JOHN ABBOTT

MARIA ANTOINETTE

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Содержание

John S. C. Abbott
Maria Antoinette Makers of History

PREFACE

In this history of Maria Antoinette it has been my endeavor to give a faithful narrative of facts, and, so far as possible, to exhibit the soul of history. A more mournful tragedy earth has seldom witnessed. And yet the lesson is full of instruction to all future ages. Intelligence and moral worth combined can be the only basis of national prosperity or domestic happiness. But the simple story itself carries with it its own moral, and the *reflections* of the writer would encumber rather than enforce its teachings.

Chapter I.
Parentage and Childhood

1740-1770

Maria Theresa

She succeeds to the throne

In the year 1740, Charles VI., emperor of Austria, died. He left a daughter twenty-three years of age, Maria Theresa, to inherit the crown of that powerful empire. She had been married about four years to Francis, duke of Lorraine. The day after the death of Charles, Maria Theresa ascended the throne. The treasury of Austria was empty. A general feeling of discontent pervaded the kingdom. Several claimants to the throne rose to dispute the succession with Maria; and France, Spain, Prussia, and Bavaria took advantage of the new reign, and of the embarrassments which surrounded the youthful queen, to enlarge their own borders by wresting territory from Austria.

Success of Maria Theresa's enemies

The young queen, harassed by dissensions at home and by the combined armies of her powerful foes, beheld, with anguish which her proud and imperious spirit could hardly endure, her troops defeated and scattered in every direction, and the victorious armies of her enemies marching almost unimpeded toward her capital. The exulting invaders, intoxicated with unanticipated success, now contemplated the entire division of the spoil. They decided to blot Austria from the map of Europe, and to partition out the conglomerated nations composing the empire among the conquerors.

Her flight to Hungary

The queen's firmness

The Hungarian barons

Maria Theresa retired from her capital as the bayonets of France and Bavaria gleamed from the hill-sides which environed the city. Her retreat with a few disheartened followers, in the gloom of night, was illumined by the flames of the bivouacs of hostile armies, with which the horizon seemed to be girdled. The invaders had possession of every strong post in the empire. The beleaguered city was summoned to surrender. Resistance was unavailing. All Europe felt that Austria was hopelessly undone. Maria fled from the dangers of captivity into the wilds of Hungary. But in this dark hour, when the clouds of adversity seemed to be settling in blackest masses over her whole realm, when hope had abandoned every bosom but her own, the spirit of Maria remained as firm and inflexible

as if victory were perched upon her standards, and her enemies were flying in dismay before her. She would not listen to one word of compromise. She would not admit the thought of surrendering one acre of the dominions she had inherited from her fathers. Calm, unagitated, and determined, she summoned around her, from their feudal castles, the wild and warlike barons of Hungary. With neighing steeds, and flaunting banners, and steel-clad retainers, and all the paraphernalia of barbaric pomp, these chieftains, delighting in the excitements of war, gathered around the heroic queen. The spirit of ancient chivalry still glowed in these fierce hearts, and they gazed with a species of religious homage upon the young queen, who, in distress, had fled to their wilds to invoke the aid of their strong arms.

The queen's appeal

Enthusiasm of her subjects

Maria met them in council. They assembled around her by thousands in all the imposing splendor of the garniture of war. Maria appeared before these stern chieftains dressed in the garb of the deepest mourning, with the crown of her ancestors upon her brow, her right hand resting upon the hilt of the sword of the Austrian kings, and leading by her left hand her little daughter Maria Antoinette. The pale and pensive features of the queen attested the resolute soul which no disasters could subdue. Her imperial spirit entranced and overawed the bold knights, who had ever lived in the realms of romance. Maria addressed the Hungarian barons in an impressive speech in Latin, the language then in use in the diets of Hungary, faithfully describing the desperate state of her affairs. She committed herself and her children to their protection, and urged them to drive the invaders from the land or to perish in the attempt. It was just the appeal to rouse such hearts to a phrensy of enthusiasm. The youth, the beauty, the calamities of the queen roused to the utmost intensity the chivalric devotion of these warlike magnates, and grasping their swords and waving them above their heads, they shouted simultaneously, "Moriamur pro rege nostro, Maria Theresa" – "*Let us die for our king, Maria Theresa.*"

The queen heads her army

She overthrows her enemies

Until now, the queen had preserved a demeanor perfectly tranquil and majestic. But this affectionate enthusiasm of her subjects entirely overcame her imperious spirit, and she burst into a flood of tears. But, apparently ashamed of this exhibition of womanly feeling she almost immediately regained her composure, and resumed the air of the indomitable sovereign. The war cry immediately resounded throughout Hungary. Chieftains and vassals rallied around the banner of Maria. In person she inspected and headed the gathering army, and her spirit inspired them. With the ferocity of despair, these new recruits hurled themselves upon the invaders. A few battles, desperate and sanguinary, were fought, and the army of Maria was victorious. England and Holland, apprehensive that the destruction of the Austrian empire would destroy the balance of power in Europe, and encouraged by the successful resistance which the Austrians were now making, came to the rescue of the heroic queen. The tide of battle was turned. The armies of France, Germany, and Spain were driven from the territory which they had overrun. Maria, with untiring energy, followed up her successes. She pursued her retreating foes into their own country, and finally granted peace to her

enemies only by wresting from them large portions of their territory. The renown of these exploits resounded through Europe. The name of Maria Theresa was embalmed throughout the civilized world. Under her vigorous sway Austria, from the very brink of ruin, was elevated to a degree of splendor and power it had never attained before. These conflicts and victories inspired Maria with a haughty and imperious spirit, and the loveliness of the female character was lost amid the pomp of martial achievements. The proud sovereign eclipsed the woman.

Character of Maria Theresa

Character of her husband

It is not to be supposed that such a bosom could be the shrine of tenderness and affection. Maria's virtues were all of the masculine gender. She really loved, or, rather, *liked* her husband; but it was with the same kind of emotion with which an energetic and ambitious man loves his wife. She cherished him, protected him, watched over him, and loaded him with honors. He was of a mild, gentle, confiding spirit, and would have made a lovely wife. She was ambitious, fearless, and commanding, and would have made a noble husband. In fact, this was essentially the relation which existed between them. Maria Theresa governed the empire, while Francis loved and caressed the children.

Crowning of Francis

Maria Theresa's renown

The queen, by her armies and her political influence, had succeeded in having Francis crowned Emperor of Germany. She stood upon the balcony as the imposing ceremony was performed, and was the first to shout "Long live the Emperor Francis I." Like Napoleon, she had become the creator of kings. Austria was now in the greatest prosperity, and Maria Theresa the most illustrious queen in Europe. Her renown filled the civilized world. Through her whole reign, though she became the mother of sixteen children, she devoted herself with untiring energy to the aggrandizement of her empire. She united with Russia and Prussia in the infamous partition of Poland, and in the banditti division of the spoil she annexed to her own dominions twenty-seven thousand square miles and two millions five hundred thousand inhabitants.

Maria Theresa's sternness

From this exhibition of the character of Maria Theresa, the mother of Maria Antoinette, the reader will not be surprised that she should have inspired her children with awe rather than with affection. In truth, their imperial mother was so devoted to the cares of the empire, that she was almost a stranger to her children, and could have known herself but few of the emotions of maternal love. Her children were placed under the care of nurses and governesses from their birth. Once in every eight or ten days the queen appropriated an hour for the inspection of the nursery and the apartments appropriated to the children; and she performed this duty with the same fidelity with which she examined the wards of the state hospitals and the military schools.

Anecdote

The following anecdote strikingly illustrates the austere and inflexible character of the empress. The wife of her son Joseph died of the confluent small-pox, and her body had been consigned to the vaults of the royal tomb. Soon after this event, Josepha, one of the daughters of the empress, was to be married to the King of Naples. The arrangements had all been made for their approaching nuptials, and she was just on the point of leaving Vienna to ascend the Neapolitan throne, when she received an order from her mother that she must not depart from the empire until she had, in accordance with the established custom, descended into the tomb of her ancestors and offered her parting prayer. The young princess, in an agony of consternation, received the cruel requisition. Yet she dared not disobey her mother. She took her little sister, Maria Antoinette, whom she loved most tenderly, upon her knee, and, weeping bitterly, bade her farewell, saying that she was sure she should take the dreadful disease and die. Trembling in every fiber, the unhappy princess descended into the gloomy sepulcher, where the bodies of generations of kings were moldering. She hurried through her short prayer, and in the deepest agitation returned to the palace, and threw herself in despair upon her bed.

Fatal result

Her worst apprehensions were realized. The fatal disease had penetrated her veins. Soon it manifested itself in its utmost virulence. After lingering a few days and nights in dreadful suffering, she breathed her last, and her own loathsome remains were consigned to the same silent chambers of the dead. Maria Theresa commanded her child to do no more than she would have insisted upon doing herself under similar circumstances. And when she followed her daughter to the tomb, she probably allowed herself to indulge in no regrets in view of the course she had pursued, but consoled herself with the reflection that she had done her duty.

Death of Francis

Plan of the counselors

The Emperor Francis died, 1765, leaving Maria Theresa still in the vigor of life, and quite beautiful. Three of her counselors of state, ambitious of sharing the throne with the illustrious queen, entered into a compact, by which they were all to endeavor to obtain her hand in marriage, agreeing that the successful one should devote the power thus obtained to the aggrandizement of the other two. The empress was informed of this arrangement, and, at the close of a cabinet council, took occasion, with great dignity and composure, to inform them that she did not intend ever again to enter into the marriage state, but that, should she hereafter change her mind, it would only be in favor of one who had no ambitious desires, and who would have no inclination to intermeddle with the affairs of state; and that, should she ever marry one of her ministers, she should immediately remove him from all office. Her counselors, loving power more than all things else, immediately abandoned every thought of obtaining the hand of Maria at such a sacrifice.

Birth of Maria Antoinette

Maria Antoinette's character

Maria Antoinette, the subject of this biography, was born on the 2d of November, 1755. Few of the inhabitants of this world have commenced life under circumstances of greater splendor, or with more brilliant prospects of a life replete with happiness. She was a child of great vivacity and beauty, full of light-heartedness, and ever prone to look upon the sunny side of every prospect. Her disposition was frank, cordial, and affectionate. Her mental endowments were by nature of a very superior order. Laughing at the restraints of royal etiquette, she, by her generous and confiding spirit, won the love of all hearts. Maria Antoinette was but slightly acquainted with her imperial mother, and could regard her with no other emotions than those of respect and awe; but the mild and gentle spirit of her father took in her heart a mother's place, and she clung to him with the most ardent affection.

Affecting scene

Maria Antoinette's grief

When she was but ten years of age, her father was one day going to Inspruck upon some business. The royal cavalcade was drawn up in the court-yard of the palace. The emperor had entered his carriage, surrounded by his retinue, and was just on the point of leaving, when he ordered the postillions to delay, and requested an attendant to bring to him his little daughter Maria Antoinette. The blooming child was brought from the nursery, with her flaxen hair in ringlets clustered around her shoulders, and presented to her father. As she entwined her arms around his neck and clung to his embrace, he pressed her most tenderly to his bosom, saying, "Adieu my dear little daughter. Father wished once more to press you to his heart." The emperor and his child never met again. At Inspruck Francis was taken suddenly ill, and, after a few days' sickness, died. The grief of Maria Antoinette knew no bounds. But the tears of childhood soon dried up. The parting scene, however, produced an impression upon Maria which was never effaced, and she ever spoke of her father in terms of the warmest affection.

Maria Theresa as a mother

Maria Theresa, half conscious of the imperfect manner in which she performed her maternal duties, was very solicitous to have it understood that she did not neglect her children; that she was the best *mother* in the world as well as the most illustrious sovereign. When any distinguished stranger from the other courts of Europe visited Vienna, she arranged her sixteen children around the dinner-table, towering above them in queenly majesty, and endeavored to convey the impression that they were the especial objects of her motherly care. It was not, however, the generous warmth of love, but the cold sense of duty, which alone regulated her conduct in reference to them, and she had probably convinced herself that she discharged her maternal obligations with the most exemplary fidelity.

Mode of education

Petty artifices

Maria's proficiency in French

She forgets her native tongue

Maria's taste for music

Her ignorance of general literature, etc

The family physician every morning visited each one of the children, and then briefly reported to the empress the health of the archdukes and the archduchesses. This report fully satisfied all the yearnings of maternal love in the bosom of Maria Theresa; though she still, that she might not fail in the least degree in motherly affection, endeavored to see them with her own eyes, and to speak to them with her own lips, as often as once in a week or ten days. The preceptors and governesses of the royal household, being thus left very much to themselves, were far more anxious to gratify the immediate wishes of the children, and thus to secure their love, than to urge them to efforts for intellectual improvement. Maria Antoinette, in subsequent life, related many amusing anecdotes illustrative of the petty artifices by which the scrutiny of the empress was eluded. The copies which were presented to the queen in evidence of the progress the children were making in hand-writing were all traced first in pencil by the governess. The children then followed with the pen over the penciled lines. Drawings were exhibited, beautifully executed, to show the skill Maria Antoinette had attained in that delightful accomplishment, which drawings the pencil of Maria had not even touched. She was also taught to address strangers of distinction in short Latin phrases, when she did not understand the meaning of one single word of the language. Her teacher of Italian, the Abbé Metastasio, was the only one who was faithful in his duties, and Maria made very great proficiency in that language. French being the language of the nursery, Maria necessarily acquired the power of speaking it with great fluency, though she was quite unable to write it correctly. In the acquisition of French, her own mother tongue, the German, was so totally neglected, that, incredible as it may seem, she actually lost the power either of speaking or of understanding it. In after years, chagrined at such unutterable folly, she sat down with great resolution to the study of her own native tongue, and encountered all the difficulties which would tax the patience of any foreigner in the attempt. She persevered for about six weeks, and then relinquished the enterprise in despair. The young princess was extremely fond of music, and yet she was not taught to play well upon any instrument. This became subsequently a source of great mortification to her, for she was ashamed to confess her ignorance of an accomplishment deemed, in the courts of Europe, so essential to a polished education, and yet she dared not sit down to any instrument in the presence of others. When she first arrived at Versailles as the bride of the heir to the throne of France, she was so deeply mortified at this defect in her education, that she immediately employed a teacher to give her lessons secretly for three months. During this time she applied herself

to her task with the utmost assiduity, and at the end of the time gave surprising proof of the skill she had so rapidly attained. Upon all the subjects of history, science, and general literature, the princess was left entirely uninformed. The activity and energy of her mind only led her the more poignantly to feel the mortification to which this ignorance often exposed her. When surrounded by the splendors of royalty, she frequently retired to weep over deficiencies which it was too late to repair. The wits of Paris seized upon these occasional developments of the want of mental culture as the indication of a weak mind, and the daughter of Maria Theresa, the descendant of the Cæsars, was the butt, in saloon and café, of merriment and song. Maria was beautiful and graceful, and winning in all her ways. But this imperfect education, exposing her to contempt and ridicule in the society of intellectual men and women, was not among the unimportant elements which conducted to her own ruin, to the overthrow of the French throne, and to that deluge of blood which for many years rolled its billows incarnadine over Europe.

The French teachers

Their character

The Abbé de Vermond

He shamefully abuses his trust

Maria Theresa had sent to Paris for two teachers of French to instruct her daughter in the literature of that country over which she was destined to reign. From that pleasure-loving metropolis two play actors were sent to take charge of her education, one of whom was a man of notoriously dissolute character. As the connection between Maria Antoinette and Louis, the heir apparent to the throne of France, was already contemplated, some solicitude was felt by members of the court of Versailles in reference to the impropriety of this selection, and the French embassador at Vienna was requested to urge the empress to dismiss the obnoxious teachers, and make a different choice. She immediately complied with the request, and sent to the Duke de Choiseul, the minister of state of Louis XV., to send a preceptor such as would be acceptable to the court of Versailles. After no little difficulty in finding one in whom all parties could unite, the Abbé de Vermond was selected, a vain, ambitious, weak-minded man, who, by the most studied artifice, insinuated himself into the good graces of Maria Theresa, and gained a great but pernicious influence over the mind of his youthful pupil. The cabinets of France and Austria having decided the question that Maria Antoinette was to be the bride of Louis, who was soon to ascend the throne of France, the Abbé de Vermond, proud of his position as the intellectual and moral guide of the destined Queen of France, shamefully abused his trust, and sought only to obtain an abiding influence, which he might use for the promotion of his own ambition. He carefully kept her in ignorance, to render himself more necessary to her; and he was never unwilling to involve her in difficulties, that she might be under the necessity of appealing to him for extrication.

Etiquette of the French court

Etiquette of the Austrian court

Instead of endeavoring to prepare her for the situation she was destined to fill, it seemed to be his aim to train her to such habits of thought and feeling as would totally incapacitate her to be happy, or to acquire an influence over the gay but ceremony-loving assemblages of the Tuileries, Versailles, and St. Cloud. At this time, the fashion of the French court led to extreme attention to all the punctilios of etiquette. Every word, every gesture, was regulated by inflexible rule. Every garment worn, and every act of life, was regulated by the requisitions of the code ceremonial. Virtue was concealed and vice garnished by the inflexible observance of stately forms. An infringement of the laws of etiquette was deemed a far greater crime than the most serious violation of the laws of morality. In the court of Vienna, on the other hand, fashion ran to just the other extreme. It was fashionable to despise fashion. It was etiquette to pay no regard to etiquette. The haughty Austrian noble prided himself in dressing as he pleased, and looked with contempt upon the studied attitudes and foppish attire of the French. The Parisian courtier, on the other hand, rejoicing in his ruffles, and ribbons, and practiced movements, despised the boorish manners, as he deemed them, of the Austrian.

Precepts of the teacher

Character of Maria Antoinette

Maria a noble girl

Her virtues and her faults

The Abbé de Vermond, to ingratiate himself with the Austrian court, did all in his power to inspire Maria Antoinette with contempt of Parisian manners. He zealously conformed to the customs prevailing in Vienna, and, like all new converts, to prove the sincerity of his conversion, went far in advance of his sect in intemperate zeal. Maria Antoinette was but a child, mirthful, beautiful, open hearted, and, like all other children, loving freedom from restraint. Her preceptor ridiculed incessantly, mercilessly, the manners of the French court, where she was soon to reign as queen, and influenced her to despise that salutary regard to appearances so essential in all refined life. Under this tutelage, Maria became as natural, unguarded, and free as a mountain maid. She smiled or wept, as the mood was upon her. She was cordial toward those she loved, and distant and reserved toward those she despised. She cared not to repress her emotions of sadness or mirthfulness as occasions arose to excite them. She was conscientious, and unwilling to do that which she thought to be wrong, and still she was imprudent, and troubled not herself with the interpretation which others might put upon her conduct. She prided herself a little upon her independence and recklessness of the opinions of others, and thus she was ever incurring undeserved censure, and becoming involved in unmerited difficulties. She was, in heart, truly a noble girl. Her faults were the excesses of a generous and magnanimous spirit. Though she inherited much of the imperial energy of her mother, it was tempered and adorned

with the mildness and affectionateness of her father. Her education had necessarily tended to induce her to look down with aristocratic pride upon those beneath her in rank in life, and to dream that the world and all it inherits was intended for the exclusive benefit of kings and queens. Still, the natural goodness of her heart ever led her to acts of kindness and generosity. She thus won the love, almost without seeking it, of all who knew her well. Her faults were the unavoidable effect of her birth, her education, and all those nameless but untoward influences which surrounded her from the cradle to the grave. Her virtues were all her own, the instinctive emotions of a frank, confiding, and magnanimous spirit.

Palace of Schoenbrun

The scenes of Maria's childhood

The childhood of Maria Antoinette was probably, on the whole, as happy as often falls to the lot of humanity. As she had never known a mother's love, she never felt its loss. There are few more enchanting abodes upon the surface of the globe than the pleasure palaces of the Austrian kings. Forest and grove, garden and wild, rivulet and lake, combine all their charms to lend fascination to those haunts of regal festivity. In the palace of Schoenbrun, and in the imbowered gardens which surround that world-renowned habitation of princely grandeur, Maria passed many of the years of her childhood. Now she trod the graveled walk, pursuing the butterfly, and gathering the flowers, with brothers and sisters joining in the recreation. Now the feet of her pony scattered the pebbles of the path, as the little troop of equestrians cantered beneath the shade of majestic elms. Now the prancing steeds draw them in the chariot, through the infinitely diversified drives, and the golden leaves of autumn float gracefully through the still air upon their heads. The boat, with damask cushions and silken awning, invites them upon the lake. The strong arms of the rowers bear them with fairy motion to sandy beach and jutting headland, to island, and rivulet, and bay, while swans and water-fowl, of every variety of plumage, sport before them and around them. Such were the scenes in which Maria Antoinette passed the first fourteen years of her life. Every want which wealth could supply was gratified. "What a destiny!" exclaimed a Frenchman, as he looked upon one similarly situated, "what a destiny! young, rich, beautiful, and an archduchess! Ma foi! quel destiné!"

Personal appearance of Maria

Description of Lamartine

The personal appearance of Maria Antoinette, as she bloomed into womanhood, is thus described by Lamartine. "Her beauty dazzled the whole kingdom. She was of a tall, graceful figure, a true daughter of the Tyrol. The natural majesty of her carriage destroyed none of the graces of her movements; her neck, rising elegantly and distinctly from her shoulders, gave expression to every attitude. The woman was perceptible beneath the queen, the tenderness of heart was not lost in the elevation of her destiny. Her light brown hair was long and silky; her forehead, high and rather projecting, was united to her temples by those fine curves which give so much delicacy and expression to that seat of thought, or the soul in woman; her eyes, of that clear blue which recall the skies of the north or the waters of the Danube; an aquiline nose, the nostrils open and slightly projecting, where emotions palpitate and courage is evidenced; a large mouth, Austrian lips, that is, projecting and well defined; an oval countenance, animated, varying, impassioned, and the *ensemble* of these features,

replete with that expression, impossible to describe, which emanates from the look, the shades, the reflections of the face, which encompasses it with an iris like that of the warm and tinted vapor, which bathes objects in full sunlight – the extreme loveliness which the ideal conveys, and which, by giving it life, increases its attraction. With all these charms, a soul yearning to attach itself, a heart easily moved, but yet earnest in desire to fix itself; a pensive and intelligent smile, with nothing of vacuity in it, because it felt itself worthy of friendships. Such was Maria Antoinette as a woman."

Maria's betrothal

Its motives

Maria's feelings on leaving Schoenbrun

Her love for her home

When but fourteen years of age she was affianced as the bride of young Louis, the grandson of Louis XV., and heir apparent to the throne of France. Neither of the youthful couple had ever seen each other, and neither of them had any thing to do in forming the connection. It was deemed expedient by the cabinets of Versailles and Vienna that the two should be united, in order to promote friendly alliance between France and Austria. Maria Antoinette had never dreamed even of questioning any of her mother's arrangements, and consequently she had no temptation to consider whether she liked or disliked the plan. She had been trained to the most unhesitating submission to maternal authority. The childish heart of the mirth-loving princess was doubtless dazzled with the anticipations of the splendors which awaited her at Versailles and St. Cloud. But when she bade adieu to the gardens of Schoenbrun, and left the scenes of her childhood, she entered upon one of the wildest careers of terror and of suffering which mortal footsteps have ever trod. The parting from her mother gave her no especial pain, for she had ever looked up to her as to a superior being, to whom she was bound to render homage and obedience, rather than as to a mother around whom the affections of her heart were entwined. But she loved her brothers and sisters most tenderly. She was extremely attached to the happy home where her childish heart had basked in all childish pleasures, and many were the tears she shed when she looked back from the eminences which surround Vienna upon those haunts to which she was destined never again to return.

Chapter II.
Bridal Days

1770-1775

Louis XV

Prince Louis

When Maria Antoinette was fifteen years of age, a light-hearted, blooming, beautiful girl, hardly yet emerging from the period of childhood, all Austria, indeed all Europe, was interested in the preparations for her nuptials with the destined King of France. Louis XV. still sat upon the throne of Charlemagne. His eldest son had died about ten years before, leaving a little boy, some twelve years of age, to inherit the crown his father had lost by death. The young Louis, grandchild of the reigning king, was mild, inoffensive, and bashful, with but little energy of mind, with no ardor of feeling, and singularly destitute of all passions. He was perfectly exemplary in his conduct, perhaps not so much from inherent strength of principle as from possessing that peculiarity of temperament, cold and phlegmatic, which feels not the power of temptation. He submitted passively to the arrangements for his marriage, never manifesting the slightest emotion of pleasure or repugnance in view of his approaching alliance with one of the most beautiful and fascinating princesses of Europe. Louis was entirely insensible to all the charms of female beauty, and seemed incapable of feeling the emotion of love.

Madame du Barri

Her dissolute character

Louis XV., a pleasure-loving, dissolute man, had surrounded his throne with all the attractions of fashionable indulgence and dissipation. There was one woman in his court, Madame du Barri, celebrated in the annals of profligacy, who had acquired an entire ascendency over the mind of the king. The disreputable connection existing between her and the monarch excluded her from respect, and yet the king loaded her with honors, received her at his table, and forced her society upon all the inmates of the palace. The court was full of jealousies and bickerings; and while one party were disposed to welcome Maria Antoinette, hoping that she would espouse and strengthen their cause, the other party looked upon her with suspicion and hostility, and prepared to meet her with all the weapons of annoyance.

Children of Louis XV

Neither morals nor religion were then of any repute in the court of France. Vice did not even affect concealment. The children of Louis XV. were educated, or rather not educated, in a nunnery.

The Princess Louisa, when twelve years of age, knew not the letters of her alphabet. When the children did wrong, the sacred sisters sent them, for penance, into the dark, damp, and gloomy sepulcher of the convent, where the remains of the departed nuns were moldering to decay. Here the timid and superstitious girls, in an agony of terror, were sent alone, to make expiation for some childish offense. The little Princess Victoire, who was of a very nervous temperament, was thrown into convulsions by this harsh treatment, and the injury to her nervous system was so irreparable, that during her whole life she was exposed to periodical paroxysms of panic terror.

Anecdote of Madame du Barri

One day the king, when sitting with Madame du Barri, received a package of letters. The petted favorite, suspecting that one of them was from an enemy of hers, snatched the packet from the king's hand. As he endeavored to regain it, she resisted, and ran two or three times around the table, which was in the center of the room, eagerly pursued by the irritated monarch. At length, in the excitement of this most strange conflict, she threw the letters into the glowing fire of the grate, where they were all consumed. The king, enraged beyond endurance, seized her by the shoulders, and thrust her violently out of the room. After a few hours, however, the weak-minded monarch called upon her. The countess, trembling in view of her dismissal, with its dreadful consequences of disgrace and beggary, threw herself at his feet, bathed in tears, and they were reconciled.

Madame du Barri's beauty

Her political influence

Madame du Barri's pavilion

The Duke de Brissac

Madame du Barri's flight

The remaining history of this celebrated woman is so remarkable that we can not refrain from briefly recording it. Her marvelous beauty had inflamed the passions of the king, and she had obtained so entire an ascendency over his mind that she was literally the monarch of France. The treasures of the empire were emptied into her lap. Notwithstanding the stigma attached to her position, the nation, accustomed to this laxity of morals, submitted to the yoke. As the idol of the king, and the dispenser of honors and powers, the clergy, the nobility, the philosophers, all did her homage. She was still young, and in all the splendor of her ravishing beauty, when the king died. For the sake of appearances, she retired for a few months into a nunnery. Soon, however, she emerged again into the gay world. Her limitless power over the voluptuous old monarch had enabled her to amass an enormous fortune. With this she reared and embellished for herself a magnificent retreat, adorned with more than regal splendor, in the vicinity of Paris – the Pavillon de Luciennes, on the borders of the forest of St. Germain. The old Duke de Brissac, who had long been an admirer of her charms, here lived with her in unsanctified union. Almost universal corruption at that time pervaded the nobility of

France – one of the exciting causes of the Revolution. Though excluded from appearing at the court of Louis XVI. and Maria Antoinette, her magnificent saloons were crowded by those ever ready to worship at the shrine of wealth, and rank, and power. But, as the stormy days of the Revolution shed their gloom over France, and an infuriated populace were wrecking their vengeance upon the throne and the nobles, Madame du Barri, terrified by the scenes of violence daily occurring, prepared to fly from France. She invested enormous funds in England, and one dark night went out with the Duke de Brissac alone, and, by the dim light of a lantern, they dug a hole under the foot of a tree in the park, and buried much of the treasure which she was unable to take away with her. In disguise, she reached the coast of France, and escaped across the Channel to England. Here she devoted her immense revenue to the relief of the emigrants who were every day flying in dismay from the horrors with which they were surrounded. The Duke de Brissac, who was commander of the constitutional guard of the king, appeared at Versailles in an hour of great excitement. The mob attacked him. He was instantly assassinated. His head, covered with the white locks of age, was cut off, and planted upon one of the palisades of the palace gates, a fearful warning to all who were suspected of advocating the cause of the king.

She is betrayed

Condemnation of Madame du Barri

Her anguish and despair

Execution of Madame du Barri

And now no one knew of the buried treasure but Madame du Barri herself. She, anxious to regain them, ventured, in disguise, to return to France to disinter her diamonds, and take them with her to England. A young negro servant, whom she had pampered with every indulgence, and had caressed with the fondness with which a mother fondles her child, whom she had caused to be painted by her side in her portraits, saw his mistress and betrayed her. She was immediately seized by the mob, and dragged before the revolutionary tribunal of Luciennes. She was condemned as a Royalist, and was hurried along in the cart of the condemned, amid the execrations and jeers of the delirious mob, to the guillotine. Her long hair was shorn, that the action of the knife might be unimpeded; but the clustering ringlets, in beautiful profusion, fell over her brow and temples, and veiled her voluptuous features and bare bosom, from which the executioner had torn the veil. The yells of the infuriated and deriding populace filled the air, as they danced exultingly around the aristocratic courtesan. But the shrieks of the unhappy victim pierced shrilly through them all. She was frantic with terror. Her whole soul was unnerved, and not one emotion of fortitude remained to sustain the woman of pleasure through her dreadful doom. With floods of tears, and gestures of despair, and beseeching, heart-rending cries, she incessantly exclaimed, "Life – life – life! O save me! save me!" The mob jeered, and derided, and insulted her in every conceivable way. They made themselves merry with her anguish and terror. They shouted witticisms in her ear respecting the pillow of the guillotine upon which she was to repose her head. Struggling and shrieking, she was bound to the plank. Suddenly her voice was hushed. The dissevered head, dripping with blood, fell into the basket, and her soul was in eternity. Poor woman! It is easy to condemn. It is better for the heart to pity. Endowed with almost celestial

beauty, living in a corrupt age, and lured, when a child, by a monarch's love, she fell. It is well to weep over her sad fate, and to remember the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation."

Such were the characters and such the state of morals of the court into which this beautiful and artless princess, Maria Antoinette, but fifteen years of age, was to be introduced. As she left the palaces of Vienna to encounter the temptations of the Tuileries and Versailles, Maria Theresa wrote the following characteristic letter to the future husband of her daughter.

Letter from Maria Theresa

> "Your bride, dear dauphin, is separated from me. As she has ever been my delight, so will she be your happiness. For this purpose have I educated her; for I have long been aware that she was to be the companion of your life. I have enjoined upon her, as among her highest duties, the most tender attachment to your person, the greatest attention to every thing that can please or make you happy. Above all, I have recommended to her humility toward God, because I am convinced that it is impossible for us to contribute to the happiness of the subjects confided to us without love to Him who breaks the scepters and crushes the thrones of kings according to his will."

Departure of Maria for Paris

Emotions of the populace

The great mass of the Austrian population, hating the French, with whom they had long been at war, were exceedingly averse to this marriage. As the train of royal carriages was drawn up, on the morning of her departure, to convey the bride to Paris, an immense assemblage of the populace of Vienna, men, women, and children, surrounded the cortège with weeping and lamentation. Loyalty was then an emotion existing in the popular mind with an intensity which now can hardly be conceived. At length, in the excitement of their feelings, to save the beloved princess from a doom which they deemed dreadful, they made a rush toward the carriages to cut the traces and thus to prevent the departure. The guard was compelled to interfere, and repel, with violence, the affectionate mob. As the long and splendid train, preceded and followed by squadrons of horse, disappeared through the gate of the city, a universal feeling of sadness oppressed the capital. The people returned to their homes silent and dejected, as if they had been witnessing the obsequies rather than the nuptials of the beloved princess.

Magnificent pavilion

Singular custom

The gorgeous cavalcade proceeded to Kell, on the frontiers of Austria and France. There a magnificent pavilion had been erected, consisting of a vast saloon, with an apartment at either end. One of these apartments was assigned to the lords and ladies of the court of Vienna; the other was appropriated to the brilliant train which had come from Paris to receive the bride. The two courts vied with each other in the exhibition of wealth and magnificence. It was an established law of

French etiquette, always observed on such occasions, that the royal bride should receive her wedding dress from France, and should retain absolutely nothing belonging to a foreign court. The princess was, consequently, in the pavilion appropriated to the Austrian suite, unrobed of all her garments, excepting her body linen and stockings. The door was then thrown open, and in this plight the beautiful and blushing child advanced into the saloon. The French ladies rushed to meet her. Maria threw herself into the arms of the Countess de Noailles, and wept convulsively. The French were perfectly enchanted with her beauty; and the proud position of her head and shoulders betrayed to their eyes the daughter of the Cæsars. She was immediately conducted to the apartment appropriated to the French court. Here the few remaining articles of clothing were removed from her person, and she was re-dressed in the most brilliant attire which the wealth of the French monarchy could furnish.

Grand procession

The reception

And now, charioted in splendor, surrounded by the homage of lords and ladies, accompanied by all the pomp of civic and military parade, and enlivened by the most exultant strains of martial bands, Maria was conducted toward Paris, while her Austrian friends bade her adieu and returned to Vienna. The horizon, by night, was illumined by bonfires, flaming upon every hill; the church bells rang their merriest peals; cities blazed with illuminations and fire-works; and files of maidens lined her way, singing their songs of welcome, and carpeting her path with roses. It was a scene to dazzle the most firm and contemplative. No dream of romance could have been more bewildering to the ardent and romantic princess, just emerging from the cloistered seclusion of the palace nursery.

Young Louis's indifference

Louis, then a young man about twenty years of age, came from Paris with his grandfather, King Louis XV., and a splendid retinue of courtiers, as far as Compiègne, to meet his bride. Uninfluenced by any emotions of tenderness, apparently entirely unconscious of all those mysterious emotions which bind loving hearts, he saluted the stranger with cold and distant respect. He thought not of wounding her feelings; he had no aversion to the connection, but he seemed not even to think of any more intimacy with Maria than with any other lady who adorned the court. The ardent and warm-hearted princess was deeply hurt at this indifference; but instinctive pride forbade its manifestation, except in bosom converse to a few confiding friends.

The marriage

Insensibility of young Louis

The bride and her passive and unimpassioned bridegroom were conducted to Versailles. It was the 16th of May, 1770, when the marriage ceremony was performed, with all the splendor with which it could be invested. The gorgeous palaces of Versailles were thronged with the nobility of Europe, and filled with rejoicing. The old king was charmed with the beauty and affability of the young bride. All hearts were filled with happiness, except those of the newly-married couple. Louis was tranquil and contented. He was neither allured nor repelled by his bride He never sought her society alone, and ever approached her with the same distance and reserve with which he would approach any other

young lady who was a visitor at the palace. He never intruded upon the privacy of her apartments, and she was his wife but in name. While all France was filled with the praises of her beauty, and all eyes were enchanted by her graceful demeanor, her husband alone was insensible to her charms. After a few days spent with the rejoicing court, amid the bowers and fountains of Versailles, the nuptial party departed for Paris, and entered the palace of the Tuileries, the scene of future sorrows such as few on earth have ever experienced.

Acclamations of the Parisians

Maria shows herself to the populace

She receives their homage

As Maria, in dazzling beauty, entered Paris, the whole city was in a delirium of pleasure. Triumphal arches greeted her progress. The acclamations of hundreds of thousands filled the air. The journals exhausted the French language in extolling her loveliness. Poets sang her charms, and painters vied with each other in transferring her features to canvas. As Maria sat in the dining saloon of the Tuileries at the marriage entertainment, the shouts of the immense assemblage thronging the gardens rendered it necessary for her to present herself to them upon the balcony. She stepped from the window, and looked out upon the vast sea of heads which filled the garden and the Place Louis XV. All eyes were riveted upon her as she stood before the throng upon the balcony in dazzling beauty, and the air resounded with applauses. She exclaimed, with astonishment, "What a concourse!" "Madame," said the governor of Paris, "I may tell you, without fear of offending the dauphin, that they are so many lovers." The heir apparent to the throne of France is called the dauphin; and, until the death of Louis XV., Louis and Maria Antoinette were called the dauphin and dauphiness. Louis seemed neither pleased nor displeased with the acclamations and homage which his bride received. His singularly passionless nature led him to retirement and his books, and he hardly heard even the acclamations with which Paris was filled.

The fire-works

Awful conflagration

Scene of horror

Consternation of Maria

Arrangements had been made for a very brilliant display of fire-works, in celebration of the marriage, at the Place Louis XV. The hundreds of thousands of that pleasure-loving metropolis thronged the Place and all its avenues. The dense mass was wedged as compactly as it was possible to crowd human beings together. Not a spot of ground was left vacant upon which a human foot could be planted. Every house top, every balcony, every embrasure of a window swarmed with the multitude.

Long lines of omnibuses, coaches, and carriages of every description, filled with groups of young and old, were intermingled with the countless multitude – men and horses so crowded into contact that neither could move. It was an impervious ocean of throbbing life. In the center of this Place, the pride of Paris, the scene of its most triumphant festivities and its most unutterable woe, vast scaffolds had been reared, and they were burdened with fire-works, intended to surpass in brilliancy and sublimity any spectacle of the kind earth had ever before witnessed. Suddenly a bright flame was seen, a shriek was heard, and the whole scaffolding, by some accidental spark, was enveloped in a sheet of fire. Then ensued such a scene as no pen can describe and no imagination paint. The awful conflagration converted all the ministers of pleasure into messengers of death. Thousands of rockets filled the air, and, with almost the velocity of lightning, pierced their way through the shrieking, struggling, terror-stricken crowd. Fiery serpents, more terrible, more deadly than the fabled dragons of old, hissed through the air, clung to the dresses of the ladies, enveloping them in flames, and mercilessly burning the flesh to the bone. Mines exploded under the hoofs of the horses, scattering destruction and death on every side. Every species of fire was rained down, a horrible tempest, upon the immovable mass. Shrieks from the wounded and the dying filled the air; and the mighty multitude swayed to and fro, in Herculean, yet unavailing efforts to escape. The horses, maddened with terror, reared and plunged, crushing indiscriminately beneath their tread the limbs of the fallen. The young bride, in her carriage, with a brilliant retinue, and eager to witness the splendor of the anticipated fête, had just approached the Place, when she was struck with consternation at the shrieks of death which filled the air, and at the scene of tumult and terror which surrounded her. The horses were immediately turned, and driven back again with the utmost speed to the palace. But the awful cries of the dying followed her; and it was long ere she could efface from her distracted imagination the impression of that hour of horror. Fifty-three persons were killed outright by this sad casualty, and more than three hundred were dangerously wounded. The dauphin and dauphiness immediately sent their whole income for the year to the unfortunate relatives of those who had perished on that disastrous day.

Presents from Louis XV

Malice of Madame du Barri

Maria's difficulties

The old king was exceedingly pleased with the beauty and fascinating frankness and cordiality of Maria. He made her many magnificent presents, and, among others, with a magnificent collar of pearls, the smallest of which was nearly as large as a walnut, which had been brought into France by Anne of Austria. These praises and attentions on the part of the king excited the jealousy of the petted favorite, Madame du Barri. She consequently became, with the party under her influence, the relentless and unprincipled enemy of Maria. She lost no opportunity to traduce her character. She spread reports every where that Maria hated the French; that she was an Austrian in heart; that her frankness and freedom from the restraints of etiquette were the result of an immoral and depraved mind. She exaggerated her extravagance, and accused her, by whispers and insinuations spread far and near, of the most ignoble crimes of which woman can be guilty. The young and inexperienced dauphiness soon found herself involved in most embarrassing difficulties. She had no kind friend to council her. Louis still remained cold, distant, and reserved. Thus, week after week, month after month, year after year passed on, and for eight years Louis never approached his youthful spouse with any manifestation of confidence and affection but those with which he would regard a mother or

a sister. Maria was a wife but in name. She did not share his apartment or his couch. Though deeply wounded by this inexplicable neglect, she seldom spoke of it even to her most intimate friends. The involuntary sigh, and the tear which often moistened her cheek, proclaimed her inward sufferings.

The Countess de Noailles

Laws of etiquette

An illustration

When Maria first arrived in France, the Countess de Noailles was assigned to her as her lady of honor. She was somewhat advanced in life, haughty and ceremonious, a perfect mistress of that art of etiquette so rigidly observed in the French court. Upon her devolved the duty of instructing the dauphiness in all the punctilios of form, then deemed far more important than the requisitions of morality. The following anecdote, related by Madame Campan, illustrates the ridiculous excess to which these points of etiquette were carried. One winter's day, it happened that Maria Antoinette, who was entirely disrobed in her dressing-room, was just going to put on her body linen. Madame, the lady in attendance, held it ready unfolded for her. The dame d'honneur came in. As she was of superior rank, etiquette required that she should enjoy the privilege of presenting the robe. She hastily slipped off her gloves, took the garment, and at that moment a rustling was heard at the door. It was opened, and in came the Duchess d'Orleans. She now must be the bearer of the garment. But the laws of etiquette would not allow the dame d'honneur to hand the linen directly to the Duchess d'Orleans. It must pass down the various grades of rank to the lowest, and be presented by her to the highest. The linen was consequently passed back again from one to another, till it was placed in the hands of the duchess. She was just on the point of conveying it to its proper destination, when suddenly the door opened, and the Countess of Provence entered. Again the linen passed from hand to hand, till it reached the hands of the countess. She, perceiving the uncomfortable position of Maria, who sat shivering with cold, with her hands crossed upon her bosom, without stopping to remove her gloves, placed the linen upon the shoulders of the dauphiness. She, however, was quite unable to restrain her impatience, and exclaimed, "How disagreeable, how tiresome!"

Countess de Noailles's ideas of etiquette

An anecdote

Another anecdote illustrates the character of Madame de Noailles, who exerted so powerful an influence upon the destiny of Maria Antoinette. She was a woman of severe manners, but etiquette was the very atmosphere she breathed; it was the soul of her existence. The slightest infringement of the rules of etiquette annoyed her almost beyond endurance. "One day," says Madame Campan, "I unintentionally threw the poor lady into a terrible agony. The queen was receiving, I know not whom – some persons just presented, I believe. The ladies of the bed-chamber were behind the queen. I was near the throne, with the two ladies on duty. All was right; at least I thought so. Suddenly I perceived the eyes of Madame de Noailles fixed on mine. She made a sign with her head, and then raised her eyebrows to the top of her forehead, lowered them, raised them again, and then began to make little signs with her hand. From all this pantomime, I could easily perceive that something was

not as it should be; and as I looked about on all sides to find out what it was, the agitation of the countess kept increasing. Maria Antoinette, who perceived all this, looked at me with a smile. I found means to approach her, and she said to me, in a whisper, 'Let down your lappets, or the countess will expire.' All this bustle rose from two unlucky pins, which fastened up my lappets, while the etiquette of costume said *lappets hanging down*."

Maria's contempt for etiquette

The Countess de Noailles nicknamed

One can easily imagine the contempt with which Maria, reared in the freedom of the Austrian court, would regard these punctilios. She did not refrain from treating them with good-natured but unsparing ridicule, and thus she often deeply offended those stiff elderly ladies, who regarded these trifles, which they had been studying all their lives, with almost religious awe. She gave Madame de Noailles the nickname of Madame Etiquette, to the great merriment of some of the courtiers and the great indignation of others. The more grave and stately matrons were greatly shocked by these indiscretions on the part of the mirth-loving queen.

Ludicrous scene

Rage of the old ladies

On one occasion, when a number of noble ladies were presented to Maria, the ludicrous appearance of the venerable dowagers, with their little black bonnets with great wings, and the entire of their grotesque dress and evolutions, appealed so impressively to Maria's sense of the ridiculous, that she, with the utmost difficulty, refrained from open laughter. But when a young marchioness, full of fun and frolic, whose office required that she should continue standing behind the queen, being tired of the ceremony, seated herself upon the floor, and, concealed behind the fence of the enormous hoops of the attendant ladies, began to play off all imaginable pranks with the ladies' hoops, and with the muscles of her own face, the contrast between these childish frolics and the stately dignity of the old dowagers so disconcerted the fun-loving Maria, that, notwithstanding all her efforts at self-control, she could not conceal an occasional smile. The old ladies were shocked and enraged. They declared that she had treated them with derision, that she had no sense of decorum, and that not one of them would ever attend her court again. The next morning a song appeared, full of bitterness which was spread through Paris. The following was the chorus:

"Little queen! you must not be
So saucy with your twenty years
Your ill-used courtiers soon will see
You pass once more the barriers."

Habits of Maria Theresa

The dauphiness becomes unpopular

While Madame de Noailles was thus torturing Maria Antoinette with her exactions, the Abbé de Vermond, on the contrary, was exerting all the strong influence he had acquired over her mind to induce her to despise these requirements of etiquette, and to treat them with open contempt. Maria Theresa, in the spirit of independence which ever characterizes a strong mind, ordinarily lived like any other lady, attending energetically to her duties without any ostentation. She would ride through the streets of Vienna unaccompanied by any retinue; and the other members of the royal family, on all ordinary occasions, dispensed with the pomp and splendors of royalty. Maria Antoinette's education and natural disposition led her to adhere to the customs of the court of her ancestors. Thus was she incessantly annoyed by the diverse influences crowding upon her. Following, however, the bent of her own inclinations, she daily made herself more and more unpopular with the haughty dames who surrounded her.

Dining in public

How it was done

It was a very great annoyance to Maria that she was compelled to dine every day as a public spectacle. It must seem almost incredible to an American reader that such a custom could ever have existed in France. The arrangement was this. The different members of the royal family dined in different apartments: the king and queen, with such as were admitted to their table, in one room, the dauphin and dauphiness in another, and other members of the royal family in another. Portions of these rooms were railed off, as in court-houses, police rooms, and menageries, for spectators. The good, honest people from the country, after visiting the menageries to see the lions, tigers, and monkeys fed, hastened to the palace to see the king and queen take their soup. They were always especially delighted with the skill with which Louis XV. would strike off the top of his egg with one blow of his fork. This was the most valuable accomplishment the monarch over thirty millions of people possessed, and the one in which he chiefly gloried. The spectators entered at one door and passed out at another. No respectably dressed person was refused admission. The consequence was, that during the dining hour an interminable throng was pouring through the apartment; those in the advance crowded slowly along by those in the rear, and all eyes riveted upon the royal feeders. The members of the royal family of France, accustomed to this practice from infancy, did not regard it at all. To Maria Antoinette it was, however, excessively annoying, and though she submitted to it while she was dauphiness, as soon as she ascended the throne she discontinued the practice. The people felt that they were thus deprived of one of their inalienable privileges, and murmurs loud and angry rose against the innovating Austrian.

Versailles

Magnificence of the palace

Much of the time of Louis and his bride was passed at the palaces of Versailles. This renowned residence of the royal family of France is situated about ten miles from Paris, in the midst of an extensive plain. Until the middle of the seventeenth century it was only a small village. At this time Louis XIV. determined to erect upon this solitary spot a residence worthy of the grandeur of his throne. Seven years were employed in completing the palace, garden, and park. No expense was spared by him or his successors to render it the most magnificent residence in Europe. No regal mansion or city can boast a greater display of reservoirs, fountains, gardens, groves, cascades, and the various other embellishments and appliances of pleasure. The situation of the principal palace is on a gentle elevation. Its front and wings are of polished stone, ornamented with statues, and a colonnade of the Doric order is in the center. The grand hall is about two hundred and twenty feet in length, with costly decorations in marble, paintings, and gilding. The other apartments are of corresponding size and elegance. This beautiful structure is approached by three magnificent avenues, shaded by stately trees, leading respectively from Paris, St. Cloud, and Versailles.

Gallery of paintings, statuary, etc

Gorgeous saloons

Splendid gardens

Other palaces

This gorgeous mansion of the monarchs of France presents a front eight hundred feet in length, and has connected with it fifteen projecting buildings of spacious dimensions, decorated with Ionic columns and pilasters, constituting almost a city in itself. One great gallery, adorned with statuary, paintings, and architectural embellishments, is two hundred and thirty-two feet long, thirty broad, and thirty-seven high, and lighted by seventeen large windows. Many gorgeous saloons, furnished with the most costly splendor, a banqueting-room of the most spacious dimensions, where luxurious kings have long rioted in midnight revels, an opera house and a chapel, whose beautifully fluted pillars support a dome which is the admiration of all who look up upon its graceful beauty, combine to lend attractions to these royal abodes such as few other earthly mansions can rival, and none, perhaps, eclipse. The gardens, in the midst of which this voluptuous residence reposes, are equal in splendor to the palace they are intended to adorn. Here the kings of France had rioted in boundless profusion, and every conceivable appliance of pleasure was collected in these abodes, from which all thoughts of retribution were studiously excluded. The expense incurred in rearing and embellishing this princely structure has amounted to uncounted millions. But we must not forget that these millions were wrested from the toiling multitude, who dwelt in mud hovels, and ate the coarsest food, that their proud and licentious rulers might be "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously

every day." Such was the home to which the beautiful Maria Antoinette, the bride of fifteen, was introduced; and in the midst of temptations to which such voluptuousness exposed her, she entered upon her dark and gloomy career. This, however, was but one of her abodes. It was but one even of her country seats. At Versailles there were other palaces, in the construction and the embellishment of which the revenues of the kingdom had been lavished and in whose luxurious chambers all the laws of God had been openly set at defiance by those earthly kings who ever forgot that there was one enthroned above them as the King of kings.

The Great and the Little Trianon

Gardens, cascades, etc

Nature of Maria's mind

Walks in the garden

Maria's want of education

She attempts to supply it

Within the circuit of the park are two smaller palaces, called the Great and the Little Trianon. These may be called royal residences in miniature; seats to which the king and queen retired when desirous of laying aside their rank and state. The Little Trianon was a beautiful palace, about eighty feet square. It was built by Louis XV. for Madame du Barri. Its architectural style was that of a Roman pavilion, and it was surrounded with gardens ornamented in the highest attainments of French and English art, diversified with temples, cottages, and cascades. This was the favorite retreat of Maria Antoinette. This she regarded as peculiarly her home. Here she was for a time comparatively happy. Though living in the midst of all the jealousies, and intrigues, and bickerings of a court, and though in heart deeply pained by the strange indifference and neglect which her husband manifested toward her person, the buoyancy of her youthful spirit enabled her to triumph, in a manner, over those influences of depression, and she was the life and the ornament of every gay scene. As her mind had been but little cultivated, she had but few resources within herself to dispel that ennui which is the great foe of the votaries of fashion; and, unconscious of any other sources of enjoyment, she plunged with all the zest of novelty into an incessant round of balls, operas, theaters, and masquerades. Her mind, by nature, was one of the noblest texture, and by suitable culture might have exulted in the appreciation of all that is beautiful and sublime in the world of nature and in the realms of thought. She loved the retirement of the Little Trianon. She loved, in the comparative quietude of that miniature palace, of that royal home, to shake off all the restraints of regal state, and to live with a few choice friends in the freedom of a private lady. Unattended she rambled among the flowers of the garden; and in the bright moonlight, leaning upon the arm of a female friend, she forgot, as she gazed upon the moon, and the stars, and all the somber glories of the night, that she was a queen, and rejoiced in those emotions common to every ennobled spirit. Here she often lingered in the midst of congenial joys, till the

murmurs of courtiers drew her away to the more exciting, but far less satisfying scenes of fashionable pleasure. She often lamented bitterly, and even with tears, her want of intellectual cultivation, and so painfully felt her inferiority when in the society of ladies of intelligence and highly-disciplined minds, that she sought to surround herself with those whose tastes were no more intellectual than her own. "What a resource," she once exclaimed, "amid the casualties of life, is a well-cultivated mind! One can then be one's own companion, and find society in one's own thoughts." Here, in her Little Trianon, she made several unavailing attempts to retrieve, by study, those hours of childhood which had been lost. But it was too late. For a few days, with great zeal and self-denial, she would persevere in secluding herself in the library with her books. But it was in vain for the Queen of France to strive again to become a school-girl. Those days had passed forever. The innumerable interruptions of her station frustrated all her endeavors, and she was compelled to abandon the attempt in sorrow and despair. We know not upon how trivial events the great destinies of the world are suspended; and had the Queen of France possessed a highly-disciplined mind – had she been familiar with the teachings of history, and been capable of inspiring respect by her intellectual attainments, it is far from impossible that she might have lived and died in peace. But almost the only hours of enjoyment which shone upon Maria while Queen of France, was when she forgot that she was a queen, and, like a village maiden, loitered through the gardens and the groves in the midst of which the Little Trianon was embowered.

Maria's enemies

Their malignant slanders

The enemies of Maria had sedulously endeavored to spread the report through France that she was still in heart an Austrian; that she loved only the country she had left, and that she had no affection for the country over which she was to reign as queen. They falsely and malignantly spread the report that she had changed the name of Little Trianon into Little Vienna. The rumor spread rapidly. It excited great displeasure. The indignant denials of Maria were disregarded. Thus the number of her enemies was steadily increasing.

Visit of Maximilian

A quarrel about forms

Unexpected tenderness of Louis

Another unfortunate occurrence took place, which rendered her still more unpopular at court. Her brother Maximilian, a vain and foolish young man, made a visit to his sister at the court of Versailles, not traveling in his own proper rank, but under an assumed name. It was quite common with princes of the blood-royal, for various reasons, thus to travel. The young Austrian prince insisted that the first visit was due to him from the princes of the royal family in France. They, on the contrary insisted that, as he was not traveling in his own name, and in the recognition of his own proper rank, it was their duty to regard him as of the character he had assumed, and as this was of a rank inferior to that of a royal prince, it could not be their duty to pay the first visit. The dispute ran high. Maria, seconded by the Abbé Vermond, took the part of her brother. This greatly offended many of the

highest nobility of the realm. It became a family quarrel of great bitterness. A thousand tongues were busy whispering malicious accusations against Maria. Ribald songs to sully her name were hawked through the streets. Care began to press heavily upon the brow of the dauphiness, and sorrow to spread its pallor over her cheek. Her high spirit could not brook the humility of endeavoring the refutation of the calumnies urged against her. Still, she was too sensitive not to feel them often with the intensest anguish. Her husband was comparatively a stranger to her. He bowed to her with much civility when they met, but never addressed her with a word or gesture of tenderness, or manifested the least desire to see her alone. One evening, when walking in the garden of Little Trianon, he astonished the courtiers, and almost overpowered Maria with delightful emotions, by offering her his arm. This was the most affectionate act with which he had ever approached her. Such were the bridal days of Maria Antoinette.

Chapter III.
Maria Antoinette Enthroned

1774-1775

Louis XV. seized with small-pox

In the year 1774, about four years after the marriage of Maria Antoinette and Louis, the dissolute old king, Louis XV., in his palace at Versailles, surrounded by his courtiers and his lawless pleasures, was taken sick. The disease soon developed itself as the small-pox in its most virulent form. The physicians, knowing the terror with which the conscience-smitten monarch regarded death, feared to inform him of the nature of his disease.

"What are these pimples," inquired the king, "which are breaking out all over my body?"

"They are little pustules," was the reply, "which require three days in forming, three in suppurating, and three in drying."

Flight of the courtiers

The dreadful malady which had seized upon the king was soon, however, known throughout the court, and all fled from the infection. The miserable monarch, hated by his subjects, despised by his courtiers, and writhing under the scorpion lash of his own conscience, was left to groan and die alone. It was a horrible termination of a most loathsome life.

The Marchioness du Pompadour

Her dissolute character

The vices of Louis XV. sowed the seeds of the French Revolution. Two dissolute women, notorious on the page of history, each, in their turn, governed him and France. The Marchioness du Pompadour was his first favorite. Ambitious, shrewd, unprincipled, and avaricious, she held the weak-minded king entirely under her control, and spread throughout the court an influence so contaminating that the whole empire was infected with the demoralization. Upon this woman he squandered almost the revenues of the kingdom. The celebrated Parc au Cerf, the scene of almost unparalleled voluptuousness, was reared for her at an expense of twenty millions of dollars. After her charms had faded, she still contrived to retain her political influence over the pliant monarch, until she died, at the age of forty-four, universally detested.

Debauchery of Louis XV

He squanders the public revenue

Madame du Barri, of whom we have before spoken, succeeded the Marchioness du Pompadour in this post of infamy. The king lavished upon her, in the short space of eight years, more than ten millions of dollars. For her he erected the Little Trianon, with its gardens, parks, and fountains, a temple of pleasure dedicated to lawless passion. The king had totally neglected the interests of his majestic empire, consecrating every moment of time to his own sensual gratification. The revenues of the realm were squandered in the profligacy and carousings of his court. The people were regarded merely as servants who were to toil to minister to the voluptuous indulgence of their masters. They lived in penury, that kings, and queens, and courtiers might revel in all imaginable magnificence and luxury. This was the ultimate cause of that terrible outbreak which eventually crushed Maria Antoinette beneath the ruins of the French monarchy. Louis XV., in his shameless debaucheries, not only expended every dollar upon which he could lay his hands, but at his death left the kingdom involved in a debt of four hundred millions of dollars, which was to be paid from the scanty earnings of peasants and artisans whose condition was hardly superior to that of the enslaved laborers on the plantations of Carolina and Louisiana. But I am wandering from my story.

Remorse of the king

The lamp at the window

In a chamber of the palace of the Little Trianon we left the king dying of the confluent small-pox. The courtiers have fled in consternation. It is the hour of midnight, the 10th of May, 1774. The monarch of France is alone as he struggles with the king of terrors. No attendants linger around him. Two old women, in an adjoining apartment, occasionally look in upon the mass of corruption upon the royal couch, which had already lost every semblance of humanity. The eye is blinded. The swollen tongue can not articulate. What thought of remorse or terror may be rioting through the soul of the dying king, no one knows, and – no one cares. A lamp flickers at the window, which is a signal to those at a safe distance that the king still lives. Its feeble flame is to be extinguished the moment life departs. The courtiers, from the windows of the distant palace, watch with the most intense solicitude the glimmering of that midnight taper. Should the king recover, they dreaded the reproach of having deserted him in the hour of his extremity. They hope, so earnestly, that he may not live. Should he die, they are anxious to be the first in their congratulations to the new king and queen. The hours of the night linger wearily away as expectant courtiers gaze impatiently through the gloom upon that dim torch. The horses are harnessed in the carriages, and waiting at the doors, that the courtiers, without the loss of a moment, may rush to do homage to the new sovereign.

Death of Louis XV

Indecent haste of the courtiers

The clock was tolling the hour of twelve at night when the lamp was extinguished. The miserable king had ceased to breathe. The ensuing scene no pen can delineate or pencil paint. The courtiers, totally forgetful of French etiquette, rushed down the stairs, crowded into their carriages, and the silence of night was disturbed by the clattering of the horses' hoofs, as they were urged, at their utmost speed, to the apartments of the dauphin.

Emotions of the young king and queen

There Maria Antoinette and Louis, with a few family friends, were awaiting the anticipated intelligence of the death of their grandfather the king. Though neither of them could have cherished any feelings of affection for the dissolute old monarch, it was an hour to awaken in the soul emotions of the deepest melancholy. Death had approached, in the most frightful form, the spot on earth where, probably, of all others, he was most dreaded. Suddenly a noise was heard, as of thunder, in the ante-chamber of the dauphin. It was the rush of the courtiers from the dead monarch to bow at the shrine of the new dispensors of wealth and power. This extraordinary tumult, in the silence of midnight, conveyed to Maria and Louis the first intelligence that the crown of France had fallen upon their brows. Louis was then twenty-four years of age, modest, timid, and conscientious. Maria was twenty, mirthful, thoughtless, and shrinking from responsibility. They were both overwhelmed, and, falling upon their knees, exclaimed, with gushing tears, "O God! guide us, protect us; we are too young to govern."

Homage of the courtiers

The Countess de Noailles was the first to salute Maria Antoinette as Queen of France. She entered the private saloon in which they were sitting, and requested their majesties to enter the grand audience hall, where the princes and all the great officers of state were anxious to do homage to their new sovereigns. Maria Antoinette, leaning upon her husband's arm, and with her handkerchief held to her eyes, which were bathed in tears, received these first expressions of loyalty. There was, however, not an individual found to mourn for the departed king. No one was willing to endanger his safety by any act of respect toward his remains. The laws of France required that the chief surgeon should open the body of the departed monarch and embalm it, and that the first gentleman of the bed-chamber should hold the head while the operation was performed.

"You will see the body properly embalmed?" said the gentleman of the bed-chamber to the surgeon.

"Certainly," was the reply; "and you will hold the head?"

Burial of Louis XV

Each bowed politely to the other, without the exchange of another word. The body, unopened and unembalmed, was placed by a few under servants in a coffin, which was filled with the spirits of wine, and hurried, without an attendant mourner, to the tomb. Such was the earthly end of Louis XV. In an hour he was forgotten, or remembered but to be despised.

The king and queen leave Versailles

At four o'clock of that same morning, the young king and queen, with the whole court in retinue, left Versailles, in their carriages, for Choisy. The morning was cold, dark, and cheerless. The awful death of the king, and the succeeding excitements, had impressed the company with gloom. Maria Antoinette rode in the carriage with her husband, and with one or two other members of the royal family. For some time they rode in silence, Maria, a child of impulse, weeping profusely from the emotions which moved her soul. But, ere long, the morning dawned. The sun rose bright and clear over the hills of France, and the whole beautiful landscape glittered in the light of the most lovely of spring mornings. Insensibly the gloom of the mind departed with the gloom of night. Conversation commenced. The mournful past was forgotten in anticipation of the bright future. Some jocular remark of the young king's sister elicited a general burst of laughter, when, by common consent, they wiped away their tears, banished all funereal looks, and, a merry party, rode merrily along, over hill and dale, to a crown and a throne. Little did they dream that these sunny hours and this flowery path but conducted them to a dungeon and the guillotine.

The coronation

Enthusiasm of the people

Maria's grief

The king's estrangement

The coronation soon took place at Rheims, with the greatest display of festive magnificence. The novelty of a new reign, with a youthful king and queen, elated the versatile French, and loud and enthusiastic were the acclamations with which Louis and Maria Antoinette were greeted whenever they appeared. They were both, for a time, very popular with the nation at large, though there was in the court a party hostile to the queen, who took advantage of every act of indiscretion to traduce her character and to expose her to ignominy. In these efforts they succeeded so effectually as to overwhelm themselves in the same ruin which they had brought upon their victim. A deep-seated but secret grief still preyed upon the heart of Maria. Though four years since her marriage had now passed away, she was still comparatively a stranger to her husband. He treated her with respect, with politeness, but with cold reserve, never approaching her as his wife. The queen, possessing naturally a very affectionate disposition, was extremely fond of children. Despairing of ever becoming a mother herself, she thought of adopting some pleasant child to be her playmate and friend. One day, as she was riding in her carriage, a beautiful little peasant boy, about five years of age, with large blue eyes and flaxen hair, got under the feet of the horses, though he was extricated without having received any injury. As the grandmother rushed from the cottage door to take the child, the queen, standing up in her carriage, extended her arms to the old woman, and said,

"The child is mine. God has given it to me to rear and to cherish. Is his mother alive?"

"No, madame!" was the reply of the old woman. "My daughter died last winter, and left five small children upon my hands."

"I will take this one," said the queen, "and will also provide for all the rest. Will you consent?"

"Indeed, madame," exclaimed the cottager, "they are too fortunate. But I fear Jemmie will not stay with you. He is very wayward."

The little peasant boy

Becomes a monster of ingratitude

The postillion handed Jemmie to the queen in the carriage, and she, taking him upon her knee, ordered the coachman to drive immediately to the palace. The ride, however, was any thing but a pleasant one, for the ungoverned boy screamed and kicked with the utmost violence during the whole of the way. The queen was quite elated with her treasure; for the boy was extremely beautiful, and he was soon seen frolicking around her in a white frock trimmed with lace, a rose-colored sash, with silver fringe, and a hat decorated with feathers. I may here mention that the petted favorite grew up into a monster of ingratitude, and became one of the most sanguinary actors in the scenes of terror which subsequently ensued.

The queen's traducers

One would think that the enemies of Maria Antoinette could hardly take advantage of this circumstance to her injury; but they atrociously affirmed that this child was her own unacknowledged offspring, whose ignominious birth she had concealed. They represented the whole adventure but a piece of trickery on her part, to obtain, without suspicion, possession of her own child. Such accusations were borne upon the wings of every wind throughout Europe, and the deeply-injured queen could only submit in silence.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.