ELLIOT FRANCES DICKINSON

OLD COURT LIFE IN FRANCE, VOLUME II (OF 2)

Frances Elliot
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Содержание

Frances Minto Dickinson Elliot Old Court Life in France, Volume II (of 2)

CHAPTER I. TEMPTED

NEWS came from the army announcing brilliant success. The valour of the King was specially extolled; he was no longer a bashful, feeble prince, victimised by feminine cabals, tyrannised over by Richelieu. He had suddenly become a warrior, foremost in danger, leading his troops in person into the hottest of the fray. Each day his absence lasted, and every fresh intelligence that arrived, added to the excitement of Louise de Lafayette. The danger to which he was exposed made her tremble.

She eagerly desired his return, not for the mere pleasure of seeing and conversing with him (though that was very dear to her), but because she was sure that the time had come when he would himself hold the reins of government, and display all that nobleness of character with which her romantic fancy had invested him. Such, at least, was the conviction, however

delusive, of the pretty maid of honour, who, lost in contemplation of the King's virtues, failed to perceive the state of her own heart.

At length the campaign terminated. Louis had re-taken all the places conquered by the Spaniards. They were in full retreat. The King returned to Paris, which, not having been considered out of danger from the attacks of the enemy, received him with transports of joy. Mademoiselle de Lafayette, a witness of the universal enthusiasm, saw in Louis the worthy successor of Henry the Great, and the inheritor of all his glory. Intoxicated by these dreams, she imagined that even her advice would be in future needless – that the King of his own accord would suppress the arrogance of Richelieu, and from henceforth exercise the royal authority alone.

The following day, the Court being at the Louvre, Louis visited the Queen at her lever. As he returned into the anteroom, he approached Louise de Lafayette. She was too much agitated even to welcome him. That Louis was also greatly moved was evident. The pallor that always overspread his face when excited, was almost death-like, and every feature worked convulsively. For some moments they stood opposite to each other, without saying a word. Then, overmastering his agitation, Louis spoke to her in a low voice: – "I know not, mademoiselle, when we shall be able to resume those conversations which were so infinitely delightful – I am overwhelmed with business." Then, after glancing round, and seeing that every one had retired, he seized her hand and kissed it tenderly.

"Ah! so much the better," said Louise, beaming with smiles. "May you, Sire, ever be thus occupied."

"Do you want to banish me, then, just as I am returned?" said he, retaining her hand in both of his.

"No, Sire; but I want to see you reign."

"You have heard me blamed for my indolence? I am sure you have. All I ask is, that you will wait and judge for yourself. The Court is filled with my enemies." He spoke with animation.

"Sire, I need not wait," replied the maid of honour eagerly, her liquid eyes, full of faith and affection, turned upon him, "I have long ago decided in your favour."

"May you never change!" ejaculated Louis fervently. "It would console me for a world of injustice. I must now leave you," and he pressed her hand again and raised it to his lips.

The eagerness with which Louis applied himself to state affairs after his return, evoked much mirth and ridicule among the ladies of the Court. Louise de Lafayette was pained. When Madame de Sennécy declared that his Majesty's industry could not possibly last, she was offended in the highest degree. The Cardinal, too, was openly abused for the military appointments he had made during the war by these fair critics, whereupon Louise, who dared not openly defend the King, endeavoured to justify him by exonerating the Cardinal. One morning, when both King and minister had been bitterly attacked in the anteroom, before the Queen had left her apartments, Louise remarked to those around her that the Cardinal, though

unpopular, was undeniably great; that he had founded the Académie Française, rebuilt the Sorbonne, established the Royal Printing Press, founded the Jardin des Plantes, and that, as a minister, he was brave, daring, and wise.

These sentiments caused great surprise, for Mademoiselle de Lafayette had hitherto by no means spared Richelieu. The Duchesse de Sennécy openly rebuked her for what she styled her "hypocrisy," and sent her in tears to her room. Her words, however, were immediately reported to the Cardinal by Chavigny, a gentleman of the bedchamber, who was present, one of the many salaried Court spies in his pay. Chavigny particularly dwelt upon the earnestness of the maid of honour, and assured the Cardinal that she could only have so expressed herself in order to gain his favour.

No sooner had Chavigny left the Palais Royal than the Comte de la Meilleraye, a distant relation of Richelieu, requested an audience. La Meilleraye was also in attendance on the King. He had come, as he said, to ask a great favour of his all-powerful cousin. Would the Cardinal assist him to a most advantageous marriage with a lady to whom he was devoted – Mademoiselle de Lafayette? From the first moment he had seen her, he said, her beauty, her elegance, her modest bearing and simplicity – qualities so rare in the Court circle – had enchanted him. Thus spoke the Comte de la Meilleraye. Richelieu listened graciously. He liked by all legitimate means to advance his family, and if the maid of honour was his partisan, as Chavigny had reported,

nothing could be more expedient than such a marriage. He promised therefore to consult the King at once, and to endeavour to obtain his permission, warning La Meilleraye to do nothing in the matter until he had heard again from him.

The morning Council of State over, Richelieu accompanied the King into his writing closet, to discuss in private some important matters.

As the Queen's coterie had predicted, Louis soon wearied of business; everything was now replaced, as before, in the hands of the minister.

Louis leant back in his chair. He scarcely heard the Cardinal's remarks.

From time to time, when specially appealed to, he bowed his head in acquiescence. Then turning away his eyes abstractedly towards the windows, which faced the inner court, he anxiously watched the driving clouds that scudded across the sky. He had fixed a hunting-party at Rambouillet, and longed to start as soon as the weather cleared, and Richelieu had left him.

The mellow voice of the Cardinal, who, however imperative in action, never startled his feeble master by any outward display of vehemence, had continued speaking for some time, in a monotonous tone, when the King, seeing the sunshine appear, suddenly rose.

"Your eminence has, I imagine, done with me for to-day," said he, looking eagerly towards the door.

"Yes, Sire; but there is still a trifling matter upon which I

would ask your decision."

"Pray mention it," replied Louis, tapping his boots with a riding-whip he had taken off a table.

"My relative, the Comte de la Meilleraye, begs your permission to marry."

"Willingly," replied Louis; "who is the fair lady, Cardinal?"

"It is Mademoiselle Louise de Lafayette, Sire, maid of honour to the Queen."

If a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet, Louis could not have been more overcome. He turned perfectly livid, took a long breath, tottered backwards and sat down again. The all-seeing eyes of the Cardinal were fixed upon him; he did not speak, but watched his master. Louis for some moments did not raise his head; then he heaved a deep sigh, and with much effort, in a strangely different voice, asked faintly —

"Does Mademoiselle de Lafayette herself desire this marriage?"

Richelieu had turned away, and affecting to be busied with some books and papers lying on the table, replied in an indifferent manner —

"As yet, Sire, we are unacquainted with the lady's sentiments; but, as I am informed she has no other attachment, I cannot but believe such an alliance as that of my cousin will be acceptable to her."

The nervous spasm with which it was evident the King had awaited this reply instantly relaxed. The colour returned to his

cheeks, his eyes brightened, and he stood up —

"Before I can decide anything," said he, "I must know Mademoiselle de Lafayette's feelings; acquaint me with them speedily."

He spoke in a firm, decided way, very unusual with him.

The Cardinal drew his own conclusions.

By-and-by Chavigny informed Richelieu that Mademoiselle de Lafayette had at once, and unhesitatingly, refused the hand of the Count. Richelieu only smiled. "I knew it. The King, my good Chavigny, is in love with her himself. She returns it. They understand each other. Chavigny, I must see this foolish girl, who ventures to mix herself up with his Majesty. I must personally acquaint myself with her feelings."

"Your Eminence will find it most difficult to speak with her in private. The Duchesse de Sennécy proposes giving a masked ball, at which her Majesty and the Court will be present; would that suit your plans?"

"Not at all," replied Richelieu. "When I speak there must be no mask. I must study her countenance. She is young and disingenuous. I shall read her inmost thoughts. She has not been long enough at Court to have learnt dissimulation. I must see her before the King leaves Paris. We can meet at my niece's, the Duchesse de Combalet."

"Mademoiselle de Lafayette could only feel honoured by such a summons from your Eminence," replied Chavigny.

"Yes, I fancy she will accept the offers I shall make her, unless

she is an absolute idiot."

Mademoiselle de Lafayette was duly invited to a *déjeûner* at the Palais Cardinal by the Duchesse de Combalet, who received her alone. During breakfast her hostess said everything that could flatter and please her. She praised her dress and her appearance. She was so simple, so unselfish, so different from the other maids of honour, the Duchess said. Then she went on to inform her that she knew the Cardinal had the highest opinion of her; that he had often expressed his admiration of her character and her person to herself, the Duchess. "It is very unusual with him, Mademoiselle, to speak to me about the Queen's ladies; he is too much engrossed with state affairs, too serious to notice them. But you are an exception; you have made a deep impression on my uncle."

Louise bowed, grew red and white by turns, and listened in wondering silence.

Suddenly the door opened, and Cardinal Richelieu appeared, followed by two favourite cats. Smiling benignly, he received the maid of honour with great condescension. Mademoiselle de Lafayette rose at his entrance, and was about to withdraw, when he took her hand and insisted on her reseating herself.

The Duchesse de Combalet spoke with him on general subjects, and constantly appealed to Louise for her opinion. She gave it with her usual modest frankness. Everything she said was applauded by the Cardinal. He put forth all his powers to please her.

In about half an hour a servant entered and whispered to the

Duchess. She affected great annoyance at the interruption, and begged the Cardinal and her guest to excuse her for a quarter of an hour, while she gave some directions. "Besides," said she, and she turned with a meaning look to the maid of honour, "I know that his Eminence wants to have a little private conversation with you about our cousin De la Meilleraye, whom you have so cruelly refused. Poor man! he is in despair. I shall return in a few minutes." Saying which she kissed Mademoiselle de Lafayette on both cheeks, and withdrew.

Richelieu and the maid of honour were now alone. The Cardinal was no longer the dissolute prelate of other days, the adorer of two queens of France, the slave of Madame de Chevreuse, the lover of Marion de l'Orme. The life of labour he led would have long ago killed any but a man of his iron will and calm temperament. He never slept more than three hours at a time, and literally worked day and night. At eight o'clock in the morning he was astir, ready to receive spies, generals, and ministers, suppliants, and princes, who were already waiting in the anteroom. He was as active as a Roman senator, with a hundred clients assembled in his portico. His cheeks were pinched and sunken; his face sallow; his thin lips colourless; his brow, a network of those fine wrinkles that come of excessive thought. Even his eyes were dull, and half concealed by his eyelids, though on occasions they would still shoot forth sparks of fire. The straight hair that lay upon his forehead, under his red *calotte*, was scanty and almost white. Altogether, his appearance

was that of a man physically worn-out, and indicative of his painful illness and somewhat premature death. But the spirit of the man was strong within him, and a consciousness of latent power disclosed itself in every feature.

As he leant back in a spacious arm-chair, the two cats nestled on his knees, he bent his half-closed eyes upon Louise with almost feline cunning. Those half-closed eyes alone betrayed his nature; otherwise, his countenance expressed nothing but tranquil enjoyment.

"Mademoiselle de Lafayette," he said in a soft, musical voice that struck pleasantly upon the ear, "I have both to reproach you and to thank you." Louise looked at him with surprise. "Yes, I thank you for the favour with which I hear you speak of me; and I reproach you for having hitherto concealed from me your good opinion. I am desirous to see you become a member of my family. I hope you will marry my cousin. But, believe me, the ties of gratitude are stronger with me than those of blood. Mademoiselle, I wish to be your friend." Louise bowed her head with great respect, but felt bewildered.

Richelieu piqued himself on being a great physiognomist. He had made a special study of the human countenance. He saw that the face of Mademoiselle de Lafayette was totally untroubled. Her perfect self-possession astonished him. The phrase he had uttered – "I wish to be your friend," solemn words, indeed, from the mouth of Richelieu – had caused in her no change of expression! Her composed demeanour was, in the eyes of the

Cardinal, an additional reason for securing her as a partisan. He had before much desired to gain her to himself, but he now came to attach an immense importance to success.

"I am very grateful for your Eminence's kind expressions," said Louise at last, with great modesty, but with equal firmness; "but I do not wish to marry. If the offer of your friendship involves any sacrifice of my freedom, I must, with sorrow, decline it. I seek nothing, your Eminence. I need no protection." There was a quiet dignity in her words and manner that took the Cardinal aback. He said nothing; but his eyes, now fully open and glistening, rested on the maid of honour with surprise and displeasure.

Yet the real loftiness of soul she displayed, the indifference with which she ignored his offers, appeared to him so unaccountable that he could only imagine she wished to extract from him some terms more definite and decided. This idea gave him courage to recommence the attack.

"Let us be frank," said he, smiling. "I know all."

"What do you mean, monseigneur?"

"The King loves you. The purity of his heart and his high principles may allow you to confess it. He loves you. And his interest, as well as your own, requires that we should be friends."

Mademoiselle de Lafayette grew very pale; she trembled, but did not for a moment lose her presence of mind. "To what sort of friendship does your Eminence allude?"

"An entire confidence on your part, and an active

acknowledgment on mine."

The Cardinal was on the point of promising her titles, estates, and pensions; but Mademoiselle de Lafayette, who, with downcast eyes, listened to him in silence, all at once looked up fixedly into his face. This look stopped him short.

"Your Eminence," said she, "can only wish me to give my personal confidence. In honour I could promise no other. But I *have* no secrets, no concealments. I am without ambition, I desire no favour. Besides, I am sure that your Eminence will at once understand me when I say – that, if ever it were the pleasure of his Majesty to repose confidence in me —*there is no temptation, no power on earth*, that would induce me to betray it." As she spoke, she looked straight at the Cardinal. The colour returned to her cheeks, and she sat erect – gentle, yet infinitely bold.

Richelieu reddened, but he suppressed his rising indignation. "The confidence of a great King," replied he solemnly, a dark fire darting from his eyes, "can only be properly accepted when the person to whom it is addressed is capable of offering real assistance to the sovereign. I propose, Mademoiselle de Lafayette, to render you capable of imparting such assistance. Whatever may be your natural sense and penetration, this is an occasion in which experience alone is valuable."

"But does not your Eminence think that rectitude of purpose – "

"It is evident that you are little versed in the intrigues of courts, mademoiselle," answered he loftily, eying her with haughty

disdain. "Perhaps some day you will discover that the offer I have made you of my esteem and assistance is not to be despised."

"No one can attach a higher value than I do to the good opinion of your Eminence," interposed Mademoiselle de Lafayette with warmth; "but I do not think you have at all proved it in what you have just said. Although I think I deserve it," she added timidly.

The Cardinal contemplated her attentively for some moments. His face was set, his eyes flashed, and his hands which were clenched rested on his knees. "I have only one word more to add," said he in an angry voice. "Any idea of favour with the King without my support is a delusion." He was rapidly losing self-restraint. This girl had lashed him into a fury. She saw it, but felt no fear.

"Your Eminence, I think only of my duty," she replied with firmness. "I fear no threats. I can make no promise."

At these words the Cardinal rose. His face was swollen with passion; a wicked fire gleamed in his eyes; her coolness transported him beyond endurance. "Once more, Mademoiselle de Lafayette, remember what I say. My resolutions are unalterable; I trample down everything. Without my assistance, beware! Think of the future. Recall the past. My enemies are rotting in their graves – my friends rule France." Then, speaking more calmly, he added, "You are too great a fool to understand what you are doing. I can pardon your presumption, however, because I know how to cure it. Mademoiselle de Lafayette, you may withdraw."

CHAPTER II.
THE KEEPER OF THE ROYAL CONSCIENCE

RICHELIEU, thoroughly exasperated, determined to crush the girl who had dared to brave him. He called to his aid his creature Chavigny. Chavigny was intriguing, acute, and superficial; an admirable tool – for he originated nothing. Years ago he had sold himself to Richelieu, but as he always went out of his way to abuse him, the connection was not suspected. Under the direction of the Cardinal, he had entirely gained the King's confidence. His easy good-nature encouraged the shy Louis to tell him all his secrets, and to consult him in all his difficulties.

Chavigny, who up to this time had attached little importance to the King's inclination for the new maid of honour, looking upon it simply as a passing admiration for an attractive girl, too inexperienced to take advantage of his favour, upon being questioned, informed Richelieu that the King wrote to her daily, and that she replied as often. Richelieu at once resolved on his course of action. He would in future see the correspondence himself. Each letter was to be skilfully unsealed by his secretary, Desmaret, and read, before it was delivered.

It was not possible for even the hard, stern Richelieu to peruse these letters unmoved. He had been once young and passionate

himself. He could not but appreciate the delicacy and eloquence with which the King veiled his passion, and softened intense love into the semblance of friendship. Nor could he avoid feeling some admiration for the sweet and simple nature that breathed in every line written by the maid of honour. Both were evidently ignorant of the ardour of their mutual attachment. What was to be done? He must consult the King's confessor.

Father Caussin, a Jesuit, had been only nine months confessor to the King. He was learned, conscientious, and guileless. Richelieu had selected him for this important post in the belief that he would assume no political influence over his royal penitent. The General of the order had objected to his appointment on the same grounds. In person Caussin was tall and spare. His long black cassock hung about his thin figure in heavy folds. His face was pale and emaciated. Yet a kindly smile played about his mouth, and his black eyes beamed with benevolence. Such was the ecclesiastic who seated himself opposite to Richelieu.

"My father," said the Cardinal, saluting him stiffly, and leaning forward and laying his hands on some papers placed beside him on a table, as though they related to what he was about to say. – "I have summoned you on a very grave matter." Nothing could be more solemn than the Cardinal's voice and manner. The pleasant smile faded at once out of the confessor's face. He became as grave, if not as stern as the Cardinal, leant his head upon his bony hand, and turned his eyes intently upon

him. "Circumstances have come to my knowledge," continued Richelieu, "which, in my opinion, justify me in asking you a very searching question." Caussin moved uneasily, and in a somewhat troubled manner interrupted him.

"Your Eminence will not, I trust, desire to trench upon the privacy of my office, – for in that case I could not satisfy you."

Richelieu waved his hand impatiently, placed one knee over the other with great deliberation, and leant back in his chair. "My father, I am surprised at your insinuation. We are both Churchmen, and, I presume, understand our respective duties. The question that I would ask is one to which you may freely reply. Does it appear to you that his Majesty has of late shown indifference in his spiritual duties?" Caussin drew a long breath, and, though relieved, was evidently unwilling to answer.

"Pardon me, my father," again spoke the Cardinal, a slight tone of asperity perceptible in his mellow voice, "I ask you this question entirely in the interest of the holy order to which you belong. Many benefices have fallen vacant lately, and it is possible, – it is *possible*, I repeat, that I may advise his Majesty to fill up some of them from the ranks of the Company of Jesus." His half-closed eyes rested significantly on Father Caussin as he said these words.

Caussin listened unmoved. "There are, doubtless," said he, "many members of our order who would do honor to your selection, Cardinal. For myself, I should want no preferment; – indeed, I should decline it." He spoke with the frankness of

perfect sincerity.

Richelieu looked down, and worked the points of his fingers impatiently on the table. His hands were singularly white and shapely, with taper fingers. As a young man he had loved to display them; the habit had remained with him when he was thoughtful or annoyed. "Well, my father," said he, "your answer?"

Caussin eyed the Cardinal suspiciously, – "I am happy to reassure your Eminence; his Majesty is, as usual, in the most pious sentiments."

"Hum! – that is strange, very strange; I fear that the benevolence of your nature, my father – " Caussin drew himself up, and a look as much approaching defiance as it was possible for him to assume passed into his pleasant face. Richelieu did not finish the offensive sentence. "It is strange," he went on to say, "for I have reason to *know*– I ask you for no information, reverend father – that his Majesty's feelings are engaged in a mundane passion which, if encouraged, may lead him from those precepts and exercises in which he has hitherto lived in obedience to the Church."

"To what passion do you allude?" asked Caussin cautiously.

"To the infatuation his Majesty evinces for the new maid of honour, Louise de Lafayette. The lady is self-willed and romantic. She may lead him into deadly sin."

Caussin started. "I apprehend nothing of the kind," replied he drily.

"True, my father, but that is a matter of opinion. I think differently. Absolution, after repentance," continued the Cardinal pompously, "may wash out even crime, but it is for us, – you, his Majesty's confessor, and I, his minister, both faithful servants of the Holy Father," – Caussin looked hard at the Cardinal, who was by no means considered orthodox at Rome, – "it is for us to guard him from even the semblance of evil. I have sent for you, my father, to assist me in placing Louise de Lafayette in a convent. It will be at least a measure of precaution. I shall require all your help, my father; will you give it me?" Richelieu, as he asked this important question, narrowly observed Caussin from under his drooping eyelids. The confessor was evidently embarrassed. His kindly countenance was troubled; and he was some time in answering.

"To dedicate a young and pure soul to God," he replied, at length, with evident hesitation, "is truly an acceptable work; but has your Eminence considered that the lady in question is of the most blameless life, and that by her example and influence his Majesty may be kept in that path of obedience and faith which some other attachment might not insure?" As he asked this question Caussin leaned forwards towards Richelieu, speaking earnestly.

"Father Caussin," said the Cardinal, in his hardest manner, and motioning with his hand as though commanding special attention, "we must look in this matter beyond his Majesty's feelings. I have good reason for alarm. A crisis is impending,"

and he turned again to the papers lying on the table with a significant air. "If Louise de Lafayette has any vocation, let her be advised to encourage it. Consider in what manner you can best bend the King's will to comply. You tell me the lady is a good Catholic; I rejoice to hear it. She comes of a family of heretics. She may be sincere, though I much doubt it. At all events, she must be removed; simply as a matter of precaution, my father, I repeat, she must be removed. Let me beg you to consult the General of your order upon this matter immediately. Understand me, I am advising this simply as a matter of precaution, nothing more." All this time Caussin had listened intently to the Cardinal. The troubled look on his face had deepened into one of infinite sadness. His brow was knit, but there were doubt and hesitation in his manner.

"I can only consent to assist your Eminence," he replied, in a low voice, after some moments of deep thought, "on the condition that the lady herself freely consents. I can permit no violence to be done to her inclinations, nor to the will of his Majesty. If the lady is ready to offer up herself to the Church through my means, it will doubtless redound to the credit of our order; but she shall not be forced."

"Certainly not, certainly not," interposed Richelieu, in a much more affable tone. "I do not know why your reverence should start such a supposition."

"I will consult our General, Cardinal," continued Caussin; "but I am bound to say that the influence the lady has hitherto

exercised has been most legitimate, most orthodox, altogether in favour of our order, to which she is devoted, and of the Church. She is a most pious lady."

"All the more fit for the privilege I propose to bestow upon her," answered Richelieu, with unction; "she will be safe from temptation within the bosom of the Church, a blessing we, my father," and Richelieu affected to heave a deep sigh, and cast up his eyes to heaven, "we, who live in the world, cannot attain. We act then in concert, my father," he added quickly, in his usual manner, "we act for the good of his Majesty's soul?"

Caussin bowed acquiescence, but mistrust and perplexity were written upon every line of his honest face, as he observed the evident satisfaction evinced by the Cardinal at his compliance.

Richelieu rose: "We will force no one's inclination, my father," he said blandly, "but all possibility of scandal must be removed. You must at once prepare his Majesty. It will be a good work, and will greatly recommend you to your order." Caussin, with a look of the deepest concern, bowed profoundly and withdrew. When he was alone, the Cardinal re-seated himself and fell into a deep muse. "Now," said he, at length, speaking to himself, "her fate is sealed. I will take care that her vocation shall be perfect. This presumptuous girl shall soon come to rejoice, ay, rejoice, that she is permitted to take refuge in a convent. As for Caussin, he is a fool. I must remove him immediately."

Richelieu, as he said of himself, never halted in his resolves. Caussin was shortly sent off by a *lettre de cachet* to Rennes,

narrowly escaping an intimation from the Cardinal to his Superior that it would be well to exercise his devotion to the order as a missionary in Canada.

CHAPTER III.
A NOBLE RESOLVE

THE Court had removed from the Louvre to Saint-Germain, always the favourite abode of the melancholy monarch.

Louis suffered tortures from the galling restraints his position entailed upon him in his intercourse with Mademoiselle de Lafayette. He rarely saw her alone. When he addressed her, he was conscious that every eye was fixed upon them. Their correspondence, carried on by means of Chavigny, was, he felt, full of danger. His only comforter in his manifold troubles was this same treacherous Chavigny. Prompted by the Cardinal, Chavigny urged the King, on every possible occasion, to make some arrangement with Mademoiselle de Lafayette to meet in private. "If she loves you," said this unworthy tool, "if you really possess her heart, she will long to meet your Majesty with greater freedom as much as you can do. It is for you to make some such proposal to her. Do it, Sire; do it without delay, or I assure you the lady will think you careless and indifferent." Thus spoke Chavigny. Louis listened, meditated on what he said, and was convinced. He gave himself up to the most entrancing day-dreams.

The season was summer. The weather was hot, and the tall windows of the great saloon were thrown open. The Court

had gathered round the Queen, who was engaged in a lively conversation with Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the young daughter of the Duc d'Orléans. Seeing that her services were not required, Louise de Lafayette, pensive and silent, stole away to the balcony outside the windows. She stood alone, lost in her own thoughts. With noiseless steps Louis approached her. He lent by her side over the balustrade, bending his eyes on the broad plains towards Paris.

"You are thoughtful, Sire," said Louise timidly. "Will you tell me your thoughts?"

"If I do," replied Louis, casting a fond glance upon her, "will you trust me with yours?"

A delicious tremor passed through her whole frame. She cast down her large grey eyes, and smiled. "Indeed I trust you, Sire," she murmured softly; "you know I do."

"But trust me more, – let our communion be more intimate. A brother's love is not more pure than mine," whispered the King; "but," and he hesitated and blushed, "I have never enjoyed the privilege of a brother." Louise raised her eyes inquiringly.

The King was greatly confused. "A brother – " and he stopped. Then, seeing her earnest look of curiosity – "A brother," he repeated, "salutes his sister: I have never enjoyed that privilege, Louise." He was scarcely audible. "Let my self-denial, at least, secure me all your confidence."

"Oh, Sire, you have it, entire and unreserved; you know it. I might distrust myself, but you, Sire, never, never!"

"How happy you make me!" returned the King, and a sickly smile overspread his haggard face. "I understand – I appreciate your attachment to me; but oh, mademoiselle, how can my feeble words express mine to you? – how can I describe that which is without bounds – without limit? You can live without me. You can find solace in your own perfection, in the admiration of those around you – but I, I am nothing without you. I am a mere blank – a blot upon a luxurious Court – an offence to my superb wife. No one cares for my happiness – not even for my existence, but you. When I cannot approach you, I am overcome by despair. Oh, Louise, give yourself up to me, in pity – without fear, without restraint. Let me see you every day, – let me be encouraged by your words, led by your counsels, soothed by your pity, blessed by your sight. You say you do not doubt me. What then do you fear?"

The maid of honour looked at him with tearful eyes. His earnestness, his desolation, his entreaties, melted her heart. His unconscious love made her pulses beat as quickly as his own.

"You know that I am devoted to you, – what more can I say?" she whispered softly.

"I have a favour to ask you," said Louis anxiously, – "a favour so great I hesitate to name it." He was greatly agitated. At this moment the passionate love he felt animated him with new life, and lent a charm to his countenance it had never borne before.

"A favour, Sire? – it is granted before you speak. How is it that you have concealed it from me?"

"Then I am satisfied," – the King heaved a sigh of relief, – "what I ask depends entirely on you. You will grant it."

"Am I to promise?"

"Well, only give me your word; that is enough."

"Sire, I give you my word; from the bottom of my heart, I give you my word. Tell me what it is you desire." And she raised her face towards the King, who contemplated her with silent rapture.

"Not now, – not now," murmured he, in a faltering voice; "I dare not; it would require too long an explanation, – we might be interrupted," and he turned and glanced at the scene behind him, – at Anne of Austria, blazing with diamonds, radiant with regal beauty, her silvery laugh surmounting the hum of conversation. He saw the brilliant crowd that thronged around her where she sat. Great princes, illustrious ministers, historic nobles, chivalric soldiers, grave diplomatists, stately matrons, ministers of state, her ladies in waiting, and the five other maids of honour, in the glory of golden youth. He saw the dazzling lights, the fluttering feathers, the gorgeous robes, the sparkling jewels, standing out from the painted walls, – all the glamour of a luxurious Court. Then he gazed at the sweet face of the lonely girl whose loving eyes were bent upon him awaiting his reply, – his soul sank within him.

"Would to God I were not King of France," he exclaimed abruptly, following the tenor of his thoughts. Then, seeing her wonder at his sudden outburst, he added, "The favour I ask of you shall be made known to you in writing. This evening you shall

receive a letter from me; but," – and he drew closer to her and spoke almost fiercely, – "remember you have pledged yourself to me – you cannot, you dare not withdraw your word. If you do," – and an agonised look came into his face, – "you will drive me to madness." Saying these words, he suddenly disappeared. She was again left standing alone on the balcony.

Louise de Lafayette was startled, but not alarmed. The notion that the King was capable of making any indecorous proposition to her never for a moment occurred to her; at the same time she felt the utmost curiosity to know what this secret might be. She formed a thousand different conjectures, each further than the other from the truth. On entering her room at night, she found a letter from the King. She hastily tore it open and read as follows: —

> "I have long adored you, and you only. During the whole time you have been at Court, I have been able but twice to address you alone, and to chance only did I even then owe that inexpressible privilege. It is impossible for me to endure this restraint any longer. If you feel as I do, you will not desire it. I have therefore commanded that my hunting-lodge at Versailles should be arranged as much as possible in accordance with your taste. There is a garden laid out, filled with the flowers you love; there are secluded lawns; there is the boundless forest. Above all, there is freedom. Come then, my Louise, and share with me this rural retreat – come where we can meet, unrestrained by the formalities of my Court. Bring with you any friend you

please. At Versailles I hope to spend part of every week in your company. My happiness will be perfect; you will find me the most grateful of men. You will have nothing to fear. Do you dream calumny? Who would dare to attack a lady as pure as yourself? May I not claim your consent when I rely on your promise to grant whatever I ask? I feel that you cannot deny me, for you have repeated a thousand times that you trust my principles. You cannot doubt my honour. To refuse me would only be to insult me. Surely Louise, you would not do that! It would wound me to the very soul. It would destroy every hope of my future life.

"(Signed) Louis."

When Mademoiselle de Lafayette read this artful letter, which had been composed by Chavigny under the direction of Richelieu, and copied out by the King, she was utterly confounded. The fatal veil which had so long concealed the truth fell from her eyes. Even to a girl pure and simple as herself, all further delusion was impossible. This letter and the feelings that dictated it were not to be misunderstood.

"Merciful heavens!" cried she, clasping her hands, "with what a tone of authority, with what assurance, he proposes to dishonour me! This, then, is the attachment I believed to be so pure! What! does he, the husband of the Queen of France, suppose that I would encourage a guilty passion! Wretch that I am! Instead of helping him, I have led him into sin! I had no right to engross his thoughts. He is already estranged from his wife, and I have severed them still further! O God! what will the

Queen think of me? How can I atone for this horrible sin? I must – I will – reconcile them. Then God may forgive my involuntary crime!"

Again and again, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she read and re-read the letter. She pressed the paper to her lips. The next moment she dashed it on the floor in an agony of remorse.

"Oh, how can I reply?" sobbed she. "What can I say to temper the blow which must sever us? He will be in despair – he will die. But my reputation, my honour – his own – his duty to the Queen! No, I will never consent to such degradation – my soul revolts at the thought! How gladly would I sacrifice my life for him, but I cannot commit a sin. I must leave the palace, I must go – Whither?"

As she listened to the echo of her own words, an unformed thought suddenly darted into her mind. Go – yes, she would go where none could follow. Youth, beauty, wealth, the sacrifice should be complete. She would prove, even in separation, how great had been her love. "*There is no other way*," she said, speaking aloud, and an angelic smile lit up her face. She cast herself upon her knees, and prayed in peace. Her prayer finished, she took up her pen and replied thus to the King: —

> "Your Majesty desires that we should no longer meet in the presence of witnesses. Before knowing what was required of me, I promised to comply. I will not withdraw my word; but I entreat of your Majesty the liberty of myself selecting the place where these private interviews are to be

held. When I have received your Majesty's assent, I will inform you where this place is to be. In eight days' time I shall be prepared to receive you. Your Majesty can then judge of the extent of my confidence, and of the unbounded devotion I feel towards you.

"Louise de Lafayette."

CHAPTER IV.
THE SACRIFICE

NEXT morning, as soon as it was light, Louise sent for the King's confessor. She showed him the King's letter, and confided to him her resolution. Caussin listened in silence; but the kindly old man, priest though he was, could not restrain his tears – so touching was her innocence, so heartfelt her sorrow. He understood the simple goodness of her heart; he trembled at the sacrifice she was imposing on herself; but he could not combat her arguments. He promised, therefore, to assist in making the needful arrangements, and he pledged himself to support the King in the trial awaiting him.

The coach was in waiting which was to bear her to her future home. All at once she recollected she had still one final sacrifice to make. The letters of the King, which she always carried about her, were still intact within the silken cover in which she preserved them. She drew these letters from her bosom and gazed on them in silent agony. Her eyes were blinded by tears. She dared not read them again, for she knew they would but increase her grief. As she held them in her hand, remorse at what she had done preponderated over every feeling. Thus to have enthralled a husband belonging to another – her sovereign and her mistress – came suddenly before her in its true light. She felt

she had forgotten her duty. Once more she kissed the crumpled leaves over which her fingers had so often passed; she deluged them with her tears. Then she lit a taper and set fire to the whole.

She sat immovable before the burning fragments; her eyes fixed, her hands clasped. As the flame rose, glistened, and then melted away into light particles of dust that the morning air, blowing in from the open window, bore away fluttering in the breeze, she seemed to look upon the death of her love. "Alas!" cried she, "now all is over." Vows of eternal constancy, entreaties that would melt a heart of stone, confidence beyond all limit, affection that enshrouded her in folds of unutterable tenderness – gone, – vanished into air! Such was the image of her life: a life bright in promise, gay and dazzling, to smoulder down into ashes, too fragile even to claim a resting-place.

Louise de Lafayette wrote a few lines to the Duchesse de Sennécy, praying her to convey her dutiful salutations to her Majesty, and to request her dismissal from the post of maid of honour, which, she said, "she felt she had fulfilled so ill." Then she addressed the following note to the King: – "I request your Majesty to meet me this day week, at noon, in the parlour of the Convent of the Daughters of Mary, in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine."

When the King read these lines his heart sank within him. The austerity of the place, a rendezvous in a convent of peculiar sanctity, where he knew Mademoiselle de Lafayette always resorted at the solemn season of Lent and Passion Week, where

he could only converse with her between double bars, was not the place of meeting of which he had fondly dreamed! Yet his natural delicacy made him fully appreciate the modesty of Louise and the gentle rebuke she administered to him for his too pressing solicitation in naming a place of meeting. At the convent, although they would certainly be alone, no scandal could possibly attach to the interview. More than this he never for an instant imagined. The habits of piety in which Mademoiselle de Lafayette lived, and her frequent retreats for religious purposes, raised in his mind no suspicion. He should see her, and see her alone, undisturbed, unwatched. On that thought he dwelt with rapture; time would, he hoped, do the rest.

Punctually, at noon, the King arrived at the Convent of the Daughters of Mary. He was received by the Abbess in person, and conducted into the parlour. Here she left him. A moment more, a curtain was withdrawn, and, behind double bars of iron, Louise de Lafayette stood before him. She wore the dark brown robes and corded girdle of the order, the long white veil of the noviciate falling round her lovely face. The King stood transfixed, his eyes riveted upon her.

"Forgive me, Sire," said she, in a voice full of sweetness, "forgive me for having dared to dispose of myself without your leave. But, Sire, a too fervent attachment had led us both into danger. I had forgotten my duty in the love I felt for you, – your Majesty forgot you were a husband. That letter, in which you proposed meeting me at Versailles, opened my eyes to the truth.

God be thanked, there was yet time for repentance. This morning I have taken the white veil, and in a year I shall pronounce the final vows. My life will still be passed with you, Sire; but it will be a life of prayer." As she spoke she smiled sadly, and awaited his reply.

"Great God!" exclaimed Louis at length, when he could find words. "Is this a vision? Are you an angel already glorified?" He sank upon his knees before her.

"Rise, Sire," said she solemnly; "such a posture befits neither the dignity of your station nor the sacredness of mine. I am no angel, but still your tender friend; a friend who watches over you, who only lives to remind you of your duties. You will share my heart with the holy virgins among whom I live, the saints in heaven, and my God. Let not even the tomb divide us – live, Sire, such a life that we may be reunited among the spirits of the just."

"Oh, Louise!" exclaimed Louis, in a voice choked with emotion; "Louise, who alone fills my despairing, my solitary heart! at your feet I abjure all profane, all unholy thoughts. Speak – command me! my spirit follows you. But, alas!" and he rose to his feet and wrung his hands in bitterest anguish, "what is to become of me in the midst of my detestable Court? Suffer me to follow your example; let me too, within the walls of a cloister, seek that resignation and courage which make you so sublime."

"Good heavens, Sire!" exclaimed Louise de Lafayette, "what do I hear? You, a sovereign, a husband, bury yourself in a cloister! Our situations are utterly unlike. I, a solitary girl, have

but withdrawn from a world to which you were my only tie. Your glory, the glory of France, your own welfare, and the welfare of the Queen, are to you sacred duties. And now, Sire, listen to me," and she approached close to the bars which divided them, and a look of the old melting tenderness passed for a moment over her beautiful face, "Sire, if ever I have been dear to you, listen. The sin for which I feel most poignant sorrow – the sin which years, nay, a life of expiation cannot wipe out – is – that I have by my selfish, my miserable attachment, alienated you from the Queen." Louis was about to interrupt her, but she signed to him to be silent. "I know, Sire, what you would say," she broke in hastily, – "that our attachment has in no way altered your relations towards her Majesty. True, it is so; but my influence over you ought to have been devoted to unite you. It ought to have been my privilege to render both your Majesties happy as man and wife, to give heirs to France, to strengthen the Government. Alas, alas! I have sinned almost beyond forgiveness!" and for awhile she broke into passionate sobs, which all her self-command could not restrain. "Her Majesty, Sire, is a most noble lady, beautiful, generous, loyal, courageous. For twenty years she, the greatest queen in Europe, has been neglected, almost scorned by you her husband. Under these trials her lofty spirit has not flinched – she has been true to you and to herself. Temptation, provocation, nay, insults have not shaken her virtue. Believe nothing against her, Sire – her soul is as lovely as her body. Sire, the Queen is childless, devote your

whole life to her and to France; tend her, protect her, love her. Then, and then only, shall I be reconciled to God." As she spoke her sweet grey eyes turned towards heaven, her countenance was transfigured as in an ecstasy; no saint standing within a sculptured shrine could be more pure, more holy.

The King gazed at her awestruck. "Dispose of me as you will," murmured he; "command my life – but, remember that now I have lost you, happiness is gone from me for ever!"

"Adieu, Sire," said Mademoiselle de Lafayette. "The hour-glass warns me that our interview is over. Return in six months and tell that I have been obeyed."

She drew the dark curtain across the bars, and the Abbess entered. Louis returned hastily to Saint-Germain.

CHAPTER V.
MONSIEUR LE GRAND

IN the broad valley of the Loire, between Tours and Saumur, the train stops at the small station of Cinq-Mars. This station lies beside the Loire, which glides by in a current so broad and majestic, as to suggest a series of huge lakes, with banks bordered by sand and scrub, rather than a river. On either side of the Loire run ranges of low hills, their glassy surface gashed and scored by many a rent revealing the chalky soil beneath, their summits fringed with scanty underwood, and dotted with groups of gnarled and knotted oaks and ragged fir-trees, the rough roots clasping cairns of rock and blocks of limestone. In the dimples of these low hills lie snugly sheltered villas, each within its own garden and policy. These villas thicken as the small township of Cinq-Mars is approached, – a nest of bright little houses, gay streets, and tall chimneys telling of provincial commerce, all clustered beneath chalky cliffs which rise abruptly behind, rent by many a dark fissure and blackened watercourse. Aloft, on a grassy marge, where many an old tree bends its scathed trunk to the prevailing wind, among bushes and piled-up heaps of stones, rise the ruins of a feudal castle. Two gate towers support an arch, through which the blue sky peeps, and some low, broken walls, without form and void, skirt the summit of the cliff. This ruin,

absolutely pathetic in its desolate loneliness, is all that remains of the ancestral castle of the Cöiffiers de Cinq-Mars, Marquis d'Effiat. From this hearth and from these shattered walls, now raised "*to the height of infamy*," sprung that handsome, shallow, ambitious coxcomb, known as the Marquis de Cinq-Mars, who succeeded Mademoiselle de Lafayette in the favour of Louis XIII.

Deprived of Louise de Lafayette, the King's spirits languished. In spite of his partial reconciliation with Anne of Austria, and the birth of a son, he was sullen and gloomy, spoke to no one, and desired no one to speak to him. When etiquette required his presence in the Queen's apartments, he seated himself in a corner, yawned, and fell asleep. The internal malady of which he died had already undermined his always feeble frame. His condition was altogether so critical, that the Cardinal looked round for a companion to solace his weariness. Henri de Cinq-Mars had lately come up to Paris from Touraine. In years he was a boy, under twenty. He was gentle, adroit, and amusing, but weak, and the Cardinal believed he had found in him the facile instrument he sought.

Cinq-Mars was presented to the King. Louis was at once prepossessed by his handsome person and distinguished manners. Cinq-Mars, accustomed from infancy to field sports and country life, angling in the deep currents of the Loire and the Indre, hunting wild boars and deer in the dense forests of Azay and of Chanteloup, or flying his gear-falcon from the summits

of his native downs, struck a sympathetic chord in the sad King's heart. One honour after the other was heaped upon him; finally he was made Grand Seneschal of France and Master of the Horse. From this time he dropped the patronymic of "Cinq-Mars," and was known at Court as "Monsieur le Grand," one of the greatest personages in France. For a time all went smoothly. King and minister smiled upon the petulant stripling, whose witty sallies and boyish audacity were tempered by the highest breeding. He was always present when the Cardinal conferred with the King, and from the first gave his opinion with much more freedom than altogether pleased the minister, who simply intended him for a puppet, not for an adviser. When the Cardinal remonstrated, Cinq-Mars shook his scented curls, pulled his lace ruffles, talked of loyalty and gratitude to the King, and of personal independence, in a manner the Cardinal deemed highly unbecoming and inconvenient. Monsieur le Grand cared little for what the Cardinal thought, and did not take the trouble to hide this opinion. He cared neither for the terrible minister nor for the eccentric Louis, whom he often treated, even in public, with contempt. It was the old story. Confident in favour, arrogant in power, he made enemies every day.

Monsieur le Grand, however, passed his time with tolerable ease when relieved of the King's company, specially in the house of Marion de l'Orme, Rue des Tournelles. He was presented to her by Saint-Evrémond, and fell at once a victim to her wiles. Marion was the Aspasia of the day, and the charm of

her *entourage* was delightful to him after the restraints of a dull and formal Court. Here he met D'Ablancourt, La Chambre, and Calprenéde, the popular writers of the age. The Abbé de Gondi and Scarron came also, and even the prudish Mademoiselle de Scudéri did not disdain to be present at these *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. Marion de l'Orme, then only thirty, was in the zenith of her beauty. Her languishing dark eyes exercised an absolute fascination over Cinq-Mars from the first instant they met. Her affected reserve, the refinement of her manners, the *entrain* of her society, free without license, captivated him. He believed her to be virtuous, and desired to make her his wife. Marion de l'Orme was to become *Madame le Grande*!

This was precisely what that astute lady had angled for. Hence her reserve, her downcast eyes, her affected indifference. She saw that she was dealing with a vain, ignorant boy, who, in her hands, was helpless as an infant. Truly, he was madly in love with her, but he was a minor, and under the guardianship of the Dowager Marquise de Cinq-Mars, his mother, who might possibly not view an alliance with Mademoiselle Marion de l'Orme as an honour to the ancestral tree of the Effiats de Cinq-Mars. The marriage must be secret. Early one morning they started from the Rue de Tournelles in a coach and never stopped until they had reached the old castle among the hills of Touraine, above the feudatory village of Cinq-Mars. In the chapel of that now ruined pile their faith was plighted. Marion promised love, Cinq-Mars constancy. They were incapable of

either. For eight days the old castle rang with the sounds of revelry. Cinq-Mars and Marion were as in a fairy palace; life was but a long enchantment. But at the end of that time Nemesis appeared in the shape of the Dowager Marchioness, to whose ears the report of these merry-makings came at Paris. Cinq-Mars replied to his mother that it was all a *passetemps*, and that Mademoiselle de l'Orme – well – was still Mademoiselle de l'Orme; that he loved the Principessa Maria di Gonzaga (to whom the handsome profligate had, indeed, paid his addresses before leaving Paris, the better to throw dust in the eyes of the world), and that he should shortly return to Paris and his duty with his Majesty.

The mediæval chatelaine, however, was not to be deceived. She knew of the secret marriage, and nothing could exceed her rage. That Marion de l'Orme should sit on the feudal dais upon the seigneurial throne – that she should wear her jewelled coronet, should eat out of her silver dish, and inhabit her apartments – the thing was atrocious, scandalous, impossible. She flew to the Cardinal, with whom she had some friendship, and informed him of what had occurred. The Cardinal, who had formerly favoured Marion de l'Orme with more than his regard, was as much incensed as herself. That his *protégé*, Cinq-Mars, should supplant him, made him, old as he was, furiously jealous. That Cinq-Mars should dare to abandon the splendid position he himself had assigned him, leave the morbid Louis a prey to any adventurous scoundrel whose adroit flattery or

affected sympathy might in a few hours render him arbiter of the Court and master of the kingdom, was, to Richelieu's thinking, an unpardonable crime. The artful prelate immediately took his measures. A royal ordinance was speedily framed, making all marriages contracted by persons under age, and without the consent of guardians, null and void!

Cinq-Mars returned to Court indignant, insolent, defiant; swearing vengeance against the meddling Cardinal, and ready to enter into any scheme for his destruction. Mademoiselle Marion de l'Orme re-opened her salon in the Rue des Tournelles.

As for Louis, from whom the knowledge of this little escapade had been carefully concealed, he received back the truant with greater favour than ever. Cinq-Mars, confident in the King's attachment, and looking on him as too feeble to combat his own audacious projects, spoke words which Louis had not heard since the beloved voice of Louise de Lafayette had uttered them. "He ought to rid himself of the Cardinal, and rule for himself," said Monsieur le Grand; "if not by fair, then by foul means." "*Let Richelieu die*," cried Cinq-Mars, "as he has made others die – the best blood in France: Montmorenci, Chalais, Saint-Preuil, Marillac, and so many others." It is certain that the King listened to these proposals favourably. He actually consented to conspire against himself and the State which he governed. Louis was too stupid to realise the absurdity of his position. He permitted Cinq-Mars to coquet with the Spanish Government, in order to insure the support of Spanish troops to be sent from

the Netherlands to defend Sedan against the Cardinal and his own army in case of failure. But Richelieu, now fully alive to the dangerous ascendancy of Cinq-Mars, – for he had spies everywhere, specially the soft-spoken Chavigny, who was always about the King, – openly taxed his Sovereign with treachery in a message borne to him by the Marquis de Mortémart. Louis was dumbfounded and terrified. He wrote a letter that very same day, addressed to the Chancellor Séguier, apologising for his seeming infidelity to his minister. "He did not deny," said he, "that Monsieur le Grand desired to compass the Cardinal's death," but, with incredible meanness, he added, "that he had never listened to him." Monsieur le Grand, whose weak head was by this time completely turned, fully believing himself invincible, openly discussed what he should do when he was himself prime minister. Suspecting Louis of being too weak to be his only supporter, he turned to Gaston, Duc d'Orléans. Monsieur, whose life, like that of his brother's, singularly repeats itself, bethinking himself of early times and of a certain moonlight meeting on the terrace of Saint-Germain, at once addressed himself to the Queen. But she had already suffered too much to allow herself again to be drawn into danger. When Monsieur detailed the plot, and asked her significantly, "What news she had lately had from her brother, the King of Spain?" she answered that she had had no news, and instantly changed the conversation. This did not at all cool Monsieur's ardour, such as it was. Three times he had been banished from France for treason, and three times he had

returned, as ready as ever, with or without the Queen, to conspire, to betray, and to be again banished. So the traitor-prince and the vainglorious favourite, both intensely hating Richelieu, laid their heads together to destroy him by means of Spain. To them was joined the Marquis de Thou, one of the *jeunesse dorée* of the Court, along with Fontrailles, secretary to Monsieur. The great Cardinal, sitting in the Palais Royal like a huge spider in his web, ready to pounce upon his prey as soon as it had reached the precise spot where he intended to seize it, was familiar with every detail. Monsieur was to receive four hundred thousand crowns in order to raise levies in France; he was also to declare war against France in concert with Spain.

The Cardinal was to be assassinated or imprisoned for life; Gaston was to be proclaimed regent for his nephew Louis XIV. It was the old story, only, now an heir was born to the throne, Monsieur did not dare to claim the first place. Fontrailles, a creature of his own, he allowed to be sent into Spain. The treaty was signed at Madrid by Fontrailles, on the part of Monsieur and Cinq-Mars, and by the King of Spain on his own part. This done, Fontrailles flew back to France, with the precious document stitched in his clothes. Scarcely was the ink dry, before Richelieu was provided with a copy.

The Court was at Narbonne, on the Mediterranean, whither Cinq-Mars had led the King, in order to be near the Spanish frontier. Richelieu was at this time greatly indisposed, and in partial disgrace. He hung about the Rhone, sometimes at

Tarascon, near Avignon, sometimes at Valence, conveniently near to be informed by Chavigny of everything that happened. Chavigny, deep in Louis's confidence, pendulated between the King and the minister. At the fitting moment, Chavigny requested a formal audience. It was the afternoon of the same day that Fontrailles had returned to Narbonne, the treaty with Spain still stitched in his clothes. Contrary to custom, when Chavigny knocked at the King's door, Louis requested Monsieur le Grand to retire. This alone ought to have aroused his suspicions. While Chavigny talked with the King, Cinq-Mars, ashamed of letting the Court see his exclusion from the room, lolled in the anteroom reading a story. Fontrailles found him there.

"How now, Monsieur le Grand," said he, "do you allow his most Christian Majesty to give an audience at which you are not present? You are getting him into bad habits."

"It is only Chavigny," replied Cinq-Mars, not taking his eyes off his book; "he can have nothing particular to say, for he is here every day. I am weary of the King's company. I have been with him all day, and I want to finish this story, which is much more interesting than his stupid talk." And Cinq-Mars threw himself back in his easy-chair, and resumed his reading.

"Ah, Monsieur le Grand," said Fontrailles, smiling at him curiously, "fortune favours you. You are a beautiful man. Look at me, with my hump" (Fontrailles was deformed); "I use my eyes; I am going to-night to meet Monsieur, before I leave Narbonne. I have brought him that little present from Madrid you know

of. I have it safe here in my pocket," and Fontrailles tapped his side and grinned. "Come with me, Monsieur le Grand," said he, coaxingly, and he tried to take his hand, but Cinq-Mars repulsed him. "Come with me; believe me, the air of Narbonne is heavy at this time of year. I am not sure that it is not deadly, very deadly, indeed – especially for you, Monsieur le Marquis. A little change will do your health good. I am going. Come with me where we can breathe"; and Fontrailles laughed a short dry laugh, and looked out of the window upon the blue expanse of ocean, whose waves beat against the yellow shores of the Mediterranean.

"I pray you, Fontrailles, do not trouble me," said Cinq-Mars, looking up over his book and yawning. "I really must have some time to myself, or I shall die. Besides, I want to see his Majesty when Chavigny goes; he is staying longer than usual, I think."

"Yes, Monsieur le Grand, too long for a man coming from the Cardinal, methinks."

Fontrailles still stood watching Cinq-Mars. His deep-set eyes were fixed upon him intently, as Cinq-Mars, with perfect indifference, went on reading his story. Fontrailles passed his hand thoughtfully over his brow two or three times. A look of pity came into his face as he contemplated Cinq-Mars, still reading. He was so young, so fresh, so magnificent; his golden locks long and abundant; his pleasant face faultless in feature; his delicate hands; his perfumed clothes, – all so perfect! Should he try to save him? A tear gathered in the eye of the hardened conspirator.

"Monsieur le Grand," said he softly, stepping up nearer to

Cinq-Mars and placing his hand on his red and silver shoulder-knot – "Monsieur le Grand, I say – "

"What, Fontrailles, are you not gone yet? *Ma foi!* I thought you were far on your road to Monsieur – "

"No, Monsieur le Grand; no, I am not gone yet."

Cinq-Mars put down his book, sat upright, and looked at him.

"What the devil do you want with me, Fontrailles? I will meet you and Monsieur le Duc to-morrow. For to-night, peace."

"Have you no suspicion of what Chavigny is saying to the King all this time, Marquis?" asked Fontrailles with an ominous grin.

"None, my friend; but I shall hear it all before his *coucher*. His most gracious Majesty is incapable of lying down to rest before telling me every syllable," and Cinq-Mars snapped his finger and thumb contemptuously towards the door of the room within which Louis was closeted with Chavigny.

"Are you quite sure of the King, Monsieur le Grand?" asked Fontrailles significantly, still leaning over Cinq-Mars and pressing his hand upon his shoulder-knot. "It is needful for you to be quite sure of him. His Majesty is apt to be weak and treacherous."

Cinq-Mars nodded his head; then, as if something had suddenly struck him, he rose, and in his turn began to gaze curiously at Fontrailles, whose manner and countenance were strangely expressive of some unspoken fear.

"You are very tall, Monsieur le Grand," said Fontrailles abruptly, speaking low, with his hand placed over his eyes, the

better to contemplate Cinq-Mars, now drawn up to his full height, and staring at him with wonder; "you are very tall," he repeated, "and I am such a little man. You are very handsome, too – the handsomest gentleman in all France – and very gracious to me also – very kind and gracious."

Fontrailles spoke thoughtfully, as a man who turned some important matter over in his mind.

"Have you come here only to tell me this, Fontrailles?" answered Cinq-Mars, laughing, and again he yawned, passed his jewelled fingers through his clustering locks, and again took up the book which he had laid down on a table beside him, and reseated himself. Fontrailles, however, had never taken his eyes off him. His gaze had deepened into an expression of deep sorrow, although he spoke jestingly. Whatever train of thought occupied him, it had not been broken by what Cinq-Mars had just said.

"You are very tall," he again repeated, as if speaking to himself, in a peculiar voice; "so tall, indeed, that you could do without your head, Monsieur le Grand, and yet be taller than I am. Perhaps this makes you careless. I am short, and I could not afford to lose my head – so – I am going to leave Narbonne instantly. The air here is as deadly to my constitution as it is to yours. Marquis, pray do believe me. Will you come with me – the tall man with the little one? – both needing a change. Will you come?"

Cinq-Mars did not heed him a whit. Fontrailles laid his hand

heavily on the thick shock of Monsieur le Grand's golden curls.

"No, *mille diables*, no!" roared Cinq-Mars in a rage, shaking him off; "I will not go. Why should I go? For God's sake leave me. I am just at the catastrophe of my story, and you keep on tormenting me like a gadfly."

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Grand," replied Fontrailles submissively, "I did but advise you for your good. I desire your company for the sake of that comely head of yours; but, as I said, you are tall, and I am short, which makes a great difference. It is a long journey across the mountains of France into the Low Countries," added he, sighing. "That will be my road – a long and weary road. It might fatigue your excellency. I am going, Monsieur le Marquis. I am gone – Adieu!"

Cinq-Mars did not look up, and Fontrailles, turning upon him a last look full of pity, disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.
DEATH ON THE SCAFFOLD

WHEN Chavigny left the King, Cinq-Mars entered the royal chamber. Louis was silent, absorbed, and melancholy – would answer no questions, and abruptly dismissed the favourite on the plea that he was fatigued and needed rest.

Monsieur le Grand was naturally surprised at the change. The significant words of Fontrailles recurred to him; too late he repented his careless indifference to the friendly warning. But after all, if the King failed him, there was Monsieur and there was the treaty. What had he, Cinq-Mars, to fear when the King's brother had so deeply compromised himself? The Cardinal, too, was ill – very ill; he might die. Still, as he turned to his own suite of apartments his mind misgave him. The King had not told him one word of his interview with Chavigny; and although Chavigny would have denied it upon oath on the consecrated wafer, Cinq-Mars knew he was the Cardinal's creature and his go-between with the King.

When Cinq-Mars reached his rooms he found a letter from his friend, De Thou. "Fly," said this letter – "fly instantly. I have certain intelligence that the Cardinal is acquainted with every particular of the treaty signed at Madrid. For myself I have nothing to fear; but you have incurred the deadly hatred of

Richelieu."

Thereupon Cinq-Mars, hurriedly disguised himself in a Spanish cloak, with a sombrero hat slouched over his face, stole out of the prefecture where the King was staying, and made his way as fast as he could run to the city gates. They were closed. Then, fully aroused to the urgency of his position, the strange words of Fontrailles ringing in his ears, he sought out the abode of an humble friend, whom he had recommended to serve the Court with mules for the journeying to the south from Paris – a man of Touraine, whom he had known from his boyhood. He roused him from sleep – for the night had now closed in – and acquainted him with his danger. The faithful muleteer did his best. He hid him under some loose hay with the mules in the stable. It was in vain. Cinq-Mars had been seen and tracked from the prefecture to the muleteer's house, and the scented exquisite – whose word a few hours before ruled the destiny of France – was dragged out headlong from the hay, his fine clothes torn and soiled, his face scratched and bleeding, amid the hooting of the populace and the jeers of his enemies.

De Thou, his friend, was arrested on the same day, not as guilty of conspiring, but simply as being cognisant of the existence of the treaty of Madrid, which Fontrailles had carefully carried off into the Netherlands stitched in his clothes, a copy of which lay with the Cardinal.

Monsieur Duc d'Orléans was also, for the fourth time, arrested and imprisoned.

The effect of that copy of the treaty which Chavigny had shown to the King, while Cinq-Mars read his story, was instantaneous. Louis became greatly alarmed. He understood that Richelieu knew all, and therefore must be fully aware that he had himself encouraged and approved a plot to kill him. The same day that Cinq-Mars was conducted a prisoner to the Castle of Montpellier, Louis insisted upon going himself to Tarascon, to make a personal apology to Richelieu. He was already so weakened by the disease of which he died, that he was forced to be carried in a chair into the Cardinal's lodgings. They were together many hours. What passed no one knew, but it is certain that the "*amiable criminal*," as Cinq-Mars is called by contemporary authors, was the scapegoat sacrificed to the offended dignity of the Cardinal; that Monsieur, the King's only brother, was to be tried for treason; and that Richelieu should be restored to the King's confidence. In his eagerness to propitiate his offended minister, Louis actually proposed to take his two sons from the custody of the Queen and place them with the Cardinal, in order to guarantee his personal safety. This abject proposition was declined by Richelieu, who was unwilling to provoke the Queen's active hostility at so critical a moment.

Richelieu had conquered, but he was dying. Though his body was broken by disease, his mind was vigorous as ever; in revenge and hatred, in courage and fortitude, his spirit was still lusty. In his enormous thirst of blood, none had ever excited him like the airy Marquis de Cinq-Mars, – a creature of his own, whom he

had raised to the dizzy height of supreme power, to become his rival in love and power. The great minister felt he had made a mistake: it angered him. He had not patience to think that he should have been taken in by a butterfly, whose painted wings he had decorated with his own hands. He, the all-potent Cardinal, the ruler of France, circumvented by a boy! He swore a big oath that not only should Cinq-Mars die, but that death should be made doubly bitter to him.

Richelieu was now at Valence on the Rhone. How was he to reach Lyons, where the trial was to take place? The distance is considerable. His limbs were cramped and useless, his body racked by horrible pain. But go he would; if he died upon the road he would go. So he ordered a room of wooden planks to be constructed, gilt and painted like a coach, and lined with crimson damask. This room contained a bed, a table, and a chair. Within reclined the Cardinal. Too ill to bear the motion of a carriage, he was borne on the heads of twenty of his body-guard by land. Houses, walls, and gate-ways, were knocked down to make way for him. By water he was conveyed in a towing boat pulled up the Rhone against the current by horses to Lyons. Attached to this boat was another, in which the prisoners Cinq-Mars and De Thou were carried. So Richelieu passed onwards, with all the pomp of a Roman pro-consul conducting barbarian princes first to adorn his triumph, then to die! As for Monsieur, he had already made his peace with his brother and Richelieu. He turned King's evidence, and betrayed everybody. Fontrailles, who alone could

have convicted him, was safe across the frontier. "Talk not to me of my brother," even the besotted Louis exclaimed, when he heard that Monsieur was again at liberty; "Gaston ever was, and ever will be, a traitor."

The only crime which even the ingenuity of Richelieu could prove against Cinq-Mars was that he had joined with Monsieur in a treaty with Spain. Now the original transcript of this treaty was lost, Fontrailles having carried it with him into the Netherlands, stitched in his pocket. If Monsieur the Duc d'Orléans, therefore, had declined to speak, Cinq-Mars and his friend De Thou must have been acquitted. But Monsieur, on the contrary, loudly demanded to be interrogated on his own complicity and on the complicity of Cinq-Mars. The Cardinal had already showed what was in his mind, by giving orders, as soon as he was lifted out of his portable chamber, on arriving at Lyons, and before the trial had begun, "for the executioner to hold himself in readiness."

The trial was on the 12th of September, 1642. It began at seven o'clock in the morning, at the Hôtel de Ville. The Chancellor Séguier, a personal enemy of Monsieur le Grand, who had affronted him in the days of his greatness, was the president, and Monsieur Duc d'Orléans the principal witness. Monsieur's evidence was given with touching candour. He was so careful to tell all the truth, so skilful in bringing out all those facts which were calculated to place Cinq-Mars in the most odious light, that the charges were easily proved to the satisfaction of the judges. The trial was over in a few hours. Then the two young men were

summoned before the judges in the council-chamber to hear their sentence. It was read out to them by Monsieur de Palleruc, a member of the criminal court of Lyons. According to this sentence they were both to be beheaded; Cinq-Mars was to be tortured. He listened with calmness, De Thou with resignation. They both shook hands with their judges. "I am prepared to die," said Cinq-Mars to Séguier, the Chancellor, "but I must say the idea of torture is horrible and degrading. It is a most extraordinary sentence for a man of my rank and of my age. I thought the laws did not permit it. Indeed, I do not fear death, gentlemen," continued the poor lad, turning to the judges, "but I confess my weakness, – I dread torture. At least, I beseech you, let me have a confessor."

His request was complied with, and Father Malavette, a Jesuit, was brought into the council-chamber. As soon as he saw him Cinq-Mars ran forward and embraced him. "My father, they are going to torture me," he cried; "I can scarcely bring myself to bear it! What is your opinion?"

"That you must submit to the hand of God, Monseigneur. Nothing happens but by his permission."

Cinq-Mars bowed his handsome head, covered with the sunny curls, and was silent. From the council-chamber he was led by Monsieur de Lanbardemont, an officer of the Court, to the torture-room. Here he remained about half an hour, and suffered torture, both ordinary and extraordinary. His supple limbs and delicate skin were horribly lacerated. He was unable to walk

when he came out, and was supported by the officials. "Let me now think of my soul," he said faintly; "send my confessor to me, and permit me to be alone with him." This wish was granted, and an hour passed, during which he confessed and received absolution. Then he said to Father Malavette, "I have not eaten for twenty-four hours, my father, and I am very weak. I fear if I do not take something I may swoon upon the scaffold, though indeed, I assure you, I do not fear to die." A little wine and bread were brought to him, of which he partook. "Ah! my father," said the poor boy of twenty-two, "what a world it is! Everybody I know has forsaken me. How strange it is! I thought I had many friends, but I see no one cares for me now but poor De Thou, whom I alone have brought to this pass."

"Alas! my son, you are young, or you would not wonder at this," answered Father Malavette sorrowfully; "'put not your faith in princes.' What says Ovid too, who, like you, enjoyed the favour of Augustus, and was then cruelly punished?

"'Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos.'"

"But, my father, when I was the favourite of his Majesty, I tried to serve my friends in every way I possibly could, yet now I am alone."

"No matter," said the priest, shaking his head, "your service to them only made them your enemies."

"Alack, I fear it is so," replied Cinq-Mars, sighing deeply.

Then he asked for paper, and wrote to his mother. He prayed her to pay all his debts, and again expressed his utter astonishment at the conduct of his friends. At three o'clock in the afternoon both he and De Thou were carried in a hired coach into the Place des Terraux, lying over against the banks of the river Soane, in the outskirts of the city. Here the scaffold was erected. Every house in the Place was covered by temporary balustrades and balconies; the roofs also were crowded with spectators. Thousands had come together to see the favourite die.

Cinq-Mars with difficulty mounted the ladder leading to the scaffold, with the help of Father Malavette. Then, still holding him by the hand to steady his wounded limbs, he raised his plumed hat from off his head, and, with a graceful air, saluted the multitude. He turned to every side, and passed around to each face of the platform, so that all might see him and receive his salutation. He wore a court suit of fine Holland broadcloth, trimmed with gold lace; his black hat ornamented with red feathers was turned back in the Spanish style. He had high-heeled shoes with diamond buckles, and green silk stockings, and he carried a large scarlet mantle, to cover his body after decapitation, neatly folded on one arm. His fair young face was perfectly serene, and his clustering curls, slightly powdered, were scented and tended as carefully as heretofore. Having bowed to the crowd, he replaced his hat on his head, and, with his hand resting on his right side, he turned round to look about him. Behind were two blocks, covered with red cloth. Beside them

stood the executioner. He was only a city porter – the regular official being ill – a coarse and brutal fellow, with bloated face, wearing the dress of a labourer. When he came up to Cinq-Mars with scissors to cut off his hair, M. le Grand put him away with a motion of disgust. He begged Father Malavette to do him this office, and to keep his hair for his mother. While the long ringlets which fell over his shoulders were being cut off, Cinq-Mars turned towards the executioner, who had not yet taken the axe out of a dirty bag which lay beside him, and asked him haughtily, "What he was about?" and "Why he did not begin?" The rude fellow making a wry face in reply, Cinq-Mars frowned, and addressed himself to Father Malavette. "My father," said he, "assist me in my prayers, then I shall be ready."

After he had prayed very devoutly, and kissed the crucifix repeatedly, he rose from his knees, and again in a firm voice repeated, "I am ready, begin!" Then he added, "May God have mercy upon me, and forgive my sins." He threw away his hat, unloosed the lace ruff about his throat, put back his hair from his face, and laid his head on the block. Several blows descended ere his head was severed from the body; the executioner being unready and new to his office. When the head fell it gave a bound, turned itself a little on one side, and the lips palpitated visibly, the eyes being wide open. The body was covered with the scarlet mantle borne by Cinq-Mars on his arm for that purpose, and carried away to be buried.

The King, informed by the Cardinal of the precise day and

hour when Cinq-Mars would suffer death, – for every detail had been virtually arranged before Richelieu left Valence in his wooden chamber, – took out his watch at the appointed time, and, with the most perfect unconcern, remarked to Chavigny, "At this moment Monsieur le Grand is making an ugly face at Lyons."

Then Richelieu ordered that the feudal castle of Cinq-Mars, in the valley of the Loire, should be blown up, and the towers razed "*to the height of infamy*."

CHAPTER VII.
THE END OF THE CARDINAL

WHEN the Louvre was a walled and turreted stronghold, with moat and drawbridge, bastion and tower, lying on grassy banks beside the river Seine, then unbordered by quays and untraversed by stone bridges, an ancient castle, strongly fortified, stood in the open country, hard by, without the city walls. In the time of Charles VI., the mad king, husband of the notorious Isabeau de Bavière, this castle belonged to Bernard Comte d'Armagnac, Constable of France, the ally of the English against his own sovereign, and a leader in those terrible civil wars that desolated France throughout the space of two reigns. Hither the English and the Burgundians often repaired, to meditate some murderous *coup de main* upon the capital, to mass their bloodthirsty troops for secret expeditions, or to seek a safe retreat when the fortune of war was adverse. As time went by this castle grew grey with age; the rebel nobles to whom it belonged were laid in their graves; no one cared to inhabit a gloomy fortress, torn and battered by war and sacked by marauders. The wind howled through the desolate chambers, owls hooted from the rents in its turrets, and noisome reptiles crawled in the rank weeds which choked up its courts. It came to be a gruesome place, lying among barren fields, where the ruffians and desperadoes

of the city resorted to plan a murder or to hide from justice. This God-forgotten ruin and the foot-trodden fields about it were purchased at last by wealthy nobles, who loved the fresh country breezes beyond the new streets which now arose on this side of the river. The materials of the old castle served to furnish walls for the palaces of the Rambouillets and the Mercœurs, historic names in every age of the national annals. Here they kept their state, until Cardinal Richelieu, either by fair means or foul, it mattered little to him, bought and destroyed their spacious mansions, pulled down all that remained of the castle walls, filled up the ditches, levelled the earth, and, on the ill-omened spot, raised the sumptuous pile known as the Palais Cardinal, near, yet removed from, the residence of the sovereign at the Louvre. The principal buildings ran round an immense central square, or courtyard, planted symmetrically with trees and adorned with fountains and statues. From this central square four other smaller courts opened out towards each point of the compass. There was a chapel splendidly decorated, and, to balance that, two theatres, one sufficiently spacious to hold three thousand spectators, painted on panel by Philippe de Champagne. There were ballrooms furnished with a luxury unknown before; boudoirs – or rather bowers – miracles of taste and elegance; galleries filled with pictures and works of art, and countless suites of rooms, in which every decoration and adornment then practised were displayed. Over the grand entrance in the Rue Saint-Honoré appeared, carved in marble,

the arms of Richelieu, surmounted by a cardinal's hat and the inscription "Palais Cardinal." Spacious gardens extended at the rear.

Still the Cardinal, like Wolsey at Hampton Court, added wall to wall of the already overgrown palace, and bought up street after street within the city to extend the gardens, until even the subservient Louis showed some tokens of displeasure. Then, and not till then, did the Cardinal cease building. At his death he presented his palace to the sovereign; and from that day to this the Palais Cardinal, now Palais Royal, has become an appanage of the State.

Before us stands the Palais Cardinal – solitary, in the midst of lonely gardens, sheltered by waving groves. The greensward is divided by straight walks, bordered by clipped lime-trees, rounded at intervals into niches for statues and trophies; balustraded terraces border deep canals, and fountains bubble up under formal groups of yew or cypress. The palace casts deep shadows on the grass. It is very still. High walls encircle the enclosure. The very birds are mute. Not the bay of a hound is heard. Moss gathers on the paths and among the tangled shrubberies, and no flowers catch the radiance of the sunshine. Within is the great, the terrible Cardinal. The ground is sacred to the despot of France, the ruler of the monarch, the glance of whose eye is death or fortune. Journeying direct from Lyons in his chamber on wheels – after the execution of Cinq-Mars – to Fontainebleau, where he rested, he is come here to die. Yonder he

lies on a bed of state, hung with embroidered velvet in a painted chamber, the walls covered with rare pictures and choicest tapestry, the windows looking towards the garden. The moment approaches when he will have to answer for his merciless exercise of absolute power over king and people, to that Heavenly Master whose priest and servant he professes to be. How will he justify his bitter hatred, his arrogant oppression of the great princes and nobles of France? How will he meet the avenging ghosts of the chivalrous Montmorenci, the poetic Chalais, the gallant Cinq-Mars, the witty Saint-Preuil, the enthusiastic Urbain Grandier, in the unknown country whither he is fast hastening? Who tried to seduce, then to ruin, the Queen, Anne of Austria, and send her back, divorced and disgraced, into Spain? Who turned the feeble Louis into a servile agent of his ambition, and exercised over his weak mind a tyranny as shameful to himself as degrading to the sovereign? True, Richelieu may plead reasons of State, a rebellious nobility, traitorous princes, and an imbecile king; but the isolation of the throne, begun under his rule, was both barbarous and impolitic, as after ages showed. True, he possessed rare genius, and his life was industriously devoted to what he called "*the glory of France*"; but it was a mean and selfish glory, to attain which he had waded through the noblest blood of the land.

Look at him now – he has just received extreme unction. A hypocrite to the last, he folds his hands on his breast and exclaims – "This is my God; as in his visible presence, I declare I have

sacrificed myself to France." When he is asked by the officiating priest – "If he forgives his enemies?" – he replies, "I have no enemies but those of the State." Now the hand of death is visibly upon him. In a loose robe of purple silk, he lies supported by pillows of fine lace. He is hardly recognisable, so great have been his sufferings, so complete is his weakness; his bloodless lips pant for breath, his hollow eyes wander on vacancy, his thin fingers work convulsively on the sheets, as though striving against the approach of invisible foes.

But, before he departs, a signal honour is reserved for him. Behold, the rich velvet curtains, heavy with golden embroideries, are held aside by pages who carry plumed hats in their hands, and Louis XIII. enters hastily. He is bareheaded, and is accompanied by the princes of the blood and the great ministers of State. Louis is so shrunken and attenuated, so white and large-eyed, that in any other presence he might have been deemed a dying man himself. As he advances to the *ruelle* that encloses the bed, he composes his thin lips and pinched face into a decent expression of condolence. How can he but *affect* to deplore the death of a minister whose fierce passions overshadowed his whole life like a moral upas-tree? Nevertheless the fitting phrases are spoken, and he embraces the ghastly form stretched out before him with a semblance of affection. The expiring Cardinal presses the hand of his master, and makes a sign that he would speak. Louis bows down his head to catch the feeble voice, which says – "Sire, I thank you for this honour; I have spent my whole life in your

service. I leave you able ministers; trust them, Sire; but," – and he stops and struggles fearfully for breath, – "but, beware of your Court. It is your *petit coucher* who are dangerous. Your favourites have troubled me more than all your enemies." Then the Cardinal sinks back, fainting on his pillows.

Louis withdraws with affected concern; but, ere he reaches the spacious anteroom, lined with the Cardinal's retainers in magnificent liveries, he bursts into an inhuman laugh – "There goes a great politician to his death," he says to Chavigny, who is beside him, and he points with his thumb towards the Cardinal's chamber; "a wonderful genius. Now he is gone I shall be free – I shall reign." He chuckles with delight at the idea of being at last rid of the Cardinal; and a grim smile spreads itself over his ashen face.

It is a ghastly joke, as cruel as it is selfish. As if Louis's life were bound up in the existence of his great minister – he is himself a corpse within a year!

CHAPTER VIII.
THE QUEEN REGENT

LOUIS XIV. was four years and a half old when his father died at Saint-Germain, aged forty-two. Tardy in everything, Louis XIII. was six weeks in dying. The state christening of his son was celebrated during his illness. When asked his name, the little lad replied, "I am Louis XIV."

"Not yet, my son, not yet," murmured the dying King, "but shortly, if so it please God."

Anne of Austria, named Regent by her husband's will, rules in her son's name. A splendid Court assembles round her, at the Louvre, at Saint-Germain, and at Fontainebleau. Her exiled favourites are there to do her homage. The Duchesse de Chevreuse, after a long sojourn in Spain, England, and Flanders, – for she loves travel and the adventures of the road, either masked, or disguised as a page, a priest, or a cavalier, – is reinstated in her Majesty's favour. In Spain the Duchess's vanity was gratified by enslaving a royal lover – the King of Spain, brother of Anne of Austria; in England she diverted herself with fomenting personal quarrels between Charles I. and Henrietta Maria; in Flanders – a dull country – she found little to amuse her.

Mademoiselle de Hautefort (soon to become Duchesse and

Maréchale de Schomberg) returns in obedience to the Queen's command, who wrote to her even when the King was alive, "Come, dearest friend, come quickly. I am all impatience to embrace you!"

The Duchesse de Sennécy arrives from the provinces, and the Chevalier de Jars from England. The latter had been imprisoned in the Bastille, and threatened with torture by Richelieu, to force him to betray the Queen's correspondence with Spain at the time of the Val de Grâce conspiracy. He had been liberated, however, but while the Cardinal lived had remained in England.

These, among many other faithful attendants, resume their places at the *petit coucher*, in the *grand cercle*, and at the morning *lever*.

Then there are the princes and princesses of the blood-royal: – Monsieur the Duc d'Orléans – no longer breathing vows of love in the moonlight, but a veteran intriguer – living on the road to Spain, which always meant rebellion, together with his daughter, *La Grande Mademoiselle*, a comely girl, the greatest heiress in Europe; Cæsar, Duc de Vendôme, son of Gabrielle and Henry IV., with his Duchess and his sons, the Ducs de Mercœur and De Beaufort; Condé, the uncrowned head of the great house of Bourbon – more ill-favoured and avaricious than ever – his jealous temper now excited against the bastards of the house of Vendôme, with his wife, Charlotte de Montmorenci, sobered down into a dignified matron, devoted to her eldest son, the Duc d'Enghien, and to her daughter, the Duchesse de Longueville, the

brightest ornament of the Court; the Duc de Rochefoucauld and his son, the Prince de Marsillac, the author of *Les Maximes*, to become a shadow on the path of the last-named Duchess, who is to die in a convent; the great House of La Tour d'Auvergne, Viscomtes de Turenne and Ducs de Bouillon, from which springs Henri de Turenne, the rival of young Condé; Séguier, Duc de Villemer, generously forgiven for the part he took against the Queen as Chancellor, at the Val de Grâce; and, last of all, Henry, Duc de Guise – by-and-by to astonish all Europe by his daring escapade at Naples, where, but for Masaniello, he might have been crowned King, with the Queen's beautiful maid of honour, Mademoiselle de Pons, at his side.

There is also about the Court a young man named Giulio Mazarin, born in Rome of a Sicilian family, late secretary to Cardinal Richelieu. He has passed many years in Spain, and can converse fluently in that language with her Majesty whenever she deigns to address him. He has a pale, inexpressive face, with large black eyes, *à fleur de tête*, generally bent on the ground. His manners are modest, though insinuating; his address is gentle, his voice musical. Like all Italians, he is artistic; a *conoscente* in music, a collector of pictures, china, and antiquities. So unobtrusive and accomplished a gentleman cannot fail to please, especially as he is only a deacon, and, with a dispense, free to marry. The Queen, who often converses with him in her native tongue, appreciates his merits. Her minister, the Bishop of Beauvais, leaves the Court. He finds that his presence is useless,

as the Queen acts entirely under the advice of this young Italian, whom she also selects as guardian to the young King, who, poor simple boy, looks on Mazarin as a father.

The Regency begins auspiciously. Fifteen days after the death of Louis XIII. the decisive victory of Rocroy was gained over the Spaniards by the Duc d'Enghien, a youthful general of twenty-two. Paris was exultant. The roads were strewed with wreaths and flowers; tapestry and banners hung from every window, fountains of choicest wines flowed at the corners of the streets, and amid the booming of cannon, the blare of trumpets, the crash of warlike instruments, and the frantic shouts of an entire population, the Queen, and her little four-year old son, ride in a gold coach to hear a *Te Deum* at Notre-Dame.

Her Majesty's authority is much increased by this victory. Mazarin, under favour of the Queen, gradually acquires more and more power. He presides at the council; he administers the finances – for which he came to be called "*the plunderer*"; he tramples on the parliament and bullies the young King. The princes of the blood and all the young nobles are excluded from offices of state or places in the household. Every one begins to tremble before the once modest young Italian, and to recall with dismay the eighteen years of Richelieu's autocracy.

But Mazarin has a rival in Henri de Gondi, afterwards Cardinal de Retz, now coadjutor to his uncle, the Archbishop of Paris. No greater contrast can be conceived than between the subtle, shuffling Italian, patient as he is false, and Gondi, bold,

liberal, independent, generous even to his enemies, incapable of envy or deceit, grasping each turn of fortune with the ready adaptiveness of genius, and swaying the passions of men by his fiery eloquence; a daring statesmen, a resolute reformer, one of whom Cromwell had said – "that he, De Retz, was the only man in Europe who despised him."

Gondi considered himself sacrificed to the Church – for which he had no vocation – and did his utmost, by the libertinism of his early life, to render his ordination impossible; but in vain. Although he had abducted his own cousin, and been the hero of numberless scandals, the Archbishopric of Paris was considered a sinecure in the family of Gondi, and Archbishop and Cardinal he must be in spite of his inclination and of his excesses. In politics he was a republican, formed on the pattern of Cato and of Brutus, whose lives he had studied at the Sorbonne. He loved to be compared to Cicero and to Cataline, and to believe himself called on to revolutionize France after the fashion of a factious conspirator of old Rome. He longed to be anything belligerent, agitative – tribune, general, or demagogue. "Ancient Rome," he said, "honoured crime, therefore crime was to be honoured." "Rather let me be the leader of a great party than an emperor!" exclaimed he, in the climax of one of his thrilling perorations. The mild precepts of the gospel were clearly little to his taste. He had mistaken not only his vocation but his century. He should have lived in the Middle Ages; and as an ecclesiastical prince-militant led armies into battle, conquered territories, and made

laws to subject peoples. Yet underlying the wild enthusiasm of his language, and the reckless energy of his actions, there was a kindly, almost gentle temper that imparted to his character a certain incompleteness which accounts for the falling off of his later years. Grand, noble as was De Retz, Mazarin ultimately beat him and remained master of the situation.

Under the guidance of Gondi (De Retz) the parliament, paralysed for a time, soon learns its power, and gives unmistakable tokens of insubordination by opposing every edict and tax proposed by the Government. Some of the most fractious of "these impertinent bourgeois," as Condé called them, were arrested and exhibited in chains like captives in a Roman triumph – at Notre-Dame on the occasion of a second *Te Deum* sung for a second great victory gained by young Condé. Mazarin, by this act, over-taxed the endurance of the citizens. In one night two hundred barricades rise in the streets of Paris. The Queen-Regent can see them from her windows. This ebullition of popular fury appears to Gondi as the realisation of his youthful dreams. The moment has come to make him a tribune of the people. He has loyally warned the Regent of the impending peril. The Queen considered his words mere bravado, and treated him personally with suspicion and contempt. Gondi was warned that Mazarin had decided on his exile. His generous nature was outraged: "To-morrow," he said, "before noon, I will be master of Paris." Noon did see him master of Paris; but, loose as was his estimate of the sacredness of his office, he was still

Archbishop-Coadjutor; he could not personally lead the rabble, or publicly instigate the citizens to rebellion. A man of straw must represent him, and do what he dared not – harangue at the crosses and corners of the streets, head the popular assemblies, and generally excite the passions of the turbulent Parisians to fever heat. This man of straw was found in the Duc de Beaufort, grandson of Henri Quatre, through Gabrielle d'Estrées, – a dandy, a swaggerer, but a warrior.

Now the Duc de Beaufort, hot-headed and giddy, without either judgment or principles, cares little for either Cardinal, Coadjutor, or Queen, – is utterly indifferent as to who may rule or who may serve, provided always his own claims, as prince of the blood, to the most lucrative posts are admitted. But he does care very much for an affront offered to the Duchesse de Montbazon, of whom he is desperately enamoured.

The Duchesse de Montbazon, stepmother of the Duchesse de Chevreuse, and lady in waiting to the Queen, finds late one evening, on returning to her hotel, two love-letters dropped on the floor of her private closet. One is from a gentleman, the other is from a lady; both are unsigned. She of course at once decides that the handwriting of the one is that of the lady she most hates, that of the other, the lover of that same lady, whom she hates even more, if possible, than the lady herself. Now the lady whom she hates most is the Duchesse de Longueville, younger, more attractive, and more powerful than herself. The gentleman she selects is the Count de Coligni, who had deserted

her for the sake of the Duchess. The next morning, at the Queen's lever, Madame de Montbazon shows these two love-letters to every one, and being the mistress of a caustic tongue, makes some diverting remarks on their contents. Her words are repeated to the Duchesse de Longueville; she denies the fact altogether. Her mother, the Princesse de Condé, Charlotte de Montmorenci, broadly hints to Anne of Austria that the Prince de Condé, the greatest general France had ever possessed since the days of the Constable de Bourbon, will join the malcontent parliament, nay, may even lead Spain into France, if her Majesty does not instantly cause the Duchesse de Montbazon to retract all she has said of his sister. Such is patriotism under the Regency! The Queen, overwhelmed by the clamour of the two duchesses, invokes the help of Cardinal Mazarin. The Cardinal, in his Italian-French, soothes and persuades both, muttering many classic oaths of *Cospetto* and *Corpo di Bacco* under his breath. He goes to and fro between the ladies, flatters both, and proposes terms of apology. Every suggestion is objected to; an hour is spent over each word. Such a negotiation is far more difficult than the government of France. All conclusion seems impossible, the Queen at last speaks with authority. She says that "if Madame de Montbazon will not retract, she shall lose her place at Court."

So Spain is not at this time to invade France under the command of Condé, and the Duchesse de Longueville is to receive an apology.

The apology is to be made at the Hôtel de Condé. The

Duchesse de Longueville – a superb blonde, with melting blue eyes, golden-brown hair, transparent complexion, and a dazzling neck and shoulders, a coronet of orient pearls and a red feather on her head, a chaplet of the same jewels clasping her throat, wearing a robe of blue tissue, bordered and worked with pearls – stands in the great saloon of her father's ancestral palace. Her feet rest on a dais of cloth of gold and silver; the dais is covered by a canopy spangled with stars. The walls of the saloon are covered with bright frescoes of birds, fruit, and flowers, panelled into golden frames. Four great chandeliers of crystal and silver are placed on pedestals at each corner of the room, lighting up a glittering crowd of princes and princesses of the blood who stand beside the Duchess on the estrade. The greatest nobles of France are present. The doors are flung open, and the Duchesse de Montbazon, a dainty brunette, brilliant, audacious, enticing, who, although forty, is still in the zenith of her charms, flashes into the room in full court costume, her sacque (or train) of amber satin brocaded with gold reaching many yards behind her. The colour on her cheeks is heightened either by rouge or passion; her eyes glitter, and her whole bearing is of one who would say, "I *must* do this, but I defy you." She knows that all the gentlemen take part with her, if the ladies side with her enemy. She walks straight up to the dais on which the Duchesse de Longueville, *née* Princesse de Condé, stands, stops, looks her full in the face, then leisurely and with the utmost unconcern casts her eyes round on the company, smiles sweetly to the Duc

de Beaufort, and bows to those princes and nobles who are her champions, particularly to the Ducs d'Orléans and de Guise. Then she unfolds her painted fan, and with insolent unconcern reads what follows from a slip of pink paper attached to one of the jewelled sticks:

"Madame, I come here to assure your highness that I am quite innocent of any intention of injuring you. Had it not been so I would humbly beg your pardon, and willingly submit to any punishment her Majesty might see fit to impose on me. I entreat you, therefore, to believe that I have never failed in the esteem which your virtues command, nor in the respect due to your high rank."

The Duchesse de Longueville's soft blue eyes, usually incapable of any other expression but tenderness or supplication, look absolutely wicked, so defiant is the bearing of Madame de Montbazon. She advances to the edge of the estrade, draws herself up with an imperious air, and casting a haughty glance at her rival, who, crimson in the face, is fanning herself violently and ogling the Duc de Beaufort, reading also from her fan, pronounces the following words, dictated by Cardinal Mazarin:

"Madame, I am willing to believe that you took no part in the calumny which has been circulated to my prejudice. I make this acknowledgment in deference to the commands of the Queen."

Thus ends the quarrel; but not the consequences. The whole Court and city is in an uproar. The citizens are deeply interested, and to a man take part with the *chère amie* of Beaufort against

the Duchesse de Longueville, and against Condé and Mazarin.

Condé is not sure if he will not after all lead the Spaniards against France. The Duchesse de Montbazon feeds the flame for her private ends. She lays all the blame of her humiliation on Cardinal Mazarin, which exasperates Beaufort to madness. She incites Henri, Duc de Guise, another of her adorers – the wildest, bravest, and most dissolute of princes – to challenge the Comte de Coligni, whom she had designated as the writer of one of the love-letters. A duel is fought in the Place Royale. The Duchesse de Montbazon watches the while out of a window of the palace of the Duc de Rohan, her cousin. Coligni is killed. He falls, it is said, into the arms of the Duchesse de Longueville, who is present on the Place, disguised as a page.

The Duc de Beaufort, whose turbulent folly foreshadows the *grand seigneur* of later reigns and almost excuses the great Revolution, refuses to receive a royal herald, sent to him by the Queen, turns his back upon her Majesty at her lever, and threatens the life of the Cardinal. The Duchesse de Montbazon is banished.

CHAPTER IX.
THE DUC DE BEAUFORT

THE Duc de Beaufort is summoned to a private audience at the Louvre. On his way up the grand staircase entering from the inner quadrangle he meets his mother, the Duchesse de Vendôme, and his sister, the Duchesse de Nemours, who, their attendance on the Queen over, are descending.

"Good God! Francis," cries his mother, raising her hands with a gesture of horror, "I thought you were safe at Rambouillet. *You* within the Louvre at this moment? You must be mad!" And she throws herself upon him and tries to bar his further passage.

"Oh, my brother!" exclaims his sister Nemours, in the same breath, throwing her arms around his neck; "in the name of the Holy Virgin, do not tempt your fate. Fly, dear Francis – fly, while you can – our coach is waiting below – come with us instantly." And Madame de Nemours takes him by the arm, and tries to draw him downwards.

Beaufort plants himself firmly on the stair. His first impulse is to push them both forcibly aside, and to proceed; his next to curse their folly in the spicy *argot* of the *halles*. He does neither; but stands open-mouthed, his fierce eyes demanding an explanation he does not condescend to ask. The explanation is soon forthcoming.

"My son," cries his mother, bursting into tears, and seizing on his hand to detain him, as he makes a motion as if to evade them, "listen to me, I implore you. Your sister and I have been in waiting on the Queen many hours to-day. She is terribly incensed against you. People have been coming all day with tales to her here, at the Louvre. Crowds have filled her audience chamber."

"*Mille Diables!* What do you mean, mother?" bursts out Beaufort, shaking himself free from both ladies. "You call me mad, if any one be mad it is yourselves. I am here, summoned by the Queen herself, to a private audience. *Ventre de ma vie!*" – Beaufort much affects some of the favourite oaths of his grandfather, Henri Quatre – "what are her Majesty's humours to me?"

"Oh, Francis," sobs the Duchesse de Nemours, "what have you done? You have threatened the life of Cardinal Mazarin. The Queen knows it. She has sent for you to secure your person. She can have no other motive. Nothing can exceed her indignation. She said, in my hearing, that you had personally insulted her; that your party, the *Importants*, were the curse of her reign; and that the Duchesse de Montbazon corrupted the princes of the blood by her intrigues. In the name of Heaven, do not venture near her Majesty if you value your liberty, or even your life!"

The Duchesse de Vendôme wrings her hands while her daughter is speaking.

"For my sake, quit Paris, my dear son. If you remain, not even Gondi can save you. Come with us instantly, and cross the

frontier while you can."

Her words are broken; she trembles at her son's manifest danger; Beaufort looks at her, shakes his head, and bursts into a loud laugh.

"You are a couple of lunatics, both of you" – and again he laughs – "I shall not leave Paris; I will not even hide myself. Calm yourself, mother," – and he kisses her on the cheek – "her Majesty has summoned me to a private audience. I shall obey her. She is no traitress. I have been guilty of rudeness towards her. I go to wipe out the remembrance of it. I am rough, but not brutal, especially to the Queen. Besides, *they dare not arrest me*." [1]

Saying which, he pushes his mother and sister, who still endeavour to stop him, on one side, and bounds up the stairs.

It is evening. Anne of Austria is alone in a spacious withdrawing-room, from which her private writing-closet opens. Four lofty windows turn towards the river – one is open. She sits beside it, gazing at the dazzling tints of the summer sunset that lace the western heavens with bars of fire. In front rise the double towers of Notre-Dame. The fretted spire of the Sainte-Chapelle glistens against a bank of heavy clouds that are rapidly welling up from the south. These clouds deepen with the twilight. The lustre of a stormy sunset soon fades out. The sun disappears, and darker and denser clouds gather and thicken, and obscure the light. Low thunder rumbles in the distance, and a few heavy raindrops

[1] These words, spoken by the Duc de Beaufort, are the same as those of the Balafré, at Blois, before his assassination by Henry III.

descend. Long shadows fall across the floor, the corners of the room grow dark, and only a few bright gleams, lingering low on the horizon, rest on the Queen's face and figure.

Anne of Austria has now passed into middle life; her form is full, her movements heavy. The glorious eyes are still lustrous, but no longer flash with the fire of youth. Her hair, though still abundant, has lost its glossy brightness. Her dress is rich, her bearing cold and stately. She affects a distant, almost a haughty manner, and is severe in exacting the most rigid etiquette from all who approach her, save alone the Cardinal. He comes and goes as he lists, smiling and obsequious, but no longer humble or subservient as of yore. Indeed, at times he treats her Majesty with absolute familiarity, to the utter dismay of the Duchesse de Chevreuse and Mademoiselle de Hautefort. When not engaged with Mazarin in state affairs, or in giving audiences, the Queen passes her time in her oratory. Not only is she devout herself, but exacts at all events the same outward show of piety from her ladies.

Twilight has deepened into gloom, ere the Duc de Beaufort enters. He stands in shadow, and as he glances at the Queen, he inwardly apostrophises his mother and sister as a couple of fools and gossips, for imagining him to be in any danger of her displeasure. His boisterous bearing – for he affects the manners of the lowest of the populace, the better to sway them, and by so doing to embarrass the minister – is visibly softened. He remembers with pain the insults of which he has been guilty

in turning his back on the Queen, when they last met, and in refusing to receive her herald. He is both repentant and flattered at her summons. His obeisance to her is unusually low, and some tokens of emotion betray themselves on his dissipated, though handsome countenance.

"Good evening, cousin," says Anne of Austria, as he enters, a gracious smile upon her face, and with that queenly grace natural to her, she presents her still beautiful hand to him, which he kisses kneeling. "Where have you been these four days past? You are a stranger at the Louvre."

Her voice is sweet, her look is gentle. It is impossible that what Beaufort has heard can be true.

"Madame," he answers, bowing, "had I not been absent from Paris, I should not have failed to present my duty to your Majesty. But I am only just returned from a hunting-party at Rambouillet, whither I went with my brother-in-law, Nemours. Until I came back I did not know that you had asked for me. What can I do for your Majesty's service? I am always at your command."

"Ah, cousin, you are always at my command, I know," answers the Queen, repeating his words, and she gives a little laugh. Beaufort winces at the covert rebuke. He feels that her meaning must be ironical, yet she speaks caressingly, and the same gracious smile still plays about her mouth.

"You once called me the most honourable man in France, Madame; I am proud to remember it." Beaufort speaks roughly, and in a loud voice; the momentary polish is passing away with

the momentary emotion. "I am what I ever was. I do not change. I wish I could say the same of your Majesty. Madame, you have greatly altered," and he looks at her straight in the face. Anne of Austria shifts her position, so as to sit in shadow, then she replies: —

"I have no *special* purpose in summoning you, cousin, save for the satisfaction your presence here gives me." Again Beaufort feels the covert stab, and observes that she studiously avoids noticing his remarks on her altered conduct towards him.

"You and I," adds the Queen, in a voice strangely monotonous, "are indeed old friends and comrades as well as cousins."

"You have not a truer friend in whole France than I am," answers the Duke vehemently, and he advances a step or two towards the window, near which the Queen sits, raises his hand to emphasise his words, and lets it fall so heavily on a table near as to make the whole room echo. The Queen still smiles graciously.

"Yes, Madame, I am no courtier; I hate courts; but before you made that Italian *facchino* your favourite you relied on Beaufort." As he pronounced the Cardinal's name his face hardens and his hands clench themselves; an almost imperceptible shudder passes over the Queen. Then he continues: —

"Was it not to Beaufort that you entrusted the sacred person of his Majesty and your own safety after the death of your husband, before the Regency was settled?"

Anne of Austria bows her head in silence. She is evidently determined not to take offence. If any one else had dared to

mention the Cardinal to her in such language she would have ordered him to the Bastille.

Had the Duke been less giddy this knowledge ought to have curbed him, especially after the warning he had received; but his thoughts are now passing into a different channel, and he heeds it not.

"Yes, cousin, I have known you long, and closely," is the Queen's cautious rejoinder. "You have been at Rambouillet, Prince," she continues; "have you had good sport? The canals there are, I am told, full of fat carp. Do you love fishing?"

The Duke stares at her without replying. The Queen, who appears to desire to continue the conversation, yet to avoid all discussion, still speaks —

"My son will grow up to be a keen sportsman, I hope. The royal forests must be better guarded. Did you and the Duc de Nemours find any deer at Rambouillet?"

Spite of the Queen's unusual loquacity, there is something in her manner which irritates the excitable Duke. He cannot altogether convince himself that she is not mocking him. He had come certainly repentant, but his fiery temper now overmasters him at the bare suspicion.

"Did your Majesty send for me to put such questions as these?" cries he roughly. "If so, I would rather have stayed at Rambouillet."

"Truly, Duke," replies the Queen evasively, colouring at his bluntness, "it is difficult to content you. I have already said that

I summoned you for no special purpose, save that we might converse together" – and she stops suddenly, and hesitates – "as cousins, and *as friends*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.