxes arrived in his village and warned the inhabitants that the *taille* was going to be much heavier.

"He had observed the peasantry to be fatter than elsewhere, had seen fowls' feathers on their doorsteps, had heard that I spent money among them, and judged that they were comfortably off and living well. This sort of thing discourages the peasant, causes discontent and misery in the kingdom, and would make Henri Quatre weep, were he alive to see it."

Other most hated taxes were those on salt and tobacco, and there was constant smuggling, both on the frontier and between the provinces with their differing tariffs, in defiance of the severest penalties and in spite of the army of agents employed by the financiers to whom Louis XIV and Colbert had farmed out these and other monopolies. The Farmers-general made gigantic fortunes, and their collectors, like the publicans of old, exacted far more than was lawfully due to them. In these circumstances smuggling became an organized trade; even, in the eyes of the people, an heroic profession. The risk was very great, for the punishments were terrible, ranging from the galleys to a cruel death; but nothing deterred the bands of young and daring adventurers, in many of whose families smuggling was an inherited instinct.

Apparently this was not the case with Louis Mandrin, the most famous smuggler of the eighteenth century in France, whose life-story has been told us by M. Funck-Brentano. He was descended from a worthy *bourgeois* family at Saint-Étienne in Dauphiné, horse-dealers and general merchants, living in their own good flint-built house, still shown, in the central square of the little hilly town. We are asked to imagine young Louis as a fair, curly-haired choir-boy of the parish church, the *curé's* apt scholar, sitting in a corner of his father's open-fronted shop and listening with sharp ears to the talk of customers who came from distant villages and mountain-sides to

buy drapery, wool or wax, jewellery or spirits. Thus he heard many tales of local misery, of the cruel doings of tax-gatherers, and the luxurious lives of their employers far away in Paris. A passion of rebellious anger filled the boy's heart. There was fierceness in his blood. He was the son not only of François Mandrin, the peaceable tradesman, but of Marguerite his wife, a woman of hot and revengeful temper, who once nearly murdered an unlucky neighbour on the suspicion of having bewitched her delicate girl. Such a mother counted for much in the wild and short careers of her sons.

Unluckily for Louis, his father died young, and at seventeen, the eldest of nine children, he was suddenly forced to work for the support of them all. His mother drove him into various money-getting enterprises; her self-will, greediness, and violence ruled the family for harm. Louis was a fine lad, handsome, strong, and gay; popular with his neighbours, energetic at his work: in a better home he might have done well. As it was, he ran wild, drank, quarrelled, and fought; involved himself in lawsuits till ruin threatened his household and little Saint-Étienne became too hot to hold him.

Then a chance of good fortune came his way. In 1748 the War of the Austrian Succession was in full swing, and the Maréchal de Belle-Isle, commanding the French army in Provence, needed large numbers of mules to carry stores and baggage over the Alps into Italy. Louis Mandrin, a horse-dealer like his father, was commissioned to supply and to take the management of a 'brigade' of harnessed mules for this purpose. He set off merrily with two companions and a few stable-boys, driving his mules—"a hundred less three"—down the Rhône valley and so by Arles and Draguignan to the sea and the frontier.

That mountain coast of enchanting colour, then so

lonely, with its white stony tracks and torrent-beds and its olive and chestnut woods, was very unlike Mandrin's own Dauphiné, where tall rocks and solemn pines climbed the slopes of colder mountains. But the work of transport from one army camp to another was hard and dangerous. Several mules were lost among the precipices and ravines. Mandrin and his 'brigade' were called upon for feats of endurance which trained him admirably for his later adventures. He was happy, hardy, and brave; ready for months of such mountain work with his nimble beasts and hoping for profit that would restore his fortunes, when the war ended suddenly; a fatal event for him, at least, says his biographer.

One misfortune followed another. His mules died of disease; and he had no compensation, since their deaths were not due to enemy action. Nor was he paid for certain provisions he had supplied to the financiers—the Farmers-general, in fact—who had contracted to feed the army. So Louis Mandrin returned to Saint-Étienne with five poor mules to his credit, a ruined man. In neighbouring farms he was long remembered, crushed by fate at twenty-four, sitting under some wide chimney-place with his head in his hands, silent and sad, large tears dripping through his fingers.

In a young man of Mandrin's character despair led naturally to desperation. And his own grievances against authority were terribly sharpened by the fate of two younger brothers, worse if not wilder fellows than himself, one of whom was hanged for coining false money, the other condemned to the galleys for robbing a church. Then came the drawing for the militia, a most unpopular service in independent Dauphiné, at which Louis threw himself into a fray with the gendarmes in defence of friends on whom the lot fell. Two of the King's men were killed, and Louis

Mandrin, with others, was condemned to death. He escaped over the frontier into Savoy, joined a small force already existing of smuggling banditti, and in the depth of winter swooped back into Dauphiné with a hundred armed men and a train of mules laden with contraband—tobacco, gunpowder, wine, watches, muslins, woollen goods, and so forth.

This was the first of six campaigns succeeding each other at short intervals during sixteen months. For that time Mandrin and his comrades, of whom he became at once the leader, were a terror to the agents of 'les Fermes' in South-eastern France. Their operations extended as far north as Burgundy and Franche-Comté, for we hear of them at Pont-de-Veyle, Autun, Beaune, and Besançon, and as far into Central France as the Rouergue and Auvergne.

Everywhere they made for the tax-gatherers' houses and demanded with threats the large sums of money these men had received for their masters, the Farmers-general. Contraband tobacco was offered in exchange. The *gâpians*, or 'gulls'—the south-country nickname for the twenty-four thousand collectors who hovered spying over the nation like hungry sea-birds over a rocky shore—often put up a spirited resistance, for their calling was their living. Then up went muskets, out came knives, and the smugglers usually had the best of it. For they were strong, desperate, determined young men, and the officials of the customs were often small people living in small houses, protected indeed by the power of the State, but hated by the people they robbed and ruined. The smugglers who attacked them were sure of sympathy in town and country: secret, but none the less useful. Mandrin and his men could hide their bales of contraband goods everywhere: in farms, inns, and lonely hovels; in

churches and presbyteries, in castles and manor-houses. If their frays cost lives, which frequently happened, magistrates were unwilling to convict them. They were always able to escape, flying by night on their strong little horses, threading pathless forests, swimming rivers, till they reached safety in Savoy or Switzerland.

Then they were back again in France with fresh bales of goods which they sold openly to the country people, charging them a few pence for tobacco which the *gâpians* valued at as many francs. No wonder that the young *Capitaine des Contrebandiers*, as Mandrin styled himself, was a popular personage. Like Robin Hood and other such heroes he was polite and generous to the poor, keeping his terrors for the dishonest and grasping rich.

"The people love this Mandrin furiously," Voltaire wrote to a friend. "He interests himself for those who are devoured by man-eaters. . . . In the time of Romulus or of Theseus he would have been a great man; but in these days such heroes are hanged."

That tragic end seemed distant enough on a midsummer fair-day in 1754 when Mandrin and his troop rode into Rodez, the old red-towered cathedral city of the Rouergue.

A merry picture has been drawn for us of the confusion in the market-place, the blue-smocked peasants, the women with their quilled caps and lace collars, pushing in crowds among sheep, pigs, poultry, and vegetables for a better view of the band of mounted men, played into the town by the martial music of their own drums and fifes. A hundred or more, sunburnt, dusty, and way-worn, wide felt hats tilted over their eyes, armed with muskets, pistols, and knives: these, the rank and file of the smugglers, were followed by Mandrin and his lieutenant; these again by a number of laden mules driven with wild shouts by men on foot. The young captain rode a grey horse; his

hair was light and curly ; he wore a scarlet cloak and a fine black beaver hat caught up with gold cords. Thus he and his band rode triumphantly through the town to an open square, where the bales were boldly unpacked. And that day, at Rodez Fair, quite freely, to their own joy and in spite of *gâpians*, the folk of town and country bought cheap tobacco and muslins from Switzerland.

Among Mandrin's pleasanter adventures was one in the neighbourhood of Lyons. On a hot summer afternoon a company of ladies and gentlemen were assembled on the terrace of a château which overhung the road at the entrance of a village. Their agreeable talk was interrupted by peasants running along the road, shrieking "*Les Mandrins !*" instantly followed in a cloud of dust by the smuggler captain and his wild regiment. The ladies were startled ; but Mandrin waved his hat and cried to them to have no fear. Presently, having left his men in the village, he appeared himself at the château with two companions and a bale of Swiss embroidered muslin or some such tempting merchandise, which he offered to the ladies at a very moderate price. They were delighted, it seems, to cheat the Farmers-general by dealing with the notorious Mandrin : they found his visit pleasantly exciting and fed him with oranges and melons. Later in the evening, the village having been handsomely paid for entertaining the band, and handfuls of small coins having been scattered among the children, *les Mandrins* trotted off in another cloud of dust, leaving golden opinions behind them.

But the law could not be defied for ever with impunity. The Farmers-general began to take the matter seriously. It became known that Mandrin's ambition was to push as far as the neighbourhood of Paris, where these rich magnates lived splendidly in beautiful country houses, to

seize a few of them and carry them across the frontier as hostages. To such a daring brigand nothing seemed impossible. The Farmers-general were alarmed. They had troops of their own in constant pursuit of Mandrin; when these failed to catch him the royal troops were called into action: regiments of dragoons scoured the country and watched and guarded the frontiers. The people began to be frightened: it was all very well for smugglers to fight tax-gatherers, but fighting the King's own soldiers was a different affair. Public sympathy began to fail Mandrin; and it must be added that he was becoming unworthy of it. On many occasions his men behaved brutally and he did not check them; in fact, during the last months he was more often drunk than sober. The end was not far off.

Mandrin was caught at a favourite haunt of his in Savoy, the old Château de Rochefort, near Pont de Beauvoisin, where the river Guiers was the boundary between France and the Sardinian kingdom. Spies tracked him and the royal troops arrested him and carried him into France: an unlawful act strongly resented by the Court of Sardinia. But diplomatic stormings came too late to save the arch-enemy of the Farmers-general. There was no delay in Mandrin's punishment. He was tried at Valence, and executed there with the extremest cruelty of the time on 26th May, 1755.

Not forty years later, at the height of the Revolutionary Terror, twenty-eight Farmers-general, bad and good together, perished in one day under the knife of the guillotine.

Thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.

CHAPTER XXII

CHÂTEAU AND VILLAGE

Un nid sous le feuillage,
Un manoir dans les bois!

VICTOR HUGO

Heureux villageois, dansons:
Sautez, fillettes
Et garçons!
Unissez vos joyeux sons,
Musettes
Et chansons!

P. J. DE BÉRANGER

IN the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the old feudal nobility of France, as distinguished from those clever men who had been ennobled for services to the State and those rich men who had bought their honours, were divided into two classes, of the Court and of the country. By no means every ancient name was to be found among the crowd that waited on Louis XIV or degraded itself at the far worse Court of his great-grandson. Many nobles lived and died on their estates: they were often poor enough in spite of their privileges; but these were not the men who restored or added to their fortunes by marrying into the rich *bourgeoisie* after the example of many of the more worldly-wise *noblesse de cour*; nor were these the men whose selfishness helped to bring about the Revolution. Proud, remote, shabby, and plain, stiff without and gay within, the provincial *seigneur*, the poor country gentleman of France in the reign of Louis XV, dwelt among his

peasant tenants and usually had their respect, if not their affection.

Let us look at a village in the west of France and the old château or manor that watched over it; the manor whose gates and walls had been its strong refuge and defence in times when wars and marauding bands swept the country. In those times feudal privileges were the fighting man's reward for protecting the helpless; and still, in the eighteenth century, in places far away from the talk of towns, it was only a few here and there, more thoughtful than their fellows, who found it strange that the *seigneur* should take toll of their corn and wine, already so heavily taxed by the Government, that his pigeons and his game should live on their harvest, that their flour should be ground in his mill and shared with him. These and other such ancient customs had existed for many centuries; they almost seemed to be in the natural order of things. One of the most oppressive, the system of unpaid labour known as *la corvée*, had by this time almost died out on private estates, though the King's officials still enforced it for the making and mending of roads. Many other powers once exercised by the *seigneur* had also vanished: he was no longer the ruler and judge, the chief magistrate, the terror of evil-doers: all this provincial authority had passed to the royal Intendants, and in many a village the syndic, or head of the parish assembly, the tax-collector, even the schoolmaster, man of many offices, sexton, sacristan, choir-leader, was a person of more actual importance than either the *curé* or the landowner. This "high and powerful" gentleman, as he was described in documents and on his tombstone, was sometimes poorer than his farmers. In many cases he had little beyond his old feudal rights, a thankless possession; and his local influence depended largely on his character.

Château and Village

Look along the valley. The road, grass-grown and deeply rutted, wanders down past uneven groups of low white cottages to the ford where the stream ripples across it, then gradually climbs again between the wooded hills. The cottages are thatched, a few slated, but all of one storey, except for a garret in the roof. Outside, each has a shed or two, the better ones a dunghill outside the door; the little farms are approached by a flagged pathway and shaded by walnut or chestnut trees. On a green mound half-way through the village stands the church with its old round apse and tall tower, from which three deep-toned bells, rung by an active schoolmaster, are constantly pealing. They chime or clang for all services, for the *angelus* at morning, noon, and evening; for births, deaths, and marriages; for alarms of fire or robbery; in a thunderstorm; to drive away evil spirits; at the hour of curfew (*couvre-feu*), when all honest folk must be indoors and all fires and lights put out. They and the church clock order the life of the village.

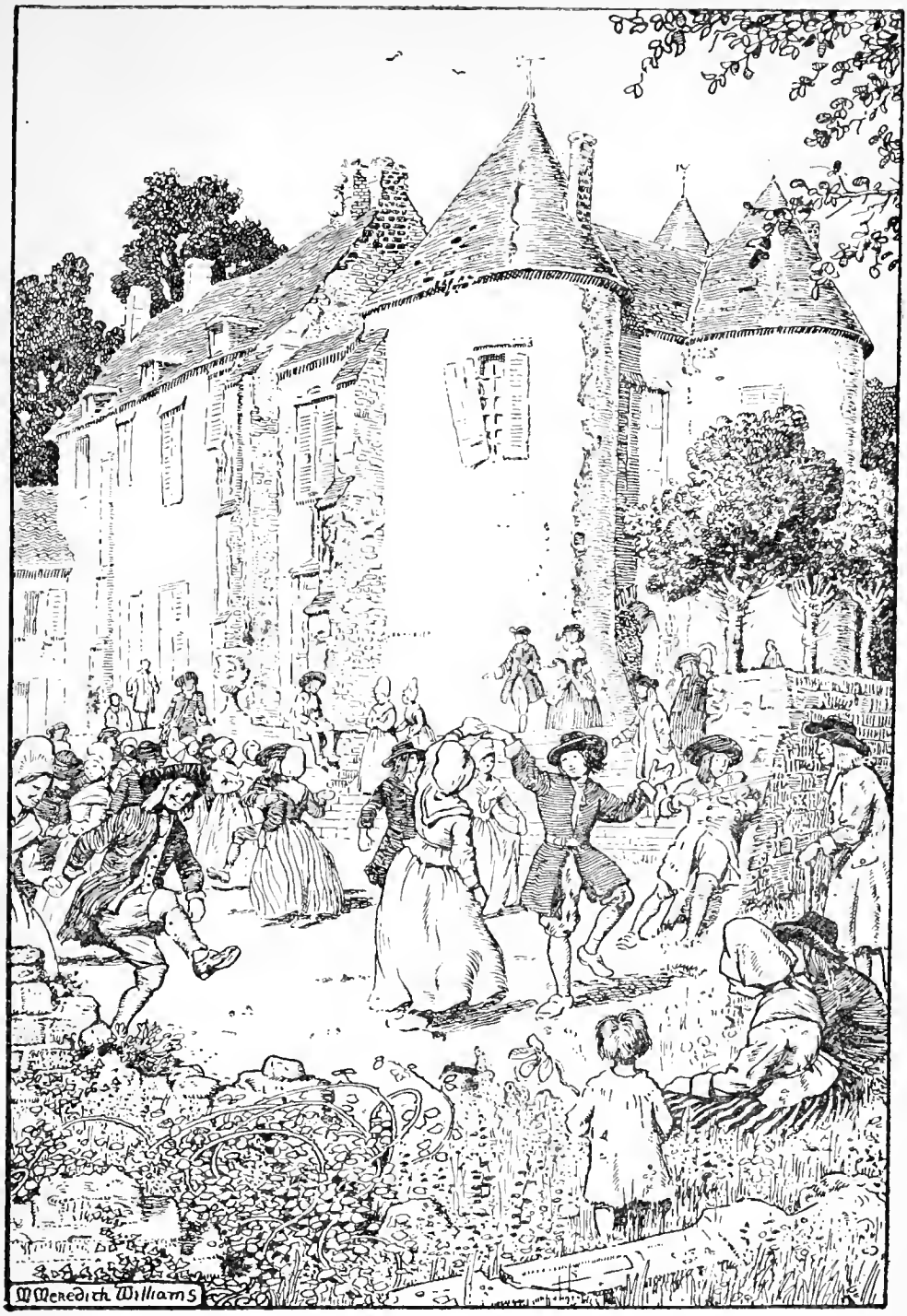
On one side of the road the ground behind the cottages slopes to low meadows and the stream: on the other, it climbs to the edge of the forest, where sheep feed in a guarded flock: and here too on the hill-side are the small sunny vineyards and cornfields and vegetable patches which help the people to live. A short by-road turns down to the stream and crosses it by a rough bridge. The dark water moves slowly between rustling poplars; king-fishers dart across the shade with a flash of blue. Then an avenue of large old walnut-trees climbs the slope to the gates of the château. The white walls of the courtyard, built, like the house, of country stone, are ruinous and over-grown with ivy; the *plaisance*, which used to extend be-yond them, laid out by a great-grandfather in the days of Louis XIV, is neglected now; a few roses bloom, wild and

straggling, smothered in grass and leaves; the yew and box hedges, once trimly clipped, have lost their form.

Though not very large as such houses go, and with no great extent of stables, kennels, dovecot towers, and the like, this ancient manor has a stately air as it stands with its back to the woods and moors, its high grey roofs and weather-cocks shining. Drawing nearer, we see that the long outside shutters, half closed against the sun, are hanging by one hinge, and that many birds have built their nests about the cracked windows and crumbling chimneys. Weeds are growing in the courtyard, where an old dog lies asleep in a corner of shade.

Monsieur le Baron and his family are to be found in the large hall, the centre of the house, which serves them for all purposes. Anciently there was an immense state bed in one corner, removed by civilization into an adjoining room. But the hall is still medieval enough, with its enormous carved and emblazoned chimney-piece, its ceiling of painted beams veiled by cobwebs, its paved floor, high-backed chairs, and chests of walnut wood set against walls hung partly with old stamped leather, partly with worn tapestry, partly with quaint portraits of ancestors. Nothing of the fine art and luxury of the eighteenth century has penetrated here.

But the Baron and his family are much more alive than their surroundings, and in this hour of repose after the twelve-o'clock dinner they have many matters to discuss, while Monsieur walks up and down in his plain suit and leather gaiters—the syndic is better dressed on a holy-day—and Madame with her two daughters sits working cross-stitch to replace the ragged seats of the chairs. The only son, a young fellow of eighteen, wears the only gloomy countenance: and yet the next day is to see him on his way to Versailles, where a great noble, a distant cousin,



An Old French Château
M. Meredith Williams

has half promised him a small place in the household of the Dauphin, lately married to an Austrian princess and soon to be King Louis XVI. Perhaps young Charles is quick enough to guess what his first experience of the gay world will be, with country manners, country servants, country clothes, country horses, and the old-fashioned learning picked up from the *curé* by a lad whom two old peasants had held at the font.

His mother's dark eyes rest upon him with a touch of the sweet mockery that enchanted bygone Courts in her ancestresses.

"Charles will marry the daughter of a Farmer-general," she softly says. "Do not be sad, my child. Think how your rich wife will transform the old home! We shall all grow fat in her shadow."

"Pardon, madame!" the Baron turns upon her. "Charles will marry in his own rank. And I, at least, wish for no changes here."

She smiles. "No; you have your gun and your fishing-rod. Certainly they help to feed us, but they do not mend the roof or build up the walls."

"All that will last my time," says the little Baron. "And I have this!"

He snatches up a shabby fiddle lying on a chest, and after a caressing touch or two begins to play a Spanish dance, slow, romantic, and thrilling. After a moment young Charles steps up bowing to his mother, and together they glide off along the hall in graceful movement to that cadence. The two young girls with entwined arms follow them, and presently the Baron himself is both playing and leading the dance, in and out of the long sunbeams on the floor.

At length he stops suddenly, saying: "Do not fatigue yourselves; you must dance with the village later."

And to be sure, when the holy-day is a few hours older the harsh music of peasant pipers fills the air, and men, women, and children follow it up the avenue. All wear their best clothes: the men are well dressed in cloth, with deerskin waistcoats and silver buttons, their long hair tied with ribbon under wide felt hats; the women in serge of different colours, silk aprons, silver chains and crosses, starched caps of the local pattern.

Monsieur le Baron adjusts his wig and goes out into the courtyard to receive them with ceremony. He and his family join in the country dances, which with a few breathless pauses last on into the late evening, till shadows are long and the schoolmaster slips away to ring the *angelus*. When the older people are tired they stand out and talk with Monsieur and Madame and the *curé*; there are sick cows and sick children to be consulted on, coming marriages, all the gossip of the country-side, and the prospects of Monsieur Charles into the bargain.

Two or three old servants look out smiling from kitchen and stables; a wandering pedlar unpacks his wares on the terrace steps. There is an air of friendly simplicity and harmless chatter; even dark and sour faces, for these are not absent, are lightened of their discontent by the merry music and joy of the well-loved dance.

Later they all troop away to their mud-floored cabins and their evening meal of milk-soup and beans and black bread. There is a pleasant acrid scent of burning wood as the smoke from their chimneys mounts into the quiet air.

Young Charles cannot sleep or rest that night. Has he some presentiment of changes in a coming time far beyond any imaginable new experience of his own?

Certainly the old home and the old people have never been so dear. He looks out from his tower window into a world of moonshine, deathly still but for the croak of a frog in the ponds below and the hoot of an owl as it flits between the trees in the avenue.

In the old province one may chance nowadays to hear a story that brings a past century to life again. Not so long ago a traveller, a tourist, walking down in a summer evening from the tableland into the valley, passed the ruined fragments of a château or manor-house. Part of it had been made into a farmhouse, now deserted; part had been destroyed by fire and was a heap of blackened stones overgrown with weeds and briars. Crossing the old courtyard to gain the road that led to the village, the tourist, who had been struck by the eerie loneliness of the place, suddenly became aware that it was not so lonely. In the twilight, among the broken stones and the weeds, he saw groups of strangely dressed people, eighty to a hundred of them, dancing round and round, up and down, in figures equally strange. There was no sound, except the evening wind that stirred the walnut leaves. The tourist went on his way marvelling, for he knew that those peasants with their ancient costumes and their quaint country dances must be nigh on a hundred and fifty years old.

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO GOOD MEN

Ah! si de telles mains, justement souveraines,
Toujours de cet empire avaient tenu les rênes!
L'équité clairvoyante aurait régné sur nous,
Le faible aurait osé respirer près de vous.

ANDRÉ CHÉNIER

Quand je montai sur ce trône éclatant
Que me destina ma naissance,
Mon premier pas dans ce poste brillant
Fut un édit de bienfaisance.

MARQUISE DE TRAVANET

HE was plain 'Monsieur Turgot' to the Court, and there was a gulf of difference between him and the crowd of elegant, luxurious, privileged nobles who surrounded the young sovereigns, Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. In the point of family, however, he was no upstart and no outsider. He was a gentleman of an old Norman house, and his ancestors, called Turgot des Tourailles, Turgot de Saint-Clair, or by some other territorial name, had served the State for at least two hundred years. His father had been created a marquis by Louis XV as a reward for his services as Provost of the Merchants of Paris. While holding this office he undertook and carried out a vast plan for draining the unhealthy quarters of the city. He was a man of high cultivation, the friend of all that was most enlightened in the France of his day. He died a Councillor of State.

Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, the youngest and most famous of the Provost's sons, was intended for the Church

and was known in his youth as the Abbé de Laulne, but the influences of the time, Voltaire, the philosophers, the literary *salons* and the brilliant men he met there, turned his mind against an ecclesiastical career. He was not the kind of man who could lightly take Orders while unconvinced, or lead the life of many a courtly young cleric in a society ruled by Louis XV. Grave, shy, and awkward, he was a keen observer and a careful student of France and her history. He longed to administer public affairs, to fight a thousand abuses. While still a young man, he was appointed by the King Intendant of Limoges, a poor district overburdened with taxes and crushed by privileged landlords. Here, at the cost of much unpopularity—except among the peasantry—Turgot trained himself by thirteen years of hard work for the object of his dreams, the great reform that should transfigure his country.

At last his day was come. He found himself at Court, Controller-General of Finance, which practically meant Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister in one, for the actual head of the Government under Louis XVI, M. de Maurepas, a worthy and amiable old courtier, was very little of a statesman.

The Court was at Compiègne when the new Minister laid his plans before the new King. We can imagine the two men and their surroundings. Turgot was a man in the prime of life, with dark eyes and a strong, resolute countenance. A judge of faces might have guessed him over-confident in his own ideas and intolerant of those of others. Louis XVI was an awkward, heavy-looking youth of twenty, in appearance perhaps the most unkingly of French kings, careless and untidy in his dress, with hands scratched and stained by the hard work he delighted in. But as to heart, character, and honest intention, France never had

a better king. How he differed from his grandfather Louis XV, for instance, is suggested by a little story told by M. Stryienski in his book on the eighteenth century.

In the first days of the new reign a polite official of Louis XV's Court presented himself.

"Who are you?" said Louis XVI.

"Sire, I am called La Ferté."

"What do you want?"

"Sire, I am come to take your orders."

"What for?"

"I am in charge of—of the *Menus*——"

"What are the *Menus*?"

"Sire, the *Menus plaisirs* (amusements) of your Majesty."

"My amusement is to walk in the park. I don't want you," said Louis XVI, and turned his back on the gentleman.

Now, in a small room at the palace of Compiègne, decorated with paintings and mosaic, looking out into the August sunshine of gardens laid out under Louis XV, the young King met a man who offered him no personal amusement, but called upon him to realize the state of his country and by resolute self-sacrifice to work a great reform. Turgot knew well that his success in his new office depended on the support of the King, and he was not without misgivings, frankly expressed to his friends. The nearer he drew to his task of transforming the State, of establishing equal justice for all, the more formidable did it appear: a true labour of Hercules.

And now he found himself face to face with the good, stupid boy of clumsy manners who was the centre of all he wished to destroy; all the heartless gaiety, luxury, and Court extravagance inherited from Louis XV; all the mad race to destruction of an already bankrupt State.

"I hear that you did not wish to be Controller-General," the King said to the new Minister.

Turgot replied by saying something of his inexperience of so difficult an office, adding: "But it is not to the King I give myself; it is to the upright man."

Young Louis took both his hands. "You shall not be disappointed. I give you my word of honour. I will enter into all your views, and I will always support you in any bold steps you may have to take."

Then M. Turgot, highly encouraged, laid his plans before the King. They were wide and sweeping. Privileges were to vanish: taxation was to become fair and equal; there was to be free trade between the provinces, especially in corn and wine. There was to be no more State bankruptcy, no more borrowing, no more laying on of fresh taxes. And above all things there must be no more extravagance. Looking his King straight in the face, Turgot said:

"Your Majesty, economy is a necessity. And it is you yourself who must set the example. No more money gifts to be bestowed on your courtiers; no more expensive favours drawn from the misery of others. I must fight against your own generosity and that of those dear to you. I shall be feared, hated, and calumniated at Court: even the people may be deceived into distrust of me. Your Majesty will remember that I rely solely on your personal justice and kindness."

And King Louis said again: "Monsieur Turgot, you have my confidence."

So Turgot set to work to regenerate France. But like so many reformers with a high ideal, he left human nature out of account. And French human nature at that time, in spite of much philanthropic talk *à la* Rousseau, was by no means prepared for unselfish action. In unexpected

ways Turgot found himself opposed to his countrymen, and not alone to the Court and the richer classes. The people themselves were alarmed by the new law as to free trade in corn, believing that it meant exportation and less food for the country. This belief was encouraged by Turgot's enemies and strengthened by two bad harvests which kept up high prices and threatened famine. Riots in all parts of the country, even in Paris and under the King's windows at Versailles, did not shake Turgot's belief in himself or that of King Louis in his Minister ; but they foreshadowed his fall.

He did not add to his popularity by proposing that the young King should be crowned in Paris, at Notre-Dame, instead of in the cathedral of Reims, the sacred city of the monarchy, where nearly all the French kings had been crowned. A mere matter of economy : but Turgot did not allow for national sentiment, strong in 1775, even though M. de la Ferté and his crowd of underlings—a coronation being reckoned among the *Menus plaisirs* of royalty—were probably the chief persons who found these expensive ceremonies to their advantage. On this occasion Turgot did not have his own way. Louis XVI was crowned at Reims with all the magnificence of a bygone time.

The Finance Minister followed his determined course, making enemies at every turn. We may fancy him at one of the Court balls or *fêtes*, which he did his utmost, by pulling the royal purse-strings tight, to deprive of their splendour. There he stands, a dignified figure, soberly dressed, speaking little, for men avoided his severe presence and candid words. Among the throng at Court he had, besides the King, only one friend and supporter, M. de Malesherbes, the Minister of the Household, who honestly tried to carry out his plans, and to some

extent, though a person of pleasanter manners, shared his unpopularity.

Those Court balls were a wonderful sight of gorgeous colour and flashing jewellery and waving, towering feathers. Here and at the great *fêtes* were to be seen those 'monumental' head-dresses which French society adopted for a short time; a fashion never likely to be revived. Women's hair, piled up in a snowy powdered mass, was crowned by, for instance, a miniature English garden, "with grass-plots and streams"; or real flowers kept fresh in small glass bottles "curved to the shape of the head"; or a bird hovering over a rose; or a shepherd, his dog, and his flock; or some other original design. Among these strange figures in hoops, wigs, and masks, tall, fair, graceful, high-spirited, proud yet simple, a 'white soul' in a Court of greatly mixed elements, moved the young Queen of France, Marie-Antoinette.

She was a frank, generous girl, and there are many stories of her kindness of heart to prove that she was very capable of being touched by the sufferings of the nation and of understanding the need for reform. "Monsieur Turgot is an honest man," she said. But she saw nothing with her own eyes; she was told little of the truth; and most of the influences round her were strong in a contrary direction. She loved beauty and gaiety and the pleasures that were heaped at her feet; and she was a child of eighteen.

Her friends, nearly all of them—for there were noble exceptions—her merry, frivolous, mischievous ladies, her smiling, witty gentlemen, were bitterly opposed to changes and retrenchments which touched them personally by crippling the royal power of scattering money and favours. Many well-paid and useless offices were abolished by Monsieur Turgot. His restraining hand was felt

everywhere, but especially among the Queen's friends; and in these young days of hers Marie-Antoinette was passionately devoted to her friends.

A few months found Turgot's forebodings justified. His reforms were faced by the opposition of all the great people in the kingdom, of the Parliament, of the financiers, of the Church, of the Court, and to a certain extent of the Queen. Before two years had passed both he and Malesherbes fell, for Louis XVI, with all his brave promises and good intentions, was not strong enough to fight against such a phalanx of enemies. The King was sorry.

"It is only Monsieur Turgot and I who love the people," he said regretfully.

"Never forget, sire," Turgot wrote in his last letter to the young master who had failed him, "that weakness laid Charles I's head on the block; that weakness made Charles IX cruel; that under Henri III it was the cause of the League; that it made a crowned slave of Louis XIII; that it brought about all the misfortunes of the late reign."

So France rolled on her ancient way for a few more years, while dark, red-flushed clouds, the curtain behind which the sun of the Capet monarchy was soon to set, climbed swiftly on the horizon.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE QUEEN AND HER SERVANTS

One was my page, a lad I reared and bore with day by day.
CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI

O Richard! ô mon Roi!
L'univers t'abandonne,
Et sur la terre il n'est que moi
Qui s'intéresse à ta personne.
MICHEL JEAN SEDAINE

ONE day in the summer of 1776—the summer of Turgot's fall—Queen Marie-Antoinette was driving with her ladies in the forest country near Versailles. The royal coach with its outriders was passing through a tiny village, a cluster of hovels that crouched about the road in the shelter of the great trees. A little boy three years old ran out to see the sight and was knocked down by the leading horse before the postilion had time to avoid him. Loud shrieks: an old peasant woman rushes out from her door to seize the child, whom the royal grooms have already rescued unhurt from under the prancing horse's feet. One of the gentlemen-in-waiting has dismounted and taken him in his arms: the Queen, rising up in her coach, stretches out both hands to the old dame in eager kindness.

"The child is safe, mother! All is well. He is your grandson? Is his mother living?"

"No, madame. My daughter died last winter, leaving me with the five children on my hands."

"I will provide for them all. As to this one, will you give him to me? I have none of my own—he will be a comfort to me—will you consent?"

"Madame is too kind. The children are lucky—but Jacques is a very naughty boy. I doubt if he will stay with you."

Poor little Jacques, fair-haired and rosy, the picture of a peasant child in his woollen cap, red frock, and sabots, was lifted into the coach and taken screaming on the Queen's lap.

"He will soon be accustomed to me," said Marie-Antoinette, and after a few more kind words she ordered her coachman to drive on.

But the story goes that the drive had to be considerably shortened, so loud were Jacques' shrieks and so violent the kicks he bestowed on the Queen and her ladies. When the gentleman-in-waiting carried him into the palace—by the way, we have met this young man before as Monsieur Charles, the son of a certain château in the woods, now and ever the devoted servant of Marie-Antoinette, Dauphiness and Queen—the screams and kicks went on, and it was a miserable, frightened, shrieking child whom the Queen led into her own rooms, to the great surprise of all her household.

Two or three days in the care of a kind nurse worked wonders. Little Jacques became aware that he was amazingly well off. He soon ceased to cry and struggle. The beautiful child who was brought to the Queen at nine o'clock every morning in a white frock trimmed with lace, a pink sash with silver fringe, and a feathered hat, might have been the little prince she so earnestly longed for. Jacques, now known by the more elegant name of Armand, soon forgot his grandmother and his brothers and sisters and their forest home. He became the

life of that childless household, a merry, happy boy, the Queen's petted plaything. Her waiting-woman who tells the story says that he breakfasted and dined with her Majesty, sometimes even with the King. He was brought up in this fashion till the Queen's eldest child, born two years later, was old enough to be carried into the royal apartments. After that his position was changed, but the Queen's kindness never failed: he was educated at Versailles and always employed in the palace.

When the great events of 1789, following on one another, were leading France on her way to changes then undreamed of, this young Armand, the Queen's adopted child and servant, was a lad of sixteen. And of all the spreaders of evil reports about Marie-Antoinette, of all those who repaid her goodness with black ingratitude and treachery, of all the jealous, mean, cowardly characters who threw themselves into revolution for fear of being compromised by the debt they owed to royalty—and there were many of them—this young peasant was one of the worst. It might have been kinder to leave him in his grandmother's roadside hovel.

It was on those famous days, 5th and 6th October, 1789, that he showed his true quality. The Revolution had begun. The States-General, lawfully representing the French people, had been summoned after an interval of a hundred and seventy-five years to meet at Versailles, and had transformed themselves into the National Assembly. The old State prison of the Bastille had fallen, symbol of tyranny, scene of legends now exploded. Reforms both wide and deep had been agreed on, privileges voluntarily resigned; the King had accepted changes which disarmed and fettered the monarchy, and had he been such a man as Henri Quatre, a popular leader rather than a driven

victim, the 'principles of 1789' might have triumphed without the bloodshed and wholesale destruction of following years. His own weakness and the loyalty of his friends and officers, who justly feared the violence of the Assembly, hurried on catastrophes which suited the ends of his enemies; and the most powerful, the most cunning of these were to be found in his own circle. The men of the Terror, into whose hands the Revolution fell—it is the way of revolutions—were not yet rulers of France. Modern evidence goes to show that Philippe, Duke of Orléans, the King's disloyal cousin, was the chief mover in a plot to bring about the fall of royalty by sending the Parisian mob to Versailles. The cry of dear and scarce bread was an excuse for the ignorant, who were told that they had only to fetch their King and Queen to Paris and all would be well.

Everything seemed peaceful enough on that autumn afternoon. At Versailles the gardens and the park lay quiet under a grey sky, yellow leaves drifting down from the tall elms, fountains playing softly. Louis XVI was shooting at Meudon, some miles away, tired of stormy debate. Marie-Antoinette was alone at her beloved Little Trianon. This small château and its surroundings, given to her by the King long ago, had for some years been her chief delight; she had laid out the gardens in English fashion, with winding walks and bridges and streams, had built her little hamlet and toy farm, and with her children and ladies had lived the 'simple life' there as often as Court engagements would allow. All the old eccentric and gorgeous fashions had disappeared. A straw hat, a plain muslin gown, a lace scarf: thus the Queen was dressed as she walked in her garden and sat in her grotto at Trianon on that October day, the last day of peace that she was ever to know in this world. As to happiness, that had long deserted her. The death of her eldest son, the

political troubles of the kingdom, the riots in the provinces and the destruction of châteaux which had already led to the emigration of many who should have been the King's loyal friends; the deaths of others who stood to their posts; the cruel insults levelled at herself and all dear to her: no wonder that she sat thoughtful and uneasy, wondering what the future had in store. Irresolute and inactive as the King was, what fair judge could fail to see that he meant to do his duty both to the nation in its new needs and to the old trust of monarchy, the French tradition handed down through so many centuries? But Louis was weak, and no one knew him better or mourned his weakness more sadly than she. Mirabeau, a brilliant observer, said later that the Queen was "the only man" the King had about him.

As she sat there thinking, a letter was brought from the palace begging her to return at once, for the people of Paris were marching on Versailles with pikes and guns. In the King's absence there was no one to give orders: the Assembly was as much disturbed as the royal household itself.

The messenger vanished and Monsieur Charles stood in his place: he had attended the Queen to Trianon, as one of her most faithful servants and trusted friends. He was now nearly forty years old, and twenty years of Court life had altered him little: he seemed still the quiet native of west-country woods. His father had died, luckily for himself, before that rising of the peasants which left the old manor a blazing ruin; his mother, with his sisters and brothers-in-law, had escaped with difficulty to the coast, whence a friendly ship's captain carried them to England. Charles had not married, in his own rank or any other.

As they returned to the palace the Queen asked him what had become of young Armand, whose duty it would

naturally have been to bring her the letter she had just received.

"Madame, no one knows. Armand disappeared three days ago."

"Not for the first time."

"No, madame. It appears that Armand finds Paris irresistible."

"What will be the end of it!" said Marie-Antoinette dreamily. "He is too young, poor boy: bad companions may ruin him. You have often protected him, Charles, but I have indulged him too far."

"I fear, your Majesty, he is an ungrateful little hound."

The Queen smiled and sighed. "In these days, who knows!" she said. "My servants may be wise if they seek more profitable service. But Armand is young to be faithless. These new riots may bring him back to me."

Rain was softly beginning, twilight falling, as she went forward to meet the hunger-army of Paris, storming at her doors.

Where was Armand?

Many accounts have been written, many pictures painted, of the march of the women from Paris to Versailles. We see the mixed multitude, trampling through the mud, up and down hill, between the misty masses of autumn forest that covered heights and valleys to each horizon. Thousands of the lowest women in Paris are mingled with the thieves and bad characters of the city. A few are on horseback, most on foot, ragged, barefooted, an immense number hardly knowing why they are there, except for the wild cries of "Bread, bread!" but carried along in the crowd to the rattle of drums, the rumble of cannon-wheels; for not content with flourishing pikes, scythes, and muskets, the leaders are dragging along with them three guns taken from the Hôtel de Ville.

The crowd is split into groups, some far wilder and more angry than others. Strange figures appear in these: rouged, powdered, painted, wearing women's gowns; but men's feet in heavy shoes are plainly seen under the draperies. Names are given to some of these people; names well known later in revolutionary history as belonging to Philippe Egalité's crew. To some of these young men, no doubt, it was a merry adventure: to go to Versailles in such company, bent on defying the Assembly and insulting—if nothing worse—the King and Queen. Worse, much worse, were the threats of one desperate dancing group led by a tall lad with fair curls, whose pretty baby face might indeed have belonged to the slender woman whose skirts he wore. His pocket full of bribes, his mouth of curses, and his envious heart eager for some cruel vengeance on his best friends, young Armand headed that group of Marie-Antoinette's enemies. In this fashion did the riots bring him back to her.

Under heavy rain and darkening skies the procession reached the Avenue de Paris, the stately approach between formal rows of elms which led straight to the château; and we are told that as they advanced they shouted: "*Vive le Roi!*"

It was not that night, while the muddy and bedraggled crowd were sleeping exhausted in the streets and courts of Versailles or howling their threats under the windows, La Fayette and his National Guards arriving from Paris, those within the château wondering what the next few hours might bring forth—it was not that night, but the early morning, which found Armand ready to keep his promise to his new friends, that he would lead them straight to the Queen's bed-chamber; and once there, they might do what they pleased! He was a valuable ally, for he knew every turn and corner in the labyrinth of

rooms and passages which surrounded the royal apartments. He knew a secret way into the gardens too, by which he had more than once escaped and returned. By that way, in the chilly dawn of the October morning, he led a party of savage women, real and disguised, crying in horrible language for the blood of Marie-Antoinette. They were the first to enter the château, the vanguard of a wild crowd that stormed its way in through the Courtyard of the Princes and up the marble staircase between the guardrooms and anterooms of the King and the Queen.

All the château was practically unguarded, for Louis XVI had been advised by La Fayette to send his soldiers away, except a few of the bodyguard who were to keep the principal doors—but were ordered by the King not to fire on the attacking crowd, or even to defend themselves. He still trusted his people, and was probably the only person in the château who slept that night.

One after another the brave guards were struck down. Armand and his group were thundering at the doors of the Queen's apartments, and her defenders had already the worst of it when Monsieur Charles came flying to join them.

"Time, time! We must gain time!" he cries to his friends; and then he turns on the leader of the mob.

"What, you, Armand! You here, dressed up like a miserable girl! Do the ladies from Paris know that you are one of her Majesty's favourite pages—that she saved you from starvation, carried you in her arms, treated you as a child of her own! So false to her, can these ladies know that you will not trick and deceive them?"

The attack is so sudden and so strong, Charles's voice rings so high and clear, that for an instant the fierce creatures fall back. One even cries: "Then she is good, the Queen?" Armand, glancing round in sudden terror,

sees scowling faces. Then he yells out: "Lies, lies! I hate the woman! I have nothing to do with her!" swings his musket in the air and deals Monsieur Charles a blow on the head which lays him senseless at his feet. And the crowd storms on, shrieking with furious laughter.

We know that by a few minutes gained through the heroic martyrdom of several of her loyal guards and servants Marie-Antoinette was saved from the actual hands of her enemies. But we can well believe that she tasted something of the bitterness of death when she looked down from the baleony of the château on the vast, swaying, wavering, terrible crowd by whieh she and Louis XVI and their children were to be escorted to Paris: that crowd who bore the heads of faithful men on pikes, and among whom, pressing on the coach, singing, laughing, triumphant, her tired eyes may have recognized in a mad boy decked out like a girl the darling rosy Jacques who once sat upon her knee.

Perhaps she foresaw that Armand would one day redeem himself. And indeed he did so in a measure three years later, when, still a lad under twenty, he fought and fell for France under General Dumouriez at the battle of Jemappes.

That tragic journey of the King and Queen to Paris was the end of the old monarchy of France and also of the glory of Versailles.

CHAPTER XXV

KING TERROR

He stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form.

ROBERT BROWNING

L'ombre livide
D'un peuple d'innocents qu'un tribunal perfide
Précipite dans le cercueil.

ANDRÉ CHÉNIER

WHAT was the Reign of Terror?

Kings had ruled in France for many centuries, but of not one of their reigns could it be justly said that it was a reign of terror. Old times and old traditions made the king the father of his people. Sometimes a bad father: selfish, luxurious, tyrannical, greedy, thoughtless; sometimes just, generous, and kind. But always the father: and even when incapable or unworthy, as in the case of Charles VI or of Louis XV, still the *Bien-aimé* of his people. In their view he stood between them and their oppressors, were these either foreign enemies or feudal masters or the courtiers and tax-gatherers of later centuries. The people of France were never afraid of their kings, nor their kings of them. Louis XI was the only one to whose reign the word 'terror' applied; and then chiefly to his struggle with ambitious nobles; citizen and peasant had little cause for complaint.

When we look at the years from 1792 to 1794, during which 'terror' was the ruling power in France, and try to understand what this vague and awful thing really was, it is well to glance back to those first months of the

Revolution, when France was trembling in the shadow of 'the Great Fear.' Immediately after the destruction of the Bastille, which foreshadowed to France the downfall of her monarchy, a mysterious panic seized upon nearly all the provinces. It was rumoured—few knew how or whence—that armies of brigands were coming to destroy everything; that there was no longer any authority or any safety in the kingdom. And then the peasants flew to arms—not for the King's sake, who had lost his power, but for their own; then, in their madness, led on, some say, by emissaries of the Revolution, they attacked the châteaux to revenge old grievances by burning feudal documents, thus thinking to protect themselves from future demands for service or payment. The consequence was that all went up in flames: papers, houses, possessions of every kind; and the owners were lucky if they escaped with their lives. This was the work of *la Grande Peur*.

The Terror, like the Fear, was panic. It threw the Revolution into the hands of a few blood-stained fanatics, afraid of a monarchist reaction, afraid of defeat by enemies on the frontier, afraid of each other, afraid that France would come to her senses and demand an account of their desperate tyranny: afraid of any just comparison of the present with the past. Its spirit can be judged by the words of Robespierre: "The generation which has seen the old *régime* will always regret it; therefore every individual who was more than fifteen years old in 1789 ought to be killed." "Destroy them all," cries Collot d'Herbois, another of the leaders. "Destroy them all, and bury them in the soil of liberty."

All over France terror reigned, with its inseparable companions, cruelty and general destruction. Let us look especially at Paris, 'the city of light,' in those dark days when the old world was crumbling. At first sight

you would say that she had not lost her gaiety. Her older streets, mostly a tangle of cobbled lanes within a circle of modern walls and gates, were still the " mixture of pomp and beggary, filth and magnificence " described by an English traveller not long before the fall of the Bastille. The south bank of the Seine was still covered with convents and colleges, old abbeys with their gardens, old houses of the nobility with courtyards leading into narrow streets. The great churches stood open, not now for religious services, but for political meetings, balls, banquets, and the worship of the goddess ' Reason ' ; their ancient tombs were rifled, their shrines and other treasures pillaged or destroyed. Theatres and *cafés* were crowded ; shops were besieged by queues of people, and after their marketing they danced and sang in the streets as of old, affecting ignorance, says an eye-witness, of the horrors they dared not oppose.

This may have been possible during the massacres at the prisons, but was so no longer when the tall red machine, the guillotine, invented as a humane substitute for the axe and block of former ages, was doing its awful work in the Place Louis-Quinze, now the Place de la Révolution. There Louis XVI, long imprisoned with his family in the tower of the Temple, was executed in the presence of a great crowd on 21st January, 1793. The death of the good King committed the Revolutionary leaders to the ' dark frenzy ' of the Reign of Terror.

When Terror became, literally, ' the order of the day,' the populace developed a kind of callous savagery. If they wanted bread—and these were years of scarcity—they pillaged the shops ; if they wanted amusement, what could be more thrilling than the daily drama of life and death acted before their staring eyes—from the mock trials at the old palace on the Island, where Fouquier-

Tinville, the infamous Public Accuser, demanded the death penalty for batches of helpless victims, their ages varying between eighty-eight and sixteen, to the passage of the condemned through the streets and the shocking spectacle of the executions?

For the Parisian crowd the excitement of each day began about four o'clock in the afternoon. Sanson, the executioner, arrived at the Conciergerie, the prison close to the Palais de Justice, whither hundreds of unfortunate creatures of every age, every rank, and from every part of the kingdom had been transferred on the previous day from the other prisons of Paris to stand the trial at which acquittal was a miracle: a miracle that did not happen as the Terror went on deepening. They were marched out now into the courtyard: a few weeping, the great majority calm and brave; they were crowded into the carts, whips were cracked, wheels creaked and groaned; the slow progress through the streets began. The springless carts with their tragic loads jolted and rumbled through the deep uneven lanes of the Cité. Slowly, we are told, they gained the Pont-Neuf, where the statue of Henri IV stood no longer; the Revolution had melted it down with the church bells to make cannon. Slowly along the quays and through the narrow streets they reached the old and busy thoroughfare, the Rue Saint-Honoré. A pushing crowd kept them company with mockery and insulting songs, pressing upon them as near as the armed guards would permit. The windows were full of spectators, and for the moment the shops were closed, but as soon as the carts had passed on life resumed its ordinary course: people went about their business, some hastening to hide their tears in dark rooms or lonely lanes—for pity was a crime—some marketing, some gossiping, some strolling off in search of a new pastime: there were plenty to be

"1793" 238

By permission of the artist, T. Blake Wirgman

found in the days before King Terror's hand became so heavy that the boldest Republican dared hardly venture outside his own door for fear of arrest and death.

All through the autumn and winter of 1793 to 1794, at the hour of approaching sunset and reddening skies, with jingling of harness and horses whipped into a gallop, that awful cavalcade went plunging from the streets into the wide open square, the Place de la Révolution. "There," says a French writer, "round the high guillotine, round the plaster statue of Liberty already bronzed by the smoke of blood, thousands of red-capped heads undulated like a field of poppies. All those heads were gazing. . . ." Idlers looked on from the Tuileries gardens, from the Champs Elysées, from every window within sight.

The carts were emptied and the victims mounted the steps. One after another they were bound, strapped, flung down; on one after another the knife descended. Man, woman, or child, old or young, strong or helpless, all met the same fate; and as each head fell the crowd shouted, waving caps and sticks. The same writer declares that in the very shadow of the guillotine street-criers were tinkling their little bells and selling cakes and drinks, while pickpockets drove a lively trade.

Queen Marie-Antoinette travelled that way of the Cross alone, exactly four years and ten days after the drive from Versailles, and in the same sad weather of drizzling rain. Who can forget the picture of 'the Widow Capet' dressed in white, a few grey locks, under the coarse cap, remaining of her beautiful fair hair; her hands tied, her worn face fixed in proud unconsciousness, neither seeing nor hearing the enormous crowd to whom, set high in the death-cart, she is offered as a spectacle!

It was a strange Court that attended French royalty in its progress into the unknown. There were personages of

royal blood: the King's sister, the saintly Madame Elisabeth; his cousin the traitor Duke of Orléans, who had voted for his death. There were hundreds of men and women bearing old, noble names, who had been too loyal or too proud to save themselves by emigration. There were bishops and priests, abbesses with their nuns. There were men high in the law, among them the good and courageous M. de Malesherbes, Turgot's friend, who came forward in his old age to defend Louis XVI at his trial. There were philosophers, men of science, men of business, some of them the best and most liberal of citizens. There were brave and enthusiastic women such as Charlotte Corday and Madame Roland; unhappy cowards such as Madame du Barry. There were whole companies of the men who in turn ruled the Revolution and were destroyed by their rivals; Girondins in the autumn followed by Jacobins in the spring. Through the first half of the year 1794 no one was safe; every one was suspect; in that extremity of Terror it became necessary to keep the prisons full. Madame la Guillotine must not be cheated of her daily toll of heads; for the safety of the rulers of the moment depended on her. No wonder that pity was a crime.

There is no end to the romantic stories that have been and will be told of tragic adventures and wonderful escapes during those days. Most of them are founded on fact, and many of them, in their pictures of gay courage and unselfishness, are an honour to human nature. The fate of one little family may be taken as typical of what many had to expect and to endure.

A small, bright-eyed woman, plainly dressed in black, carrying a milliner's box in one hand and clutching a young girl with the other, had hurried across the bridge from the south bank and was now pushing her way along the Rue Saint-Honoré. Her errand was to a small shop

not far beyond the Church of Saint-Roch, a shop much patronized by the ladies of the Revolution. The proprietor, a leading Terrorist, knew Citoyenne Mercier as the wife of a poor and crippled friend of his who lived near the Luxembourg, and admired the nimble fingers which twisted a bonnet-ribbon or twirled up a cockade to perfection. He also knew that this perfection had been learnt in the workrooms of Mademoiselle Bertin, the late Queen's milliner, who had escaped to England early in the Revolution. He kept the secret in his own interest and that of Jeanne Mercier's husband.

The little woman worked hard to keep her Jules and the one child left to them: two had died in that winter of sickness and privation. Natalie had recovered in the sunshine of a lovely spring, and now Citoyen Picot, the man-milliner, had offered to take her as an apprentice without premium. It was a favour: for in May 1794 his trade was at a low ebb. Paris was half empty and wrapped in gloom; every life lay at the mercy of Robespierre, Fouquier, and their small gang, of whom Picot was one. But he and they believed in a better time coming, 'the Reign of Virtue,' France being purified in blood. And Natalie, with her mother's clever fingers, inherited her mother's dainty taste. She was her father's child in enthusiasm for the new world that was dawning so darkly. She was willing to push him about the streets in his chair, even as far as the dreadful precincts of the guillotine itself. He told her that all the wicked people in France were being destroyed there. So little Natalie, with her jaunty red cap and cockade, was a child of the Revolution. Citoyen Picot risked nothing by employing her.

Jeanne Mercier went about her business silently, a faithful wife and mother. Jules and Natalie understood that she hated the sight and smell of blood. It seemed less

reasonable that she should catch at any chance of avoiding the death-carts, so common a spectacle in the Rue Saint-Honoré and so entertaining in the variety of their loads.

On that stormy 10th of May—21st Floréal by the Republican calendar—at least one victim of real distinction was to make her last journey. Jules Mercier knew this; and he and Natalie conspired to delay Jeanne in starting, so that she and the girl might be overtaken by the carts before they reached Picot's shop. It happened as they had planned. About the Church of Saint-Roch—its front now decorated with tricolour flags and red caps on pikes—the crowd was so dense that Jeanne and Natalie could go no farther.

They stood at the foot of the steps and watched and listened, Natalie in eager curiosity, Jeanne nervous and trembling, while rumbling from the east, through lines of strangely silent people, the procession of carts came jolting over the stones. There were twenty-four persons to be guillotined that day. Among them were old ladies, young officers, an archbishop, a canon of Notre-Dame, a chemist of the Rue Saint-Honoré, several servants and poor people. But one held all eyes, bare-headed, for the strong wind on the bridge had torn away the handkerchief that covered her hair, and now the soft curls were blown about her fine, delicate face. Elisabeth of France had for years been known as a saint, even by the rough fish-women of Paris. In her peace and innocence, serenity and courage, she was like a guardian angel that day among her companions, and the beautiful sight of her struck the crowd dumb.

Poor little Jeanne Mercier turned aside and sobbed. Natalie grasped her arm.

"Mother, mother, what are you doing?"

"I cannot bear it. I went once to her house—Mademoiselle Bertin sent me. She was so kind, so sweet, so

pleased with the pretty hat—these hands made it—oh, my God, what horrors!"

The carts had passed on. Some one touched Jeanne on the shoulder and her tearful eyes looked up into the dark, wild face of a Jacobin commissary.

"What, weeping for the tyrant's sister? Thou shouldst be in the cart with her!"

"No, no! We are employed by Citoyen Picot," cried Natalie.

The face became cruel. "Ha! *Suspect!* We must see to this."

On a later day Jeanne learned that the zealous commissary was not only a friend of Fouquier-Tinville the insatiable, but an enemy of Picot, who had helped to send his brother to the scaffold a month before in the same batch with Danton and Camille Desmoulins. But that night it was like an awful, impossible dream to find herself and Natalie, with Jules Mercier and Citizen Picot and his family, sleeping in a prison instead of under their own roof.

Jeanne, who had been touched by human sympathy and the pity of it all, who had shrunk trembling from the sight of blood and the mocking multitude, and yet had gone dutifully to her work each day, now showed herself the bravest of that sad little company. Picot raged; Jules, the cynical, laughed and sobbed alternately; Natalie wept and shivered, her fair head in her mother's arms; Jeanne alone was calmly courageous. She did but follow the example of nearly all the prisoners, most of them there for no better reason. As an instance, one poor little couple who owned a marionette-show had been arrested because their 'Charlotte Corday' was too pretty. She cost them their lives.

In the black and poisonous underground rooms where all were flung together, high and low, sick and well, ill-lodged, ill-fed; where no gleam of May sunshine could

reach them; where doors and gates were only thrown open for the entry of more prisoners or the going forth of those who passed on to the Conciergerie and the guillotine —in these rooms men and women talked and laughed agreeably, invented little occupations, showed kindness to the helpless and suffering, comforted the sad. Thus they kept themselves ready for the roll-call that thinned their numbers day by day.

As summer days lengthened and shortened the group swept in on 10th May grew smaller. Picot and his wife were the first to go: the commissary wanted his revenge. Jules Mercier the cripple, Picot's friend, followed him a week later. Then Jeanne and Natalie expected that every morning would be their last, not guessing that their enemy himself had travelled the same road.

The oppressive days dragged on and on; and at length, when July was nearly over, one of the great dates in French history—9th Thermidor—gave France freedom to breathe and to speak again. For Robespierre was dead, and King Terror died with him.

The prison doors were soon opened, and among the liberated captives two little women set out for their home, dizzy in the fresh air, limbs shaking, and eyes dazzled by the sunshine. A young fellow-prisoner, Picot's son, whose existence had luckily been forgotten, walked beside them and helped Jeanne with his strong arm. He and Natalie had discovered in prison that they loved each other, and for them the future was bright with hope.

"We will open the shop again," he said. "We will make our fortune. Thy mother is the best milliner in France, Natalie; she made becoming hats and caps for *les ci-devants*. Yes: I have heard my father say so, when he did not know I was there. Courage, *citoyennes*; our day is coming!"

"Your day, my children!" Jeanne Mercier sighed.

CHAPTER XXVI

VIVE L'EMPEREUR!

To-day there is no cloud upon thy face,
Paris, fair city of romance and doom!
Thy memories do not grieve thee, and no trace
Lives of their tears for us who after come.

. . . . . .

For thus it is. You flout at kings to-day.
To-morrow in your pride you shall stoop low
To a new tyrant who shall come your way.

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT

On parlera de sa gloire
Sous le chaume bien longtemps.

P. J. DE BÉRANGER

PERHAPS, in some old French town, some of us may have stood at a window to watch a students' pageant winding along the narrow street: one of those educational pageants known as *promenades à travers les âges* and intended as object-lessons in French history. The characters, riding or walking, were dressed for their parts in the fashion of each time, and their ornaments and weapons flashed in the sunlight. There were Gauls, fiercely helmeted; Roman warriors with gleaming shields; long-haired Merovingians; medieval kings; Jeanne the Maid with her banner; splendid monarchs of the Renaissance; Henri Quatre with his traditional white plume; Louis Quatorze in the majesty of the *Grand Siècle*. Then followed the men of the Revolution, when the great wheel had turned and all those splendours had passed away; red caps and pikes surrounding a model of *la sainte Guillotine*. And last of all a short man riding a white horse; a

man with straight black hair, straight pale features, dark glowing eyes; dressed in a grey greatcoat open over a green coat with a star, white breeches and high boots and a plain cocked hat. And for us who gazed from the window it was a striking fact that the crowd up and down the street, who had been content to stare silently while eighteen centuries of their national history passed by, broke into sudden applause with clapping of hands at the sight of Napoleon.

Seldom in the world have the man and the opportunity met more remarkably than in the case of that little Corsican soldier. The great country of France with its far-extended frontiers and its thirty-four old provinces—lately subdivided into departments, but all, from Béarn, Roussillon, and Provence to Normandy, Picardy, and Artois, from Brittany and Poitou to Alsace and Franche-Comté, differing in thousands of ways, soil, character, customs, industries—had been profoundly shaken by the Revolutionary earthquake. And France was at war with Europe; and, heroic and often victorious as her armies were, she needed a different rule from that of the National Convention if she was to keep her place in the front rank of the nations. The Convention had pulled the ancient fabric down: other hands must restore and build up. This was the situation that gave genius its opportunity; and genius came from the southern sea in the shape of a young Artillery officer, Napoleon Buonaparte.

He arrived in Paris in the autumn of 1795 to find the strangest state of things, both in politics and society, that the brilliant and changeable city ever knew. The Terror was past, but the men of the Terror, those who survived the 9th Thermidor, were still in power, and now busy arranging for their own permanent rule by re-electing

themselves with a new Constitution and a gorgeous figure-head of five Directors dressed in Court costume of François I, velvet and gold embroidery, coloured sashes, cloaks of the finest cloth, velvet caps with white curling feathers. This absurd masquerade expressed the violent reaction from red caps and *carmagnole* jackets and the gloom of the Revolution which had flung Paris and all France into a whirl of mad gaiety. Paris was dancing, banqueting, gambling, speculating, making fortunes, while her poorer people were starving and wild with discontent, her streets falling into decay and her shops crammed with relics of the old ruined aristocracy, furniture, pictures, clothes, to be bought for a mere song. The beautiful hair of many victims of the guillotine, made into fashionable wigs, adorned the silly heads of the women in clinging garments and sandals who danced with the ridiculous young men in long coats, short waistcoats, tight trousers, pointed shoes, immense cravats covering their chins ; young men nicknamed *incroyables*, who lisped fashionably and cultivated affectation as a fine art. If this new society meant a certain degree of political reaction, the elegance, good taste, and cultivation of a former *régime* were conspicuously absent. And with such a man as Barras, *ci-devant* noble and first of the Directors, as its leader, the new society's morals did not gain by the change.

Napoleon Buonaparte's fortunes were at a low ebb when he came to Paris, where Barras was almost his only friend. Yet he had served and gained his experience in the Republican army. But an admirer of Robespierre could expect no favour in 1795, and though already a general, he had been dismissed from active service and was poor and desperate enough when he told Barras that he meant to volunteer into the Turkish army. It was his idea that the East was the most certain path to glory. History

might have been oddly changed if Napoleon had conquered Europe from Constantinople.

Then came the riots of 4th and 5th October (12th and 13th Vendémiaire), when several of the Paris 'sections' rose against the new Constitution and marched 40,000 strong to attack the National Convention at the Tuileries. The Government troops having at first given way—possibly that mingled crowd of strange allies, extreme Jacobins and returned or hidden Royalists, found sympathizers among them—Barras, in the name of the Convention, called upon little General Buonaparte, sitting in the gallery, who would not, he said, be hindered by scruples in doing his duty. This was in the evening. While their new commander made his preparations, collecting his guns and posting his men, the Convention spent an uncomfortable night of anxiety. In the morning things looked serious, for the insurgents were on the way to surround the Tuileries, having occupied the Pont-Neuf and the Rue Saint-Honoré. The day wore on; the Convention was terrified; but Napoleon would not move till he was ready. No weakness or humanity delayed the soldier who meant to make sure of success. At four o'clock his guns blazed from the bridges and in the narrow streets. A picture of the time shows the work of that "whiff of grape-shot" which first made Paris acquainted with Napoleon: the tall houses in the Rue Saint-Honoré, their fronts obscured by smoke; the steps under the pillared front of Saint-Roch, hotly defended and strewn with dead and wounded men. This, it seems, was the centre of the fighting. Saint-Roch bears the marks to this day. Thus Napoleon saved the worn-out Convention and gave the Directory those few years of power, foolishly and dishonestly used, which wearied France of the disorders of so-called liberty and prepared her for a soldier's

rule. "No one regretted the Directory, except the five Directors."

In the autumn of 1799 the brilliant victor of Italy and Egypt destroyed this helpless Government and made himself First Consul of the French Republic. And if Napoleon could have been contented to use the political side of his marvellous genius, restoring his exhausted country, re-establishing religion, making the wise laws which are the foundation of French life to-day, his name would have stood high among the world's benefactors. But his ambition soared beyond all this, and his chief passion was for 'glory' of another kind.

The year 1802 sees him, one may say, at the real zenith of his career. He is now at the beginning of the thirteen years during which his name was to dominate Europe, and in course of which, in spite of all his triumphs and conquests, its first fine lustre was gradually to be dimmed. But no shadow of the future falls on the most gorgeous scene of his whole life and perhaps the most splendid the old cathedral ever saw, his coronation in Notre-Dame on 2nd December, 1804. Pope Pius VII travelled from Rome to give him the Imperial crown with the "sceptre of Charlemagne."

Notre-Dame glows with colour and gilding: its old walls and arches are hung with magnificent tapestry; nave and choir wave with feathers, flash with jewels, rustle with satin and brocade. All Napoleon's new princes and princesses, dukes, counts and barons, generals and marshals, make a dazzling congregation such as the old Court never surpassed, if it ever equalled. Stately music rolls down the aisles, while the dim light of the December day steals in through rich windows paled by the flame of a thousand candles.

It is very cold. The aged Pope in his white vestments,

majestic, frail to look upon, his dark eyes veiled with sadness, has long to wait and to shiver before the new master of France, who has not learned that "punctuality is the politeness of kings," enters the cathedral with his wife Josephine at the end of a splendid procession. Napoleon's appearance in his coronation robes is singularly fine. Once, in poverty and shabbiness, so yellow and haggardly thin as to be almost ugly, ease and triumphant fortune now show his Greek features and clear olive skin in their natural beauty. Already he wears a crown of gold laurel leaves. His long robe is of crimson velvet embroidered with gold; over it hangs the collar of his new order, the Legion of Honour, in large diamonds; the Imperial robe of purple velvet and ermine sweeps from his shoulders. The Empress Josephine, on that day the proudest and happiest woman in France, wears white satin and blazes with jewels. When she married the little Corsican officer in 1796, who could have foretold this? And who, in 1804, could be bold enough to prophesy a hidden future?

As the Imperial procession enters Notre-Dame a sudden and tremendous shout of "*Vive l'Empereur!*" bursts from the multitude gathered there. And presently, after the anointing and blessing of Emperor and Empress, when the Pope is about to proceed to the actual coronation, Napoleon—the *colossal parvenu*, a great French writer called him—takes the crown and places it on his own head, afterward with his own hands crowning Josephine. And then those old walls echo back the selfsame chant that saluted the Emperor Charlemagne in St Peter's at Rome on Christmas Day a thousand years before: "*Vivat in æternum semper Augustus!*"

Truly an amazing sequel to the Revolution!

Let us glance on through eight years of what Napoleon called 'glory.' His great army with its eagle standards

The Coronation of Napoleon 250

Baron Myrbach

victorious everywhere ; his soldiers, especially the famous Old Guard, his personal slaves ; his Empire extending east, north, and south ; his brothers and sisters reigning over the kingdoms of Europe ; his subjects dazzled and breathless, some adoring, others, chiefly women, suffering too sharply under the sacrifice of all the brave youth of France that his conquests demanded ; but all proud of the hero who made the nation invincible. All had to give way, at home and abroad, before his conquering march : Josephine, divorced and forsaken, saw an Austrian princess in her place and a baby heir at the Tuileries. Society bowed before a ruler more absolute and more tyrannical than any king ; gentle by birth, it is true, yet without the instincts or the manners of a gentleman ; fascinating yet brutal ; of boundless genius and equally boundless selfishness.

And then came the beginning of Napoleon's downfall : the Russian campaign where he really met his match for the first time, not in the shape of any mortal magnate's army, but in that of Winter, a stronger monarch than all.

November 1812 : the eagles in full retreat ; blazing Moscow and great tracts of devastated country behind the Grand Army, which had marched into Russia in the heat of early autumn and was now struggling back toward Smolensk and the rivers Dnieper, Beresina, and Niemen ; no longer in military array, but wandering in scattered bands through the fog-bound forests, tormented by hovering Cossacks and hungry wolves, fighting blinding snowstorms which blotted out the only road, paralysed by bitter frost, no shelter, no food. It was a large army, for those days, that had set out with Napoleon to conquer Russia : 600,000 men. Long before the disastrous retreat had crossed the frontier the numbers had gone down to 55,000. Only 20,000 reached Kovno on the Niemen ;

and most of these were living skeletons who had thrown away their weapons.

But in the many stories of that time one never reads that the soldiers of the Grand Army—certainly not those of the Old or the Young Guard—had a word of reproach for the Emperor who was the cause of all their sufferings. They never lost faith in him. Nothing was impossible to him. He must succeed in the end ; and all these terrible scenes were part of the fortune of war.

Two young grenadiers of the Guard, neighbours at home in France, went through the horrors of the Russian retreat together. They saw and suffered strange things in a world like the wildest visions of poets such as Dante or Victor Hugo. It was dark, and the whirling wind was full of thick snow which made all objects invisible, except at moments the tall pine and birch trees, beneath whose great stems and dark canopied heads no clear path could be found. Once away from the road, its sides heaped with dead horses and men, white frozen mounds glimmering in the ghastly twilight, it was soon impossible to find the way back to that small chance of safety. Plunging among the trees, their comrades lost, their uniform in rags, sometimes up to their shoulders in snow, these two friends dragged each other out of icy hollows, tried to help the wounded who were of necessity left behind, tried to light fires, to make soup of horse-flesh, to gain a little of that blessed sleep from which thousands like them never woke again. They had many wild adventures and saw many unforgettable sights. They saw miserable wounded men trying to shelter themselves within the bodies of dead horses ; whole circles of dead men lying with their feet to a dead fire, while ravens hovered above. They saw a trumpeter standing erect, frozen in death, his trumpet at his lips. They saw soldiers carrying their wounded

officers for leagues on their shoulders, or passing the night grouped round a young commander to save his life by the warmth of their own bodies. And it snowed and snowed : and the lost army seemed to be following a lost leader.

One day at dawn, when the fugitive host was not far from the fatal crossing of the Beresina, the two grenadiers saw their hero again. They had regained the road, and the head of the Imperial column loomed up a pale phantom through the mist. A number of officers, some on horseback, many on foot, lame, and worn with hunger ; a few of the cavalry of the Guard ; and then Napoleon walking, surrounded by his princes and generals, wrapped in a great fur cloak, a stick in his hand, and on his head a velvet cap edged with black fox fur. The young men's tears ran down to make fresh icicles on their frozen moustaches.

" Am I asleep or awake ? " said one to the other. " I weep to see our Emperor marching on foot—he who is so great, he of whom we are so proud ! *Vive l'Empereur !* "

Napoleon turned and looked at them : he never forgot a soldier of his Guard.

After the Beresina, when most of the men and horses remaining to the Grand Army were whirling down its ice-laden torrent amid storms of wind and snow, the Emperor's staff could not find fuel enough to keep him warm in his plank shelter. They sent round to the bivouacs of the shivering soldiers to ask for dry wood ; and there was not a man, we are told, who refused to give the best he had. " Even the dying lifted their heads once more to say : ' Take it for the Emperor.' "

And Napoleon left the remnant of his ruined army to live or die as they might, and started off in furious haste for Paris, where the plots of the discontented were already threatening his dynasty. Fresh armies must be raised

in exhausted France: fresh victories must make him secure. But all this could only delay by a few months the day when the conqueror of Europe, defeated and forsaken, was to find his rule limited to the little island of Elba.

The end was not yet: "the violet returns with the spring." Such words as these were whispered throughout France before the coast of old Provence had witnessed one of the most striking scenes in its long history. In his boyhood Napoleon had sailed to France over that tideless sea; its waves had carried him lately into banishment; and now, on a cloudless March afternoon in 1815, he landed in the Golfe Jouan with 11,000 men to reconquer his Empire. The sun shone brilliantly; the Mediterranean trembled under the cold wind, all dark blue ripples edged with silver foam. The pine-trees and the grey olives threw a warm sheltering shadow, and as the day advanced the sunlight touched the snowy range of the Maritime Alps with gold and red.

Napoleon ordered his men to light a fire on the shore, and he waited there through the evening and part of the night, his ships anchored in the bay, detachments of his Guard visiting Cannes and Antibes and other towns and villages in search of food and horses. They met with little resistance, though little welcome. France was now ruled by Louis XVIII, and though the returned Bourbons and their followers were hardly popular, France for the time seemed tired of war and of 'glory.'

It was a romantic scene that night on the shore of the little bay. Bright stars were shining; the wind ruffled the flames of Napoleon's bivouac fire. He sat near it on a military chest, wrapped in his greatcoat, surrounded by maps of the country, buried in anxious and gloomy thought; for though he had assured his officers and men

that he would return to Paris without firing a shot, he was far too clever not to realize the difficulties of his adventure. As he sat there the bells of the old church at Cannes clanged out the *angelus* and the curfew. The dark masses of the woods, olives below, pines above, hid the valleys and the roads that climbed to the mountain wall, the wall of France against a southern invader. All Napoleon's hopes and ambitions lay beyond that high mysterious wall. He meant to cross it, confident in his star, in the magic of his name and the love of his old soldiers. He would speak to them as a son of the Revolution of 1789, as the healer of the wounds the Terror had left, and the soldier whom the powers of nature alone had been able utterly to overwhelm.

They say that an old Royalist of Cannes crept down to the shore that night with his old gun, intending to shoot the returned usurper. But he was stopped in the very moment of taking aim by a friend who had followed him, fearing the consequences of such a deed. For Cannes was undefended, and Napoleon's Old Guard would have taken a speedy revenge.

We may follow Napoleon a little farther. In a few days he had crossed the mountains and was approaching Grenoble, the fortified capital of Dauphiné, strongly garrisoned by Royalist troops. Napoleon and his escort were met by a detachment sent out to prevent his advance to the walls. He walked forward alone to meet them.

"Comrades, do you know me? I am your Emperor, your father. Fire on me if you will!"

"*Vive l'Empereur!*"

The troops of Grenoble are at Napoleon's feet. Eagle standards and tricolour cockades appear as if by magic, and he marches triumphant on his way.

At Lyons it is the same story: and the journey on to

Fontainebleau and Paris, ending in a wonderful reception at the Tuileries, is one of ever-increasing enthusiasm. Once again kings and princes fly before the conquering name of Napoleon.

The news of that month of March 1815, one startling event following another, was announced by the journals with swift changes of tone such as these :

"The Monster has escaped from Elba."

"General Buonaparte has reached Grenoble."

"Napoleon is at Lyons."

"His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Napoleon has arrived at the Tuileries."

A hundred days later Napoleon fought and lost the battle of Waterloo. And then,

O wild St Helen ! very still she kept him,

till his bones were brought back to Paris and laid in that tomb under the stately dome of Louis XIV's Invalides which is to this day, and for all the nations of the world, a place of pilgrimage.