LOUIS SAINT-SIMON

MEMOIRS OF LOUIS XIV AND HIS COURT AND OF THE REGENCY. VOLUME 08

Louis de Rouvroy Saint-Simon

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Содержание

Duc de Saint-Simon Memoirs of Louis XIV and His Court and of the Regency – Volume 08

CHAPTER LV

Although, as we have just seen, matters were beginning to brighten a little in Spain, they remained as dull and overcast as ever in France. The impossibility of obtaining peace, and the exhaustion of the realm, threw, the King into the most cruel anguish, and Desmarets into the saddest embarrassment. The paper of all kinds with which trade was inundated, and which had all more or less lost credit, made a chaos for which no remedy could be perceived. State-bills, bank-bills, receiver- general's-bills, title-bills, utensil-bills, were the ruin of private people, who were forced by the King to take them in payment, and who lost half, two-thirds, and sometimes more, by the transaction. This depreciation enriched the money people, at the expense of the public; and the circulation of money ceased, because there was no longer any money; because the King no longer paid anybody, but drew his revenues still; and because all the specie out of his

control was locked up in the coffers of the possessors.

The capitation tax was doubled and trebled, at the will of the Intendants of the Provinces; merchandise and all kinds of provision were taxed to the amount of four times their value; new taxes of all kinds and upon all sorts of things were exacted; all this crushed nobles and roturiers, lords and clergy, and yet did not bring enough to the King, who drew the blood of all his subjects, squeezed out their very marrow, without distinction, and who enriched an army of tax-gatherers and officials of all kinds, in whose hands the best part of what was collected remained.

Desmarets, in whom the King had been forced to put all his confidence in finance matters, conceived the idea of establishing, in addition to so many taxes, that Royal Tithe upon all the property of each community and of each private person of the realm, that the Marechal de Vauban, on the one hand, and Boisguilbert on the other, had formerly proposed; but, as I have already described, as a simple and stile tax which would suffice for all, which would all enter the coffers of the King, and by means of which every other impost would be abolished.

We have seen what success this proposition met with; how the fanciers trembled at it; how the ministers blushed at it, with what anathemas it was rejected, and to what extent these two excellent and skilful citizens were disgraced. All this must be recollected here, since Desmarets, who had not lost sight of this system (not as relief and remedy—unpardonable crimes in the financial doctrine), now had recourse to it.

He imparted his project to three friends, Councillors of State, who examined it well, and worked hard to see how to overcome the obstacles which arose in the way of its execution. In the first place, it was necessary, in order to collect this tax, to draw from each person a clear statement of his wealth, of his debts, and so on. It was necessary to demand sure proofs on these points so as not to be deceived. Here was all the difficulty. Nothing was thought of the desolation this extra impost must cause to a prodigious number of men, or of their despair upon finding themselves obliged to disclose their family secrets; to hate a lamp thrown, as it were, upon their most delicate parts; all these things, I say, went for nothing. Less than a month sufficed these humane commissioners to render an account of this gentle project to the Cyclops who had charged them with it. Desmarets thereupon proposed it to the King, who, accustomed as he was to the most ruinous imposts, could not avoid being terrified at this. For a long while he had heard nothing talked of but the most extreme misery; this increase saddened him in a manner so evident, that his valets perceived it several days running, and were so disturbed at it, that Marechal (who related all this curious anecdote to me) made bold to speak to the King upon this sadness, fearing for his health. The King avowed to him that he felt infinite trouble, and threw himself vaguely upon the state of affairs. Eight or ten days. after (during which he continued to feel the same melancholy), the King regained his usual calmness, and called Marechal to explain the cause of his trouble.

The King related to Marechal that the extremity of his affairs had forced him to put on furious imposts; that setting aside compassion, scruples had much tormented him for taking thus the wealth of his subjects; that at last he had unbosomed himself to the Pere Tellier, who had asked for a few days to think upon the matter, and that he had returned after having had a consultation with some of the most skilful doctors of the Sorbonne, who had decided that all the wealth of his subjects was his, and that when he took it he only took what belonged to him! The King added, that this decision had taken away all his scruples, and had restored to him the calm and tranquillity he had lost. Marechal was so astonished, so bewildered to hear, this recital, that he could not offer one word. Happily for him, the King quitted him almost immediately, and Marechal remained some time in the same place, scarcely knowing where he was.

After the King had been thus satisfied by his confessor, no time was lost in establishing the tax. On Tuesday, the 30th of September, Desmarets entered the Finance Council with the necessary edict in his bag.

For some days everybody had known of this bombshell in the air, and had trembled with that remnant of hope which is founded only upon desire; all the Court as well as all Paris waited in a dejected sadness to see what would happen. People whispered to each other, and even when the project was rendered public, no one dared to talk of it aloud.

On the day above-named, the King brought forward this

measure in the Council, by saying, that the impossibility of obtaining peace, and the extreme difficulty of sustaining the war, had caused Desmarets to look about in order to discover some means, which should appear good, of raising money; that he had pitched upon this tax; that he (the King), although sorry to adopt such a resource, approved it, and had no doubt the Council would do so likewise, when it was explained to them. Desmarets, in a pathetic discourse, then dwelt upon the reasons which had induced him to propose this tax, and afterwards read the edict through from beginning to end without interruption.

No one spoke, moreover, when it was over, until the King asked D'Aguesseau his opinion. D'Aguesseau replied, that it would be necessary for him to take home the edict and read it through very carefully before expressing an opinion. The King said that D'Aguesseau was right—it would take a long time to examine the edict—but after all, examination was unnecessary, and would only be loss of time. All remained silent again, except the Duc de Beauvilliers, who, seduced by the nephew of Colbert, whom he thought an oracle in finance, said a few words in favour of the project.

Thus was settled this bloody business, and immediately after signed, sealed, and registered, among stifled sobs, and published amidst the most gentle but most piteous complaints. The product of this tax was nothing like so much as had been imagined in this bureau of Cannibals; and the King did not pay a single farthing more to any one than he had previously done. Thus all the fine

relief expected by this tax ended in smoke.

The Marechal de Vauban had died of grief at the ill-success of his task and his zeal, as I have related in its place. Poor Boisguilbert, in the exile his zeal had brought him, was terribly afflicted, to find he had innocently given advice which he intended for the relief of the State, but which had been made use of in this frightful manner. Every man, without exception, saw himself a prey to the tax-gatherers: reduced to calculate and discuss with them his own patrimony, to receive their signature and their protection under the most terrible pains; to show in public all the secrets of his family; to bring into the broad open daylight domestic turpitudes enveloped until then in the folds of precautions the wisest and the most multiplied. Many had to convince the tax agents, but vainly, that although proprietors, they did not enjoy the tenth part of them property. All Languedoc offered to give up its entire wealth, if allowed to enjoy, free from every impost, the tenth part of it. The proposition not only was not listened to, but was reputed an insult and severely blamed.

Monseigneur le Duc de Bourgogne spoke openly against this tax; and against the finance people, who lived upon the very marrow of the people; spoke with a just and holy anger that recalled the memory of Saint-Louis, of Louis XII., Father of the People, and of Louis the Just. Monseigneur, too, moved by this indignation, so unusual, of his son, sided with him, and showed anger at so many exactions as injurious as barbarous, and at so many insignificant men so monstrously enriched with the

nation's blood. Both father and son infinitely surprised those who heard them, and made themselves looked upon, in some sort as resources from which something might hereafter be hoped for. But the edict was issued, and though there might be some hope in the future, there was none in the present. And no one knew who was to be the real successor of Louis XIV., and how under the next government we were to be still more overwhelmed than under this one.

One result of this tax was, that it enabled the King to augment all his infantry with five men per company.

A tax was also levied upon the usurers, who had much gained by trafficking in the paper of the King, that is to say, had taken advantage of the need of those to whom the King gave this paper in payment. These usurers are called 'agioteurs'. Their mode was, ordinarily, to give, for example, according as the holder of paper was more or less pressed, three or four hundred francs (the greater part often in provisions), for a bill of a thousand francs! This game was called 'agio'. It was said that thirty millions were obtained from this tax. Many people gained much by it; I know not if the King was the better treated.

Soon after this the coin was re-coined, by which much profit was made for the King, and much wrong done to private people and to trade. In all times it has, been regarded as a very great misfortune to meddle with corn and money. Desmarets has accustomed us to tricks with the money; M. le Duc and Cardinal Fleury to interfere with corn and to fictitious famine.

At the commencement of December, the King declared that he wished there should be, contrary to custom, plays and "apartments" at Versailles even when Monseigneur should be at Meudon. He thought apparently he must keep his Court full of amusements, to hide, if it was possible, abroad and at home, the disorder and the extremity of affairs. For the same reason, the carnival was opened early this season, and all through the winter there were many balls of all kinds at the Court, where the wives of the ministers gave very magnificent displays, like fetes, to Madame la Duchesse de Bourgogne and to all the Court.

But Paris did not remain less wretched or the provinces less desolated.

And thus I have arrived at the end of 1710.

At the commencement of the following year, 1711, that is to say, a few days after the middle of March, a cruel misfortune happened to the Marechal de Boufflers. His eldest son was fourteen years of age, handsome, well made, of much promise, and who succeeded marvellously at the Court, when his father presented him there to the King to thank his Majesty for the reversion of the government of Flow and of Lille. He returned afterwards to the College of the Jesuits, where he was being educated. I know not what youthful folly he was guilty of with the two sons of D'Argenson; but the Jesuits, wishing to show that they made no distinction of persons, whipped the little lad, because, to say the truth, they had nothing to fear from the Marechal de Boufflers; but they took good care to left the others

off, although equally guilty, because they had to reckon with D'Argenson, lieutenant of the police, of much credit in book matters, Jansenism, and all sorts of things and affairs in which they were interested.

Little Boufflers, who was full of courage, and who had done no more than the two Argensons, and with them, was seized with such despair, that he fell ill that same day. He was carried to the Marechal's house, but it was impossible to save him. The heart was seized, the blood diseased, the purples appeared; in four days all was over. The state of the father and mother may be imagined! The King, who was much touched by it, did not let them ask or wait for him. He sent one of his gentlemen to testify to them the share he had in their loss, and announced that he would give to their remaining son 'what he had already given to the other. As for the Jesuits, the universal cry against them was prodigious; but that was all. This would be the place, now that I am speaking of the Jesuits, to speak of another affair in which they were concerned. But I pass over, for the present, the dissensions that broke out at about this time, and that ultimately led to the famous Papal Bull Unigenitus, so fatal to the Church and to the State, so shameful far Rome, and so injurious to religion; and I proceed to speak of the great event of this year which led to others so memorable and so unexpected.

CHAPTER LVI

But in Order to understand the part I played in the event I have alluded to and the interest I took in it, it is necessary for me to relate some personal matters that occurred in the previous year. Du Mont was one of the confidants of Monseigneur; but also had never forgotten what his father owed to mine. Some days after the commencement of the second voyage to Marly, subsequently to the marriage of the Duchesse de Berry, as I was coming back from the King's mass, the said Du Mont, in the crush at the door of the little salon of the chapel, took an opportunity when he was not perceived, to pull me by my coat, and when I turned round put a finger to his lips, and pointed towards the gardens which are at the bottom of the river, that is to say, of that superb cascade which the Cardinal Fleury has destroyed, and which faced the rear of the chateau. At the same time du Mont whispered in my car: "To the arbours!" That part of the garden was surrounded with arbours palisaded so as to conceal what was inside. It was the least frequented place at Marly, leading to nothing; and in the afternoon even, and the evening, few people within them.

Uneasy to know what Du Mont wished to communicate with so much mystery, I gently went towards the arbours where, without being seen, I looked through one of the openings until I saw him appear. He slipped in by the corner of the chapel, and I went towards him. As he joined me he begged me to

return towards the river, so as to be still more out of the way; and then we set ourselves against the thickest palisades, as far as possible from all openings, so as to be still more concealed. All this surprised and frightened me: I was still more so when I learned what was the matter.

Du Mont then told me, on condition that I promised not to show that I knew it, and not to make use of my knowledge in any way without his consent, that two days after the marriage of the Duc de Berry, having entered towards the end of the morning the cabinet of Monseigneur, he found him alone, looking very serious. He followed Monseigneur, through the gardens alone, until he entered by the window the apartments of the Princesse de Conti, who was also alone. As he entered Monseigneur said with an air not natural to him, and very inflamed—as if by way of interrogation—that she "sat very quietly there." This frightened her so, that she asked if there was any news from Flanders, and what had happened. Monseigneur answered, in a tone of great annoyance, that there was no news except that the Duc de Saint-Simon had said, that now that the marriage of the Duc de Berry was brought about, it would be proper to drive away Madame la Duchesse and the Princesse de Conti, after which it would be easy to govern "the great imbecile," meaning himself. This was why he thought she ought not to be so much at her ease. Then, suddenly, as if lashing his sides to get into a greater rage, he spoke in a way such a speech would have deserved, added menaces, said that he would have the Duc de Bourgogne to fear

me, to put me aside, and separate himself entirely from me. This sort of soliloquy lasted a long time, and I was not told what the Princesse de Conti said to it; but from the silence of Du Mont, her annoyance at the marriage, I had brought about, and other reasons, it seems to me unlikely that she tried to soften Monseigneur.

Du Mont begged me not, for a long time at least, to show that I knew what had taken place, and to behave with the utmost prudence. Then he fled away by the path he had come by, fearing to be seen. I remained walking up and down in the arbour all the time, reflecting on the wickedness of my enemies, and the gross credulity of Monseigneur. Then I ran away, and escaped to Madame de Saint-Simon, who, as astonished and frightened as I, said not a word of the communication I had received.

I never knew who had served me this ill-turn with Monseigneur, but I always suspected Mademoiselle de Lillebonne. After a long time, having obtained with difficulty the consent of the timid Du Mont, I made Madame de Saint-Simon speak to the Duchesse de Bourgogne, who undertook to arrange the affair as well as it could be arranged. The Duchesse spoke indeed to Monseigneur, and showed him how ridiculously he had been deceived, when he was persuaded that I could ever have entertained the ideas attributed to me. Monseigneur admitted that he had been carried away by anger; and that there was no likelihood that I should have thought of anything so wicked and incredible.

About this time the household of the Duc and Duchesse de Berry was constituted. Racilly obtained the splendid appointment of first surgeon, and was worthy of it; but the Duchesse de Berry wept bitterly, because she did not consider him of high family enough. She was not so delicate about La Haye, whose appointment she rapidly secured. The fellow looked in the glass more complaisantly than ever. He was well made, but stiff, and with a face not at all handsome, and looking as if it had been skinned. He was happy in more ways than one, and was far more attached to his new mistress than to his master. The King was very angry when he learned that the Duc de Berry had supplied himself with such an assistant.

Meantime, I continued on very uneasy terms with Monseigneur, since I had learned his strange credulity with respect to me. I began to feel my position very irksome, not to say painful, on this account. Meudon I would not go to—for me it was a place infested with demons—yet by stopping away I ran great risks of losing the favour and consideration I enjoyed at Court. Monseigneur was a man so easily imposed upon, as I had already experienced, and his intimate friends were so unscrupulous that there was no saying what might be invented on the one side and swallowed on the other, to my discredit. Those friends, too, were, I knew, enraged against me for divers weighty reasons, and would stop at nothing, I was satisfied, to procure my downfall. For want of better support I sustained myself with courage. I said to myself, "We never experience all

the evil or all the good that we have apparently the most reason to expect." I hoped, therefore, against hope, terribly troubled it must be confessed on the score of Meudon. At Easter, this year, I went away to La Ferme, far from the Court and the world, to solace myself as I could; but this thorn in my side was cruelly sharp! At the moment the most unlooked-for it pleased God to deliver me from it.

At La Ferme I had but few guests: M. de Saint-Louis, an old brigadier of cavalry, and a Normandy gentleman, who had been in my regiment, and who was much attached to me. On Saturday, the 11th of the month, and the day before Quasimodo, I had been walking with them all the morning, and I had entered all-alone into my cabinet a little before dinner, when a courier sent by Madame de Saint-Simon, gave me a letter from her, in which I was informed that Monseigneur was ill!

I learnt afterwards that this Prince, while on his way to Meudon for the Easter fetes, met at Chaville a priest, who was carrying Our Lord to a sick person. Monseigneur, and Madame de Bourgogne, who was with him, knelt down to adore the Host, and then Monseigneur inquired what was the malady of the patient. "The small-pox," he was told. That disease was very prevalent just then. Monseigneur had had it, but very lightly, and when young. He feared it very much, and was struck with the answer he now received. In the evening he said to Boudin, his chief doctor, "I should not be surprised if I were to have the small-pox." The, day, however, passed over as usual.

On the morrow, Thursday, the 9th, Monseigneur rose, and meant to go out wolf-hunting; but as he was dressing, such a fit of weakness seized him, that he fell into his chair. Boudin made him get into bed again; but all the day his pulse was in an alarming state. The King, only half informed by Fagon of what had taken place, believed there was nothing the matter, and went out walking at Marly after dinner, receiving news from time to time. Monseigneur le Duc de Bourgogne and Madame de Bourgogne dined at Meudon, and they would not quit Monseigneur for one moment. The Princess added to the strict duties of a daughter-in-law all that her gracefulness could suggest, and gave everything to Monseigneur with her own hand. Her heart could not have been troubled by what her reason foresaw; but, nevertheless, her care and attention were extreme, without any airs of affectation or acting. The Duc de Bourgogne, simple and holy as he was, and full of the idea of his duty, exaggerated his attention; and although there was a strong suspicion of the small-pox, neither quitted Monseigneur, except for the King's supper.

The next day, Friday, the 10th, in reply to his express demands, the King was informed of the extremely dangerous state of Monseigneur. He had said on the previous evening that he would go on the following morning to Meudon, and remain there during all the illness of Monseigneur whatever its nature might be. He was now as good as his word. Immediately after mass he set out for Meudon. Before doing so, he forbade his children, and all who had not had the small-pox, to go there, which was

suggested by a motive of kindness. With Madame de Maintenon and a small suite, he had just taken up his abode in Meudon, when Madame de Saint-Simon sent me the letter of which I have just made mention.

I will continue to speak of myself with the same truthfulness I speak of others, and with as much exactness as possible. According to the terms on which I was with Monseigneur and his intimates, may be imagined the impression made upon me by this news. I felt that one way or other, well or ill, the malady of Monseigneur would soon terminate. I was quite at my ease at La Ferme. I resolved therefore to wait there until I received fresh particulars. I despatched a courier to Madame de Saint-Simon, requesting her to send me another the next day, and I passed the rest of this day, in an ebb and flow of feelings; the man and the Christian struggling against the man and the courtier, and in the midst of a crowd of vague fancies catching glimpses of the future, painted in the most agreeable colours.

The courier I expected so impatiently arrived the next day, Sunday, after dinner. The small-pox had declared itself, I learnt, and was going on as well as could be wished. I believed Monseigneur saved, and wished to remain at my own house; nevertheless I took advice, as I have done all my life, and with great regret set out the next morning. At La queue, about six leagues from Versailles, I met a financier of the name of La Fontaine, whom I knew well. He was coming from Paris and Versailles, and came up to me as I changed horses. Monseigneur,

he said, was going on admirably; and he added details which convinced me he was out of all danger. I arrived at Versailles, full of this opinion, which was confirmed by Madame de Saint-Simon and everybody I met, so that nobody any longer feared, except on account of the treacherous nature of this disease in a very fat man of fifty.

The King held his Council, and worked in the evening with his ministers as usual. He saw Monseigneur morning and evening, oftentimes in the afternoon, and always remained long by the bedside. On the Monday I arrived he had dined early, and had driven to Marly, where the Duchesse de Bourgogne joined him. He saw in passing on the outskirts of the garden of Versailles his grandchildren, who had come out to meet him, but he would not let them come near, and said, "good day" from a distance. The Duchesse de Bourgogne had had the small-pox, but no trace was left.

The King only liked his own houses, and could not bear to be anywhere else. This was why his visits to Meudon were few and short, and only made from complaisance. Madame de Maintenon was still more out of her element there. Although her chamber was everywhere a sanctuary, where only ladies entitled to the most extreme familiarity entered, she always wanted another retreat near at hand entirely inaccessible except to the Duchesse de Bourgogne alone, and that only for a few instants at a time. Thus she had Saint-Cyr for Versailles and for Marly; and at Marly also a particular retiring place; at Fontainebleau she had

her town house. Seeing therefore that Monseigneur was getting on well, and that a long sojourn it Meudon would be necessary, the upholsterers of the King were ordered to furnish a house in the park which once belonged to the Chancellor le Tellier, but which Monseigneur had bought.

When I arrived at Versailles, I wrote to M. de Beauvilliers at Meudon praying him to apprise the King that I had returned on account of the illness of Monseigneur, and that I would have gone to see him, but that, never having had the small-pox, I was included in the prohibition. M. de Beauvilliers did as I asked, and sent word back to me that my return had been very well timed, and that the King still forbade me as well as Madame de Saint-Simon to go to Meudon. This fresh prohibition did not distress me in the least. I was informed of all that was passing there; and that satisfied me.

There were yet contrasts at Meudon worth noticing. Mademoiselle Choin never appeared while the King was with Monseigneur, but kept close in her loft. When the coast was clear she came out, and took up her position at the sick man's bedside. All sorts of compliments passed between her and Madame de Maintenon, yet the two ladies never met. The King asked Madame de Maintenon if she had seen Mademoiselle Choin, and upon learning that she had not, was but ill-pleased. Therefore Madame de Maintenon sent excuses and apologies to Mademoiselle Choin, and hoped she said to see her soon, —strange compliments from one chamber to another under the

same roof. They never saw each other afterwards.

It should be observed, that Pere Tellier was also incognito at Meudon, and dwelt in a retired room from which he issued to see the King, but never approached the apartments of Monseigneur.

Versailles presented another scene. Monseigneur le Duc and Madame la Duchesse de Bourgogne held their Court openly there; and this Court resembled the first gleamings of the dawn. All the Court assembled there; all Paris also; and as discretion and precaution were never French virtues, all Meudon came as well. People were believed on their word when they declared that they had not entered the apartments of Monseigneur that day, and consequently could not bring the infection. When the Prince and Princess rose, when they weft to bed, when they dined and supped with the ladies,—all public conversations—all meals —all assembled—were opportunities of paying court to them. The apartments could not contain the crowd. The characteristic features of the room were many. Couriers arrived every quarter of an hour, and reminded people of the illness of Monseigneur —he was going on as well as could be expected; confidence and hope were easily felt; but there was an extreme desire to please at the new Court. The young Prince and the Princess exhibited majesty and gravity, mixed with gaiety; obligingly received all, continually spoke to every one; the crowd wore an air of complaisance; reciprocal satisfaction showed in every face; the Duc and Duchesse de Berry ware treated almost as nobody. Thus five days fled away in increasing thought of future events

—in preparation to be ready for whatever might happen.

On Tuesday, the 14th of April, I went to see the chancellor, and asked for information upon the state of Monseigneur. He assured me it was good, and repeated to me the words Fagon had spoken to him, "that things were going an according to their wishes, and beyond their hopes." The Chancellor appeared to me very confident, and I had faith in him, so much the more, because he was on extremely good footing with Monseigneur. The Prince, indeed, had so much recovered, that the fish-women came in a body the self-same day to congratulate him, as they did after his attack of indigestion. They threw the themselves at the foot of his bed, which they kissed several times, and in their joy said they would go back to Paris and have a Te Deum sung. But Monseigneur, who was not insensible to these marks of popular affection, told them it was not yet time, thanked them, and gave them a dinner and some money.

As I was going home, I saw the Duchesse d'Orleans walking on a terrace. She called to me; but I pretended not to notice her, because La Montauban was with her, and hastened home, my mind filled with this news, and withdrew to my cabinet. Almost immediately afterwards Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans joined me there. We were bursting to speak to each other alone, upon a point on which our thoughts were alike. She had left Meudon not an hour before, and she had the same tale to tell as the Chancellor. Everybody was at ease there she said; and then she extolled the care and capacities of the doctors, exaggerating

their success; and, to speak frankly and to our shame, she and I lamented together to see Monseigneur, in spite of his age and his fat, escape from so dangerous an illness. She reflected seriously but wittily, that after an illness of this sort, apoplexy was not to be looked for; that an attack of indigestion was equally unlikely to arise, considering the care Monseigneur had taken not to over-gorge himself since his recent danger; and we concluded more than dolefully, that henceforth we must make up our minds that the Prince would live and reign for a long time. In a word, we let ourselves loose in this rare conversation, although not without an occasional scruple of conscience which disturbed it. Madame de Saint- Simon all devoutly tried what she could to put a drag upon our tongues, but the drag broke, so to speak, and we continued our free discourse, humanly speaking very reasonable on our parts, but which we felt, nevertheless, was not according to religion. Thus two hours passed, seemingly very short. Madame d'Orleans went away, and I repaired with Madame de Saint-Simon to receive a numerous company.

While thus all was tranquillity at Versailles, and even at Meudon, everything had changed its aspect at the chateau. The King had seen Monseigneur several times during the day; but in his after-dinner visit he was so much struck with the extraordinary swelling of the face and of the head, that he shortened his stay, and on leaving the chateau, shed tears. He was reassured as much as possible, and after the council he took a walk in the garden.

Nevertheless Monseigneur had already mistaken Madame la Princesse de Conti for some one else; and Boudin, the doctor, was alarmed. Monseigneur himself had been so from the first, and he admitted, that for a long time before being attacked, he had been very unwell, and so much on Good Friday, that he had been unable to read his prayer-book at chapel.

Towards four o'clock he grew worse, so much so that Boudin proposed to Fagon to call in other doctors, more familiar with the disease than they were. But Fagon flew into a rage at this, and would call in nobody. He declared that it would be better to act for themselves, and to keep Monseigneur's state secret, although it was hourly growing worse, and towards seven o'clock was perceived by several valets and courtiers. But nobody dared to open his mouth before Fagon, and the King was actually allowed to go to supper and to finish it without interruption, believing on the faith of Fagon that Monseigneur was going on well.

While the King supped thus tranquilly, all those who were in the sick- chamber began to lose their wits. Fagon and the others poured down physic on physic, without leaving time for any to work. The Cure, who was accustomed to go and learn the news every evening, found, against all custom, the doors thrown wide open, and the valets in confusion. He entered the chamber, and perceiving what was the matter, ran to the bedside, took the hand of Monseigneur, spoke to him of God, and seeing him full of consciousness, but scarcely able to speak, drew from him a sort of confession, of which nobody had hitherto thought, and suggested

some acts of contrition. The poor Prince repeated distinctly several words suggested to him, and confusedly answered others, struck his breast, squeezed the Cure's hand, appeared penetrated with the best sentiments, and received with a contrite and willing air the absolution of the Cure.

As the King rose from the supper-table, he well-nigh fell backward when Fagon, coming forward, cried in great trouble that all was lost. It may be imagined what terror seized all the company at this abrupt passage from perfect security to hopeless despair. The King, scarcely master of himself, at once began to go towards the apartment of Monseigneur, and repelled very stiffly the indiscreet eagerness of some courtiers who wished to prevent him, saying that he would see his son again, and be quite certain that nothing could be done. As he was about to enter the chamber, Madame la Princesse de Conti presented herself before him, and prevented him from going in. She pushed him back with her hands, and said that henceforth he had only to think of himself. Then the King, nearly fainting from a shock so complete and so sudden, fell upon a sofa that stood near. He asked unceasingly for news of all who passed, but scarce anybody dared to reply to him. He had sent for here Tellier, who went into Monseigneur's room; but it was no longer time. It is true the Jesuit, perhaps to console the King, said that he gave him a well-founded absolution. Madame de Maintenon hastened after the King, and sitting down beside him on the same sofa, tried to cry. She endeavoured to lead away the King into the carriage already

waiting for him in the courtyard, but he would not go, and sat thus outside the door until Monseigneur had expired.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.